

Tom Jones'

Special Delivery



Just when you thought America's supply of heroes was running low, along comes Tom Jones, the brave and inspirational fellow who is running one marathon a day (26.2 miles) to raise child abuse awareness in the country. Along the way, Tom is delivering "My Stuff" bags to abused kids. We caught up with Tom in Ohio where he was running toward his October rendezvous with Dr. Laura in Washington, D.C. In an exclusive interview, Tom discusses his motives and the long road he has taken to help America's kids.

Perspective: Why are you running across America?

Tom Jones: I'm doing this to bring awareness to child abuse, which I believe is a national crisis. I'm also doing this to raise money to donate to programs dealing with child abuse. And because I have a passion for it.

P: What brought the child abuse problem to your attention?

TJ: When I was eight, I was taken away from my home by the police department, and made a ward of the state of California. I was raised in the system. I stayed in an institution until I was 18.

P: So you've got some pretty vivid memories, and you understand what these kids are going through.

TJ: I've got a bit of experience, yes I do.

P: What is your profession when you're not running across America?

TJ: I'm a professional athlete. I was a

prizefighter for several years and I'm a two-time world champion martial artist. That has been my livelihood for quite some time. I have made quite a good living doing that and decided that I would use the last few years of my professional career to give back to others rather than make my own pockets fat.

P: So, why the marathons? Why not walking or mountain climbing?

TJ: As a professional prizefighter I had noticed that I really enjoyed the training aspect of that particular profession. And running was something I enjoyed and it seemed that all the rest of the fighters absolutely hated it. I not only didn't seem to mind it, but I liked it quite a bit.

P: How long did it take you to plan this event and get everything going?

TJ: It took about four years, in part because I didn't understand that philanthropy was a word, much less a business. I felt that as a professional athlete I could just say that I would



get out on the road and start running and that people and corporations would respond. I had no idea whatsoever that it involved coming up with a business plan and soliciting corporate America for an operating budget. I had to solicit corporate America and take quite a bit of rejection, I might add. So what I did was focus on the marketing budgets of large corporations for visibility and that seemed to work as far as an operating budget and additional dollars so there would be money available for children.

P: How did you get corporations to sponsor you?

TJ: At first, pulling on their heart strings was futile. So I went back to the drawing board and after going to several meetings of these corporations, I found out really what their trigger was.

P: "What's in it for me?"

TJ: Partly. It was dollars and cents and showing them how they can sell their product. And I showed them that by doing this type of an activity that they could increase their sales visibility by as much as 70%, and that the public more often will purchase from a company that they believe is out there helping the community.

P: So what lesson did you learn from that experience?

TJ: You have to understand that being raised in the system, I've had some very sizable problems, especially social ones. I was removed from high school and the education system in the tenth grade. So I have a tenth grade education and I had to do this efficiently. I had to get a computer, learn computer programs, put together a business plan that made sense, do graphic arts and all the rest of the stuff that goes with it. I taught myself how to use the instrument and it just worked well.

P: Please tell our readers about the typical day on the road.

TJ: I get up at 5 a.m. and drink a Logie shake. Then I will stretch out and warm up for about 30 minutes. Then I start running. When I first started running, the day was much different, because the temperatures often exceeded 100 degrees.

P: Do you have any help?

TJ: I have a massage therapist with me who also cooks all my food. He handles the massage and that's been critical. His name is Danich "Nit" Warrarath. I have another person, Marilyn Tovar, who takes care of the daily needs of taking care of any laundry I have or anything like that. Marilyn does the support part.

P: You had a rendezvous with Dr. Laura this month in Washington DC!

TJ: Yes. We handed out "My Stuff" bags to children. Most of the children there were about the age I was when I entered the system. When I was taken away from my home, I didn't have anything that I could call my own. I would like to have received one of these bags. Well, I had no idea of the impact that it has on a child. I have cried every single time. I wish everyone could see one of these kids unzip one of these bags. When they unzip those bags and start pulling that stuff out, they're little kids again. I believe inside of my heart that I can use the vehicle that the Dr. Laura Schlessinger Foundation has graciously provided.

P: Do you have E-mail on the road?

TJ: Not on the road. But my wife reads them to me over the phone and I answer them. We have a website: run4kids.org. We've given away well over \$100,000 to children in need and I personally evaluate any organization that gets a dollar from us. I make sure the organization isn't top heavy with administration and if they're OK, then I'll earmark the dollars for the program.

P: How important to you is your faith?

"You can spend all the money in the world on a child, but if you don't spend the time, it's worthless."