

# METRO

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## Abused as boy, he has mission

**PEOPLE:** Tom Jones will run the length of the state to raise awareness of child abuse and money for the Orangewood Foundation.

By GIL HOPENSTAND  
The Orange County Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH — As a toddler, Tom Jones was forced into karate training and lengthy balances on one foot by his father, a martial arts expert and Episcopal minister. If Jones faltered during the grueling 2- to 3-hour sparring sessions, he said, his father would pound him.

By age 8, the physical and mental abuse inflicted on Jones spurred the courts to place him in the protection of the Masonic Home for Children in Colton, where he stayed until age 18.

But there is a silver lining, said Jones, 35, a personal trainer, champion kick boxer and avid runner. Under extreme physical stress, he learned to disengage his mind, to think of anything but the strain.

"It's too challenging to stay inside mentally when you're being beat. You escape mentally and that comes in real handy for running," he said, describing a daily regimen of 15 miles. "I think of world hunger, of AIDS, of how I can help in God's work. That's what I do. I occupy my time in positive thinking."

Jones is training for his next battle, running the 1,500-mile length of California in three months. He sets off Wednesday from Pelican State Beach near Oregon to the Mexican border, passing through Orange County around June 23. Along the way, he will speak against child abuse and hopes to raise \$250,000 in pledges for the Orangewood Children's Foundation, Orange County's only shelter for abused and neglected youths.

"He's been through the worst of it, and has not just pulled himself through, but took that strength and is giving back to others," said Gene Howard, Orangewood executive director. "It's not just that he's trying to raise money, but the fact that the run will cause increased aware-



CHRIS O'LEARY/The Orange County Register

ness impact on hundreds of thousands of kids."

Capacity at the shelter is 236, but Howard said that with child abuse an increasing problem, he houses an average of 250 children and occasionally as many as 300.

"I had to go large to get people's attention," Jones said, explaining the scope of his run. "You don't hear about problems except the extreme cases."

Jones left the Masons to join the Marine Corps, where he said he excelled because he knew of nothing other than institutional life. He was accustomed to communal living and felt little longing for his father, who by then had died, or mother, who left the family when Jones was young.

"This was the first time that if I did something good, I was rewarded for it," he said.

His first role model was actor Chuck Norris, with whom Jones, then 25, trained. Norris would work from well before light to well after, Jones recalled, and go out of his way to please fans.

Jones later patented and sold rehabilitation machines for hips and lower backs, but his business partner's death in a plane crash propelled Jones into drug and alcohol abuse.

"When you reach bottom, there's only one way to go," he said, and he went into rehabilita-

### BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 1: Gallons of water consumed per day
- ▶ 10: Pairs of shoes needed
- ▶ 14: Months Jones has been preparing for the run
- ▶ 50: Pairs of socks needed
- ▶ 1,500: Miles to run
- ▶ 250,000: Dollars Jones hopes to raise

**TOM JONES:**  
A big challenge ahead.

ments, the Rancho Santa Margarita-based computer-memory firm whose 400 employees get exercise instruction from Jones. "How can you run 1,500 miles? It doesn't look that bad on a map but when the sneakers hit the pavement, ouch!"

Even Jones' wife of one year, Brandi, initially had her doubts, but soon realized he was a man on a mission.

"He watches cartoons and loves all the stuff with the superheroes. He's got it in his mind to do good for people, saving people," she said.

Doubters said Jones can't have the manpower, so he enlisted the help of the Masons. Then he needed promotions, so he mustered sports celebrities such as former pro quarterback Joe Montana to run portions with him. Then he needed corporate sponsors, and won over Reebok and Taco Bell. Someone even donated a motor home for the trek.

"I conceived the bandwagon, made the bandwagon and am now getting people on it," he said. "If you believe in it, others will believe in it."

So far, about \$50,000 has been amassed from pledges, corporate sponsors, T-shirt sales and fund-raisers planned along the route. The money will help fund the \$600,000 remodeling of the Orangewood facility and expand the number of scholarships.

For donation information, call (888) 998-KIDS.

Sober for several years, Jones exudes confidence when he speaks of the fund-raiser, which he says was divinely inspired. Sure the weather might be a factor, but he insists that running 15 miles a day for three months will be a vacation. Convincing others that he could do it was another matter.

"We thought he was a little crazy," said Peter Byrne, creative director for Viking Compo-