

Interview with Tom Jones

Sameera Gokal: What prompted you to become a news reporter as opposed to a news anchor?

Tom Jones: I've never charted a course to be a field reporter or anchor. I guess I've always loved going out to meet people and tell their stories and that has become what I am known for.

SG: What are some of the stories you cover daily?

TJ: I am a general assignments reporter so I usually cover any and everything. That could range from a murder to problems with crime in a neighborhood to some court case. I get a lot of calls from people who've found themselves in some unfortunate circumstance and need my help. I really love those types of stories where I can get their situation corrected. For instance, this college student was arrested for driving alone in a High Occupancy Vehicle lane. The law says she should have only received a ticket. We found out the judge had locked others up for the same offense. Because of our story, the judge admitted she was not following the law and ceased that practice.

SG: As a news reporter, what is your typical day like?

TJ: My day starts with me going online and reading up on the news while watching the news on television. I need to know what the hot topics are as I head to work. Once I get to work, I go into an editorial meeting where we decide what stories the reporters will cover for the day. I usually pitch my idea for a story after talking to sources or following a particular issue or story. After that, I make calls to interview subjects and set up a time to meet with them. I grab a photographer and we head out to put the story together and prepare to go live for the news at 12noon, 5p and 6p.

SG: What is your favorite TV show?

TJ: My favorite television show is Survivor. I love that show because it is a mirror into how we relate to one another, and how we fall out of favor in a group setting. I've watched that show from the very beginning, and I'm always fascinated that people do things or say things that get them kicked off the island. I usually cover people who do things that find themselves in court or in jail for doing the wrong thing, so that show sort of gives me some insight into how they end up where they are.

SG: How do you feel about having the same name as a famous singer?

TJ: I used to be frustrated with having the same name as world famous singer Tom Jones. Then I began to realize the name opened doors for me and is a great conversation starter. I'm usually not a stranger to people because they can have something to talk or joke about with me. As a reporter that really helps in trying to put people at ease in an interview. So having the same name is great.

SG: Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

TJ: I don't know where I see myself in 10 years. My parents are getting older in Houston where I'm from and I'd like to get back there. But who knows.

SG: You have emceed at the Atlanta Partnership Walk for some time now. Has the experience been rewarding, and why do you want to be a part of the event every year? Please share your experience with us.

TJ: I can't remember how many times I have emceed the Atlanta Partnership Walk (I do so many events). But I know it's always inspiring to see so many people from so many countries working to end poverty. It is an amazing event. When I'm standing onstage, I can see the masses of people, and it warms my heart to know they are committed to the cause of making sure people have a basic need most of us take for granted, and that's eating. They do a wonderful job and put on a great event.

SG: What advice would you give young journalists who are interested in becoming news reporters?

TJ: To anyone young or old interested in becoming a news reporter, I say watch plenty of news. I say read plenty of news. Getting a good grasp of the English language and perfecting your on-air look is also important. But most importantly is having a thirst for getting and telling the story. Every day I go to work I genuinely cherish getting the story and then telling it. You have to be a hustler in this business. The news doesn't always come to you. Sometimes you have to go find it. And the ability to dig for news is often what separates the good reporters from the bad.