



WHO

IS

DOUGLAS

JONES

**«I watched
the Challenger
disaster
with my own eyes.
In the sky, not
on TV.»**

Douglas Jones, 41, Asheville, North Carolina

Hi Douglas.

Hi. I am Doug, unless I am in trouble. When mom says your full name, you're in trouble.

Do you know any other person called Douglas Jones?

Actually in 2005, I was working in a restaurant and a black guy working in the kitchen was called Douglas Cornelius Jones. Working as a server, I definitely saw credit cards of other Douglas Joneses. It's a fairly common name. But not popular.

We heard that in the Las Vegas Metro Area alone, there are over 23 Douglas Joneses.

In the US I think Jones is in fourth place. After Smith, Miller and Johnson.

Do you like your name?

Yeah... Hmm... No. I actually thought of going with my middle name, Wesley. It has a little more toughness to it. So I could go with Wes and Wes is more like «Wassup, Wes?» Little street cred or something. But maybe I'm just burned out on Doug, as it hasn't gotten me anywhere.

But you told us that you could write a book about your life, so it has gotten you somewhere. But to start from the beginning, where were you born and where did you grow up?

My father met my mother in Germany. He was stationed in Berlin. They got married and moved back to the US, because my father was Air Force and got re-stationed to Langley Airbase in Virginia. That's where I was born. When I was two years old, he got re-stationed to West Germany. When Germany had the West and East thing still happening. Eastside, Westside. I did kindergarten on an airbase in Germany.

So you speak German?

I did, but then my mother divorced my father because he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. That rule about marriage, «for better or for worse, in sickness and health»... She was an old hippie and left when I was five. She didn't keep her word in marriage. Left me watching my father have multiple sclerosis. Till he passed. That's when I was sixteen. But my mom, her name's Petra, she's never been much of a mother though. Just the person I was birthed from.

So how was your childhood? How was it living with your father, having multiple sclerosis?

At six years old we moved to Florida together. We stayed at Mimi's place. Mimi was the nickname of my American grandmother. My father was having a house built for him. With his medical issues he needed a house specially designed for him. Like wheelchair ramps and sidewalks around the house. I lived where I could see the space shuttle go off all the time. I lived 45 min south of NASA. I watched the Challenger disaster with my own eyes. In the sky, not on TV. I was in 4th grade. 6th grade I went to a brand-new school which was named after Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who died in the accident. So I lived in that part of Florida till I was sixteen.

Where did you go to high school?

Texas. When my father died I had to go where my hippie mom ended up. Somewhere in nowhere Texas. I had no choice. She acted like a sibling, not like a mother, when I got there. No leading direction.

And you needed direction?

Doesn't every child at some point? So I just had to go with the flow. I am not successful because I was never led by an adult in my high school days. She was a drinker. She got the booze for me as well.

Are you still in contact with her?

No, we were on Facebook for a while, but I divorced her. I am just happy she raised my baby sister. I am 17 years older than her. The reason my mom got out is because she married a man with stability. She was one of these women who want to marry a guy who does things. So she could stay home and drink. She didn't do anything successful herself. I had to teach myself. I even had to feed myself. Because there was often no food at home. I didn't have an enlightened beginning to adulthood.

How long did you stay in Texas?

Until I graduated. I had no choice. Then I stayed a few months at my cousin's place in Florida. But she was raising her own family, so I went my own way via AOL Messenger, meeting friends and then I became an adult with a roommate situation. This went on all these years. No stability. I was never taught how to be stable. Nobody taught me to go to college. Nobody taught me to do anything. I only knew I had to work to make money. That's it.

Do you think about marriage yourself? Are you in a relationship?

I tried a couple of girlfriend things, but women in the US are selfish. They use you until they find something better, then they drop you. But maybe that's only my experience. I went to nine different schools in 12 years of schooling. So no sticking around long enough to be cool with anybody. That part of Florida was growing so fast. I went to multiple brand new schools over the years. And school areas changed the whole time. Sometimes I didn't move and it was just the complexity of the system. The different school zones changed, because the population was growing.

Where do you live now?

Asheville, North Carolina.

Can you describe your place?

Now I am staying with my old roommate in his one-bedroom. I am crashing on the couch right now, until I get a job and get my shit together. This building is probably from the 1920s or 30s, wooden frame. Nothing special, at all. Probably 600 sq feet, maybe 700. But very close to downtown. I think he pays \$650 a month, and this is very cheap compared to most places in Asheville. Asheville is the highest cost of living in North Carolina, and top 10 in the country. My roommate is not a rich guy either. He's got a big screen TV, but from like probably the early 2000s. So it's a brick. Something it would probably take three people to carry. He has a clawfoot tub. The kitchen doesn't have a granite countertop, nor a steel-covered refrigerator. It's all typical old school stuff. The windows leak air when it's cold.

What is your neighborhood like?

Asheville is famous for a few things: The Biltmore House. Did you ever watch the movie Richie Rich? That's the house. «Hannibal», the second part of «The Silence of the Lambs», it's in this house. It's the largest residential house in the nation. But nobody lives there. It's a tourist spot. There's a giant Christmas tree in it. There's sixty fireplaces. Two hundred rooms. It's famous. Biltmore House. Google that. I've been to it once. The Vanderbilts built that in the early 1800s. It's like 50 or 60 bucks to see it.

Like Graceland.

I've done it once. I dated a girl who had free tickets. It has a bowling alley, a swimming pool. No water in it though.

Do you plan to stay in Asheville?

I was working at the Pisgah Inn at Blue Ridge Parkway. But it's a seasonal job because of ice and snow. They close it in winter. I've been working in restaurants for over twenty years. Eighteen of them here in Asheville. Serve. Bartend. I do anything you want. I run your store if you want. But it's hard. Asheville's cost of living, since 2008, rose by a lot. Do you know the term gentrification?

Sure.

Asheville's got that. In the 2000's, when I moved here, it was all cool young punk kids. People were living on the streets on purpose. For adventure. Today they are there because of the shitty economy. We don't take care of our poor very well in the US. If you end up on the street, you are fucked. See, we're not a democracy here. If you're not born to the loins of the money, or your school isn't being paid for, or you just can't handle the stress of life, or fight for yourself to get a proper education, it is extremely difficult in this country. You have to be top of the line or otherwise it's a for-profit system. Our educational system, our prison system, our healthcare system. Everything is there for profit. We're not a democracy. We are an oligarchy.

If you could have gone to college, what would you have studied?

Marine biology. And I liked meteorology. I lived in Florida where Mother Nature is in your face. I'd be like that dude on the Weather Channel. Santoro or whatever. Or I'd be that lieutenant Dan in «Forrest Gump». «Is that all you got?». That would be me. Hurricane Irma came along when I was up on a mountain. We lost electricity there. That was pretty cool. Today that I know more about economy and sociology and stuff I could do that. I wish I had the power to go into politics.

How did you learn these things? You read a lot?

Street knowledge. Facebook. Reading articles. Paying attention to how things function. I didn't pay attention until I was the victim of the recession of 2008. I lost my job but I had no clue why. And people didn't own laptops yet. When I got a laptop in 2009 I started to do my homework. Like, how do the people who have degrees and make money skew the system so hard? They fuck everybody over, and that makes the money for them. Labor is the producer of jobs. Disposable income in your pocket is how you create an economy. I work in restaurants. The first thing what people cut out of their lives is going out to eat. It snowballs. I lost my job together with 8 or 9 people in one month.

What did you do after that?

I went on unemployment for nine weeks. And then I loaned up. Every job I had since was shit. I used to do fine dining, but with my actual resumé, you can put only the last three jobs on there. I haven't been able to recover. For example, you can't make money in sushi joints here. They are all on the same block. The competition is really close. I tried to work at Nepalese Curry House. But they are really lazy. Working for Nepalese is like working for stoners. They don't want to try. They don't want to spend money on marketing. Basically, I am financially insecure, and my rent has gone up ever since too. In the last place I rented I had to pay \$500 for a room. Asheville is the number 4 hardest city to make your dreams come true in now. It's like Aspen, Colorado. Movies get filmed here. «The Hunger Games» was filmed here. The first «Dirty Dancing» was filmed forty minutes from here. «The Last of the Mohicans» was filmed here. I served celebrities a couple of times.

Like who?

Ray Liotta. From... ah... What was that...

«Goodfellas.»

Correct. And he actually tipped like a fucking mafia motherfucker. He tipped 20 bucks on a 120-dollar bill. What a dick. I also served Andie MacDowell a couple of times. She was in «Groundhog Day». She's in that TV commercial. Though she doesn't look that good, she's in her fifties. A lot of other celebrities came here who I did not serve. Like Dave Chappelle. I actually met Peter Dinklage from «Game of Thrones». The short guy. Woody Harrelson from «The Hunger Games». I heard he's really chill. But I never met him.

Which actor would play you?

Probably Nicolas Cage.

Why him?

We have a similar stature. His eyes are a little bigger than mine. Anything between him and maybe Brad Pitt. Or... Hmm. Maybe not Brad Pitt. Maybe Johnny Depp. Because he can play anybody he wants to.

You worked in many restaurants. What's your favorite food?

Seafood. I worked in the number one restaurant. I wish I could still get in there. It's the healthiest. I try... I want to... Like, if I had money in my pocket, I would be more conscious about animal rights. But hell, I ate at Burger King today. But I know what's going on in our animal system here. We do have a lot of farm-raised restaurant places down here, but I can't afford to eat there. So being in Burger King I promote the bad way a cow is treated vs. the farm-raised. I am too poor to make a conscious decision when I am just hungry.

So no Whole Foods for you.

Whole Foods costs so much more than, let's say Aldi. And I understand the economics. The healthy or farm-raised food costs more because it uses much more land. Organic fruit or vegetables use more land because you are not spraying insecticides. If I had the control and ability to do that, I would. And then I think seafood is better. Some fishes are smart, but a lot of them are... you know, just fish. Plus, you have your Omega 3s. You can't get Omega 3s from hamburgers. I love salmon, I love sushi.

Do you cook yourself or eat out?

I usually just get whatever I can get. If I am working at a restaurant I eat there because I get it half price. Usually you come half an hour in advance of your shift and eat half price. Which they still profit on. That's how much profit margin they have.

How much did you get paid in the restaurants?

It used to be 50% of a regular minimum income plus 10% from tips. Over the years minimum wage went up, but service wage stayed stagnant at two dollars and thirteen cents. Which it is here now. Probably it is higher in Boston because there are more unions. But I am in the South. \$7.25 is minimum wage here for anything.

So you get only two dollars...

...and thirteen cents. Which covers taxes. That's it. My credit card and my cash is tip. Normally it's 18% of your bill. So basically for every beer you buy, that's one dollar for me.

What's the biggest tip you've ever gotten?

In one restaurant in 2006 I made like \$355 in one shift. The tip was already included in the bill and they double tipped me. So I walked away with \$350-something in one night. But this is sporadic. You can't plan your bills on it.

No security.

It's a risk-factor job. Could depend on the weather. Could depend on Election Day.

What did you do today?

Today is not my normal day, because I am not on top of my game. But on a crappy day like today, which I've had a few of because I'm unemployed, I have some Quaker Oatmeal, I have a strawberry-peaches-and-cream mix. I go to the plasma center. It's not the blood part, it's the clear shit. Like if you have a blister, the clear shit is the plasma. So you can give your plasma and make money. You can do it only twice a week, because your body has to rebuild it. It's open from 8am to 6pm. I went at 2pm and I left at 3:30pm. The very first time you go, it will take you 3 hours because they will get to check all your vitals. They have to make sure you're not doing fucking drugs. Sticking needles in yourself, anything that can sabotage you. But after that it's only about an hour and a half to go in and out. And the first 5 times, it's 50 bucks apiece. They put it on your credit card. After that I went to Burger King.

And you do that every week?

I have recently. The first five times they give you \$50, and today was my fifth time. So Friday, I am gonna get... it's based on how much you weigh, I'm a thinner guy, so I'm gonna get \$30 and then if I went the second time it will be \$35. If you were fully employed, and everything else is normal, you can actually do this to pay off your phone bill. And probably your Internet. I read some of the pamphlets on the wall, they say that for someone who needs plasma it takes a thousand trials of plasma a year. So that's why they pay for it. It's a little uncomfortable, because you get poked. But you can sit there and use their Internet. And an hour and a half later you're done. It's not a bad deal. That's a party supply for the night if you have a weekend coming. It's an actual paycheck. It helps people who went through the hurricane, through fucking Puerto Rico, and all the islands all summer long, because of global warming.

What did you do while you had to wait?

Just sitting there with my left arm hooked up, my tablet between my legs, reading articles, about the economy, or the environment, and my friend's jokes. This particular time, there were so many people online, that I had to give up the reading. You know how you can be on Facebook without being online, you can read the posts, just can't hit like. So I did that for a little bit. And there was a movie on the TV. There were a couple of TVs in the room.

And after that you went to Burger King?

It doesn't affect your appetite though. They do want you to hydrate decently, drink some water before you go, but that's not a big deal. You don't have to do yoga or nothing to do this. And you can help your fellow humans. It goes global, they pay you for it, and you don't expect a bunch of hobos and shit, just regular people like me in there. It's Christmas spending money right now.

What are you planning to buy for Christmas with this money?

I'm not... I will just try to live, because I am unemployed. It gets me between jobs. But I have done it when I am employed just because it needs to be done. You have no idea how much plasma is needed in the world. It helps people who get seriously burned, like you'll have to look up plasma and see all the uses that's needed from healthy people being donated.

And what did you do after that?

I took the city bus back downtown. I went to the coffee shop. I went on Craigslist to see if there are any more job advertisements. I did an application online for Tupelo Honey. They are nationally known and their first restaurant is in Asheville.

Are you only looking for jobs in restaurants, or are you open to other types of jobs?

I'm mostly in restaurants. I have been a server, a front of the house bartender server type of person for 20 years. On rare occasions, if I am between jobs, I might run into somebody and work under the table. No paperwork. Help somebody fix a roof, or paint. But that's very hard to find. But I have done it. I am a very small guy, so there is no way I can carry 80 pound of shingles on my shoulders up a ladder. That is not going to work for me very well.

So no construction work, or things like that.

I can do it, but not the physical lifting. I can hammer a motherfucking nail like a motherfucker. I damage nails. When I first graduated from high school, before I even got a real job, I helped somebody in my town in Texas to strip an entire roof down and rebuild it. It was 5 layers of shingle. And it was the old-school, shingle-style, wooden roof instead of flat board. We rebuilt the whole thing, me and him, in a matter of 5 days. And I am just a gofer, I just do what I am told. The main guy, he does the math. That was my very first job. I was 17.

If you had enough money now, would you go to college?

I tried to do the school thing. But I was in a house with aggressive roommates. It was a roommate situation where nobody knew each other. There was so much drama happening. The guy who ran the house for the homeowner was aggressive. Drunk or whatever. I was in school, and I abused using FASFA. It's a government loan to go to college. But I failed it, because I could never concentrate. And I decided to drink beer, because I would ignore the shit around me. So I failed my entire credit, so I failed my life with that, but I was kind of forced to have to do that, because I needed money to live. It was during the recession. My unemployment check was only \$160 a month, and my rent was \$160 a week. This didn't include food or nothing. I wanted to do entrepreneurship. I have business ideas, environmental business plans.

Can you tell us more about this?

I have a new fast food idea, that has never been done, that I would like to try. But I have to find capital from investors.

Can you tell us more about your fast food ideas?

No, because then you will steal it. I don't have it blueprinted or copywritten. So I have the ideas, but I don't know how to blueprint them and I don't know how to speak with investors. But my biggest idea is a warehouse, like Home Depot, but with all environmental friendly products. It would also have a recycling center and it would be off the grid.

Would that be one of your dreams?

To create a business that helps the environment would be a dream, yes. And on top of that, as the owner I want to have an employment model different than Walmart. I want my people to make a living wage, so that they don't need subsidies. I will have a lower lifestyle than the Walmart CEO, so my people who actually do the work, who make my money, have a better lifestyle. Like in Europe. I would never want to be a greedy owner of a business.

You want your employees to earn with you. If you make profit, they make profit.

Correct. Because they are the ones doing a physical labor.

This sounds like a Marxist concept.

Marxism, or maybe communism. I believe in a mixed economy. I believe everybody should have healthcare. If we all had healthcare, we could handle pre-emptive health issues, which is cheaper. Instead of waiting for the last minute, that costs more. And also a healthy populace is a more productive populace. In Europe, you have two weeks of paid vacation?

Four or five.

Fuck yeah! We don't get zero. If a woman has a child, if she's pregnant, even your male ass gets time off. We don't have that for even the mother. I've actually had a pregnant woman as a manager working until she was releasing her baby.

Would you say that the US is somehow behind Europe?

Yeah. I am not so arrogant that I think that the US is number one. We are the third-highest populated country in the world. We are number one in military spending, number one in incarceration of our own citizens, number two in child poverty and starvation. Number one in inequality of wages. We have assholes here that have more money than they can ever spend in 100 lives. What's the point? If a lady in this country has a hundred cats in her house, we say she is crazy. If a guy piles up more money than he can ever spend, we put him on «Time» magazine. It's a mental issue here.

You should go into politics.

Yeah, well you have to have capital to do politics. The biggest problem is money in politics.

But did you ever consider being in a political party?

There is no way to do it if you don't have a rich family backing you.

What about community work?

I can't think on a small scale. Asheville, even being progressive, is still manipulated by corporations. We have a problem that makes our rents high: short-term rentals. A house that people can rent instead of a hotel, but they are in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Somebody can own a house and make a \$1000 in a weekend. For long-term rentals, it's a disease. No, you can't get into politics like that. And I wouldn't want to start small.

Do you have a pessimistic vision of the future?

Oh, I don't want children! I would adopt if I had a nice woman. But I would not if I am on my own. There are plenty here that suffer already.

And do you see a change coming up in the next couple of years?

We have Trump in office, have you not noticed?

After Trump.

We might not get past this. Hello! We are fucking with Korea. We got Iran... Do you understand that the US is the Evil Empire of the entire planet. We instigated the Middle East, we caused all of it. We are the bad guys and WW3 is not going to be pretty. So why would I get a wife, impregnate her and bring a baby into the world, and all of a sudden there is a mushroom cloud on the horizon.

Or climate change is going to...

Climate change is... Hey! Ok, last fall... We had fires last year. Gatlinburg, Tennessee lost 30 people and a thousand buildings burned. Lake Lure, where «Dirty Dancing» was filmed with Patrick Swayze, had a fire. On Election Day, we had so much smoke in downtown Asheville, it looked like Mars. It was orange. This is a temporary climate. And this last hurricane season, we had what, three or four Category 4 hits, all the fires in California, double the normal amount. Shit's happening, bro. Wake up! I've lived in Florida, I've lived in Texas, I'm up here 18 years. I moved here November 15, November 99, I feel like the leaves that fall are a week late.

How would you describe yourself?

Unfortunately, I'm a Cancer. I am a pacifist and empath to the point that it doesn't matter, because I feel the weight of the world at times. I can't tune it out. It actually affects me, to the point that I can't take care of myself.

Like a depression?

Empath. Google that word. Empathy, that's when you feel the weight of everybody else's pain, even when you're on your own.

And do you think this is because you are a Cancer?

I think so, yeah. Sometimes they correlate, sometimes they don't. I am an empath, I am a lover, I would rather do that than be a fighter.

What's the biggest thing that you ever won in your life?

Oh boy. I don't think I have won anything, except waking up in the morning. Lost, hmm... Falling for an Aquarius and then after a month I realized I was played and then my brain was fried. I am recovering from a lost love that I had. Because communication wasn't clear. Because she is an Aquarius, and we know them, they can just change their mind and disappear.

Is this something that happens often to you?

Most of the time, I would not give a fuck. It might be a one-night stand half of the time, or whatever. I only had one that was more important, but she actually got murdered in 2010. She was having a scholarship at Florida State University. My girlfriend Liz, we were friends for years before, and her boyfriend went off, he got arrested or whatever, but we were friends, so we connected. She almost didn't want to go to Florida State University, because she liked me. I was like, «Look, we'll have an open relationship. Go to Florida State University, hello! You got a scholarship? Fuck out of here.» For a couple of years during Thanksgiving breaks, Christmas breaks, spring breaks, summer breaks, we could kick it. But she had some boy issues on her end, in Tallahassee, and one of the boys murdered her. She was 25.

That's horrible.

I can give you the link on that. And wait, you should Google this, too: A Doug Jones is running for senator in Alabama. Somebody hit me on my Facebook like: «I didn't know that you were running?!» A Douglas Jones like me would never want to be in Alabama. The Republican candidate is being in trouble of either being rude to women or children. I can't remember. It's a big deal right now. But people in Alabama are mostly GOP. Southern state, you know how it is there. Apparently there are stats, that in Alabama people would rather vote for a pedophile than for a Democrat. Look it up, I swear I read something about that. That's how divided this country is. This country is naive. We aren't #1 in anything. You guys are higher ranked in standard of living, cost of living, healthcare, education, we're only #1 in things that don't matter to someone like me. Maybe the army. Our forefathers actually wanted us to protect the borders, not going out there... Our forefathers, look it up, our forefathers. Our country now has over 900 bases around the globe. We probably have a base in your country. We're the Roman empire, buddy. I am not proud of it. We're probably at the peak, which means we will collapse soon. I can't wait.

A pessimistic view.

Do you know who the Silver Surfer is? It's a Doug Jones. I just saw it on the credits of «Fantastic 4 – The Rise of the Silver Surfer». You'll have to Google that one too.

«It has a bowling alley, a swimming pool. No water in it though.»

Douglas Jones, 66, Iowa City, Iowa

Are you a Doug, a Dougie, or a Douglas?

When I was young I was a Dougie. But I think right now, I'm a Douglas professionally, and at home I'm a Doug.

How do you feel about being named Douglas Jones? Do you know any others?

There are several of me around. It's sort of funny to have a senatorial candidate and, I think I did a Google search once, there's a baseball player and a bank president, and several convicted sex offenders, all sharing the name. But I suppose people named Bob Smith have it worse. Not to mention – what's the common Chinese name, Chen. I think there are probably more Chens in the world than Joneses. I think the time it really hit home was when there were four different people on the staff of the University of Iowa who were all named Douglas Jones, including a pediatrician and the state archaeologist. But that was the biggest problem that I've ever had with multiple people with that name. I had one other experience with another Douglas Jones. When I was in college, there were two of us. Two students named Douglas Jones. And the other Douglas Jones was a girl. Douglas Susan Jones, I believe. We would get our bills confused with each other because the campus mail sometimes confused us. And at one point, I failed a course that I never knew I was registered for because they somehow confused it enough that I received the grade for the course that she had attempted to register for, but she never attended classes because it wasn't on her schedule. But the university was happy to clear that up once it became obvious what had happened.

What did you eat for breakfast this morning?

I believe I ate shredded wheat squares.

Describe what a typical day entails for you.

I take the bus to and from work. So I get up in the morning, and take the dog out the front door to relieve himself. Start fixing breakfast for my wife and I – I hope she gets up early enough to eat with me. And then I catch the bus to work. Today, my emphasis was largely on fixing my lecture notes. I teach. My classes are tomorrow. And I go to lunch, typically at a cafe and a bookstore, because I like to read the newspapers there and browse the books. And then I take the bus home around 5:15. And walk the dog before dinner. A bad habit of mine is to watch – because it's a Monday – «Antiques Roadshow» on TV. And our local television station runs the British «Antiques Roadshow» and the US «Antiques Roadshow» back to back. So I get my dose of transatlantic antiques.

What do you like about «Antiques Roadshow»?

I think I know enough about old things to be interested in some of the things that come up. And I like old scientific instruments. In fact, I collect computers built before 1975, before the personal computer era. I have several in my basement. And at work, I'm working with students to help restore a 1965 vintage machine. So it's 50 years old.

Are they very large?

The central project that I'm working with students on is. It's the size of a large home refrigerator. And that's actually only half of it. But that's the half we're trying to restore right now. And in its day, that was the smallest, cheapest computer available.

What draws you to old computers?

I teach computer science, and at this point I am the oldest faculty member in the department who hasn't retired yet. So I'm actually, what, 66. And that means I've experienced much of the history of modern computing. But the machines I'm interested

in are computers that are from before my time. I took my first programming course in 1968, in high school. It convinced me that computers were exciting and interesting. And so when I chose universities to apply to, my selection was largely determined by how good they were at computer science. I did my undergraduate work in physics, because it wasn't boring, and they didn't allow an undergraduate major in computer science at the time. And then I went to grad school in computer science. It just continued to attract my interest, and I kept getting better and better at it. When I had a choice between industry and working in academia, I chose academia even though it pays significantly less.

What's it like where you live?

University of Iowa is in a town of 60'000. And the surrounding county has a population of over 100'000. We are out in the middle, in the part of the United States that many people describe as flyover country, because people fly over it and look down on it more often than they stop and visit. But it was a very nice town to raise a family in. The stereotype of Iowa is that it's as flat as possible, but that's not true. There are no mountains, but we have exposed bedrock around the river valley, where the river has cut into the limestone.

Where else have you lived in your life?

Oh, let me see. California, Colorado. I grew up in Michigan. I went to college in Pittsburgh. I lived two years in Geneva. That was where I attended two years of junior high school and high school. My father was working at CERN. It was very fun living in Geneva. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was back 15 years ago, and 25 years ago. I find that I still understand French well enough to enjoy myself.

What was your family like growing up?

I have two sisters. One of whom is now a lawyer, the other is basically retired. We moved a lot, because my father was involved in academic research. So we lived in the mountains of Colorado for a while because he was working with cosmic rays. It's very fun living on a mountaintop. The laboratory was at 4000 meters, and the log cabin where we lived was at 3000. We only lived there in the summer. It was inaccessible in the winter.

You've mentioned mountains a couple of times – do you like mountains?

I certainly enjoyed the mountains when I was there. Iowa is famous for not having mountains. We are distant from both the Appalachian Mountains and the Rocky Mountains. I enjoy the outdoors here too. We've had bald eagles nesting within half a kilometer of our house. And we have some beautiful natural areas within an easy half-day drive. So it's easy to go canoeing through a canyon and see the sheer rock cliffs on each side. I've thoroughly enjoyed that. So it doesn't take mountains! But I do love the outdoors.

How many children do you have?

We have two. My daughter is working as a wood shop technician on the island of Manhattan in New York, at Parsons School of Design, which is a pretty good arts school. And my son is working in San Francisco for a large international architecture and engineering firm.

You guys all like to build things.

My grandfather was always building things in his shop when I was a child. So I guess it runs in the family. In fact, both my grandfathers enjoyed working with their hands.





What's your home like?

It was built in 1947. And that was soon enough after World War II that there were still significant materials shortages. So one of the eccentric features of the house is that most of the wood used in building the house appears to have been cut locally, not from the big commercial sawmills. And was put in when it was still green – not properly dried. And then it warped. (Laughs.) So several of the floors are not level. And the other thing is, whereas most commercial construction wood is pine, the wood used in the framework of the house is elm. And elm is extraordinarily hard. So you can't drive a screw or a nail into some of the beams because they are too hard. But it has a brick exterior. It's one floor, with two fireplaces. If I walk home instead of taking the bus, it's a 20-minute walk. That's one advantage of living in a relatively small town – a large university in a small town. And let's see, my lot is a half an acre. I don't have an easy conversion of that to metric on hand. I would imagine that the readership would prefer that translated. I have a row of walnut trees along the back edge of the property, and during the fall when I attempt to mow the lawn there, I sometimes wish I had a hard hat to protect me from the falling walnuts. Because they're falling from 20 meters and they hit with a bang.

Do you eat the walnuts?

I never have. It's so much work to crack them. And the squirrels like them. I live down by the river, close enough to to the river that flooding is a concern. Twice in the past 20 years, we've had what the government describes as once-in-a-hundred-year floods. And the highest of those floods came onto my property, and we were actually evacuated by the city. They forced us out by turning off the water. And in fact, mine is the lowest house on my block that was not demolished after the flood. So I used to have neighbors, and now I have parkland. The transition from having neighbors to having parkland is a very painful transition. They've cleared out most of the houses that are close to the river. But now that those houses have been gone for a few years, I rather enjoy the effect of being on open land. It was only after they demolished the houses that the bald eagles moved in. It's nice having an eagle's nest that you can watch through binoculars.

Are you worried that your house is at risk?

Yes, but only mildly, because the flood that came close was deemed to be a five-hundred-year flood. I suspect that's really a one-hundred-year flood, because of global warming and climate change and changes in land use patterns upstream from us – all of those contribute to changes in the flood risk. But nonetheless, I'm not going to live for another hundred years, and I think it's much more likely that I'll see a repeat of the floods we've already had, which did not significantly damage my house, but were very inconvenient for the town. Also, they are in the process of demolishing a bridge downstream from me and replacing it with a better bridge. That bridge acted as a dam during the flood, because it wasn't high enough. And so I think I will be safer once they finish that construction project. I suspect that all over the world, people are going to have to deal with problems like this because of global warming. Flood frequencies are going to change on just about every river.

What actor would play you in a movie?

(Laughing.) I'm very close to exactly 2 meters tall and have red hair. I don't know any actors who meet those qualifications!

What's the biggest thing you've ever won?

What's the biggest thing I've ever won? (Laughing.) This is good for a laugh. Physically, the biggest thing I've ever won is a toilet. It was at the county fair, and various organizations set up booths at the fair, with drawings for odds and ends. I've also won a steak at one of the booths. But the Iowa City Waterworks had a booth at the fair, and you could enter your name in a drawing for a low flush volume toilet. So we figured, what the heavens. My wife and I entered and we won, and when we remodeled our house we used it. So not only did we win it, but we have it and we make use of it.

Tell me about your wife.

We've been together since 1976. That was when we were married. So she, she worked as a librarian until we had children and from then on she's been a housewife, and I would describe her as a professional volunteer. She seems to have been treasurer of far too many local organizations.

Do you have hopes and dreams for the future?

Right now... the end of Trump! (Laughs.) One of the big puzzles when you're over 65 years old is when to retire. I'm enjoying teaching, but at the same time, it's a real challenge. And sometimes it would be nice not to be tied to a time clock, class schedules and things like that. Not to mention the bureaucracy of the academic world.

Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

I tend to be optimistic.

What are your predictions for the future?

The stresses caused by climate change are going to lead to a very unsettled next fifty years. We are currently facing a migration crisis in the world right now, and a significant amount of that migration north out of Africa and Central America is climate-driven. And that's going to drive – the kind of unrest we're seeing now is going to continue, and the rest of the world is going to face the consequences. I think we're going to get the carbon thing under control. And I say this a bit optimistically because I live in Iowa, and the only other place in the world with about the same population that is as aggressive in this regard is Denmark – but just a couple months ago, Iowa broke a record with wind power. For the first time, the largest electric utility in the state met 100% of its electricity demand with wind. And that was only because of the luck of a sequence of windy days. But once you do it once, it's going to happen again and again. And I've noticed, for example, that in previous years, during very hot weather, the university has been asked to cut back on electric usage, and during the hot weather we had this year, that didn't happen. And I believe the reason is wind power. And if we catch up with photovoltaics – which Iowa is not pushing – I suspect that we could actually become a net producer of clean energy for export on a regular basis. We're going to wean ourselves from fossil fuels slowly. But Iowa's not the only state well-positioned to do that, Denmark's not the only European country well-positioned to do that. This is going to happen more and more. And more and more of the challenge is going to be in the third world. China and India are going to grow so quickly that they're going to keep having horrible pollution problems, and part of that is they're burning a lot of coal. They feel an entitlement because we in the First World have set a pattern which they feel entitled to follow, despite the costs. But even there, China is beginning to catch on that they can't continue polluting their cities the way they are, and that clean power is going to be the way to go. India has only begun to realize that they're facing the same problems. Just because you're entitled to pollute doesn't mean you're going to enjoy it. So I suspect that it's going to be very painful for the next 50 years, but we're going to figure out how to live with it. Unfortunately we're going to have mass extinctions and sea level rise on the way there. Everywhere from Lower Manhattan to all of the lowlands of the Rhine Delta, Amsterdam and New Orleans, I don't know what their future is with serious sea level rise coming. Not to mention Washington, D.C., which was built in a swamp. Cities built in coastal swamps may be doomed.

It is certainly an interesting time to be alive.

But when hasn't it been an interesting time to be alive? Would you rather deal with the mass migrations forced by global warming, or the mass migrations forced by Genghis Khan? Why is Finnish a Turkic language? Who drove a bunch of Turks that far north? Humans have been migrating all over the place for a long time. Various crises have done it, but the curse – which is not really a Chinese curse, because I don't know any Chinese students who will admit that this is actually Chinese – but we claim it's an old Chinese curse: «May you live in interesting times. But I think we always have.»

«I want to
be remembered
as someone
who still carves his
pumpkins.»

«Doug Jones lent itself to the teasing name of Bug Bones.»

Douglas Jones, 47, Williamstown, Massachusetts

How do you feel about being named Douglas Jones? And are you a Doug, a Dougie, or a Douglas?

I am officially a Douglas on my birth certificate. But rarely does anyone actually call me that, unless I'm in some sort of trouble with either my mother or my wife. So I'm usually just a Doug. And, you know, I like the name. You don't necessarily see a lot of other – while there's lots of other Joneses, it's a hugely common name, there aren't necessarily that many other Dougs. I wouldn't be in a class and there'd be another Doug in the classroom, I don't think that ever, ever happened. When I was a little kid, I used to wish my name was Jeff for some reason. And one of the reasons was that Doug Jones lent itself to the teasing name of Bug Bones. Which really bothered me when I was, like, five. But now, as an adult, I'm totally fine with it.

There was the kid's show, «Doug», when I was growing up.

I was a little bit older than that. I knew it was out there but I wasn't watching it. Dougie Fresh, the rapper – he was someone that people would reference to me, would ask if that was me, or bust out some of his lyrics at me. It was really only with the Internet, when I realized, there was a baseball pitcher who was named Doug Jones. There used to be a number of pastors that, if you did a Google search, you would find their churches' websites if you looked up Doug Jones. And now of course, there's the actor Doug Jones, who is very very busy and is getting a lot more well-known, and then there's the candidate in Alabama. And there's Dougie Jones from «Twin Peaks». As my coworker just said as she was walking out: «It really seems like the year of Doug Jones!».

What did you eat for breakfast?

I had a banana and a Dr. Pepper.

Where do you live? What is your neighborhood like?

I currently live in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It's a small town, way tucked up in the northwestern corner of the state. And the area is kind of interesting because officially it's a very rural area, surrounded by a lot of farms and a lot of just open land. But Williamstown itself is the home of Williams College and also the Clark Art museum. And then MASS MoCA, which is the country's largest contemporary art museum, is just fifteen minutes away, in North Adams. Right next door. So I'm in this little bubble of art and college, a little cultural bubble, surrounded by what is actually a very rural area. It's a small-town feel here. We have one traffic light in the entire town. Main Street consists of about three to four blocks. But then, it's nice, where I live, it has a very neighborhoody feel, in a classical way. Tree-lined streets, you know, kids can walk to school, which is just a few blocks away. So, in some ways it's a very comfortable sort of town and it has all these aspects that you'd expect to find in larger places with a higher population. It's a nice mix. You can walk to the library. You can walk to the coffee shop. I walk to work pretty much every day.

What does your typical day look like?

A typical day is getting up at seven – wait, no: getting up at six and making sure that my son is awake and getting ready for school. Then usually going back to bed. And then getting up at 6:30 to make him his lunch. He's a vegetarian, so he doesn't eat the school lunch, we give him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and various fruits and vegetables. Then I putter around the house, go back to bed, until eventually I get up, get ready for work. Depending on the weather I often will walk to work because it's a 20-minute walk and it's a nice time for me to plug into – listen to a podcast. When I used to live in California I would drive and it would take me an hour to get everywhere. So I would have all these podcasts I would listen to. Now that I have a 20-minute walk, I'm a little bit behind in my podcast listening. So I like to use that opportunity to have a little quiet time for myself.

What does your work consist of?

I'm the executive director of a nonprofit movie theater. My work varies between being up in the office and just doing usual office job kind of stuff, answering emails, various kinds of paperwork. Sometimes I will need to go downstairs into the theater itself. So I might be selling popcorn, selling tickets, doing something up in the projection booth. When I'm done with work, I'll walk back home, listen to the second half of a podcast. And then it's usually scrabble together some kind of dinner – we rarely all sit down as

a family and eat a dinner together. My son is usually eating something in his room, my wife may have already eaten something by the time I get home. But my wife and myself, or all three of us, often sit down, maybe watch something on TV. At some point, they'll all go to bed. I'll stay up later, read, listen to music, watch a movie. And that's kind of the basic broad strokes.

What are some of the media works you're really interested in right now?

My two favorite podcasts right now are «The Flophouse», which is a podcast where three friends get together every week and watch what is generally acknowledged as a flop, a movie that didn't do very well in the theaters. Sometimes more contemporary, and sometimes they'll do something a little older. And then they'll just talk about it. It's a comedy podcast. I also really enjoy listening to «The West Wing Weekly», which is a podcast where in every episode they talk about, they're slowly watching every episode of «The West Wing». And in every episode of the podcast they talk about one specific episode. Which is nice because just this past year, when we were in the midst of this whole election process, I actually did a complete rewatch of «The West Wing». TV shows, it varies. I think the one show that gets all three of us together right now, my wife and my son and myself, is oddly enough «Project Runway». And other than that, I'll watch – even though I am not at all a food person, I'm very far away from being called a foodie, I don't enjoy cooking myself, I find it comforting to watch the cooking competition shows – «Top Chef» or «The Great British Bake Off». There's something about watching them pull all the ingredients together and make something that I find very satisfying, even though I would never do it myself in a million years.

How big is the theater?

It's small. I have two other people who work with me up in the office, on the administrative side of things, that I see every day or so. Then downstairs in the theater itself, it's a combination of about a half dozen people who are employees who are working in the box office, but we also rely a lot on volunteers from the community. So people sign up and come in for a particular time and help us with selling popcorn, candy, and soda.

How long has the theater been in Williamstown?

Next Thursday the theater will be marking its 101st anniversary. The first movie was screened right here in this theater on November 30th, 1916. And there have been lots of changes, different names and owners and whatnot. But the basic address – where we are, in this building – people have been coming to see movies here for over hundred years.

What was the first movie screened there?

For a long time we did not know. We thought it had just been lost to the sands of time. And then I stumbled across a clipping – someone who was doing research on the history of the theater had put together a 3-ring binder. And I was going through and just happened to notice there was an ad for the opening of the theater. It was a movie called «The Patriot». It starred an actor named William S. Hart, who at the time was very popular in the silent era. He did a lot of Westerns. And this was kind of a Western about a guy who, his land gets stolen or his claim to a gold mine gets stolen by a larger corporation. It's actually one of the silent films that doesn't exist anymore. There are no copies of it. Only 30% of all movies made before a certain era, the silent era, still exist. And «The Patriot» is one of those films that just is lost to time.

How many movies do you watch every week?

I used to keep track of it. And then, at a certain point I stopped because as the numbers went up, I was just like «I should really find something else to do with myself». If I travel to a film festival, when I go to Toronto or to Sundance for work, I could be seeing five or six movies a day. I think my all-time record at a film festival was seeing seven movies in one day, which was starting at probably about 8:30 in the morning and going all the way through a midnight screening. Just normal, when I'm not away at a festival – I don't know, around eight or nine a week? There are times when there might be a random Saturday where I actually have nothing else to do and I may sit down and watch two or three films. Or a lot of times when I have the opportunity to go to another theater, I'll coordinate it to do a double feature. So I'll just maximize my time while I'm out.

Where else have you lived?

I was born in Colorado. As a little kid, when I was 3 or 4, we moved to South Dakota for a while and then over to Minneapolis. So I went to high school in a suburb of Minneapolis. Went to college there for most of the time. And in 1994, along with a group of friends of mine, we moved out to San Francisco. The story I always tell is, one morning in Minnesota, my clock radio goes off. And the DJ comes on, and he's giving the weather report. He says, it's something like thirty degrees below zero, there's a wind chill of sixty degrees below zero. And the DJ says, «If you don't have to go outside, don't. If you do have to go outside, don't expose any skin». That's when I decided to move to California. I lived there for about ten years or so. Then moved down to Los Angeles. Lived in Los Angeles for another ten years. And then just about three years ago, moved here to Massachusetts. My wife is originally from Boston, so we had been thinking about moving East to be a little bit closer to her family. And when we found the opportunity in Williamstown, we thought, that's kind of perfect, because it's close to her family, but it's not «too» close to her family. You can get there for birthdays and anniversaries, but no one's going to just surprise you on your doorstep one Saturday afternoon.

Tell us about your wife – how did you guys meet? What's your life together like?

I've worked at movie theaters ever since, my first job was at a movie theater when I was 14. I lied about my age, told them I was 15, and got a job selling candy and popcorn. And since then, I've pretty much always worked in movie theaters or at film festivals, or in video stores. I met my wife when we were both working at the Mill Valley Film Festival in California, in Marin County. I was the programmer, she was the volunteer coordinator. And at the time, she did not have a car. So I kindly offered to – we lived pretty close to each other in San Francisco, so I said, we can just carpool. «I can pick you up and we can just go back and forth». So a lot of our relationship was born out of drives back and forth on the Golden Gate Bridge, to and from work. We just recently celebrated our fifteenth wedding anniversary, though we've been together longer than that. And it's great. We are very sympatico in a lot of our interests. We both enjoy going to thrift stores and we both get a kick out of vintage things – weird little things that we find that, at least to us, it feels like «everyone else has overlooked this treasure but look at how awesome this is». We actually just today – we put in an offer and it seems like it's going to be accepted – after years and years and years of renting, we just today, lined up buying a house.

What is your vision for this house?

We had been looking for a little while. We had found a few places that we liked, and a few places that we were like [half-hearted voice] «Yeeeeeaaah, that could work». But when we found this place, we both felt a connection to the house. There were things about it that immediately excited us. For example, the bathroom still features some very common bathroom features that were installed in the late 60s, maybe. Little things like a holder in the tile, in the wall, so you could put your tissue box inside there, and then there's sort of a chrome plate just above it. A revolving door for your toothbrushes. A little pull-down hutch for your scale. So we just got a good feeling about the house itself. But it did take a little bit of imagination. Because it was like «Whose bedroom is this? Who's going to live here? What will we do with it?» I have a lot of books and records and videos, and Paula, my wife, also has a lot of linens and various things that she collects and gets a lot of joy out of. So even as we're looking at these houses, and thinking about where we ourselves are going to live and how we'll fit into the space, we are also very thoughtful about «how is all our stuff going to fit into this space?» And it's sort of exciting. When you rent, there are things you do to apartments that you're renting – you know, you screw in a new towel rack, maybe you do some painting, there are little things you can do. But there's always the sense that this is just temporary. As you're putting something in, you're thinking, «Am I going to leave this when I move out of this place, or am I going to take this with me?» And now that we actually have, in front of us, a house that we're going to own, you definitely think a lot more about «Oh, I'm not going to put just any paper towel rack on this wall. It's going to have to be the right one». So you definitely get a lot more thoughtful about odd little minutia of the home, and your daily life.

Do you know when you're going to get to move in?

Probably in a couple of months. January 30th is supposed to be the date where we do all the tradeoffs: here are your keys, here's your check, and there you go, best of luck.

Now that you have accomplished this milestone, do you have more goals or big plans for the future?

The house was a big one. Another thing that we've talked about, and it would be nice to figure out, is still finding the right balance of home life and work life. And the right balance between Paula's work and my work, and just coordinating time when we can be like, «Let's take a vacation! Let's take a weekend away.» So often it's, we can't do anything this weekend because I've got to do this or that. Or you've got to do this other thing. Or Wylie, our son, he's got something else going on. We spend a lot of time together, which is great, and we all get along really well. But it is difficult to coordinate time that's completely clear from any other obligations for all of us. And then on top of that, when we do have that, say on a holiday – Thanksgiving or Christmas or something – then there's the balance of, we want to go do something and see the larger family. But it would be very nice to have something of ourselves – some time just for the core group of us, the three of us.

What did you do for Thanksgiving?

I did very little. Paula and Wylie went to Boston, to spend time with her brother's family. Because Paula's mom was actually out of the country, she wasn't going to be a part of Thanksgiving. So that it a bit more comfortable saying, «you know what, I think this one I'm going to stay home and do some things». I ended up working because of an unexpected computer glitch – so I actually ended up coming into the theater and working. But my Thanksgiving was mostly spent watching «The Punisher» on Netflix, and then in between episodes, systematically doing another load of laundry, or doing some more dishes, or doing a little bit of housework. So just kind of going back and forth. Sometimes with that stuff, it's easier to do when you're the only one in the house.

Tell us about your family when you were growing up.

My family is back in Minnesota. It was very much the classic mom-and-dad, son-and-daughter – I have a sister. We had a series of dogs, we had Dachshunds growing up. And it was living in the Midwest. So in some ways it was very stereotypical. There was the usual family drama growing up, but never anything all that dramatic. A lot of sort of sitcom situations that were like «This is a problem that can be wrapped up in a half hour». I snuck out of the house at night and got caught – that's going to be a half-hour conversation and then we'll be back to normal. My parents stayed together right up until my dad passed away. I still talk to my mom occasionally. I don't talk to my sister all that often. She's three years younger and so it was just enough that we never went to the same school at the same time. We were very different people growing up, and we remained that. There's no bad blood, there was no big drama, we just don't necessarily talk to one another all that often.

It's cool to me that you wanted to work in the movie screening business from the time you were too young to work. And you're still doing it. How do you feel about that? Does it feel like a big victory, or like something that just happened?

It always felt like – what else would I do? Very early on, I was the kid who was going to see movies every weekend. I was the kid at school who other kids would ask about the movies. I was the movie kid. I was seven years old when «Star Wars» came out. That was a huge influence on my childhood. I was a small kid, so I would always play R2D2 on the playground because that was the smallest character. It was a combination of seeing «Star Wars», seeing «Raiders of the Lost Ark», when I was just the perfect age for those movies – seeing those movies in theaters, then getting up on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons, but then on Sunday mornings I'd get up to watch «Academy Award Theater» on CBS. I gravitated to those things at a young age. And my work has always been going from one film-related job to another. There was a period when I worked on film crews, in the production of movies in Minneapolis. That included some bigger things, like «The Mighty Ducks», which was made in Minneapolis, and then very scrappy

indie things that other filmmakers were making, and then eventually things that my friends and myself were making. There have been a few jobs that weren't directly related to movies – I worked in a bookstore for a while – but even then I was in charge of the movie and TV book section. It has been such a big part of my life for so long that I can't even imagine what else I would do with myself.

Do you have a favorite movie?

It varies a lot. I have a short list of movies that I consider to be perfect films. Even movies that I love – like «Star Wars», which was so instrumental to me growing up – I could watch that and be like, «That is not the best acting in the world, necessarily» or «That's a little clunky». There are some films where I could not tell you anything that's wrong with it. Every element is working together and just coming together perfectly. Terence Malick's «Badlands», Guillermo del Toro's «Pan's Labyrinth». There's a British filmmaking team, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger – they made «The Red Shoes», «Black Narcissus», «The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp» – theirs are films that I come back to time and time again. I just marvel at how they worked together and what they could accomplish. They have one film called «A Matter of Life and Death» with David Nevin and Kim Hunter that is a film I go back to so many times. When I moved here to Williamsburg and took over Images Cinema, we wanted to do an event that would introduce me to the community, and I chose to show that film as my introduction to this new hometown.

If there was going to be a movie about you, who would play you?

(Laughs.) Oh my gosh, I'm trying to remember – back when I was working at the San Francisco Film Festival, we used to have this game where we would cast – if there was going to be a movie about a film festival, who would play who. I remember the people who would play my colleagues, but I'm trying to remember who we would have play me. That's one of those questions – it's sort of like asking a parent who their kid looks like. Do they look more like mom or dad? Other people have a better perspective on it than I do. I could cast someone and people could say, «Really? That's who you see yourself as?» I'm sure my wife would be able to tell you who should play me in a movie. She's got some perspective because she's got a little distance from it.

Do you end up watching movies a bunch of times?

At the theater? There will be some movies that I make a point to go back to the theater and sit down and watch again a couple times. What happens more often is that I'll find myself going into the theater while the movie's playing and watching certain scenes or certain bits again. When we were screening «Baby Driver» over the summer, I would go in – I probably saw the opening scene of that movie a dozen times or so.

What is the biggest thing you've ever won?

I'm one of those people, I feel I don't win things that often. One of the most exciting things that I've recently won is, my son and I go to New York Comic-Con. And there was a book signing for this woman Rebecca Sugar, who is the person who created a TV show called «Steven Universe». There was an event with her, and then there was a drawing – you could get your book, and then you could go get it autographed from her. Everyone had these little tickets that they handed out, and the show is very popular, especially among Comic-Con folks. So there were a lot of people, and my son and I were there, and we're watching them pulling one ticket after the other out of a fishbowl. They were filling up, only twenty five people could do it. And there was one, and then the other, and we kept not being the person who was picked. And we're like, alright, those are the odds, this is how these things happen, you don't always get picked. And then the very last slot that they were drawing for, they pulled the ticket out of the bowl, and it was the ticket that I had in my hand. At that point I had totally written it off. I was like «This totally isn't going to happen, that's too bad, it would have been cool». And then the very last chance, it came through. That was very exciting because it was also something that I got to win along with my son. That was very very exciting to him as well. Like before that, I won a TV at sort of a work conference. And that's great, but I actually haven't taken that TV out of the box yet. It was super nice to win that, but winning this along with Wylie, that was very exciting, because it was part of a larger thing he and I were doing as a father-son weekend. That made it more special.

Tell us about Wylie, what does he like, how old is he?

He is 13. He's about to turn 14, and he's great. He gets really mad when I tell him that he's my best friend. He says «You can't be my best friend, you're my dad». And I'm like, «Sorry dude, that's what it is». It's interesting because when you have kids, as much as you think, «Oh, I'm gonna put this in front of them, I'm going to steer them this way or that way» – you really have no control. They grow up and at a certain point, it's less like having a kid than just having another roommate. Because they become such their own person. But I'm very fortunate in that he has grown up sharing a lot of my own interests in, you know, comic books and certain movies and TV shows, so there's a lot of things that we can share together. If he reads something that he thinks would be cool for me, he'll give it to me, and I'll do the same right back at him. But then there are other areas where he's sort of defined himself. He's been a vegetarian since he was four or five years old, and that was something he came to completely on his own. My wife and I, his mom and I, are definite meat-eaters. Give me a pepperoni pizza and I'm set. But this is something of his own volition, he put the various pieces together and one day was like, «I don't think I really want to eat meat anymore». And Paula and I looked at each other and we said «Ok! That's your own decision and we can respect that».

What is the most important thing that you've ever lost?

That's a much more difficult question... I lost my father few years ago. He passed away. Somewhat unexpectedly. Shortly before Wylie was born. After that time, thirteen, fourteen years ago, it was a very interesting transition I guess. We were already pregnant when my father passed away. So we knew we were having a kid, but there was certainly some sort of continuation. It's not like there was something between my father passing away and then a few months later having a kid. So in some way, I don't think of that necessarily as a loss so much, as just sort of something that changed, or shifted. I couldn't explain exactly what that connection was, or what it is, but it's just sort of like, it's a connection in your mind, you sometimes put two things on the same mental shelf. Whether that actually makes sense, or whether it's just two random things that you just think of in tandem.

Do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist?

(Laughs.) I don't think either word is necessarily completely applicable to me. I'd say I lean a little bit more towards optimistic, because I do believe that things work out. Problems arise, things pop up that you have to deal with, but I do believe that you generally know how to work it out to get through to the other side, even if it's not always your absolute 100% best outcome in the world, I think that there is always an outcome. And I also really believe that there is always going to be something else. There's always something coming down the road. There's always going to be another challenge put in front of you, even if you've just gone through another challenge. I like to take sort of the long view of things. The day may have sucked for one reason or another, but there's always going to be a tomorrow, and then there's going to be six other days in this week, and maybe they'll be okay. One day out of seven, it's not a bad ratio.

And what about a larger scale, what do you think the future of the world looks like?

That's a tough one too! I think a lot of times, on a big macroscale, and even on some microscales, things are very cyclical. I think things and situations come back around. The details can change, things can take on different meanings, and you kind of have to look in a more expansive way. But I do think there's a certain level of, things happen, and then you move on, and you move on, and eventually all that moving on kind of brings you back in some way to a very similar situation as you once had way back when. I think that can be true for people, I think that can be true for larger cultural ideas, larger social ideas. That there are certain variations on a theme, and you're always working through the variations.

**«Twice in the past
20 years,
we've had what the
government
describes as
once-in-a-hundred-
year floods.»**

Douglas Jones, 71, Wallhaven, Ohio

Hi Douglas.

Hang on a second. I got to close these windows. There is too much going on this morning on the net.

Should I call you later?

No, no, I am ready now. Just had to answer a post. These days people ask me so many questions. It's getting really stressful.

What kind of questions?

Oh you know, at this time of the year it's all about Christmas. And I am in charge of the Wallhaven Christmas dinner for senior residents. I've been doing this for years now, and since 2010 I'm responsible for the marketing of the event.

And what is your marketing strategy?

Well, you have to know the people. And people have to know you. It's basically community work, on Facebook and around town. This year I designed a little poster. I spread them all over town. For example, I know the manager of Acme Fresh Market. He lets me put up my posters.

Did you make the poster by hand or on your computer?

Photoshop! My daughter installed Photoshop CS4 on my laptop last year, and I took the computer training course at the Akron Public Library. It's great and it's not expensive at all! The year before I did Excel. I met very interesting young people there who took classes because, you know, you can really increase your chances on the job market and improve your earning potential if you are young and know how to use these machines.

Can you describe us what's on the poster?

Okay, let me get one. In the middle there's a photo of the committee. Me, Paul and Etna at last year's dinner, presenting our seven sixteen pound turkeys. It was a great success I tell you. We had some bands playing and a class of 5th grade created the whole room decoration: huge cotton snowflakes hanging from the ceiling and cardboard Santa Claus dinosaurs to decorate the tables.

You eat Turkey on Christmas?

Here, they like their Turkey for Thanksgiving and for Christmas. But we play with the stuffing. This time it's all Mediterranean. My friend Sal brought his Italian touch to it. He's from Virginia. He used to work for Avellino's in Blacksburg. I've never been there, but people say it's one of the best Italian restaurants in the US.

And where do you come from?

I was born in the city of Cuyahoga Falls, 5 miles north of Akron, Ohio, on July the 31st, 1946. Exactly six years after the «Doodlebug disaster».

The «Doodlebug disaster»?

A gasoline-powered doodlebug rail-car collided with a freight train. Over 40 people died. The biggest disaster to our city. It gained national attention. My father used to work for Gorge Metropolitan Park Dam. Today they call it the First Energy Dam. It was generating hydropower for our streetcars and cooling-water for the coal plant. My father lost his job in 1958, when they stopped the hydropower operation. He worked at the dam for 25 years. After that he had temporary jobs here and there, but we mainly depended on my mother's salary. She worked as a secretary at an insurance company in Downtown Akron.

Do you have siblings?

I have one sister. Betty, she is four years younger than me. We were quite close until she became a hippie when she was 18. Maybe the biggest hippie in Ohio. Organizing concerts and protest-marches. She met her husband Douglas in Cleveland at the end of the 60s. He was a journalist, working on an article about the Cuyahoga River Fires back in the days. They've traveled the world together, India, Nepal, Australia. She liked it I guess. It has been a while since I saw her last time. Maybe eleven or twelve years. We are very different. She's always been very different. She felt she was born to the wrong family and the wrong place... You know how these things happen sometimes.

Cuyahoga River Fires?

You've never heard of this? It was all over the news at that time. Even Time Magazine published a big story. The Burning Rivers of Cleveland. A train spark put the river on fire. You don't know the Randy Newman song? «There's a red moon rising on the Cuyahoga river... There's an oil barge winding down the Cuyahoga river».

The river was on fire?

Yes, but it was not the first and not the worst fire. It had lit up a dozen times before. Back in the days the water quality was incredibly bad. People used to say that «you don't drown in Cuyahoga river, you decay». The concern erupted nationwide and the river became a sort of symbol for all the environmental problems we have.

Are you concerned about the environment?

Sure, I am concerned about the environment, but for me people come first. If people lose jobs because of new environmental rules, it's problematic. But let's not dig into that...

Where did you go to high school?

I went to Cuyahoga Falls High school. Do you know Jim Boeke? He was at the same school. Graduated five or six years before me. Played for the Tigers, like me. He later went to Heidelberg College and had a professional NFL career. He played in the «Ice Bowl» in 67. You never heard of him?

I don't know much about American Football.

Ah, yeah, you call it «American football» over there. Here it's just football. He later became a movie star.

Ah yes?

He played in «Star Trek». He was a Klingon. And then he played a football coach in «Forrest Gump».

I don't remember the football coach.

It was a small role. He died a couple of years ago.

What did you do after high school?

We couldn't afford college. So, I started working at Firestone down in Akron. It was before they were bought by the Japanese. It used to be an all American company. They even produced the helmets during the WWII. I worked in the office. I've always been good with people and communication. First, I worked at HR and then I switched to customer support. I worked there for seven years. It was a good time. I liked talking to customers on the phone the whole day. But in the 70's economy got rougher, and the early 80's the company moved its headquarters to Chicago. Many people around Akron lost their jobs. Including me.

What did you do after that?

It was a tough time. The economy changed. No office job without college. In the early 80's, I started working for the Summit Metro Parks and Recreation Department. We managed over a dozen parks and over 10'000 acres. I did a whole bunch of things there. Worked in the office, the restaurant, I even became a part-time park ranger for a while. The nature here is really beautiful, and trails are well maintained. It's very safe for families and children. You can even see wild turkeys in some of the Summit area parks. If you don't see them on the ground, you have to look up to the trees, that's where they sleep.

And you worked there till retirement?

Yes, I retired four years ago.

Are you married?

Yes, since 1972. We celebrated our 40th anniversary at the Silver Lake Country Club. How time flies. I met Daisy at Firestone. She was a secretary. Like my mother. She had a phone on her desk, too. You can't imagine how many hours we spent talking from desk to desk, sitting in different offices. At lunch we used to meet in the cafeteria.

Do you have kids?

We have two sons – Daniel and Dillan. And one daughter, Dorothy. She's our youngest. This summer our fifth grandchild was born, his name is Sidney.

Where do you live now?

We recently bought a small house on Bryden Drive. We bought it from Daisy's cousin, Sheila. She lived there until she got too old and decided to live with her daughter in a neighboring town. It's a simple one-story wooden house with an attached garage. I did some repairs and upgrades here and there. But the house is perfect for us, not too big not too small and it's easy to keep tidy. In the smaller room, which is about six feet large and seven feet long, I've installed my office.

Can you describe the room you're in?

Right now? I'm in my office. That's usually where I am when I talk on the phone. It's tiny, but I don't need anything more than a table where I can put my laptop and a comfortable chair that's good for my back. Because I have back problems, I had to spend a bit more money for a good office chair. I paid half of it and my children paid the other half. The table, a friend gave it to me, after he cleaned up his house. What else is in here? I have a pile of documents waiting to be sorted out, copies of bills, Christmas Dinner posters, and on the wall on my right, there is a calendar which my daughter-in-law, Dillan's wife, made with photos of their children. November is Debbie and Dougie lying on the ground covered with golden leaves, and all you can see is their faces coming out of the leaves and they are smiling. That's all. That's how the place where I'm sitting right now looks like. I have to say it's a very modest house, but it's cozy and Daisy and I like it here. The only thing I don't like about the house, is that it has no porch. I am planning to build a deck next spring though. I want to have a covered sitting area in front of my house. I could drink my coffee there in the morning, and see what's going on in the street. My neighbors would see me when they pass by and come and say hi. We could chitchat. Neighbour things, you know, nothing special.

Your grandson's name is Douglas?

Yes! My son named his son after me. But he's Dougie rather than Douglas. And I am a Doug for my family and my friends.

And how do you feel about being named Douglas?

How do I feel? Douglas Jones, I don't know, it's my name. It just feels right I guess. Douglas, Daisy, Daniel, Dillan and Dorothy. We are a «D» family!

And one last question: how would you like to be remembered?

Remembered? Hmm... Maybe I would like to be remembered as a man who cares about the little things. These little things which are important for our community. For example, I've recently read, that during Halloween the pumpkin-sales are going up and up every year. There are pumpkins everywhere, on every single porch. But I have the feeling nobody carves them anymore, like back in the days. People are losing their creativity. They are losing their sensibility for the small things. Maybe I want to be remembered as someone who still carves his pumpkins.

Chosen for their common name, four Douglas Joneses offer us an insight in their everyday life in the US: where they live, what they do, their hopes and dreams, and what they eat for breakfast. The Douglas Jones issue is inspired by the character in David Lynch's 2017 «Twin Peaks» series – a manufactured American insurance manager.

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