

# For The Love of It

WITH DEWITT JONES

## **For The Love of It Transcript**

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## For The Love of It with Dewitt Jones

### INTRODUCTION

In Hawaii, he's known as a paniolo. A cowboy. Respected. Intense. In charge. With a work ethic that leave's most people I know in the dust.

But that's not what intrigues me about Uncle Jimmy. No. It's the light in his eye. It's the smile on his face. It's the delight he takes in every part of what he does. He's not working just for the money. He's working for the joy. He's working for the love of it.

Uncle Jimmy. An amazing man. So focused, so passionate. And yet having such a good time out there. Looking at these pictures, I find myself asking: "Why do I do it? Why do I go to work? Is it just for the money? Would I photograph if I wasn't getting paid? Do I work out of necessity or out of joy?"

Jimmy makes me ask these questions, but he wasn't the first one. I remember back in college, I saw the poet Robert Frost speak. Another very passionate man.

For two hours he just held the audience in the palm of his hands, igniting us, inspiring us with his visions. And then he read from a poem called Two Tramps in Mud Time. He read words I'll never forget:

My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only when love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sake

My object in living is to unite my avocation and my vocation. My vocation: what I had to do, what they paid me to do. My avocation: what I couldn't help but do, what I loved to do. As my two eyes make one in sight.

At one level, Frost was saying loud and clear, do what you love! Follow your bliss; make your living doing those things that bring you joy.

I don't think there's anybody who doesn't want to do that. And yet for many of us, probably most of us, it just doesn't turn out that way.

But as I listened to Frost, I realized that he was showing me another way that I could unite my avocation and my vocation. I could do what I love. Or I could love what I do.

I could love what I do. I could just fall in love with the task at hand.

I could do my job for the love of it.

That's what so impressed me about Uncle Jimmy. True, he works on a ranch in Hawaii. But it's hard work. It's very hard work. And yet the smile on his lips never left. He delighted in every part of it. You could see it; you could feel it. He was working for the love of it.

How do I do that? How do we do that? How do we work just for the love of it? Would it make a difference?

Well remember the story about the two men chiseling marble in Medieval Italy? And a priest asked them what they were doing; and one man said "I'm chipping stone." And the other one said, "I'm building a cathedral!"

When I first heard that story, it really got to me. I kept thinking these two men are doing exactly the same job. One is a stone chipper; the other is a cathedral builder. One is doing his job because he had to. The other is doing his job for the love of it. What a difference!

Are there cathedral builders today? Well let me tell you a very personal story.

Three years ago, my son Brian went off to Hollywood. Said he wanted to be a movie producer. And I said, "Brian, Brian, come on. You got a better chance of being drafted by the Lakers than of making it as a movie producer." I mean, it's a very hard business; I wanted him to know that. I'm his dad.

Well, he hasn't made it yet. He's an assistant at Creative Artists working in what Hollywood calls the mail room.

And he begins his 14 hour day every morning at five o'clock, lifting boxes and putting a new supply of sodas in the company lunch room.

But even as he's stocking those shelves, he's got that same, that same "Uncle Jimmy smile." And when somebody asks him what he's doing, he just looks them in the eye and says, "Hey, I'm making movies."

I say again, "What a difference."

#### BEGIN WITH A FULL CUP

Think of the people you know who really love what they do. It's a joy to be around them.

I've photographed people like this for the Geographic all my life, talked to them, asked them questions, learned from them.

The ones lucky enough to be doing what they loved - it's always great to meet people like that. But it was the ones who loved whatever job they did that really fascinated me. The ones who took whatever hand life dealt them and found a positive way to look at it.

Time and again those folks showed me that if you want to fall in love with what you're doing, it's not about finding a new job. It's about finding a new way of looking at the job you have.

But that's not all they taught me. Let me tell you a story about my mother, one of the most positive women I ever met, right up 'till the day she died.

Mom used to say to me, "Dewitt, begin each day with a full cup."

And she was right. She was right because, ultimately, love is about passion and passion is about energy. And if we're going to fall in love with what we do, we need all the energy we can get. I mean, we need to be so stoked on life that we're just about to burst.

A couple years ago, I was hired to teach a seminar on creativity to a wholesale food company in New Jersey. And I found out that the motto of this company was "Price is all!" Boy, there's a vision that could drain anybody's cup.

So I came out to the company and they ushered me into this conference room with about 40 of their top salespeople. All men, all wondering why they had to take time out of their busy day to listen to a photographer. It was like looking out in a room full of Danny DeVitos!

So about half way through the seminar, I began talking about the idea of the full cup. How important it was to have something that filled you with energy. That kept you up at night smiling. That took your breath away.

And I could hear them, I could see them. They're going, "The full cup? No man, the full bank account, that's what's important!"

So I asked each of them to take out a piece of paper and write down five things that filled their cup up. Five things they did outside of work that brought them joy. And I waited. And the pens were moving very slowly on the paper. They were struggling with their lists. I thought, "These guys are running on empty!"

And finally, I said, "O.K., after each idea, I want you to write down the date of the last time you actually did it."

And right there, in the middle of that conference room, one man put his head down on the desk and started to cry. The page in front of him was blank. Completely blank. No cup fillers. No dates. And Danny DeVito in tears.

There was a long, awkward silence. A couple of the guys came over to console him. And then the room erupted in one of the most amazing discussions I've ever been part of.

On that day, the men in that room got it. They saw and they felt, at a very deep level, just how important having a full cup was.

Mom was right. You can't fall in love with your work unless you come to work with a full cup.

There are a thousand ways we can fill up our cups. We just have to realize how essential it is to our well-being and make sure we take the time to do it. Because when we fill ourselves up it spills over into everything else we do.

I love to photograph. I get to do it for a living, but I also do it in my spare time just to keep my cup full.

Not long ago, I was out photographing and across the sky at the other end of the field flew a flock of white birds. I thought, "cattle egrets, how lovely." Then they turned.

My jaw dropped. I had no idea what I was looking at. Obviously, they

weren't egrets but what were they?

For the next 15 minutes, I simply fell in love through the lens. I whooped and danced and shot I don't know how many pictures.

Then to my complete amazement the entire flock settled like confetti on the roof of a nearby house. Pigeons! They were homing pigeons! I ran across the field after them.

By the time I arrived, their owner was calling them into their cages. He told me he dyed them with food coloring and flew them for weddings or parties or anytime he felt like it. He and I had a connection that was as good as the one I'd just had through the camera. And that connection, that feeling, that inspiration stayed with me long after I returned home.

My cup wasn't just full, it was overflowing. Giving me the energy to see my business, my family, my work differently. To fall in love with everything I was doing.

#### FIND GUIDES

Every assignment I took from the Geographic was a chance to fall in love with a new place, a new set of people, a new challenge.

Sometimes I was brimming with excitement when I began. Sometimes I was scared to death. Sometimes, honestly, I just wasn't interested. But whatever the case, the first thing I would do when I arrived on the scene was to find guides. Not guides to show me around, those were easy to find.

The guides I needed were folks who were in love. With a place, with their profession, with life. Those were the guides I'd search out. And, and through their eyes, landscapes I might have found totally uninteresting suddenly came alive.

I remember one time I was doing a story on the North Coast of California.

And I had been up since dawn and it was about four o'clock in the afternoon and I was totally exhausted. All I wanted to do was to go back to my motel and go to sleep. But I was working for the Geographic and I was getting paid, and the evening light was coming on. I couldn't quit.

So I looked at the local newspaper and there on the front page was a story about a guy named Ole Wilson who'd just raised a 50 pound

cabbage in his garden. Like I cared, but it was my job. So I called Ole and I asked if I could photograph him and he said yes. But I still wasn't engaged. And all the way out to his house, all I could think about was that bed in my motel.

He was standing among his cabbages when I got there. I'll never forget his face. It was like a ball of light. "Let me show you my children!" he said.

And an hour later I left Ole's place completely rejuvenated. And with a 30 pound cabbage that he'd put in the trunk of my car.

And over the next two months, every time I had a problem with my assignment, I'd think about Ole and I'd find myself saying, "Hey, if he can fall in love with a 50 pound cabbage, I can sure fall in love with what I'm doing!"

Want to fall in love with what you do? Hang out with people who are in love with what they do.

Guides like Ole are like the light in my photographs. It's the light that makes my photographs work, it's the light that makes them special, it's the light that makes them come alive.

#### ACT AS IF

Now I know that sometimes no matter how much we fill up our cup, no matter how much we hang out with folks who seem to love what they do, that light, that inspiration - our light, our inspiration- just doesn't seem to be there. From our perspective, it's just storm clouds and darkness.

Well at some point, if the light's not there, you just have to add it. Just like using a strobe. You just have to make your own light. Just act as if you were in love with what you do.

Several years ago, there was a woman in San Francisco who wrote an article called Random Acts of Kindness. Maybe you've read it. Maybe you practice it.

I loved the article. I believed in the concept. Random acts of kindness.

Well, since she lived in San Francisco, one of her suggestions for such a random act was to pay the bridge toll of the guy behind you when you crossed the bridge.

And at that point, you know, I lived just across the Golden Gate and every time I'd come to the city, I'd say, "Ok, today's the day!" And then I'd drive a little further and I'd go, "Uh uh. Today's not the day." I don't know why, I just couldn't do it.

So one day, I just grabbed hold of myself and I said, "Today is the day. I don't care if you don't think you're ready. Just act as if you are."

I mean, I've discovered that sometimes, you just have to act as if. Even if you're scared. Even if you haven't worked the kinks out yet. You just begin to make your own light by acting as if.

So, I got out six bucks. Three for me, and three for the guy behind me. And I drove into the toll booth and I looked in my rearview mirror and hidden behind me slides a gleaming, black Porsche. Like he needs it, right? I'm not a Porsche kind of a guy; I drive a gray, dusty Subaru.

But I rolled down the window and I hand the money to the girl who's taking the tolls and I said, "This is for me and the guy behind me."

And she looks down at my Subaru and then very slowly she looks over at the Porsche. And she looks back at me and she says, "You don't know him, do you?"

And I said, "No I don't."

And she just broke into this huge smile. A wonderful smile.

And I drove out of the toll booth and I looked in the rearview mirror, here was the guy in the Porsche, trying to hand her the money. And she was talking to him; I don't know what she was saying but finally he pulled his hand back in and he accelerated from zero to sixty in about 2.4 seconds. As he passed me, he let go of the wheel and he went "Yes!"

I don't know if I made his day. I think I did. I think I made her day. But I know I made my day. I mean, I will never forget that feeling, which all began by acting as if.

And every once in a while, I take out six bucks as I cross the Golden Gate Bridge.

## EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Whenever I take photographs, I can't help saying thank you. I'm not really sure why I do it or when it started. But I do know that expressing my gratitude increases my happiness.

I see a vision through the camera and those two words just bubble up in my throat. And for me, it's important to say it out loud. Thank you. To the universe even if no one else is listening.

Someone once told me: The factor that most determines your happiness is gratitude. The more you're grateful for, the happier you'll be.

They were right, absolutely. And the more things we do for the love of it, the more grateful we'll be.

Thank you.

## MAKE A CONTRIBUTION

"A bird sings not because it has an answer, but because it has a song."

Another one of those sayings that really hit home with me. Another one of those little lessons that helps me fall in love with what I do.

Sometimes when we think about falling in love with the work we do, I think we just try too hard. We seem to think that work that's worth falling in love with should be the kind that makes a big difference. That changes lives. That saves the planet. It's great if it does; but that desire, that vision, can grow so large that it becomes a barrier. And as a result, we just don't do it.

I remember one time I was out photographing and I came across a single marsh wren singing its heart out. So beautiful there in the sunlight. Brought a huge smile to my face. Was it trying to do that? Was it trying to make a difference in my life? To give me a winning photograph? No, no, it was just sitting on that twig... singing.

It wasn't trying to make a difference; it was just making a contribution. "Here I am, this is the best I've got, the best I have to give. Take it and do with it as you will."

“A bird sings not because it has an answer but because it has a song.” It sure takes the pressure off, doesn’t it?

I’m not going to worry about making a difference. If it happens, it happens. I’m just going to take the responsibility of making a contribution, the best that I can, by falling in love with what I do.

#### PASS IT ON

Every August, Uncle Jimmy is in charge of bringing in the herd. It’s an important time of the year for the paniolo and his family. It’s branding time, making sure the cattle are healthy and getting them ready for the big sale.

He tells me a paniolo rides in the saddle differently. They sit in the very front of the saddle. Not back in the seat like the mainland cowboys.

He takes time to teach me about throwing the kaula ili. The rope lariat. He says “keep your feet planted firmly in the stirrups. Focus on the cow, not the rope. Trust your horse and, above all, trust your instincts.”

He’s teaching me about bringing in the herd. But I’m learning so much more.

He tells me the paniolo takes care of the herd, the land of his family. “Take care of your family by passing on what you know,” he says. “Teach them how to fall in love with the work.”

Pass it on?

He nods and says: “Yes, Dewitt, when you love what you do, you pass it on. That’s the way it is. Pu’uwai Aloha. A loving heart.”

#### CHASE THE LIGHT

When people see my work, they often ask, “How did you get that shot? You must have had to wait forever for the light to be like that.”

A lot of people think photographers wait for the light to be just right. Maybe some do. I don’t. I can’t. It might never happen. I have to take action, to follow the light. No, not to follow it, to chase it. To chase the light. I just can’t wait.

And that's the lesson I've learned from all the folks I've told you about. You can't wait for it to come to you. For everything to be perfect. You've just got to fall in love with what you're doing, right now. Not tomorrow, not next week. Right now.

You've got to chase it, and find it... everyday.

So fill your cup, sing your song, pass on your passion, stuff your truck with a 50 pound cabbage, and do everything you do. Just for the love of it!