

StoryCorps Interview at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center

“I realized I had a voice...”

LaWanda Jones asks her 13 year-old son, Joseph Jones, about his involvement in the WINGS Performing Arts Program at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport, MS.

LaWanda Jones: What was your first thought when I brought you here, to Lynn Meadows and the WINGS program? You were very young. What was your first thought when you came in?

Joseph Jones: Is this woman crazy? Honestly. Because, I had no idea what you were taking me to, what you were thinking about... ‘cause at the time all I had was one or two friends, baseball and sleep. (*Laughs.*)

LJ: You’ve always kind of wanted to do singing and dancing and enjoyed it. What went through your mind that very first audion – never having to sing or perform in front of anybody?

JJ: Mainly, three words – or no, four. What am I doing? I was so nervous because honestly I thought they were just going to, like, put the hammer down like it was in some kind of a game show, like *The Voice* or something. (*Laughs.*) Because, I mean, I didn’t really sing that much before and I didn’t know what I was going to do.

LJ: Did you ever think, way back then when you started, that you would actually come into your own and realize, “Hey, doing this acting and theater thing – I really love it!”?

JJ: Really, no. It was kind of a weird experience at first. I was kind of awkward [and I] didn’t really like talking in front of people. Definitely was always nervous around people.

LJ: What would you pinpoint as that one experience that made you feel like, confident, about getting on that stage?

JJ: The applause. When I walked up on that stage after an entire show was finished – all the hard work and dedication – the applause.

LJ: How has being a part of this program, and this program being so diverse, helped you in your day-to-day life?

JJ: I realized that I had a voice and that I could say things. I could voice my opinion. And now, I have friends who are *true* friends because I *do* voice that opinion.

LJ: Did you think you had a voice like that? Did you think there was anything down there like that?

JJ: Honestly, no. I was always so quiet. I never said anything, nor did I ever try to say anything.

LJ: So was it kind of empowering, making you feel, “Hey, you know this is something I could do. This is something that makes me, me!”?

JJ: More than empowering, actually. It was kind of this liberating feeling of being different from people because I didn’t know too many people around me who could sing. So when I did sing, it was a really good coping mechanism for stress.

LJ: What was your favorite character so far that you’ve gotten to perform?

JJ: I’d have to say Pumba from the Lion King was definitely my kind of character. He’s like, really funny and bouncy all the time.

LJ: Pick a line, go for it. You can do it!

JJ: *(Laughs.)* Alright. *(Sings.)* When I was a young warthog!

LJ: *(Laughs.)* Very good. That character was probably the closest to your personality and you did it *so* freely. You just blossomed. You learned movement and now it’s like, you dance like it’s nobody’s business and I feel it’s helping you develop into the man you’re becoming. It makes me proud.