

# *It's All About the Journey*

*Written by Sue Dickens*

**Name:** Linda Jones

**# of Years driving:** 31

**Company:** Owner/operator leased to R & R Trucking in Duenweg, Missouri (a suburb of Joplin)

**Best experience:** The first time I drove the Stewart-Cassiar Highway (37) coming down out of Watson Lake into Washington. There was a section of road that was all dirt – it was in the middle of winter and there were one-lane bridges to cross, and no guard rails. It was exciting!

**Biggest challenge:** Today the biggest challenge I find is apathy among drivers and there is not much camaraderie like there was 30 years ago. The biggest challenge I remember as a brand new driver was overcoming my fear of bridges. I was afraid of heights and water!

## **ABOUT LINDA**

Ready to roll on a 3,600 mile trip to Alaska from Joplin, MO, trucker Linda Jones took time out of her busy schedule to talk about her life on the road.

Her story begins many years ago as a divorced mom with three young children to raise. “I had to make some decent money and I’d been working three jobs when somebody told me if I got a job trucking I could make enough that I could probably spend my weekends at home with my kids. As it turned out the first job I got I was home every weekend,” she says with a grin.

For Linda it was the beginning of a long and happy career behind the wheel of a big rig.

But the story gets even better ... driving is how she met Jim, a trucker with 25 years of experience on the road. “We were work-



*The photo taken at the 2006 Mid-America Trucking Show shows Linda Jones with XM Satellite radio's Truckin' Bozo® - a favorite among truckers.*

ing for the same company and when we met each other we fell head over heels. Within two to three weeks we were driving together ... it has really been something,” she says grinning again.

“If you can’t make it as a couple trucking you can’t make it at all because you know you can’t get away from each other on the road. You learn to work through your problems, together ... but I can slam the curtains pretty loud if I have to,” she adds laughing.

One of their favorite runs is to Alaska, a trip they do at least three or four times a year as part of the many long hauls they do together. To make sure they are comfortable on the road in their 2003 navy blue Freightliner Classic they have a 72” sleeper outfitted with everything from a microwave and fridge to a crock pot and George Foreman grill.

“We carry a lot of stuff with us because we travel so much. I do a lot of cooking in the truck because we prefer that to eating in restaurants,” says Linda.

She and her husband agree it is tough to stay healthy on the road so they eat home cooked meals and for exercise they park as far away as they can in the parking lot of a truck stop. “Sometimes we do get layovers and when we can, we go camping and hiking.”

### **IT’S ALL ABOUT THE JOURNEY**

Even though trucking has its challenges for women, something Linda knows all about from her years of driving alone, she has never regretted her decision to join the industry.

“I have seen a lot of changes. Proving myself to other male drivers was challenging ... they would not accept me at all and would often have me in tears. Now it seems some of the drivers don’t really care about one another no matter what their gender ... it is something we need to change,” she says with conviction.

This coming from a woman who was the first female trucker in Nebraska to get a key to the pipeline so she could load her own truck with anhydrous ammonia – Linda has been making her own inroads into the industry ever since.

Linda knows joining Women In Trucking was a good decision ([www.womenintruck.org](http://www.womenintruck.org)). She believes in what the group is doing and has made a lot of friends through its network.

“Once I started driving and meeting people through the USA and Canada I found that what was lacking in my life was a relationship with other women. After a while you get to feel isolated so I was thrilled to see as the years went by more and more women coming out here, some with their husbands and some on their own,” she says.

“The women I meet are very interesting. I think they are drawn to the lifestyle because of the freedom. It is one of few industries where you don’t have to punch a time clock and you still have a little bit of freedom left to make choices.”

### **LOVING LIFE ON THE ROAD**

Trucking is a way of life for Linda and it doesn’t end when she gets home. There are always fellow truckers stopping by to visit. “We have barbecues and parties,” she explains.

In fact, their patio was the setting for the wedding of a couple that had been trucking together for 15 years. “The people in the trucking industry are all like family to me,” says Linda.

Speaking of family, two of Linda’s sons are in the industry. Her eldest son Ray is a driver and Craig works as a load planner. Her daughter Tammy is busy raising her own four children. Her third son Mack is in building supply sales and her stepson Zachary works at a local building supply store.

### **SHE’S COME A LONG WAY**

Linda has come a long way from the early days when she would put a block of ice in a dishpan under the driver’s seat to try to stay cool because her rig had no air conditioning.

“I still remember the bunk houses – they used to have before they had sleepers on trucks, in Kansas and Western Nebraska where I used to haul grain to cattle farms,” she says reminiscing.

“I remember walking through a bunkhouse and there were a couple of men sleeping and I could hear them snoring as I tippy toed to the back to take a shower,” she says laughing. “I’m sure glad those days are long gone.”

This is one trucker that can be an inspiration to other women.