

Survivors

From dirt poor

OUT OF THE DARKNESS: The Spider Jones Story
By Spider Jones and Michael Hughes
ECW Press

By PERRY LEFKO
Toronto Sun

He's sparred with Muhammad Ali, defeated Diana Ross in a singing competition and acted in a movie with Tony Curtis, but the most amazing thing Spider Jones has done in his life is live to talk about it.

Jones, the CFRB announcer who bills himself as the "lovable one," has written an interesting account of his life. *Out Of The Darkness*, which aside from covering his relationships with people in the sports and entertainment fields also includes his affiliations with thugs and gangs. Some of the people he writes about ended up in jail — as did Jones at various times — while others died, something which would have become his fate had he not dedicated himself to ending his life of crime.

He grew up literally dirt poor in Windsor. Jones often went to school smelling of urine after peeing in the bed he occupied with five other siblings. His bed-wetting was a product of his fears of the angel of death, first triggered by the sight of his dead grandfather lying in a casket. His trauma was exacerbated a year later when his infant brother died of pneumonia.

Jones battled self-doubt and suffered from a lack of self-esteem in school; he was taunted because he was the only black in his class; he regularly had to fight off bullies.

His life changed when his father took him to a boxing facility to learn how to defend himself



to the 'lovable one' on CFRB

his introduction to "sweet science" a profound effect. It came so prof- it that in later years an amateur Gold- loves champion- s. He engaged in sanctioned money s called smokers, e fighters, outfit- fth little or no ment, boxed for profit of bestors. en he wasn't ng, Jones stole s that he'd swap ash. Sometimes steal from his fa- a part-time ce- d minister who some money at ie for provisions for the family.

Jones' parents eventually lost patience with their son's reckless ways, particularly when they discovered he had stolen from them, and signed his release papers from school before the legal age of 16 on the understanding he'd look for a job. But by his own admission he became a "full-time street punk" after that.

He engaged in gang warfare but had a desire to escape from that life and improve himself. He found salvation in his wife, who helped him to realize his life-long dream of becoming a radio person- ality, something fostered in his youth after developing a love of music and meeting luminaries such as Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry. At age 30, Jones



— Joe Warrington, SUN file

returned to school, graduated with hon- ours from college and worked his way up in the "rad-dyo" business.

Jones' story is entertaining when he talks about sparring with Muhammad Ali, leading up to a fight in Toronto in 1966 against Canadian George Chuvalo. Jones became part of Ali's entourage and maintained that friendship in later years. He also cultivated a relationship with Chuvalo.

Jones' singing talents, which he show- cased at an early age in a competition that included Diana Ross before she joined the Supremes, combined with his knowledge of musical genres are as im- pressive as his fistie skills.

He's also acted in a few films, including a bit part in a Tony Curtis movie filmed in Toronto. Jones befriended the actor and became his chauffeur, guide and security guard for a few weeks during the filming.

Jones' story is entertaining, troubling,



— Mario Shark, SUN file

scary and inspir- ing. Through per- severance, he overcame poverty, bigotry and crime and, as they say in boxing, he's still standing to talk about it.

GEORGE CHUVALO, former boxer, jokes with Spider Jones, and above, Spider on the "ray-dyo".