

# Diary of a Pet Chef

## ABC TV's "The Pet Show" Chronicles

We knew we were in trouble when Jackson, the large green Eclectus parrot, bolted on the wing out of the commercial kitchen where our crew of five were shooting Critter Cuisine segments on a hot January day for the new ABC TV series, 'The PetShow'. We were shocked as he flew around the house at speed and couldn't stop him as he headed straight for the picture window, which he hit head on with a sickening 'Thud' and a tumble to the ground. Jackson was on the verge of unconsciousness when he tried to fly again and this time hit another window but only barely, hanging onto the sill by his beak. He was stunned senseless. So were we, as he was rushed to his trailer to recover.

It had all started in early November with a phone call from researchers in Perth of a new national ABC show that was geared at an upper demographic, pet lifestyle lovers and families in the 6:30 timeslot, just before the news on Tuesday nights for 37 weeks starting in March. They were looking at creating a segment on cooking for pets, Googled the net, had seen Urban Animal's Cuisine de Critters and wanted to get all of our back copies.

After a few discussions and a bit of banter, the Perth based producers suggested shooting a three minute segment centering on one recipe with a home video camera at our house. Shooting through the banisters of a stairway overlooking our kitchen, we were no Spielbergs. It turned into a hilarious blooper tape and tour-de-farce when Jackson flew into the scene and cracked up Lisa and myself. But it also took the edge off of our 'audition' and he snapped up his treat on cue as the dogs circled me while I fixed up their homegrown dog biscuits. Needless to say, the animals were the talent and I played the straight man. And it's the pet talent that probably landed us the show.

In the following weeks, discussions took place about concepts, recipes, presentation, copyrights, formats and before you know it, The Pet Chef segment had been slotted into each program and with a working title of Critter Cuisine, it was time for the lawyers to take over. What started as a fun idea had evolved into a 19-page contract and a few volleys back and forth over the terms as a small cadre of production crew started to plan shooting schedules, crewing, locations and recipes.

Ideas came and went. We couldn't use our kitchen for cooking segments because it was too small and angular. But we could use the dining area for non-cooked treat segments. Lisa's bright idea of me getting a puffy white mushroom shaped chef's hat and attaching two long brown floppy cloth dog ears to it was met enthusiastically by the producers and researchers but nixed by me. After all, once exposed on TV, shopping at the supermarket would become a different experience and I didn't need the ridicule from kids, "Mummy Mummy! Look it's that fat, bald Pet Chef with the furry dog ears!" It was on par with having floppy dice and a bobbing bubble-head Chihuahua doll in the back window of my car.

Word of the show got out in early December when ABC issued a press release:

ABC TV - Media Release  
Released: 8 December 2005

THE PET SHOW  
Tuesday 6:30pm  
Premieres: March 2006 on ABC TV

Australian television legend, Johnny Young is to host a new 6.30pm show from Perth The Pet Show.

Johnny will lead a team of vets on a program aimed at the millions of Australians who have pets. It will deliver solid, practical and most importantly reliable advice in consultation with the RSPCA.

"They say in show-business never work with animals and children. I spent many years working with kids and now I get to work with animals, which I love! I am very excited to be involved in this show and I know we will have the same success as I had with Young Talent Time." said Johnny Young.

"The ABC is thrilled to see Johnny Young return to our screens in 2006. He'll bring his special brand of warmth and humour to ABC Television, Tuesday nights at 6:30pm." Denise Eriksen, Head, Factual Entertainment ABC TV.

The Pet Show will include:

- A 'SuperVet' segment for pets, who each week will solve a different behavioral or medical problem.
- A panel of Vets in the studio ready to answer questions from the public.
- A Specialist Chef will be cooking up tasty treats for your pets and talking about nutritional requirements you may not have considered.
- An interactive competition that will turn your pet into a star.
- Information to help you make the right decision when choosing a pet.
- Behind the scenes stories from an animal emergency ward.
- A look at the relationships of some of Australia's best-known faces and their pets.



So there I was, part of the team, and in vintage trademark Hawaiian shirts, probably the most ridiculous looking one. Especially at my size which at least shows off the patterns better than a thin guy. But as my favourite Hawaiian celebrity cook warns, "Never trust a skinny chef!"

Aside from the vast amount of preparation needed in terms of nutrition, dietary and cooking information, then food procurement, utensil roundup and animal wrangling, there's also the picky little details of personal grooming-not the pets, but me! I'm too old for pimples and blemishes or even hickies, but need to mow down those hooty-owl eyebrows, make sure nose hairs and ear hairs are trimmed and nails are clipped for the camera. There's no makeup lady or toady personal assistant.

If you have visions of luxury limos, a row of air conditioned trailers next to the set, caterers on call, assistants to deal with our every whim and groupies for both human and animal talent, this is the ABC. My contract does not allow me to divulge any of the terms nor really anything about the show, so suffice to say, my parrots retirement plan is not exactly getting topped up like they would be if TVs Dr Harry or Don Bourke were my partners. Then again, maybe not.

And if you think we are going to get an incredible amount of exposure for the magazine on the show, I can assure you that the ABC standards are so strict, we couldn't wear a t-shirt, have a copy casually out on the table or make any other commercial tie-in with the show. Which is fine by us as the ABC's non-commercial stance means the show will be as intelligent and unadvertorial as our magazine has been since its inception. If it was on a commercial network, I can assure you there would be logos everywhere and some recipes might be meat loaf made with PAL!

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