

TV Close-Up: Julianna Margulies

by Eirik_Knutzen

Looking out for No. 1, Julianna Margulies made it known through a network of agents that she was ready and willing to work, but any involvement with a dramatic television series would be limited to a cable-TV project only calling for a dozen or so episodes per season.

JULIANNA MARGULIES - In the TV drama 'Canterbury's Law,' Julianne Margulies plays Elizabeth Canterbury, a brilliant attorney dedicated to taking on impossible cases. CNS Photo courtesy of Miranda Penn Turin. And, of course, the show would have to be shot entirely in New York, not all that far from her Manhattan home.

"Right away, somebody sent me the pilot script of 'Canterbury's Law,' which I loved," the 41-year-old Margulies recalled. "When the cover letter stated that it was to be filmed in New York and produced for cable network FX, I couldn't believe my luck."

But Margulies' spirit took a steep dive a couple of days later when she discovered that the secretary or production assistant who sent the script had made a typographical error.

"The original letter clearly read it was from 'FX,' but it was supposed to read 'FOX,'" she said, only finding the mix-up amusing in retrospect.

Much begging and serious discussions in the wake of the snafu led to Margulies reluctantly signing on the dotted line, knowing that "Canterbury's Law" had an initial order for only six episodes as a midseason replacement show and was guaranteed to be shot in New York (particularly the Bronx and Queens) despite the series' setting in Providence, R.I.

"Canterbury's Law" - executively produced by "Rescue Me" star Denis Leary, among others - deals with the

trials and tribulations of Elizabeth Canterbury, a brilliant attorney with obvious flaws dedicated to taking on impossible cases for the wrongly or unjustly accused while manipulating the law to fit her own agenda.

She is surrounded by a young legal team in her small practice - including dedicated do-gooders portrayed by Ben Shankman, Keith Robinson and Trieste Kelly Dunn - but cheats on her law professor husband, Matt Furey (Aidan Quinn), who is often left home alone with heartbreaking memories that usually involve their 6-year-old son, who disappeared two years ago and is presumed dead.

By the time the six episodes of "Canterbury's Law" were in the can just hours before the November screenwriters' strike was called, Margulies was seven months pregnant and able to properly rest, exercise and monitor her vital signs before delivering her first child, a strapping lad named Kieran Lindsay, on Jan. 17, 2008. Her husband (and son's father), Keith Lieberthal, is an attorney, naturally.

"The hours before and after Kieran was born were, naturally, the most incredible experience in my life," said Margulies. "As I held him in my arms for the first time, I realized that every cliché about motherhood is true. An unbreakable bond is formed between mother and child, and I realized instantly that I would be responsible for this amazing human being for the rest of my life.

"And it became absolutely clear to me that I could kill somebody in order to save my child's life - I have no doubts about it," she continued. "I find it equally credible that I could lift a car with my bare hands if my child's body is trapped underneath it. Comfort, health and safety are always on your mind."

Born (along with two older sisters) in Spring Valley, N.Y., not far from the big city, Margulies spent most of her formative years in London, as her mother, Francesca, was a dancer with the American Ballet Company, but returned in time to attend an exclusive boarding school in New Hampshire. She also earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts at the elite Sarah Lawrence College.

Her curriculum included studying art history in Florence, Italy, during her junior year, all made possible by her successful, hard-working father, Paul Margulies, the Madison Avenue wizard who created the "Plop-plop,

fizz-fizz" jingle for Alka-Seltzer some 50 years ago. But she got into acting the hard way.

After a couple of years waiting tables in Manhattan, Margulies made her feature film debut in Steven Seagal's action-packed "Out for Justice" in 1991. Ironically, it took another year to nail down another professional acting gig, but she managed to hang on long enough to break the cycle of poverty through a long run with the Yale Repertory Company and three national TV commercials.

Appearing on "ER" as nurse Carol Hathaway from 1994 to 2000 sealed her fate, picking up an Emmy Award (among six Emmy nominations) and a SAG Award for breathing life into her character.

"It was hard work, but incredibly rewarding because of all the talent there to work with," she explained. "And to see my friend George Clooney emerge from that show as a major movie star didn't surprise me, because I knew that he had it all."

She reportedly left a \$27 million offer to extend her "ER" contract, but has no regrets.

"It was time to move on, do other things. I've done movies and miniseries everywhere, but lead a very private life. My husband and I never see each other at work; we decided long ago to totally separate our personal and professional lives."

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