Hollywood Exclusive: Bonnie Hunt grateful for renewal in these tough times; Diesel, Walker step up in new

by Marilyn_Beck_&_Stacy_Jenel_Smi

Bonnie Hunt is grateful â€” and relieved â€” that her syndicated talk show has been renewed for a second year. She points out that it was not something she was able to take for granted.

"In daytime," she says, "it's very hard to stay alive. I really feel fortunate to have a pickup." And on her terms.

She notes that on some competing shows, "There seems to be a desperation to provoke â€” to surprise and embarrass guests by catching them off-guard. I can't survive that way just to get viewers. It's not just about my staying on the air, it's about doing a show I'm proud of, that's respectful to the audience."

She points out that "The Bonnie Hunt Show" couldn't have come along at a much worse time "in terms of advertising dollars and stations that are hurting. It's a tough market, when there is even more of a need than usual for something entertaining and fun that's done in a sincere way, because there are more people watching who are losing heir jobs. We talk about it all the time. We devote the first 15 minutes to talking to the audience about what so many of us are going through â€” my family like many families."

Bonnie, one of seven siblings, remains close to her family. She also remains close to her initial profession â€” as an oncology nurse â€” and, in fact, returned to those ranks in Chicago's Northwestern Memorial oncology wards, "when my first two sitcoms were cancelled.â€•

Even now, after close to two decades in show business and credits that range from "Jerry MaGuire" and "Cheaper by the Dozen" to the sitcoms "Davis Rules" and "Life With Bonnie," she has a hard time feeling like she has a permanent place as an actress. And to this day, she maintains ties with Northwestern Memorial, visiting patients and donating profits from the Bonnie's Basement segment of her show â€” in which viewers can bid on autographed items brought to the show by guests â€” to the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center in Chicago.

THE BIG SCREEN SCENE: Vin Diesel and Paul Walker have teamed up once again for "Fast & Furious," opening April 3, and their hot co-star Gal Gadot says to expect big things. "To do a fourth movie, it has to be better. It's not easy when there are such high expectations from people who saw the previous ones," says the Israeli model/actress of the franchise. "But this one is faster, bigger â€” it's going to blow minds." Playing Diesel's antagonist-turned-love-interest was a big opportunity for Gadot, who won the title of Miss Israel before completing her required stint in the Israeli army. "In Israel, when you turn 18, you have to join the army. In my case I started when I was 20 because of the Miss Israel thing. After I finished the army, I decided I wanted to do something that had more sustenance, so I got into acting," she explains. "I started being an actress a year and a half ago, so it's all new to me, but Vin never treated me like I was new, which was really nice."

In fact, Gadot feels like this breakout role couldn't have been a more perfect fit. "I've always been known to be a fast driver and a girl who loves cars, so the movie worked out great for me. I even got to have a beautiful car in the movie. Unfortunately, anytime I drove it, they asked me to drive it in the first gear because they were afraid something bad would happen."

CREEPY, KOOKIE, MOVIN' ON UP, A THREE-HOUR TOUR â€¦ : Gloria Loring will be surrounded by TV celebs including her ex-husband Alan Thicke and her pal Bea Arthur, along with son Robin Thicke and his wife, Paula Patton, as she launches her "TV Tunez Tonight" show this Sunday (3/22) at Hollywood's Music Box Theater. It's a show made up of â€” of all things â€” TV theme songs, several of which Loring has written. (The best known: her "Facts of Life" theme.) She tells us she covers some 70 pieces of material in 85 minutes in the show, from "Highway Patrol" to "Super Chicken" to "Good Times" to "Queer Eye For the Straight Guy" to "The Addams Family" to "the whole testosterone-inspired 'Bonanza, 'Wyatt Earp,' 'Daniel Boone' Western genre." Former "Days of Our Lives" cast mate Bill Hayes may be on hand, she says, reminding, "He was the original voice on 'Davy Crockett.'"

There are beautiful tunes along the way, like "Love Is," from the original "Beverly Hills, 90210." But the main point is fun. As Gloria notes, "You don't show up at a show called 'TV Tunez' with a jaded sensibility.â€•

Loring is aiming for "what they call a 'sit down' â€” a show in Vegas for six months a year where I would be able to have a life during the daytime." She says she already has interest from that gambling town.

YOU'D NEVER GUESS: Show business legend Mitzi Gaynor says she had a blast doing the commentary for the newly released 50th Anniversary Blu-ray/DVD of "South Pacific." Mitzi knows how to spin a good behind-the-scenes yarn. She tells us, for instance, that her leading man in the classic musical, the late Italian star Rossano Brazzi had a wife who weighed 300 pounds and teased him mercilessly over his sex symbol image.

"That was their relationship, very playful. That's how they had fun," she says. Brazzi's marriage to the baroness Lidia Bartolini lasted from 1940 until her death in 1981.

With reports by Emily Feimster.

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