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IN WESTERN CANADA



Word Play

WORD TRAVELS' ROBIN ESROCK TALKS ABOUT THE HEAT, THE DUST AND THE DAY HE AND CO-HOST JULIA DIMON ATE WORMS.

COMMISSIONING HISTORY

NOW IN IT'S 30TH YEAR, THE BC FILM COMMISSION IS, ARGUABLY, THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FILM COMMISSION ON THE PLANET.



Liz Scully
draws on
ZEKE'S PAD

28 years of
CINEWORKS

and a Q+A with
RICKY GERVAIS

12

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16 WORD PLAY

Robin Esrock looks back at how he and fellow travel writer Julia Dimon managed to create their own dream jobs. As the co-hosts of the TV series *Word Travels*, they have been paid to travel the world and talk about the heat, the dust and the day they ate some worms.

20 COMMISSIONING HISTORY

It's been 30 years since Grace McCarthy asked Justis Greene to head up the BC Film Commission. Working with the film and television industry, Greene and his four successors, Dianne Neufeld, Pete Mitchell, Mark Desrochers and Susan Croome have managed to create what is, arguably, the most successful film commission on the planet.

26 ARTISTIC LICENSE

When animator Liz Scully created a cartoon show about a teenager's ability to animate his world by drawing on a pad of paper, most artists could relate. So too could the animators at Bardel Animation and Australia's Flying Bark Productions, who formed an alliance to bring *Zeke's Pad* to television.

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ON THE COVER: ROBIN ESROCK AND JULIA DIMON CO-STAR IN *WORD TRAVELS*. ABOVE: JULIA DIMON.

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PRODUCTION UPDATE

What's coming. What's shooting. What's wrapped.

Paperny Leads Way

Paperny Films is currently involved in the producing of three live action series. The Vancouver-based company is working on *100 Mile Challenge*, *Chop Shop* and the third season of *Glutton for Punishment*. All three are executive produced by **David Paperny** and **Cal Shumiatcher** while *Chop Shop* adds **Lawrence MacDonald** as an executive producer.

on money matters. *Word Travels* has **Heather Hawthorn-Doyle** as executive producer, **Deborah Wainright** as producer, **Michael Bodnarchuk** directing, **Sean Cable** as DOP and **Leah Merrell** as production manager/location manager. *Smart Cookies* is executive produced by Hawthorn-Doyle and **Brian Hamilton** with **Dana Johl** producing, **Mary Frymire** directing, **Stephen Taylor** as the DOP, **Krista**



ROBIN ESROCK AND JULIA DIMON
STAR IN WORD TRAVELS

100 Mile Challenge sees a town's citizens trying to survive for 100 days eating only food that originates within a hundred-mile radius of their home. It has **Eddie O** directing, **Christian Bruyere** as line producer and **Megan Cameron** as production coordinator. *Chop Shop* profiles a counter-culture hair salon and has **Stacey Landers** as production manager. *Glutton for Punishment* features food extremist **Bob Blumer** as he battles the elements to find epicurean challenges. It is being produced by **Vera Lubimova**, with **William Morrison** as director/DOP and **Bonnie Chung** as production coordinator.

Omni Film currently has two lifestyle series in production in Vancouver. *Word Travels* follows travel writers **Robin Esrock** and **Julia Dimon** (see page 16) as they tour the world, while *Smart Cookies* looks at five young women who advise others

Kelloway as production manager and **Felicity Wong** and **Andrea Levesque** as production coordinators.

The documentary series *Keeping it Real* explores alternatives to cosmetic surgery and has **Kirk Shaw** and **Brad McAfee** as executive producers, **Wendy McKernan** as producer, **Barry Gray** as supervising producer, **Stephanie Rosloski** and **Tara Shortt** as directors, **Haydn Wazelle** as production manager and **Dawn Cormier** as production coordinator.

The feature *Tooth Fairy* brings former CFL player **Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson** to town to play a hockey player who is sentenced to become the tooth fairy for a week. It is being produced by **Jason Blum**, **Mark Ciardi** and **Gordon Gray** and co-produced by **Kevin Halloran** with **Michael Lembeck** directing, **David Tattersall** as DOP, **Marcia Hinds** as production designer, **Wendy**

Williams as production manager, **Pat Foster** as production coordinator and **Catou Kearney** as location manager. **Alex Burdett** is the special effects coordinator for the movie which wraps after a nine week shoot in late November. It is scheduled for a theatrical release in June of 2009.

The Tortured stars **Jesse Metcalfe** and **Erika Christensen** as a couple that loses their five year old to a pedophile. It has **Curtis Leopardo** and **Jonathan Zucker** as executive producers, **Carl Mazzone**, **Mark Burg** and **Oren Koules** producing, **Raymond Massey** as line producer, **Rob Lieberman** directing, **Brian Davie** as the production designer, **Michele Futerman** as the production manager, **Jim McKeown** as the production coordinator and **David Fullerton** as the location manager.

Comedian **George Lopez** is shooting a direct-to-video presentation called *George Lopez Presents* in Vancouver. He and **Ann Lopez** are the executive producers while **Frank Pace** is producing, **Craig Forrest** is the line producer/production manager, **William Dear** is directing, **Ron Stannett** is the DOP, **Matthew Budgeon** is the production designer, **Yale Kussin** is the production coordinator and **Chris Wilson** is the location manager.

The producers of the hit television series *Battlestar Gallactica* brought their cast and crew back to Vancouver in September for a movie of the week called *Battlestar Gallactica: The Plan*. The movie was executive produced by **Ronald D. Moore** and **David Eick** with **Harvey Frand** producing, **Ron French** the line producer, **Stephen McNutt** the DOP, **Richard Hudolin** the production designer, **Wayne Rose** the production manager, **Melissa Barrie** the production coordinator, **Kent Sponagle** the location manager and **Andy Chamberlayne** the special effects coordinator.

The made for television movie *Do You Know Me? (aka Have You Seen*

Me) has **Matthew O'Connor** and **Tom Rowe** as executive producers with **Shan Tam** producing, **Penelope Buitenhuis** directing, **Dave Pelletier** as DOP, **Bobby Allyn-Uhrich** as production designer, **Ian Hay** as production manager, **Louisa Main** as production coordinator and **Tracey Renyard** as location manager. It is scheduled to wrap on October 3.

Arriving in October is the latest **Uwe Boll** production, a television movie entitled *Rampage* which has **Shawn Williamson** producing, **Daniel Clarke** as producer/production manager, **Mathias Neumann** as DOP, **Tink** as production designer, **Joey Setter** as production coordinator, **Terry Mackay** as location manager and **Jak Osmond** as special effects coordinator.

The TV movie *Hardwired* has **Kirk Shaw** as executive producer, **Lindsay Macadam** producing, **Christine Haebler** as supervising producer, **Mike Hurst** directing, **Tia Buhl** as production manager, **Lucy McLeod** as production coordinator, **Greg Astop** as location manager and **Al Benjamin** as special effects coordinator.

The pilot for *Inseparable*, the story of a forensic psychiatrist with a split personality, has former teen heartthrob **Shaun Cassidy**, *The X-Files* director **Rob Bowman** and former NBC executive **Warren Littlefield** as executive producers with **Bowman** directing, **Bob Simon** producing, **Patti Allen** as production manager, **Kassandra Griebel** as production coordinator and **Abraham Fraser** as location manager.

The Cult television pilot has award-winning director **Kari Skogland** and **Angus Fraser**, **Jayne Pfahl**, **Jeff Spriet** and **James Wilkes** as executive producers. The producer is **Brad Van Arragon**, the DOP is **David Frazee**, the production designer is **Rob Gray**, the production manager is **Michael Williams**, the production coordinator is **Sheryl Rhodes** and the location manager is **Thierry Tanguy**.



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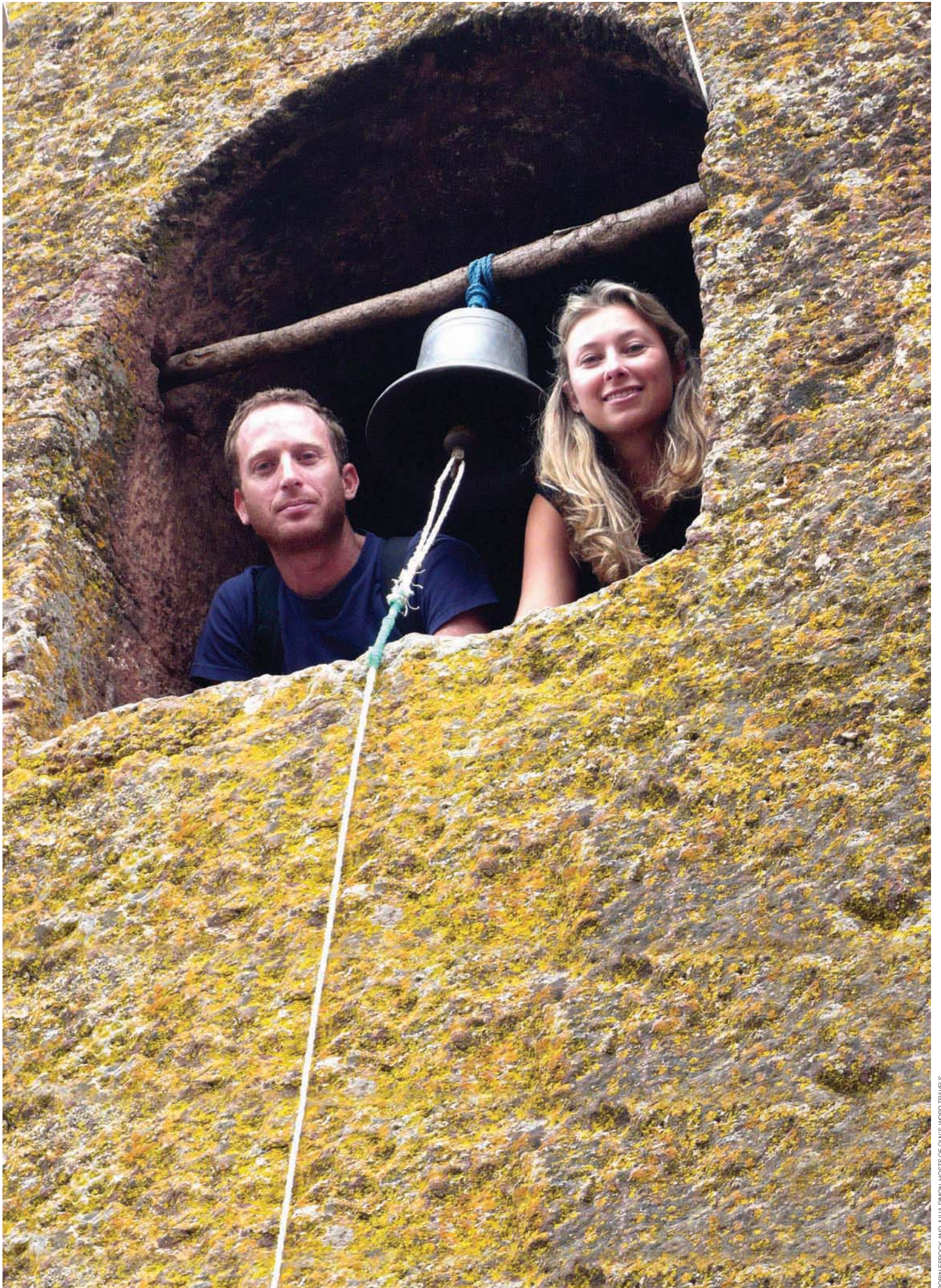


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Word Play

Robin Esrock turned a scooter accident into a world tour. Then, he turned the world tour into a job. Esrock and Julia Dimon became co-hosts of *Word Travels*, an Outdoor Life Network (OLN) show and now get paid to travel the world. In his diary on the evolution of the show, Esrock looks back at the accident that made things happen, the lost luggage, the worm eating, the wearing of bullet proof vests and, of course, the glamour.

May, 2003 The day before I am to be sworn in as a Canadian citizen, a car rips through a stop sign on Alberni Street in Vancouver, and crashes into my scooter. I execute a swan dive over my handlebars, but instead of a medal, my bike is mangled, and my left kneecap is broken. Subsequently, I am scootered off to the hospital, piled up on painkillers, and then return to my job in Artist Development at music powerhouse SL Feldman & Associates. A friend of mine hires a street violinist to perform in my office. Woe is me. A few years later, I would come to see these seemingly tragic events as the best day of my life.

December, 2003 With the aid of a lawyer, I receive a \$20,000 insurance settlement from ICBC. After six weeks of incredible pain, my knee had healed perfectly.

October, 2004 Having spent much of the year promoting music and charity events, that chunk of change in my bank account continues to bore a hole through my dreams. Should I buy a car? Should I put a deposit down on an apartment? Should I finally cash it in and do the unthinkable cool – take a year off to see the world? On my 30th birthday, I walk into a travel agent and book a 12 month return round-the-world ticket. The moment I hand over my credit card, providence takes over and my Trip of Dreams is unstoppable.

February 2005 What I don't sell I put into storage. I dust off my old backpack, and depart for Peru, the first leg of a year of madness I christen Modern Gonzo. My ambition to see so much in so little time, with so little preparation, has a definite gonzo flair to it. Having built a website for my friends and family to keep up to date with my progress, I pitch a regular column to the Vancouver Sun. My first column runs the day I leave for South America, and suddenly there's a lot more people following my progress. I'm determined to upload writing, pictures, and more to my site every week, as much for my own diary records as for others to live vicariously through my adventures.

February 2006 I return to Vancouver a year to the day. My travels took me to Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Albania, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, Dubai, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. I spent every penny, and then some. During this year, Modern Gonzo builds a cult online following, my column becomes a weekly, and I pitch other newspapers around the world, selling stories in major newspapers in the US, Hong Kong and South Africa. Coincidentally, I also meet another young Canadian travel writer named Julia Dimon in a small village in Turkey. She is also writing a round-the-world column for the Toronto Star, travelling in the opposite direction. We discuss the unique pressures and joys of being a travel writer, and decide to keep in touch.

May, 2006 The explosion of Youtube allows me to stitch together some of my video footage in Final Cut Pro (incidentally shot on a point-and-shoot 5 megapixel Canon) and upload it online. Suddenly I can share more than just writing and photos with the world.

August, 2006 Sleeping on couches and house sitting for friends and strangers, I persevere with the travel writing and begin to sell enough stories to get some industry attention. I score an assignment on the Trans-Siberia Railway, another to Borneo. The absurd reality that I am broke and homeless, yet able to jet set around the world on thrilling adventures, underscores the misconcep-

tion around the glamour of travel writing. After 18 months on the road, enough people tell me my life should be a TV show that I start to believe them. But who is lucky enough to get a travel TV show? I ask some friends who work in the industry and get the name of two production companies who might consider a pitch; one in Toronto, one in Vancouver. Although I'd no experience in such matters, I work on a one-page idea for a half-hour TV show, adding METRO's Julia Dimon as a co-host to make the package more dynamic. Neither of us could have imagined what happens next.

September, 2006 I cold email Omni Film in Vancouver. Considering I spend a great deal of time unsuccessfully pitching stories, I don't expect any reply. I'm seriously considering moving to Buenos Aires and opting out of the grid. Within a week however, Omni VP Brian Hamilton replies and sets up a meeting with TV vet Heather Hawthorn-Doyle, who had just recently headed up a newly established Omni Lifestyle division. Heather checks out my Youtube and sees immediate potential. Our first meeting goes great. Heather is a fireball of creative energy and enthusiasm. I work with her and her fantastic team to revise the one page and cut a demo to be pitched at Reel Screen in Washington, DC in January. Meanwhile, I take off to Central America on another two-month backpacking assignment. Omni's interest is encouraging, but I'm told it can take years to get a TV show off the ground. I try and keep my excitement in check.

February, 2007 Travel Cuts sponsor me on a well received 10-city national speaking tour, and I meet Julia in Toronto for the first time since Turkey. I'm jumping from one housesit to another, still living out of the same backpack for two years running, when I get the call from Heather. Although my original show concept included an interactive element, OLN have bit on a variation. Would Julia and I be interested in a show about our lives as travel writers? I have to seriously think about this...for about 0.4 of a second. Plenty of fist-pumping, screaming and jumping ensues. We rework our concept, one-page and demo, and *Word Travels*, a new title coined by OLN exec Patrice Baillergeon, is born. Within a few weeks, OLN order 13 episodes, and we have a TV show, set to begin filming in the summer. When I tell my family I will be hosting a travel TV show, it takes some time before they actually believe me.

May, 2007 Pre-production begins. Julia flies up to Vancouver for crew interviews, as we all recognize the team has to gel personally for such a strenuous assignment. To bond, we hire a karaoke room on Robson Street. If we can survive that, maybe we can survive 13 weeks of hard travel. Our Senior Producer is Gemini-winner Deb Wainwright. I'll never forget my first day in the office, when Leah our production manager and I looked at each other and realized how much work there was to do. Neither of us had worked on anything like this, and it's not like you can buy a book that tells you how to produce a travel show. There was only one place to start: Google.

June, 2007 Julia and I choose the countries we'd like to go to, and together with Leah and Deb we thrash out the logistic and budget possibilities. We spend hours researching in the library, calling tourism contacts, and emailing leads. Immediately we learn that some countries are more set up to accommodate TV crews than others, but Julia and I are both attracted to offbeat countries, where the stories will be more unusual and rewarding. Leah and I walk into a travel agent and buy plane

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tickets for the first 3-week leg to South America. She is the same travel agent at Travel Cuts from whom I bought my first round-the-world ticket over two years ago. My transformation from the office to backpacker to TV host surprises her as much as anyone.

August 2007 Principal photography begins on *Word Travels*. Heather, Deb and Leah are our support and brains back in Vancouver. We arrive in Bogota, Colombia for episode one. Our luggage doesn't. This is the first time my luggage has ever been lost! We begin filming anyway and stumble on a vibrant street carnival that happens to be taking place that day. This is the first of what will be many, many serendipitous events during the course of filming the series. With DOP Sean Cable's trademark timelapses (he shoots on XD cam, brilliant for time lapses and in camera slo mo amongst other perks), multiple set-up shots and all things TV production, it finally sinks in that I am not only a bona fide travel writer, I'm on my way to becoming an on-air TV personality too.

In our first 3 week, 3 episode sting, we fish for and swim with piranhas, soak in a mud volcano, shop for emeralds, bike the world's most dangerous road, eat giant worms, sleep in

hammocks, get travel sickness, swim with dolphins, run into political road-blocks, get caught in tropical storms, sail on Lake Titicaca, island hop in the Caribbean, get stung by wasps, abseil over waterfalls, and fire machine guns into bullet proof vests. We battle mosquitoes and taxi drivers, both of which suck your blood. We can only spend one hectic week in each country, and then we take off to the next destination. Each episode is designed to be stand-alone, so we make no reference to where we were, and where next we are going – jet lag and 18-hour transits be damned to hell!

September – November, 2007 After a two-week break, the crew embarks on a staggering nine-week shoot that sees us travel to eight countries on four continents. The show's description that it will "follow the lives of two travel writers, under pressure and under deadline" applies to the crew too. Every week we have to ship tape back to Vancouver to slot into the editing schedule. With OLN planning to broadcast the show in January, there's little room for delays, and every day counts. Julia and I continue to write articles every week on the road. Her METRO columns and my online blog correspond with the week's events.

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Back in Vancouver, two of the best editors in the business – both multiple award nominees and winners – Peter Steel and Jessica McKee, begin work at Omni Post. With my background in music, I always wanted it to be loaded with tunes and have a music-video style edge, a notion supported by Heather and Deb who used

We were not the only ones getting excited by the results of our insane race through the world. OLN loved the direction of the show, and subsequently greenlit another 26 episodes. As I gleaned information from the experienced crew around me, I realized that not only had I chanced upon a remarkable executive producer in a

“Every day, I stop, take a deep breath, and realize that somehow I’ve managed to create a lifestyle where I do indeed get paid to see the world.”

– Robin Esrock



a similar format on their previous show, the Gemini, NHK Japan Prize, Shaw Rocket Prize-winning *Make Some Noise*. Not coincidentally both Peter and Jessica edited *Make Some Noise* as well. With the help of production coordinator Caroline Manuel (who would soon join our crew full time), we mine our indie contacts and manage to pull in some incredible artists given the budget we have. Vancouver artist Max Serpentine signs on to create our theme song and original compositions.

Nine weeks in eight countries is full of incredible adventure, and subsequently incredible television. The camera wakes me up in the morning, invades the nightclubs, even follows Julia into the bushes for a pee break in Ethiopia! OK not that close, but still. Depending on the support we receive or the focus of the particular show, accommodation varies from bush tents and youth hostels to five star hotels. In a hostel in Riga, Latvia, we gather in the common room to watch the first FedExed rough cut episode of *Word Travels*. A bunch of backpackers join in the excitement – it’s not every day you get to see your first appearance on TV. Much as I originally imagined when I put together the first one page, the Venezuela episode is cut fast, action-packed and loaded with cool independent music. We love it, especially when we see Julia in the jungle, opening wide for a mouthful of fresh worm guts. This begins an ongoing tradition for the show, watching rough cuts in unusual places. In Hong Kong, the only TV we could find was in a narrow alley covered in porno. With a little persuasion, they ejected the porno and allowed us to watch the Bolivia rough cut.

great company, not only had I found myself surrounded by an incredibly talented production team, not only is it “unheard of” for a cold call to turn into a TV show within six months, but I had also landed the most helpful, understanding and supportive broadcasters anyone had ever worked with. OLN’s Patrice Baillargeon and Heather Eustace have been behind us 100% from the beginning.

January, 2008 After post-production, script assemblies, publicity, web development, and voice over work, we gathered at the Regal Beagle in Vancouver for the premiere of *Word Travels*. Surrounded by friends and family, our adventures around the world were about to be exposed to a lot more people. Julia and I had just completed a bunch of media, being interviewed on CTV, CityTV, and the CBC amongst others, and the show had already received rave reviews in the Globe and Mail and the National Post and other Canwest papers. At 7pm on Wednesday, the cold opening kicks in with a montage of images. I hear my voice: “My job is to go out there and find things that are going to inspire people to live their lives, and want to see the world.” Adds Julia: “We get to travel, we get to meet all kinds of people, make a little bit of money, but we also get to change people’s perceptions. It’s really the ultimate job!”

March, 2008 Heather calls with more exciting news. Nat Geo Adventure, an offshoot of National Geographic International, has picked up 26 episodes of *Word Travels*. Viewers from over 45 countries will now see our adventures, read our stories, learn about the world, and get inspired. Back in Canada, I begin *cont. on page 28*

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Word Travels cont. from page 19

writing a regular column for MSN (Canada's most trafficked website), Chill Magazine, and Outpost Magazine. Julia continues writing her weekly Travel Junkie column in METRO and is now syndicated internationally every Wednesday. I continue to sell stories to newspapers around the world. The adventure continues. Where will the next 26 episodes take us? I feel as though we have only scratched the surface. My mind racing in all directions I start to plot and scheme the next 26.

This is *the* dream job. In life, so much

is relative. When your job is to travel, you'll find yourself facing all sorts of nightmares you never think about when you're on holiday. Yet every day, I stop, take a deep breath, and realize that somehow I've managed to create a lifestyle where I do indeed get paid to see the world. By far, the most inspirational aspect of all this is the opportunity to share these adventures with readers and viewers around the world. In some way, I feel like my job is a quest, a mission to learn about this cruel, crazy, beautiful world on behalf of so many people who want to know more. ■

Artistic License cont. from page 27

schedule limits us. You get really good ideas within the parameters but two weeks later you will wake up and think 'I wish I had done that.' So we can't go anywhere we want any time we want. But we are optimistic that when we do season two the boundaries will open up more."

The key to the show appears to be in the tagline, "Anything can happen." One would assume that it's a good thing, given that you are describing the potential of a 14 year-old artist's imagination. Scully says that while it does suggest that there will be a lot going on, there was fear in the hearts of even the most committed broadcasters when they realized that the show would have to back up its boast.

"Everyone was scared of the tagline," she says. "They were saying 'what do you mean anything can happen? Do you mean crowds, or spaceships or aliens?' and Leonard and I would say 'no, we understand that we have a budget and a schedule.' So what we did to make it work and to make it funny and strong was to focus on the family and how the crazy things he does affect the family. There is great fodder there and we are going to go a lot further with behavioural changes. But we have figured out how to contain his imagination within our environments and make the humour come from what the characters do so that is how we manage to make it doable and still have lots of crazy things happen."

While it's never going to be easy to work on a co-production Friedman says that it's always better if you like the show that you are working on. He says that there is more to *Zeke's Pad* than just Zeke. "I like the fact that even though we are creating these very cool situations, it is very character driven. A lot of the

shows tend to explore the characters' relationships to each other and so it is about laying the groundwork and moving forward with it and I think the groundwork has been laid for secondary characters. That's part of what makes it a good show. If I see a series of cartoons and there are seven episodes that are really good that is a win. You are after 100% but all things considered it's a good show. I like it a lot."

So does Delna Bessania. She says that Scully created a show that appeals to the audience that drives television animation, the six to 10 year olds. And she feels that the show feels enough like a live action show that it will appeal to older brothers and sisters.

"I think it can appeal to the core and draw in some of the 8 to 12 year old crowd. It is an animated sitcom with the storytelling focused on Zeke but the stories revolve around his family, not necessarily school and friends. So it is a family sitcom and it will be interesting for me to see where that falls in terms of audience. If we can pull in some of those kids and keep them away from Family Channel and keep them watching animation a little longer that will be great."

Scully agrees. "There is a real sitcom element to it because there is the core family and it is structured the same as a sitcom in terms of the way it unfolds in its storytelling. We have lots of fun action but I think the sitcom feel will help to bring in an audience. A lot of kids are watching *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. They are very popular shows so ours is kind of a splice. It has the appeal of animation and it has content that has elements that you get from sitcoms. So we have the best of both worlds." ■