

The Insider

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Your Connection to the BBC Sales Company

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Editor's Note

Through no conscious effort on my part, this issue seems to be geared towards the ladies. We have an exclusive *Insider* interview with Dawn French as well as info on Patricia Routledge and a bevy of Britcom Divas.

I've never placed much credence in the "it's so tough to be a woman in comedy" idea. Let's face it - it's hard enough for *anyone* to get up on a stage or in front of a camera and try to make people laugh. One thing that Dawn French and Patricia Routledge have in common, however, is that they grew up in families that cherished them, and this unconditional love helped nurture the self-confidence needed to put your heart, soul, and face out there for all to see. Interesting ladies, and I hope you enjoy reading about them.

There is more to this issue, though. Garry Berman takes you on a guided tour through British government as seen through the eyes of Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn in *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*. There's also info on *Waiting for God* as well as Frequently Asked Questions about *The Good Life/Good Neighbors*.

As *The Insider* gears up for its second year, I would like to emphasize once again that your feedback is welcome and encouraged, so feel free to let me know what you think. See you next time.

Michelle Street, Editor

Hyacinth In Bloom

Presenting Patricia Routledge

She will forever be known and loved as Hyacinth Bucket, but a quick look beneath the surface shows both similarities and differences between Patricia Routledge and her most famous creation.

One thing actress and character do share is an adoration of their families, especially their fathers.



I was a plump girl with a loud voice. I used to ride my bike round the country lanes thinking great thoughts and spouting pieces of poetry.

-Patricia Routledge

In Patricia's case, her father was a haberdasher named Issac Edgar Routledge. He and his wife, Catherine, lived behind his shop in Birkenhead (a town in the north of England) and on February 29th, 1929, Mrs. Routledge gave birth to a daughter. They named her Katherine, but the child would grow up to be known more commonly by her middle name.

Patricia and her brother Graham were youngsters when WW2 broke out, so they were forced to spend a lot of time in the basement bunker. The family was extremely close and both children grew up secure in the knowledge that they were well loved.

Patricia attended Birkenhead High School, where she was in her words "the plump girl with a loud voice." She's the first to say that she was a bit of a disruptive show-off, but she must have enjoyed school because she came to think of her future being spent as the headmistress of a school, driving a red sports car and spending summers having romances all around Europe.

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The Insider Mailbox



AYBS? QUESTION

I'm a fan of *Are You Being Served?* I know there were many cast changes during the show's run, but why did Trevor Bannister decide to leave?

Shirley James, WI

EDITOR REPLIES: Trevor Bannister left Grace Brothers in 1979 when the opportunity came up for him to tour in a play called *Middle-Aged Spread*. This conflicted with his AYBS? shooting schedule, so he decided to leave the series.

SMEGHEADS WANT TO KNOW...

What is up with the *Red Dwarf* movie? Any news?

Bill Leverich, NJ

EDITOR REPLIES: The rumor mill has been going crazy for ages about the *Red Dwarf* movie. Robert Llewellyn told *The Insider* in August that it would happen this year. On a recent visit to Seattle Craig Charles confirmed this fact, stating that production will start in October. Sources close to *The Insider* also report that Doug Naylor is hard at work on a script, so looks like it's finally going to happen.

You can also find some *Red Dwarf* news on occasion by visiting Robert Llewellyn's homepage. It's at <http://www.llew.co.uk> Unfortunately it's not updated all that often, but well worth a visit.

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The Insider welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to editor Michelle Street at bcdigest@soltec.com or by snail mail to: *The Insider*, c/o Julie Marshall, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. Include your full name and location. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. *The Insider* reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!

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In The News



The British *Antiques Roadshow* (which spawned the enormously popular American version produced by WGBH in Boston) will be getting a new host. **Michael Aspel** who also presents *This Is Your Life*, is set to replace **Hugh Scully** as the Roadshow begins its 23rd series in the fall.

Aspel, 67, said that "The Antiques Roadshow is literally a national treasure and it's a great honor to have a chance to be involved in the show." Scully will host the Internet auction house QXL.com.

John Cleese is the star of the first movie made specifically for the Internet. *Quantum Project*, a 32-minute feature described as "the story of two-electron crossed lovers," stars Cleese and Stephen Dorff as father and son scientific geniuses. The special-effects laden film can be downloaded for \$3.95 at <http://www.sightsound.com>. This download is considered a purchase - not a rental - and you can keep the movie on your hard drive.

The team that brought you *Absolutely Fabulous* has reunited in a new sitcom called *Mirrorball*. **Jennifer Saunders, Joanna Lumley, June Whitfield, Julia Sawalha** and **Jane Horrocks** are back in a comedy set in the world of theater. Saunders, who also wrote the script, plays Vivienne Keill, a faded musical star. Instead of playing her daughter, Julia plays Jennifer's sister. A pilot was recently filmed directed by Jennifer's husband **Adrian Edmondson**.

Lenny Henry will follow up his visit to the Amazon with a special entitled *Lenny's Big Atlantic Adventure*. Henry will sail across the Atlantic with a man who once survived several days adrift off the coast of Australia.

Blackadder and *Thin Blue Line* writer **Ben Elton** is set to write the script of the film version of Sir Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Phantom of the Opera*. The film will star **Antonio Banderas**. Elton's debut as a film director, *Maybe Baby*, is also opening soon. The comedy about a young couple trying to conceive stars Hugh Laurie, Joely Richardson, and other Britcomedy stars.

The British Academy of Film and Television Arts recently handed out their annual awards in London. Winning for Best Sitcom was *The Royle Family*, a show about a family that is anything *but* royal. Winning for Best Comedy was the surreal sketch comedy of *The League of Gentlemen*

THE VICAR *REVEALED!*

Dawn French On Sex, Chocolate, and...Matthew Perry?



Americans know her mainly through her wonderful performances in *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Murder Most Horrid*, but Dawn French has been an important figure in British comedy since the early 80s, when she and partner Jennifer Saunders became an integral part of the "alternative" comedy scene. The alternative scene was comedy's answer to punk rock: nihilistic and vehemently anti-Thatcher, it was politically charged but also juvenile, loud, and highly scatological.

Dawn and Jennifer didn't exactly fit the mold. Their material was not political, but more subtle and observant, and from this rather humble beginning they developed into wonderful comic actresses and writers. Dawn recently answered some questions exclusively for *The Insider* and here's what the Vicar confessed.

Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood? How and when did you decide to enter show business?

Obviously, I was raised by wolves in deepest forest-type place. This is why I am extra hairy and extra noisy. Did not decide to enter showbiz - went instead, to drama college to become a teacher and was lured into the seedy side of the business by the offers of huge dosh (money) and sexual favours promised by (Comic Strip club owner) Paul Raymond. Also, all the kebabs you can eat for two pounds in greasy establishment next to the Comic Strip in Soho.

Who were some of your comedy idols?

Mike Nichols and Elaine May.

What was your worst experience doing stand up?

Have always chosen to sit down. Found stand up too masculine and smelly and hard on the sling-backs.

You've done stand up, film, theatre, and television. Do you enjoy one over any of the others?

Love it all - wish more people would ask me to eat chocolate for money.

Looking back, is there anything career-wise you wish you hadn't done?

Yes, I wish I hadn't kissed quite so many boys in so short a time because now I have an inexplicable rash, which I can't attribute to any one particular bloke.

The Vicar of Dibley has become incredibly popular. Was the character of Geraldine created especially for you?

Yes, Richard Curtis wrote the part for me, but he constantly reminds me of the plethora of actresses, much more talented than me, who could play it better. And he's right.

What attracted you to the role of Geraldine?

I was originally drawn to Geraldine by the promise of regular truffles on set.

The latest series of Vicar of Dibley was recently shown in the UK. Can you give some "spoilers" for those who haven't seen it yet?

The new Vicar series is fab and has so far been the best fun to film. There is a sort of "through-line" and it's Christmassy. I get to fall in love properly and not just with Jesus. Sean Bean puts in an appearance. He is top.

You've played an enormous range of characters. Is there any one that is closest to your own heart or best reflects your own personality?

Nope, not really. I keep my own personality in a cupboard under the stairs at home so that no one else can see it or nick it.

You and Jennifer are very involved with the Comic Relief charity. How did this involvement start?

Got involved with Comic Relief at the beginning when Richard Curtis suggested it might be a good idea.

During one Comic Relief telethon, Hugh Grant agreed to snog you if a certain amount of money was raised while you and Jennifer were hosting. You reached your goal and got to kiss Hugh. How was it?

Snogging Hugh Grant was divine - but not long enough. I wanted to continue well into the millennium with no pauses for breath. He seemed less willing.

You're an extremely busy lady. What is a typical day like in your life?

Dull beyond belief. Scuba diving, then all-over body wax, fencing, comedy classes, child rearing, driving, parking, shopping, driving again, drinking, parking again, satanic rituals, then cocoa and bed.

You've worked with most of the greats in British comedy. Anyone you haven't worked with that you would like to?

Wish I could have worked with/met Kenneth Williams and Hattie Jacques. Would also like to work with/marry Matthew Perry.

What are your favorite current UK comedies?

Don't know what's on in the U.S., but *Spaced* is great with Jessica Stevens, *Smack the Pony*, *League of Gentlemen* and of course *The Royle Family*, all of which I wrote.....(!)

Rumor has it that you're going to tour again with Jennifer. Is this true?

Yes, FATTY and I are going to tour at the end of this year.

Have you written anything for it?

AAAGH! - haven't written a word yet, but it's very funny thus far.

How do you and Jennifer come up with your material? Do you write separately and then pull it together or work together?

Not sure how we come up with the material - usually happens whilst gossiping and eating. We usually work together at her house. I like this because it means I can regularly nick her ornaments and small fine art objects.

Will your "backing band" Raw Sex be part of the stage show?

No, Raw Sex won't be with us this time - they both died in a tragic accident when we stabbed them repeatedly 'till they were both dead.

You also started a chain of clothing stores in the UK. What inspired you to go into the fashion industry?

This came about because I met my partner Helen Teague and instantly knew she was a genius and I had to work with her.

Are you planning to expand this business?

Yes, we plan to expand our business, but mainly we plan to expand our waistslines.

You're in the new Ben Elton movie Maybe, Baby. What role do you play?

I play an Aussie nurse.

This is Elton's first experience as a film director. How was it working with him?

I loved working with Ben Elton - I specially loved sleeping with him to get the part. He is a truly generous and experimental lover.

What other projects do you have coming up?

New projects - a series with Stephen Tompkinson - a film in U. S. (tiny part) - a film in U.K. (huge part includes horses) and a national tasting tour of biscuit factories of repute.

(Read more about Dawn in FRENCH HISTORY on page 18)

Britcom Divas From A



You can read about Britcom's ultimate Diva, Patricia Routledge, elsewhere in this issue, but here's a run down of other talented ladies deserving of the title.

A

Chloe Annett. Took over from CP (Clare) Grogan when the role of Kochanski was expanded in the seventh season of *Red Dwarf*. She also appeared in the series *Crime Travellers*.

Mina Anwar. Fans of *The Thin Blue Line* may remember her as the feisty but sexy Police Constable Habib, who constantly had to fend off the advances of Constable Goody.

B

Connie Booth. Appeared with the Pythons, married and divorced a Python, then co-wrote and co-starred in one of the greatest sitcoms ever: *Fawlty Towers*. She's American, but still made a pretty convincing Brit as Polly, the maid who (sometimes) helped keep Basil out of trouble with his wife Sybil.

Eleanor Bron. One of the first female members of the Cambridge University Footlights Club that spawned a whole generation of comedy talent. She proved herself during the 60s to be extremely adept at writing performing sketch comedy, often teamed with John Bird. She kept The Beatles out of trouble as Princess Ahmed in *Help!* and had a riotous cameo as Patsy's hippy mother in *Absolutely Fabulous*.

Patsy Byrne. Lots of fun as the dingy Nurse/Bernard in *Blackadder 2*.

C

Carol Cleveland. It couldn't have been easy playing second fiddle to the Pythons, but she managed to make her mark. Who can forget the classic... "But it's

my only line!" or how she lured unsuspecting milkman Michael Palin into her lair.

Stephanie Cole. A role model for aging divas as Diana Trent in *Waiting For God*. (Read more about her in the *Waiting For God* feature on page 8.)

Kirsten Cooke. Helped the French resistance as Michelle ("I will say this only once") in the popular Croft/Lloyd sitcom *'Allo 'Allo!*

Judy Cornwell. "Our Daisy." Her desperate attempts to get her husband Onslow to pay attention to her on *Keeping Up Appearances* are priceless.

Wendy Craig. As Ria Parkinson in *Butterflies*, she created a memorable portrait of a woman going through a mid-life crisis

Annette Crosbie. Absolute perfection as Margaret Meldrew, who puts up with cantankerous husband Victor on *One Foot in the Grave*.

D

Frances de la Tour. Very touching and funny as the love-starved Miss Jones, the object of Rigsby's desire in *Rising Damp*.

Judi Dench. That's *Dame* Judi to the rest of us. Winner of almost every award in sight, including the Oscar and the Tony, she is truly one of the most gifted actresses of this or any other generation. Look forward to her and Geoffrey Palmer in another series of *As Time Goes By* soon.

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F

Helen Fielding. Novelist who created two best selling books about the life and times of insecure diva wannabe Bridget Jones.

Dawn French. She's played murderers, vicars, and everything in between. See more on her in this issue.

G

CP (Clare) Grogan. Former singer for the Scottish band Altered Images who went on to star as the love of Lister's life Kochanski for the first six series of *Red Dwarf*. Last seen hosting a show on the British VH1.

H

Hattie Hayridge. Sorely underrated comic actress who took over from Norman Lovett as the braniac computer Holly on *Red Dwarf*. Also a talented stand-up comedian.

Pippa Haywood. Put up with Chris Barrie as Mrs. Gordon Brittas on *The Brittas Empire*.

Julia Hills. Talented actress who was memorable as Rona in *2 Point 4 Children* and kept her husband, son, and father-in-law in line as Beryl Hook in *Dad*.

Jane Horrocks. Best known as the ditzzy Bubble on *AbFab*, she displayed incredible range as a mimic in the critically acclaimed movie *Little Voice*.

J

Hattie Jacques. Star of the bawdy *Carry On* series who was once married to *Dad's Army* star John LeMesurier.

Caroline Lee Johnson. The only woman who could stand up to and control master cook Gareth Blackstock was his wife, as played with dignity and intelligence by Caroline Lee Johnson in the series *Chef!*

K

Penelope Keith. One of the true reigning queens of British situation comedy. Excelled at playing haughty snootbuckets (or, if you prefer, snoot-bouquets) in *The Good Life* and *To The Manor Born*.

Felicity Kendal. Star of *The Good Life*, *Solo*, and numerous stage productions. A good sport, she can be seen getting slathered with paint by Jennifer Saunders in Series Five of *French and Saunders*. (See more on her and Penelope Keith in this issue's *Good Life* feature.)

L

Carla Lane. Creator and writer of the classic Britcoms *Bread*, *Butterflies* and *The Liver Birds*, among others. Her sitcoms are not everyone's cuppa, but she has done some terrific work and pushed herself to try new things.

Belinda Lang. Starred as Bill Porter in *2 Point 4 Children*.

Josie Lawrence. Extraordinarily talented comedian, actress, and singer seen improvising on the Brit version of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*

Joanna Lumley. Not normally known for being a laugh riot, this former star of the *New Avengers* showed that she can be absolutely hysterical as Patsy Stone on *Absolutely Fabulous*.

M

Mary Millar. The vibrant "Our Rose" from *Keeping Up Appearances*. Always the fiancée, never the bride. Sadly, she is the first one of the *KUA* cast to pass away, succumbing to cancer in 1999.

Q

Caroline Quentin. The ex-wife of comedian Paul Merton, Quentin is terrific as Dorothy on the Brit version of *Men Behaving Badly* and also on the comedy/mystery *Jonathan Creek*.

R

Wendy Richard. Next to Mrs. Slocombe she might be considered only a diva-in-training, but Richard still manages to get plenty of digs in as Miss Brahms on *Are You Being Served?* Also proved she could do drama with a role on the long-running soap *East Enders*.

Miranda Richardson. Respected for her dramatic talent in such films as *The Crying Game* and *Tom and Viv*,

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Richardson made an indelible comic impression as the spoiled Queen in *Blackadder 2*. Also did a terrific guest shot as a neurotic new mother on *Ab Fab*. One of those rare talents who is equally at home doing comedy or drama.

S

Jennifer Saunders. She was the creative force behind *Absolutely Fabulous*, the Saunders half of French and Saunders, and even took the time to have three children and appear in a couple of episodes of *Friends*. One very talented lady.

Prunella Scales. She's done an enormous amount of wonderful work, but the power of her Divaness can be summed up in one word: *BASIL!* One of the few women who could match John Cleese line for line.

Carmen Silvera. Helped keep Café Rene running smoothly and sang badly as Edith Artois in *'Allo 'Allo!*

Joan Sims. Once part of the *Carry On* team, she can also be seen as Madge (Geoffrey Palmer's step-mother) in *As Time Goes By*.

Kathy Staff. The object of Compo's affection as Nora Batty in *Last of the Summer Wine*.

Pamela Stephenson. The blonde from *Not The Nine O'Clock News* who snagged a long-time companion in fellow comic Billy Connolly. She appeared for one season as a cast member of *Saturday Night Live*, but sadly, her talents seem to remain unexplored to a large extent.

Julia St. John. Tried hard to keep the Whitbury Leisure Centre running despite her crazy boss Gordon in *The Brittas Empire*.

Mollie Sugden. Next to Hyacinth, probably British comedy's favorite Diva. Displays massive amounts of attitude and hair as Mrs. Slocombe on *Are You Being Served?* And I am unanimous in that.

T

Emma Thompson. Survived a critically slammed sketch comedy series called *Emma* to become an Academy Award winning actress and writer. If you haven't, check out her terrific performance with Jeff Goldblum and Rowan Atkinson in the film *The Tall Guy*.

Harriet Thorpe. Valuable second banana who was the receptionist Carole on *Brittas Empire* and as Patsy's co-worker Fleur on *AbFab*.

U

Tracey Ullman. Multi-talented performer who's also put out some wonderful pop records and got Paul McCartney to appear in a video with her. Ullman began as one of the *Three of a Kind* team with Lenny Henry and David Copperfield, and before heading off to seek fame and fortune in America she appeared with French and Saunders in the series *Girls on Top*. Her HBO series *Tracey Takes On...* has won her numerous awards. She can be seen with Hugh Grant in the new Woody Allen movie.

W-Y

Julie Walters. Engaging actress and sometime sidekick to the great Victoria Wood. She was terrific as "sexual entrepreneur" Cynthia Paine in Terry Jones' film *Personal Services* and stole the heart of Michael Caine in *Educating Rita*.

Ruby Wax. A brash, loud, hysterically funny American who has made her career and home in the UK. She worked with French, Saunders, and Tracey Ullman in *Girls on Top*, has hosted numerous chat shows (including one shown on the Lifetime Network for a short while) and served as script editor on *AbFab*.

June Whitfield. From her work with Terry Scott to Edina's lovably spacey Mom on *AbFab*, she's a national treasure.

Barbara Windsor. The sparkling Cockney bombshell from the *Carry On* series.

Victoria Wood. Award winning writer, performer, and creator of some sketch gems as *Acorn Antiques*. Her one-woman appearances consistently sell out and she's also published several books including *Barmy* and *It's Up To You, Porky!*

Pauline Yates. She was outstanding as the long-suffering wife of Leonard Rossiter in *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*.



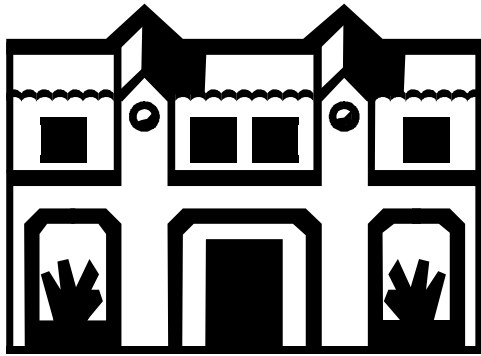
Waiting for God

*Welcome to Bayview Retirement Home...
Hate The Food, Love The People*

Diana Trent will not go gently into that good night. This poster child for growing old *disgracefully* is going to fight it every step of the way with fists in the air. The body may be aging, but her deteriorating physical form is countered by a ferocious will and a mind that's as sharp as a knife.

Tom Ballard has a totally different way of dealing with reality. He doesn't. Tom is a gentle soul who lives in his own little fantasy world, but underneath, he's every bit the tough anarchist that Diana is. He just has a less gruff exterior, that's all.

They are outwardly quite different, but Tom and Diana are destined to become important to one another after both become residents of the Bayview Retirement Home in Michael Aitken's touching, thought provoking sitcom *Waiting for God*.



Similar to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Aitkens teams up a dreamer (Tom) with a pragmatist (Diana) and sends them off to combat monsters that are both real and sometimes (especially in Tom's case) imaginary.

Monster Number 1 is aging. Diana was once the very definition of an independent woman of substance, traveling the globe as a well-respected photojournalist. Now she cannot accept that her world has become so narrow due to her physical ailments. Tom is widowed and really can't depend on his son and daughter-in-law for much because his son is a weak-willed ninny and his daughter-in-law is an alcoholic who simply doesn't care.

How is this monster fought? With anger (because Diana's theory is that as long as you're angry you know you're alive) and knowledge. The latter comes in handy when Tom has prostrate trouble and Diana immediately hits the books in an effort to find out what the doctors won't – or don't have time – to tell him.

Monster Number 2 is Harvey Nigel Bains, the greedy, pompous manager of Bayview who is far more worried about his hair and his car than he is about what goes on at the place he is paid to oversee. His lack of compassion and transparently self-serving motivation set him up to serve as an object of derision and scorn amongst the residents, especially Tom and Diana.

How do they fight this monster? By questioning him at every turn, rallying other residents, and in one memorable moment, having him appear stark naked just as an inspector comes to visit Bayview.

Monster Number 3 is the one that's not so easy to combat: a society that tends to exclude rather than embrace the wisdom of the elderly. In many countries, senior citizens are revered and honored, but much of the Western world simply wants them shut away and quiet. As modern medicine keeps people alive and in better health for longer than ever before, the issue of how differing generations will relate to and care for each other is going to become a crucial one, and Aitkens deals with the subject wonderfully in *Waiting for God*.

Stephanie Cole once told a British magazine "Although we both loved the wonderful, witty scripts, we never for a moment guessed that the great British public would become so hooked on one completely loopy old man and a stubborn old boot of a woman. Somehow it plugged into the national psyche and took off like a rocket."

Agreed. The scripts are wonderful, but Ms. Cole's portrayal of Diana is also in large part responsible for the success of the show. She attacks the role with the

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proper gusto, venom, and fury. Incredibly, she was a mere pup of around 49 when she began playing the 70ish Diana.

Cole was born in Warwickshire, England and raised by her mother and grandmother after her father left home when she was a child. She was brought up surrounded by a lot of older people, which may account for her ability to play characters well beyond her years.

She trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and spent many years doing repertory. It wasn't until she was in her 30s and almost ready to give up that she began to get more television work. She became widely known for the dramatic series *Tenko*, which dealt with women in Japanese POW camps. Like Patricia Routledge, she also appeared in an episode of Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*, playing a stockbroker's widow.

Then in 1990 she teamed up with Graham Crowden (who actually was in his 70s) to play Diana to his Tom and enjoyed the biggest success of her career.

The series is a perfect example of how a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. The cantankerous ol' Diana is a hoot, as are Tom's flights of fancy, but serious issues are addressed here. You may go away laughing, but you're also going to go away thinking, and that is the essence of artistry at its best.

During the first series, Tom and Diana discover each other and also a mutual enemy in the "idiot" Harvey. Their loathing of him causes them to bond and suddenly life has a purpose: let's make Harvey squirm.

That is, until Diana goes too far with the naked Bains and the inspector scenario. Harvey fakes a nervous breakdown and as Tom predicts, his absence as a unifying focal point of hatred causes dissention among the ranks of Bayview residents. Harvey eventually comes back and everything returns to as normal as it can be.

Bains does have one big fan, and that's his assistant Jane, played by Janine Duvitski. Jane is all propriety and morality who watches painfully as Harvey's interest always seems to be in other women. In the end, however, Jane finally gets her man, but the sad fact is that Harvey never does love Jane – he marries her because it serves his purpose and he gets to gain membership in a golf club.

Diana also gets her man, but in a different way. She agrees to marry Tom – after he does everything including threatening to bungee jump to get her to accept – but

Tom finally realizes that this is not what Diana wants and accepts that their commitment goes beyond any legalities or paperwork.

The scripts deal with many problems confronting the elderly, yet they are never preachy and can be enjoyed even if you're not a senior citizen. Diana has to swallow her pride and admit that she needs the help of a "Zimmer frame" after she has hip replacement. Tom is forced to deal with prostate troubles as well as problems with his son and daughter-in-law. Diana loses some much-needed money when a company she'd invested in goes bankrupt.

They also attend the funerals of other Bayview residents and sadly, life imitated art in 1993 when Michael Bilton, who was so endearing as resident "sexpert" Basil Makepeace, passed away. Bilton was also well known for his roles as Old Ned in *To The Manor Born* and also as Mr. Thorpe in *Are You Being Served? Again!*

These are topics about which writer Aitkens clearly has strong feelings, and he approaches each of these themes with just the right balance of humanity, message and laughs.

The almost wedding of Tom and Diana ended the fifth series and the show was put to rest. This is one of the differences between British and American television. Since British television is not so profit-driven, there's no pressure to keep a show going long past its prime just to bring in money. The show was allowed to go out on a high note exactly when it should have.

If there is one valid criticism to be leveled, it is that Aitkens seems to have expended so much effort creating the complex, memorable main characters that the supporting characters almost pale in comparison. They are either so outrageous to be unbelievable (as in Harvey's relentless narcissism) or too stereotypical (the pious, plain Jane) to ring as true as Tom and Diana.

As usual, when something works this well, the clones must follow. There was talk a couple of years ago about an American version of *Waiting For God* with Olympia Dukakis in the role of Diana, but this has yet to develop into a full fledged series.

Perhaps this is for the best. The original is a quality show that manages to enlighten and entertain. If you can't do better than that, don't even try.



The Peerless Political Satire of...

Yes, Minister/Yes, Prime Minister



An Appreciation and Episode Guide by Garry Berman

When you think about it, *Yes, Minister* was quite the daring sitcom in its day. Even if it were just beginning its life on television today, rather than twenty years ago, the idea behind it could still be considered a risky proposition. Here was a comedy set in the top levels of British government, featuring characters impeccably dressed in 3-piece suits, dealing with complex bureaucratic crises and their resolutions. No pratfalls, no silly costumes--just remarkably literate and sophisticated comedy that required the viewer to carefully follow the many twists and turns of dialogue and plotting throughout each episode.

How could such a program possibly succeed and win over the viewing public? The answer lies in the sheer talent of all involved. It premiered in 1980, aired 22 episodes through the next few years, and then, with cast and writers intact, made a smooth transition into *Yes, Prime Minister* for an additional 16 episodes.

Throughout its run, the series somehow managed to take the intricate workings of government wheeling and dealing and turn it all into a wonderfully funny, laugh-out loud satire. The show received enormous critical acclaim and won three British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards in a row for Best Comedy. It even had a fan in Margaret Thatcher herself, who was Britain's Prime Minister during the years *Yes, Minister* was on the air.

Writers Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn proved to be the perfect team for this unique project. Jay, a former producer of public affairs programs, had considerable knowledge of the inner workings of government and politics. Lynn was an experienced comedy writer and a contemporary of the Monty Python crowd.

Together they gave us three memorable characters: Jim Hacker (Paul Eddington), the earnest but naive Minister for Administrative Affairs, who was determined to make government more efficient; Sir Humphrey Appleby (Nigel Hawthorne), the scheming Permanent Secretary who reveled in creating and maintaining a swath of bureaucratic red tape; and Bernard Woolley (Derek Fowlds), Jim Hacker's Private Secretary, who often found himself in the middle of the

political and philosophical wars between the Minister and Humphrey. When the going got tough, Humphrey and Bernard would often resort to offering monologues of nonsensical doubletalk that invariably left Hacker's head spinning.

Most episodes center on the conflicting agendas between Hacker and Sir Humphrey. For each of the Minister's sincere efforts to cut down on government bureaucracy, Humphrey is there determined to preserve it. Often, however, they find themselves with a problem that requires the other's help to reach a solution. We usually see Jim placed in a tight spot--sometimes of his own creation--that requires one of Humphrey's devious (and usually self-serving) solutions. Reluctantly, Hacker goes along, and things tend to turn out all right, or nearly so.

In late 1985, *Yes, Minister* presented a special episode, "Party Games," which climaxed with Jim Hacker's rise to the very pinnacle of British government. In this episode, he becomes Prime Minister--by default, really, but Prime Minister nonetheless. Now he must tackle affairs of international importance as well as those on his home turf.

The plotlines throughout both series were topical to say the least. Labor disputes, spy scandals, nuclear weapons, the Channel Tunnel, and other issues were all tackled with considerable insight and a refreshing sense of the absurd. Writers Lynn and Jay received help from confidential sources high in the British government, which ensured a realistic portrayal of how deals are made behind the scenes. Even the show's producer, Peter Whitmore, didn't know the identity of the sources, which was okay with him. After all, he reasoned, the show was a comedy, not a documentary, and getting laughs was the priority of the day.

While we're at it, let's give due credit to the impeccable cast. When *Yes, Minister* first appeared on PBS affiliates here, American fans may have instantly recognized Paul Eddington from his earlier role as Jerry Leadbetter on *Good Neighbors*. As the well-meaning but often befuddled Jim Hacker, he gave a

(continued next page)

human touch to the image of a government bureaucrat. Nigel Hawthorne as Sir Humphrey captured the talent of talking smoothly out of both sides of his mouth, although there were moments in the series when Humphrey's power plays got the best of him. This allowed us the treat of seeing him temporarily flustered, and even panic-stricken. Derek Fowlds as Bernard handled the balancing act of being the man in the middle, who wanted nothing more than to do the right thing. However, because of his split loyalties between the Minister and Sir Humphrey, Bernard didn't always know just what the right thing was.

After *Yes, Prime Minister* ended its run in 1987, the stars moved on to other projects on stage, television, and film. Sadly, Paul Eddington succumbed to cancer in December of 1995, while appearing with his old pal and *Good Neighbors* co-star Richard

Briers in the West End production of *Home*. Nigel Hawthorne starred in *The Madness of King George* both on stage and in the film version, for which he received an Academy Award nomination as Best Actor. Derek Fowlds reappeared on our screens in the drama *Heartbeat*, in which he played a tough talking police inspector--a far cry from his portrayal as the soft-spoken Bernard Woolley.

If there was ever a Britcom that might not have survived being exported to the U.S., it would be this one. Therefore, it is a credit to everyone involved that it can be enjoyed without knowledge of the inner workings of British government or the specific political events that inspired the writers. For those who savor literate, intelligent comedy, *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* were – and still are – a welcome addition.

Some Yes, Minister/Yes, Prime Minister “GOVSPEAK”

Politicians are celebrated for talking a lot but not actually *saying* anything. No show demonstrated this better than *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*. Nigel Hawthorne as Sir Humphrey Appleby was especially adept at navigating the doublespeak used by most government official. Here are a few good examples:

From *Open Government*:

Sir Humphrey: "You came up with all of the questions I hoped nobody would ask."

Jim Hacker: "Opposition is about asking awkward questions."

Sir Humphrey: "And government is about not answering them."

Jim Hacker: "Well, you answered all mine anyway."

Sir Humphrey: "I'm glad you thought so, Minister."

From *The Writing on the Wall*

Jim Hacker: "So when this next comes up at Question Time, you want me to tell Parliament that it's their fault that the Civil Service is too big?"

Sir Humphrey: "But it is the truth, Minister."

Jim Hacker: "I don't want the truth. I want something I can tell Parliament!"

From *The Right To Know*

Sir Humphrey: "Minister, I have something to say to you which you may not like to hear."

Jim Hacker: "Why should today be any different?"

Sir Humphrey: "Minister, the traditional allocation of executive responsibilities has always been so determined as to liberate the ministerial incumbent from the administrative minutiae by devolving the managerial functions to those whose experience and qualifications have better formed them for the performance of such humble offices, thereby releasing their political overlords for the more onerous duties and profound deliberations which are the inevitable concomitant of their exalted position."

Jim Hacker: "I wonder what made you think I didn't want to hear that?"

The Insider Episode Guide

Yes, Minister/Yes, Prime Minister

Yes, Minister: Series One

1. Open Government--Jim Hacker, whose party has won the General Election, has been appointed the new Minister for Administrative Affairs. He meets his personal secretary, Bernard Woolley, and his Permanent Secretary, Sir Humphrey Appleby. Unfortunately for Hacker, his lofty goal of reducing bureaucratic red tape in government is about to meet ongoing resistance from Humphrey, who is forever dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Bernard finds himself in the middle, as he will time and again.

2. The Official Visit--To the deep disapproval of his Permanent Secretary, the Minister devises a way of turning an official visit by the president of a former British colony to political advantage.

3. The Economy Drive--Pruning the Civil Service may be one of Jim Hacker's priorities, but Sir Humphrey feels decidedly threatened by the notion. He is obligated to cooperate--unless, of course, there is a way of making the Minister abandon the policy. So Appleby puts into effect Operation Hairshirt so that the Minister will personally feel the effects of these cutbacks.

4. Big Brother -- Hacker accepts the idea of a national computer file containing private information about citizens in *principle*, but he's worried about its shortcomings in practice. He decides that something must be done to protect people's privacy. He meets resistance from Sir Humphrey, who considers secrecy an unshakable part of the job. However, an unexpected ally helps him open sealed lips.

5. The Writing On The Wall--While Jim Hacker MP and Sir Humphrey Appleby are locked in conflict over a report to recommend large-scale reductions in the size of the Civil Service, they learn of a plan which threatens them both. In order to survive they will have to work together for the first time.

6. The Right to Know-- Hacker's rebellious teenage daughter threatens a nude protest when she learns his department plans to limit protection of wild badgers in

the countryside. What would be a nightmare for any father is especially nerve-wracking to the publicity-conscious Minister.

7. Jobs For The Boys--The Minister is puzzled by Sir Humphrey's evasiveness whenever the subject of a Departmental construction project in the Midlands is raised. The trouble is that when the awful truth is revealed, the Minister finds he has implicated himself in this mess as well.

Yes, Minister: Series Two

1. The Compassionate Society--While on a tour of a new hospital, the Minister is astonished to learn that the facility has a full and busy administrative staff, but no doctors or patients to be found anywhere. He blames Humphrey (and rightfully so) for the bureaucratic mess and holds him responsible for setting things right.

2. Doing The Honours--The Minister is concerned about making cuts in his department's expenditure, whereas Sir Humphrey has other concerns. Namely, he's worried about the effect of government policy on the number of overseas students applying for admission to his old Oxford college. He also needs the Minister's approval of the Department's recommendations for the Honours List.

3. The Death List--Hacker's new crusade is to severely limit the government's power to use electronic surveillance equipment on private citizens. But his resolve is tested when he learns his name has appeared on a terrorist group's assassination list. Should he bend his own rules just this once?

4. The Greasy Pole--The British Chemical Corporation, with the support of Sir Humphrey, plans to manufacture Propanol at their Merseyside factory. But the local inhabitants, fearful of their health, protest. While the Minister tries to find a solution acceptable to all parties he finds himself under pressure from every direction.

(continued on page 18, column 2)

Classic Flashback



The Good Life/Good Neighbors

Frequently Asked Questions

Simplicity is now big business. No less a media mogul than Oprah tells us we need to spend time each day renewing our spirit and promotes books such as *Simple Abundance*, which sell millions of copies to people who want to get back to the basics and un-complicate their lives.

Sorry, girlfriend Oprah, but you're a bit late. Tom and Barbara Good decided to leave the rat race behind and simplify their lives back in 1975 when *The Good Life* (*Good Neighbors*) hit the British airwaves with an episode entitled *Plough Your Own Furrow*. Twenty-five years later this show is still as beloved as ever thanks to its timeless message, lively scripts, and wonderful performances. Here's the scoop on this classic.

How many episodes were made and when?

There were 30 episodes made between 1975 and 1978. This included four series of seven episodes each and two specials.

Who were the main characters?

Tom Good – Just turned forty and going through a mid-life crisis. Kind of a Reggie Perrin character, but not capable of going whole hog and faking his own death.

Barbara Good – Tom's wife. Supportive and willing to muck in to pursue the dream of self-sufficiency.

Jerry Leadbetter – An employee of the same firm where Tom worked. Your basic businessman who is sophisticated and part of the 'gin-and-tonic' set.

Margo Leadbetter - Jerry's snobby, socially conscious wife. Totally lacking in humor, but underneath it all possessed of a good heart.

Who were the actors who played these roles?

Richard Briers played Tom Good. Briers was born in 1934 in Merton, Surrey. He trained at the Royal Academy of

Dramatic Arts and followed that with a stint with the Liverpool Repertory Company.

Felicity Kendal played Barbara Good. Kendal was born September 25th, 1946 in Otton, Warwickshire.

Paul Eddington played Jerry Leadbetter. Eddington began his acting career in 1941, but did not find fame until he was almost middle-aged and played Jerry in *The Good Life*.

Penelope Keith played Margo Leadbetter. Keith was born April 2, 1940 in Surrey.

How was the cast brought together?

Felicity Kendal and Penelope Keith were appearing in the Alan Ayckbourn plays *The Norman Conquests* when one evening Briers attended the play and decided that these two women would be perfect for the roles of Barbara and Margo. Paul Eddington, who was appearing in another Ayckbourn play at the time, was then brought in and the quartet was in place.

Where did this series take place?

In the London suburb of Surbiton.

(cont'd. next page)

Who were the writers?

John Esmonde and Bob Larbey, who would later write *Mulberry*. On his own, Larbey would also be responsible for *A Fine Romance*, starring Judi Dench and Michael Williams, and is also the writer of *As Time Goes By*.

What profession did Tom have before giving it all up?

He was a draftsman who created the little toys that go into cereal packages.

What character changed the most during the course of the show?

Definitely Margo. Penelope Keith was able to do so much with the character that the writers expanded the role and Margo became a very popular part of the show.

Who was one of this show's biggest fans?

The Queen, who actually attended a taping of the program.

Who was NOT the show's biggest fan?

Vyvyan from the raucous 80s "alternative" sitcom *The Young Ones*. In one episode, Vyvyan berates *The Good Life* for being too nice and for promoting the stereotype that all Britons are harmless eccentrics. However, Vyvyan is taken to task by his housemate Rik, who gallantly defends Felicity Kendal's honor.

Where else can I see the actors from this show?

All four actors went on to other long-running, popular sitcoms. **Richard Briers** played something against type as Martin Byrce in another Esmonde/Larbey sitcom *Ever Decreasing Circles*. He has also worked extensively with actor/director Kenneth Branagh, including his version of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet*. His recent appearances have included *Monarch of the Glen*.

Felicity Kendal has also kept busy. She became practically an alter ego for writer Carla Lane, whose lines she delivered in two sitcoms: *The Mistress* and *Solo*.

Penelope Keith went on to star as Audrey Forbes-Hamilton in *To The Manor Born*, in which she played a similarly haughty character. From 1995-1997 she starred in *Next of Kin*. In this series, she played Maggie Prentice, a woman who finds herself and her husband raising their grandchildren after the children's parents are killed in a car crash.

Paul Eddington created the memorable character of Jim Hacker in *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*. More on that program can be found in this issue.

Which of these actors has written their autobiography?

In 1996, Paul Eddington's autobiography *So Far, So Good* was published posthumously. In 1998, Felicity Kendal published her memoirs, entitled *White Cargo*. Richard Briers has not written his autobiography, but has published books on gardening (*A Little Light Weeding*) and also on English country churches. All books are available online from amazon.co.uk.

Which of these stars is no longer alive?

Paul Eddington passed away in 1995 after a long battle with a rare form of skin cancer. He was 68 years old and left behind four children and a widow, Patricia.

Why are there two different titles for the show?

It was changed to *Good Neighbors* when it came to America so as not to conflict with another show called *The Good Life* that aired from 1971-1972. The American *Good Life* starred Larry Hagman and Donna Mills, but was not related to the British version.

What videos are available and where can I buy them?

There are five videos available and can be purchased online at amazon.com and other sites or at places like Border's bookstore. Volume 1 contains *Backs to the Wall*, *The Wind-Break War* and *Silly, But It's Fun*. Volume 2 includes *Pig's Lib*, *Just My Bill*, and *Mutiny*. Volume 3 contains *Going to Pot*, *The Happy Event*, and *The Last Posh Frock*. Volume 4 contains *Plough Your Own Furrow*, *Say Little Hen...?*, and *The Pagan Rite*. Volume 5 includes *Mr. Fix-It*, *The Day Peace Broke Out*, and *I Talk to the Trees*.

Which cast member won the coveted "rear of the year" award?

Felicity Kendal, who became quite a sex symbol playing Barbara Good and won this award in a jeans company ad.

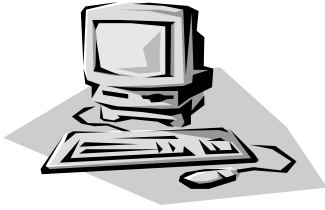
Any other trivia?

Paul Eddington was a firm believer in the Quaker faith and got booted from the entertainment section of the Armed Forces when they found out about his pacifism.

Felicity Kendal had an exotic childhood in India, where her father, Geoffrey, ran a touring Shakespeare company. Her life also became fodder for the tabloids when Tom Stoppard (the playwright and co-author of *Shakespeare In Love*) left his wife for her.

Richard Briers had a small role in the Spice Girls movie *Spice World*.





SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

Web Reviews by David Bibb

Ethan's Unofficial Waiting for God Page

<http://home.flash.net/~ehcalk/wfg/wfg-main.htm>

A delightful look at this equally delightful comedy about senior citizens living in a retirement home. Their problems with the management, the government, families, and each other makes for good humor and social commentary.

This site is set up nicely, offering an episode guide, cast biographies, pictures, sounds, interviews, and a section called Other Information. The latter contains trivia such as the name of the theme music played during the opening and closing credits. (It's the 5th movement, Allegro Giusto, of Schubert's Quintet in A, also known as the Trout Quintet. It is performed by a group called the Nash Ensemble.

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks

The Good Neighbors/The Good Life

<http://www.radix.net/~bbrown/goodlife.html>

A nice page of pictures captured from the show. There is actually very little content, so the site doesn't actually say that much. However, it does provide a link to the Good Neighbors Information Sheet, which provides some intriguing information about the show.

Rating: 2 mouse clicks

British Television Favorites

<http://bennett.tvheaven.com/index.htm>

Here is a fan's "SALUTE TO BRITISH COMEDY ON AMERICAN PUBLIC TV" which includes pages on: *Keeping Up Appearances*, *One Foot in the Grave*, *Chef*, *Blackadder*, *Yes, Minister*, *Yes, Prime Minister*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *Jeeves and*

Wooster, *Rumpole of the Bailey*, *Are You Being Served?*, *Mulberry*, *Coronation Street*, *Francis Uguhart*, *Bless Me, Father*, *The Two Ronnies*, and *the Vicar of Dibley*

Mr. Bennett, the author of these pages, has done a fine job developing these pages. Each has a number of pictures from the show, an outline of the show's premise, a well done episode guide, links to other pages, cast information, and, in some cases, a unique item from the show. In the case of *Yes, Minister*, Sir Humphrey's System for stalling Creative Inertia and the Three Types of Civil Service Silence are listed. Each page is nicely laid out.

Rating: 4 clicks

Beebfun

<http://www.beebfun.com/>

A page full of desktop themes on various British shows, from *Only Fools and Horses* to *Wallace and Gromit*, *Black Adder*, *One Foot in the Grave*, *Keeping Up Appearances*, *Mr Bean - the Movie*, and every other program imaginable.

The BBC site is large and slow to load, but the fun things here are worth the effort. The themes are geared towards Windows users.

Rating: 3 mouse clicks

Disclaimer: Please remember that the World Wide Web is an ever-changing place. Sites close down or move on a regular basis. The sites reviewed and recommended in this issue are operational at the date of publication. The Insider regrets any inconvenience caused by sites that move or close.

David Bibb is a Missouri-based Internet and British comedy addict.



Patricia Routledge (cont'd. from page 1)

She studied English at Liverpool University, but her career plans were altered when she began to participate in the end-of-term plays.

She so enjoyed the time spent on these productions that after University went to work as an unpaid assistant at Liverpool Playhouse. Her acting talent did not go unnoticed and she was asked to join the company, making her debut in 1952 as Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

This sort of career seemed distinctly at odds with her parents, who were firm believers in the notion of "Northern Puritanism" and instilled in their daughter the virtues of hard work and discipline ("common sense – that's what was expected of me" she once said). However, Routledge also admitted to an interviewer in 1998 that her outward "self-control had always masked an anarchic nature."

Truer words have never been spoken. On the one hand, there's the proper, Puritanical, very hard working Patricia, who according to writer Alan Bennett possesses a "strong moral streak and firm views." On the other hand, there was the Patricia who worshipped Lucille Ball and grew up to be extraordinarily adept at farce and physical pratfalls.

Still, her parents were a bit taken aback at her decision to go into drama. At the age of 23, she left her family home to study at the Old Vic Theatre School in Bristol and made her debut on the London stage in 1954.

In 1961, she appeared in three episodes of *Coronation Street*, but knew in her heart that this wasn't where she wanted to stay. Always a big believer in risk and not allowing herself to stagnate, she decided to move on.

That she did, all the way to New York and the Broadway stage, where in 1966 she caught the attention of famed composer Jules Styne. He asked her to star in his musical *Darling of the Day*, for which she won Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical.

Her career was then firmly established and built mainly between the stage and television, though Routledge did have roles in movies such as *The Bliss of Mrs. Blossom* and *To Sir with Love*.

Her television roles seem to be divided between pure farcical silliness and the brilliant artistry of sophisticated writers like Alan Bennett. In 1982 he created *A Woman of No Importance*, a one-woman monologue that allowed her a tour de force to showcase her extensive theatrical skills.

In 1985, Routledge had her first big sitcom role in *Marjorie and Men*. She played Marjorie Belton, recently divorced and on the lookout for a new man.

Unfortunately, Marjorie's mother (played by Patricia Hayes) also has her eyes peeled for a prospective son-in-law and desperately wants to see her daughter remarried. Since the two women now live together, the mother gets to be even more of an interfering busy-body than normal. Each of the six episodes shows Marjorie encountering a new man in her life.

That same year she appeared with the wonderful Victoria Wood in Wood's series *As Seen On TV*. She had a small role as a recurring character called Kitty, a highly snobby woman who sat in a chair and spouted such platitudes as "What has China given the world? Can you really respect a nation that's never taken to cutlery?"

Kitty would be good practice for the role that would become something of a blessing and a curse. For despite a highly distinguished, varied career and her multitude of talents as an actress, comedian, and singer, Routledge will probably always remain best known for a single line: "The Bucket residence – the lady of the house speaking."

That line is just one demonstration of her total mastery of all vocal pyrotechnics including timing, modulation and rhythm. Anyone without her innate musicality would not have been able to make that line soar as she did. She didn't so much say the line as she sang it. The whole character of Hyacinth was approached much the same way- tackled with an enthusiasm and gusto that would do any musical comedy or opera star proud.

Those years of watching Lucille Ball would also teach Routledge a thing or two about physical humor and even at a relatively advanced age she was able to pull off some remarkable stunts and pratfalls. Climbing over hedges and hanging off the backs of trucks were proof positive of her boundless energy.

Hyacinth brought Routledge to a vast American audience and there's little doubt that this was a perfect match of character and actress. Like Hyacinth, Routledge is a hard-working perfectionist who doesn't suffer fools lightly. She can be very demanding, but the effort shows every time she's on the screen.

On the other hand, Routledge is a very spiritual woman who doesn't like snobs and looked at the role as a way to poke fun at women who *are* like Hyacinth.

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Why does everyone love this character? Perhaps because she represents the Britain we want to believe still exists – a sophisticated, cultured place full of women who use Royal Doulton china, wear posh hats, and uphold the old traditions of manners and etiquette.

Then again, nah – maybe not. Hyacinth really is a larger-than-life snobbish monster on a par with Basil Fawlty. Be honest – would you really want to live next door to her? I didn't think so. Perhaps we tune in simply because we all love to see snobs deflated and we secretly hope that one day Hyacinth will *truly* get hers.

Many also tune in simply to marvel at Routledge's ability as a physical comedian. Her entire body is in perpetual motion, from the eyebrows to the legs and especially that mouth.

Alan Bennett once said of Patricia that if the role didn't conform to her "very firm moral streak" and "firm views" that she would tend to be very dubious about it. This comment may explain why Routledge liked the role so much. Hyacinth might not want to claim her family since they don't meet her exacting social standards, but in the end she loves them just as Routledge loved her own family.

Her complete domination of this character won her many awards, including Top Comedy Actress in 1991. She was also awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1993 as well as being name Personality of the Year by the Variety Club of Great Britain. Finally, in a poll to celebrate the BBC's 60th anniversary in 1996, she was voted Britain's all-time favorite comedy actress.

This was clearly a character the public adored and Routledge claims that fans would often tell her that they were like Hyacinth, or they knew someone just like her. "Poor you," was her standard reply.

Much to the disappointment of *KUA* fans, her need for change caused Routledge to say good-bye to Hyacinth in 1994 and move on to new and different territory. Our favorite snob then transformed into ace detective Hetty Wainthrop in the series *Hetty Wainthrop Investigates*.

Hetty was a bit like Hyacinth in that she could be bossy and domineering, but luckily, Hetty wasn't nearly as much of a burden to her husband as Hyacinth was to the long-suffering Richard.

Writer David Cook developed Hetty from a number of Northern women he knew. Indeed, women who hail from the gritty, industrial north of England tend to have the same bossy, no nonsense, take no guff nature.

One has to think no further than the women of *The Last of the Summer Wine* – including the infamous Nora Batty – to know what I'm speaking about.

Routledge was keen to play Hetty because she liked how the scripts dealt with important topical issues such as schizophrenia and violence. She also liked the fact that Hetty was in her 60s, but still had plenty of energy and a strong determination to reach her potential despite her age.

She first played Hetty in a 13-part radio adaptation of Cook's novel *Missing Persons*. This worked into a series that lasted from 1995-1998.

Routledge was keen to continue playing the sleuth with the young sidekick, but the series was abruptly canceled (apparently without a word to its star) in an effort to make room for shows that weren't quite so geared toward a middle-class, suburban audience.

In something of a contradiction, however, there was a desire for more *Keeping Up Appearances*, perhaps due to its popularity in America. Routledge wasn't interested, though, feeling that it had been taken as far as it could go and that the scripts were starting to recycle themselves.

Since then, Routledge has concentrated on stage work. In 1996 she played Beatrix Potter in *Beatrix* at the Chichester Festival Theater. Last year her association with Chichester continued when she appeared as Lady Bracknell in a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* that later transferred to the West End. This role garnered her great reviews with one reviewer praising her "richly comic authority."

Interestingly enough for someone who has fond memories of her childhood and a strong belief in the family, Routledge has not created a family of her own. In a scenario more suited to Rose than Hyacinth, she had a youthful affair with a married man that broke her heart. She has had other relationships since then (one with a man who died suddenly of a heart attack), but for the most part, she has immersed herself in a remarkably rich and varied career.

Patricia Routledge is now 71 years old, but this formidable woman appears to have plenty of exuberance and energy left. She is still driven and claims she can "hardly spell" the word retirement. Her stated ambition has always been to do "good work with good people." There is no doubt she has achieved this goal.



French History

She couldn't resist joking around with our interview questions (so...ummm...no...she wasn't actually raised by wolves), but here are a few *true* facts about Dawn French.

1957 – Dawn is born on October 11th in Holyhead, Wales. Her father is in the Royal Air Force, her mother is the owner of a poodle grooming parlor. In the years that follow, she is educated at a boarding school and wins a debating scholarship to study in New York.

1980 – Dawn and Jennifer make their first appearances as a stand up duo at a club called The Comic Strip.

1981 – Dawn meets her future husband Lenny Henry.

1984 – Dawn marries Lenny on October 24th at St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden, London. Around 350 people attend the ceremony.

1985 – Dawn and Jennifer team up with Tracey Ullman and Ruby Wax to play four mismatched housemates in *Girls on Top*.

1987 – Dawn and Jennifer Saunders appear in the first series of the sketch comedy show *French and Saunders*.

1991 – Dawn creates the first of many different characters in the series *Murder Most Horrid*.

1991 – Dawn and Lenny adopt a daughter and name her Billie.

1991 - Dawn and partner Helen Teague open 1647, a clothing store with fashions for larger women. The name of the store is a reference to the fact that 47% of British women are a size 16 or larger.

1993 – Dawn displays her versatility in a television drama called *Tender Loving Care*. She plays Elaine Dobbs, a nurse who kills off her patients. This is based on a true story.

1994 – The first series of *The Vicar of Dibley* debuts and Dawn delights fans as Vicar Geraldine Granger.

1999 – Dawn appears with Jennifer Saunders in the period comedy *Let Them Eat Cake*.

(Yes, Minister/Yes, Prime Minister Episode Guide- cont'd from p.12)

5. The Devil You Know--The Minister is upset by rumors of a Cabinet reshuffle. Sir Humphrey is equally worried because, if the Minister goes, who will replace him? He decides it is better to have "the devil you know..."

6. The Quality of Life--The Minister visits a city farm with a promise that its plot of land will be preserved. Humphrey, however, has promised a bank executive that the bank's proposed tower block--interfering with the farm--can go forward without the usual height restrictions. Another clash between the Minister and his Permanent Secretary ensues.

7. A Question of Loyalty--- Both the Minister and Sir Humphrey have to appear before a Select Committee of Members of Parliament who scrutinize the function of the Department of Administrative Affairs.

Yes, Minister: Series Three

1. Equal Opportunities--Jim Hacker MP decides there should be more women occupying top jobs in the Civil Service. Eyebrows, particularly those of Sir Humphrey Appleby, are raised.

2. The Challenge--In a re-organization of government administration, Jim Hacker has the task of reducing local government bureaucracy. "This is a challenge," he says in a radio interview, little realizing just how challenging the task would be.

3. The Skeleton In The Cupboard--Sir Humphrey panics when an expensive bureaucratic botch-up he committed decades earlier comes back to haunt him. Once the error is exposed, he must find a way to prove his value to the Minister.

4. The Moral Dimension--On a visit with his delegation to the Arab nation of Kumran, the Minister and his aides devise a plan to sneak liquor in with them--in violation of local laws. But Hacker soon learns of equally naughty goings on in the form of a long-standing bribery arrangement between Kumran and Britain.

5. The Bed of Nails--Jim Hacker is given the responsibility for developing and implementing an "Integrated National Transport Policy." Sir Humphrey explains that the job could turn out to be "a bed of nails" for the Minister and endeavors to protect him from such discomfort.

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6. The Whisky Priest--The Minister is in possession of some embarrassing information regarding the sale of British arms to Italian terrorists. It takes all of Sir Humphrey's skill to convince the Minister not to do anything foolish with the news.

7. The Middle-Class Rip-Off--A plan by the Minister to rescue a struggling football club from its financial difficulties brings him into conflict with Sir Humphrey.

Christmas 1984 Special --Party Games

This special, extended edition of the series serves as a transition episode. Through an intricate series of maneuvers, Hacker sets himself up as the likely successor to #10 Downing Street.

Yes, Prime Minister: Series 1

1. The Grand Design—Jim is now Prime Minister, with control of the nuclear button. He comes up with a surprising Grand Design for defense, much to Humphrey's chagrin.

2. The Ministerial Broadcast—An extremely tired Hacker is coached and groomed by a gaggle of advisors for his first television address to the nation as Prime Minister. He also begins to think that this job might not be as difficult as he thought.

3. The Smoke Screen--When Jim decides to champion his Health Minister's plan to abolish smoking by excessive taxation, a horrified Sir Humphrey calls in the tobacco lobby to prevent it.

4. The Key--Sir Humphrey tries to maneuver Dorothy Wainwright, Jim's political adviser, out of her office. Territorial battles ensue and, caught in the crossfire, Bernard considers opposing Sir Humphrey for once in his life.

5. The Real Partnership--The government runs into financial crisis just as MPs and top civil servants are due for a pay raise. Sir Humphrey needs all his skills to push his own claim through.

6. A Victory For Democracy--Called upon to take action to prevent a Commonwealth country being taken over by Marxists, Jim has his first clash as Prime Minister with the Foreign Office.

7. The Bishop's Gambit--One of the PM's duties is to recommend the appointment of bishops to the Queen. Given a choice of two by the Church, Jim likes neither--

and Sir Humphrey has his own reasons for wanting a third.

8. One of Us-- Sir Humphrey finds himself at the center of a spy scandal, while Hacker finds his popularity in the polls suffering. They just might manage to come up with a solution for each other's problem.

Yes, Prime Minister: Series Two

1. Man Overboard--When Jim decides to implement a new plan to reduce unemployment in the North, Sir Humphrey decides that desperate cases call for desperate measures.

2. Official Secrets--The former Prime Minister is writing his memoirs, which have to be submitted for security clearance. When one chapter presents Jim in a very bad light, he must force himself to make an objective decision.

3. A Diplomatic Incident--Jim wants the French to sign the Channel Tunnel agreement--but they want to impose all kinds of damaging conditions.

4. A Conflict of Interest--A major financial crisis seems set to rock the Government. With the Party Conference coming up, it is time for firm action by a decisive Prime Minister. Sir Humphrey, however, disagrees.

5. Power to the People--Sir Humphrey locks horns with the formidable Agnes Moorhouse, leader of London Council. To their own surprise, however, they find themselves to be kindred spirits.

6. The Tangled Web--If the PM gives false information to Parliament, should the Cabinet Secretary support him, or should he tell all? As Sir Humphrey ponders the ethics, he finds that he, too, has something to hide.

7. The Patron of the Arts--A drastic cut in the Arts Council Grant is due to be announced on the morning of the British Theatre Awards dinner. Jim needs all Sir Humphrey's help to avoid a hostile reception, but Sir Humphrey is a patron of the arts.

8. The National Education Service--Under pressure to improve standards of education, Jim devises a plan which presents Sir Humphrey--as Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service-- with a conflict of interest.

Garry Berman is the author of *Best of the Britcoms*, available from Taylor Publishing.