

Julie Neubert (Wendy).

"Julie Neubert, you've got a voice like a foghorn!"

The character of Wendy became yet another addition to the growing community in the first series episode Starvation by Jack Ronder. Some of her scenes with Tom Price (Talfryn Thomas) are among the funniest in the entire series. During the three episodes in which she appeared, the relationship between the two was to take on an unexpected and indeed sinister twist, culminating in one of the most controversial and memorable episodes in Survivors. In recent years she has been seen in successful series such as Inspector Morse, Wycliffe, Chandler and Co. and The Bill.

How did Julie start out in acting? "Initially I had wanted to be a writer, like Enid Blyton but at about the age of eleven I decided that I wanted to become an actress. I had a kind of club with a group of school friends at home and started putting on plays on the lawn and inviting the gardener and parents and so on! Through my teens, and it may still be noticeable, I had very weak 'r's', so when people asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up it was a toss-up whether I said I wanted to be an actress or to do drama. In the end I learned to say I wanted to go into the theatre! After some elocution lessons it became less of a problem but it was a stage I went through. At that time it seemed quite preposterous that I wanted to go into such a profession not even being able to speak properly! Getting into Drama School should probably be listed as one of the best achievements of my life. I went to Guildhall, which was wonderful. This was when I was eighteen. I was encouraged, mostly by my parents, to apply to several universities in case I didn't get into drama school. My parents weren't at all negative however. At that time the Guildhall was supported by the City of London. Unfortunately, after the first year that I was there they lost the subsidy and the fees tripled. It was only a two year course and I was very lucky that my family was able to support me. I originally come from Guernsey, and it was not possible to get a grant from there. Obviously, why should Guernsey pay for someone to become an actress and live in England? I certainly needed drama school as a stepping stone into the profession. I would not have been psychologically prepared to go into the business."

Did Julie find getting work very difficult after her time at the Guildhall? "No, I left drama school on the Friday and I started my first job in rep on the Monday in Chesterfield. I worked through about thirty-nine weeks there and then I went on to York for four weeks. Speaking about Guildhall again, although I had a wonderful time there, at the end of the first year they threw out a large number of people, half the women in fact but only one man. We knew that at the end of this first year this was going to happen, so there was a lot of pressure. So surviving the full course was the second big achievement of my life!"

Does Julie remember her first work in television? "It's hard to remember exactly. I did several small things, including being a go-go dancer a couple of times on the Mike and Bernie Winters Show. I distinctly remember dancing to 'Yellow River' ! This would have been in the early seventies. I also did an episode of Doomwatch where I worked with Pennant Roberts and I played a nanny. I first met Pennant however when he was a P.A. on Softly Softly. In fact I think that this may have been the first TV role of any significance that I did. I played the wife of a police officer who had been blinded for life."

Does Julie prefer stage or television work? "I prefer doing camera work. I think this is because of the intimacy of it. You don't have to distort the truth in order to project it. Experience on stage in rep is important because you need that communication with an audience as part of your training. People have commented on the strength of my voice. I remember when I was at Junior School and we were all messing about in the classroom because the form mistress was late. She came striding from a long distance across the playground and into the classroom and said: 'Julie Neubert, you have a voice like a foghorn!' If she had only known that those carrying properties would be very useful in later life! When you're playing to a three-thousand seater you need a voice that carries like a foghorn. My mother comes from Argentina and my father is from Lancashire and I was brought up in Guernsey. When I first went to drama school they taught me not to say 'must' and 'just' in northern pronunciation. I didn't notice I had this pronunciation but they did notice it."

How did Julie get the part of Wendy in Survivors? "This was due to Pennant Roberts. I went to the BBC to meet a director for some other purpose. In those days it was easier for actors to get interviews by writing to directors. These days they have more casting directors as a kind of buffer, so it's much harder to get through. Anyway, I was walking down the corridor when I saw the name Pennant Roberts on the door. Perhaps I was bolder in those days, but I knocked on the door and he invited me in. He said that he had only just been talking about me. He then led me down the corridor to Terry Dudley. They both stared at me very intently and asked me if I was twenty-four to which I replied that I was. They looked at each other saying, 'what do you think?' Apparently Pennant had mentioned me for the part of Wendy but then thought that I was a little bit too old, as she was meant to be only seventeen. But between them they decided either

that I looked younger than I was or that Wendy's age was never mentioned in the scripts. They wanted someone who was young, a little naive and dippy but the exact age didn't really matter. So I got the part!"

Was Julie initially contracted for just the three stories? "The original idea was that Lucy Fleming's character (Jenny) was to be murdered. They then decided that she was too nice and elected to keep her in the series. They therefore decided to write in another girl, leave her in just long enough for the viewers to care about her, then murder her instead. So, I think my character was written in purely to die. I would have loved to continue.

Did Julie enjoy her time working on Survivors? "Yes indeed. This was my first sizeable television role and I really loved it."

Julie's first episode was Jack Ronder's Starvation which was directed by Pennant Roberts. Does Julie have any memories of this first episode? "Looking at the episode now, it all seems so overacted, I think I wouldn't do it like that now! Although they wanted Wendy to be fairly naive, she obviously sussed out Tom Price (Talfryn Thomas) very quickly. Wendy was the one going around the countryside in pretty frocks with bare legs and sandals, sometimes with a mac or cardigan because the weather was awful. The others had anoraks, jeans and sensible shoes, but the idea was that while everyone else wore sensible clothes she didn't. I feel that a lot of the acting early on was unsubtle, certainly by today's standards. As the episodes progress it is less noticeable, but it was all done on a rather superficial level, rather like the series itself. I think they missed a wonderful opportunity. I thought Hampton Court was quite a spooky house. I don't think I would have wanted to sleep there. The grounds were beautiful with some amazing trees. It must have been very hard to find a location where there were no signs of life since as soon as an aeroplane went overhead all shooting had to stop. There were people down the road with their walkie-talkies stopping the traffic."

Survivors was a pioneer in the use of Outside Broadcast Cameras. Does Julie recall what it was like working with this relatively new technique? "I remember the dreadful weather and constantly having to stop to the sound of: 'we've lost camera 2!', to which we would reply: 'how careless, why don't you go and look for it?!'. As soon as the damp got in, the cameras would break down; they weren't built to cope with the outdoors. I loved going into the van and seeing all the screens and the vision-mixing all happening there in the back of this truck; it was very exciting. That's one of the nice things about doing television as opposed to film; if you're not sure how you looked in a scene you can always go and look on one of the monitors when they play it back to check it. There has been a move back to film on television today, but film is much slower and more expensive."

Julie has very few memories of Spoil of War. Her third and final story was Clive Exton's Law and Order, in which she dies at the hands of Tom Price. How did Julie feel about being written out of the series? "It must be very difficult if you are in a series and expecting to stay in it, but I knew that the deal was for three episodes so I was glad to have three instead of just one! Usually, actors only get one episode in a series."

Many people assume that Wendy was raped by Tom Price in Law and Order. How did Julie feel about being involved in such a violent demise? "The interesting thing is that nowhere in the script is there any mention at all of the word rape, yet everybody who has seen that episode assumes that Wendy was raped and murdered! There was NO rape in that script whatsoever! Obviously, Tom Price was a dirty old man but he could just have killed her in the struggle. I suppose people projected the rape element onto the story because they wanted it to be that way. It was one of the stronger episodes of the series because it really does make people think 'how would I vote in that sort of situation?' Many people who have seen the episode recently on video have told me what good television they think it is, raising important issues. I love the look of Law and Order, seeing it again now on video: the colours, the house and the fireside and the party scene. The awful depressingness of that party reminds me of gatherings at the local village hall and give me that same kind of sinking feeling In Survivors that was the best the world could offer and there was something quite searing about it. I was very impressed at the make-up techniques they employed in this episode for my death scene. They put this false skin on and then they lifted it to shove the clotted blood and everything underneath. It didn't hurt at all but I couldn't watch them doing it, because it looked exactly as if they were pulling up my own skin!"

How would Julie compare the way television is made today with how it was made twenty years ago? "Life has got so much faster and people have become so much more impatient. I hadn't thought of that until recently when I saw the episodes again on video and I kept wishing they would hurry up and get to the point. Of course, drama is about the high spots and the low spots of life and can't be the middling spots because they are not interesting enough. That's why it has to be condensed and made somewhat unreal, but that's the whole point of what drama is. My father is in the medical profession and when I watch Casualty, for example, I think that it can't really be like that. But then again so many interesting issues are raised in each episode! A truly realistic hospital series would be very boring. There seemed to be so much

more going on twenty years ago compared with today and they did a lot more stuff in the studio. Television Centre in London is almost redundant today. They do very little in it apart from game shows and chat shows. Drama is nearly all being farmed out to independent production companies these days.

"As far as Survivors is concerned, I just wish that they had approached it in a far more adult and psychological way. I thought at the time and I still think that it became rather 'cops and robbers' with people chasing each other and shooting at each other which to me is almost 'teenage' television. I felt it was such a wonderful idea and I wanted to know how it would genuinely affect the people involved. The script never really took the opportunity to look into their souls and emotions to see how the catastrophe had affected them. Law and Order did address some interesting issues and dilemmas, but even if the script writers thought that it was true that people would be running around with guns and shooting at each

other, then they could have looked at what that would do to people's psyche and at their despair that humankind had become like that. I didn't believe at the time and, although I've become a little more cynical, I still don't believe that it would do that to people. Surely, instead of going around playing cops and robbers they would cling on to each other for dear life. There was little of this to be seen in the series. The music and title sequence for Survivors are excellent, very strong and haven't dated at all. When you see them it makes you think 'this is going to be good!'."

Does Julie feel that Survivors is perhaps too depressing for today's audience and that is the main factor why it has never been repeated on terrestrial television, and why a new series is looking increasingly unlikely? "I don't think that's a good reason not to show it. After all, there's plenty of terribly depressing stuff on television. Actually, I think if anything Survivors tried to be too entertaining. I would much rather it had been less entertaining but more thought provoking. As an actress, the viewing figures are not very important to me. Getting the work and doing something which is interesting and satisfying is far more important."