

Lorna Lewis (Pet Simpson).

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Throughout the second and third series, Pet Simpson, played by Lorna Lewis, became one of the most well-known and popular characters in *Survivors*. She was not only Charles Vaughan's 'wife', but a steady figure in the community, somebody that all could respect and look up to, and with her undeniable cooking talents, was a bulwark of Whitecross. It is to be doubted whether Charles could have achieved what he in the end did, without her at his side.

How did Lorna start out in the acting profession? "I think I started out acting by copying my sister, whatever she did I wanted to do. In a sense she in fact brought me up. I was born at the beginning of the war and my mother sent us to Ireland when I was still a six-month-old baby and my sister was six years old. From then on she was always responsible for me and I think that psychologically I always needed to do what she did. Funnily enough she married someone called Michael and so did I! She also wished to be an actress and tried to go to RADA, but unfortunately was turned down. I however was more fortunate and got through my RADA audition. Before my RADA audition I had gone to Teacher's Training College as my father insisted that I do this training before becoming an actress. But by this time I was an American citizen, so I thought that I would not be allowed to work over here. My father is English and my mother Irish. He had worked for an American company and we were in the States in 1948, 50 in fact I grew up over there."

Would Lorna consider that the drama training at RADA provides a useful grounding for TV work? "No, I don't really think so. Physically I am really more of a stage actress. I have a large face with big bones; small people come up better on television and films than large people do. On the stage these features are right because they carry and you can see, even from the back row, for example, whether I am sad or happy. In fact I have a very moving and movable face, indeed too movable because with the camera up close it's distracting. The people who are best on TV are those who are very still whereas I was too busy acting as I had done on the stage. I think that had I done more television work then I would have learned. I have a feeling that I was just beginning to learn when *Survivors* finished. I think I probably prefer stage to television, because you get this instant feedback from the audience."

How did Lorna obtain the part of Pet in *Survivors*? "That is a very interesting story. I had watched the first series and thought it was very interesting. I remember saying to my daughter Tiffany's nanny that I would love to be in a series like that. Up till then I had been doing a little work, in *Windsor* and a small part for Terry Dudley in *Doomwatch*. When I saw that Terry was producing *Survivors* I wrote him a letter asking if there might be a part in it for me. He replied saying that they had just finished making the first series but if they did another one then I should get in touch again. When I realised that they were indeed going to do a second series I telephoned and managed to get an interview. Terry was charming, and he said that they were indeed going to do another series and that there was a new character in it. At this point he asked his secretary to bring in some coffee but he couldn't find a spoon to stir it with. He ended up by stirring his coffee with a pencil. Anyway, we chatted a bit more and he said that I could probably do the new part to which I replied, 'Yes, and I'm sure a thousand others could do it too!'. He said that was true but he wouldn't be interviewing a thousand people for the part. Finally he said that they would think about it and let me know. When I got home I wrote him a letter and I just happened to have this little gold spoon, which I parceled up and sent it with the letter in which I told him that I hoped that the next time he needed to stir his coffee he wouldn't have to use a pencil! I think that that must have done the trick as he wrote to me thanking me for the spoon and offering me the part of Pet! So that's how I got the part!"

Did Lorna, given her lack of television experience, feel insecure at starting out in her role as Pet? "Yes, I have to say that I was insecure. It was the first major television that I had done and I was with many people, such as Denis who had done so much more than I. One mistake that I would make would be to look in the wrong direction. It seemed obvious that if someone was looking up towards me then I should look towards them, but this wasn't so since it all depended on the camera angle. I remember that the director Terry Williams nearly had a coronary once because I was looking the wrong way, and I could hear him shouting out about it! I was so mortified about it."

Did Lorna have any specific ideas about how she wanted the character of Pet to be? "No, not really. It didn't seem to me that there was much background to the character, except that she was Denis' significant 'other'. There was not much explanation as to where she had come from. So I made Pet's background my own background in the sense of 'what would I have done in these circumstances?'. Pet's father had been the proprietor of the 'Continental Cafe' in Worcester, so she didn't come from a high-class background and probably hadn't been grandly educated."

The first story to be made of the second series was Jack Ronder's The Witch. "The story was interesting, although a little bit corny. The problem was that it was not very well acted, certainly not on my part. I remember running through the woods and shouting 'Mina, Mina!', and also the reaction of the man in the caravan that Denis remembers in his interview. I think it could have worked better for me if I had had a clearer idea of what I was doing. Also, the way in which the script was written didn't really give you much of an indication of what to do or where to go. I had not yet seen the script of Jack's first story for me, Birth of a Hope, so I didn't know who I was. Had I done that story first I would have realised that Pet simply would not have behaved in that fashion towards Mina. She comes over as far too sharp and most out of character. Terry Dudley told me that Jack in fact created the character of Pet from Cherry, who was Robin David's wife on the farm we used in that second series."

The first transmitted episode of series two was Jack Ronder's Birth of a Hope. Does Lorna have any memories of this story? "I remember the arrival of the new people, Greg and the others. I remember running out to him and saying 'Are you well?'. It was rather good that they made the episode out of sequence, as that gave us all time to get to know each other before actually getting to the first story."

While Survivors was being made, Lorna, as she does today, lived in Kent. Did she not find the constant travelling to and from Monmouthshire a strain? "My husband and I had a house in London, so it was somewhat less difficult. My first husband didn't like living in the country at all so he was delighted to have the opportunity of staying in London. A nanny would look after my daughter. I would be home every night after rehearsing in Acton, and then for the five or six days or so that we filmed in Wales my husband was happy enough to be able to stay in London and do his own thing!"

A memorable second series episode was Roger Parkes' The Chosen, in which Denis Lill and Lorna were the only regulars. This story had many scenes which were shot in the studio. "I think I look the best in this story, which was actually filmed in the studio. We did some location shots, which were filmed. This was directed by Eric Hills. I did however think that the continuity wasn't all that good for this episode. We did some scenes on location, when we were on horseback, and it was absolutely arctic and our faces were frozen stiff. After filming this we went through a door in one of the army huts. The pick up shot for this was done in the studio in London, and had us coming through the door. The problem was that I looked absolutely brilliant! Suddenly my hair looked fine and my face was unfrozen! Philip Madoc was in this episode and I remember that he and Denis would tend to lark around a lot. He had a wonderful and a great commanding presence. I think that Terry Dudley had got Roger Parkes to write a somewhat larger part for me in this story because up till then I had spent a lot of time leaning against the stove in the kitchen and simply reacting to events instead of being an instigator. I also got to do some riding, which I love."

A memorable story for Lorna in this second series was Don Shaw's Face of the Tiger, which included a memorable performance by John Line as Alistair McFadden, who was discovered to have murdered a child before the plague. "John had such a lovely voice. I remember that I actually cried during a speech he gave while I was sitting at the end of the kitchen table. I cried at what he had to say, and I was relating to him as a character. It sometimes does happen that you can respond in this way, as the character would have done."

Lorna also had a prominent role in New Arrivals, by Roger Parkes. "I seem to remember that Roger had written some dialogue that was not really well suited to Pet. That is often the problem with different authors. They may not have a particularly clear idea of what a character would say. I seem to remember having a bit of a discussion about this with the director, Terry Williams. He told me just to get on with it! In this story there was a confrontation between Pet and Mark Carter, who had a degree in agriculture and had just arrived in the community. He was intolerant of those who were already there. The problem was that I don't think that Pet would have confronted him. Charles, on the other hand, might well have confronted him as his nose was out of joint."

The Martin Worth story Over the Hills, also sees Lorna in a prominent role, as Charles tries to spark a baby boom in the community. "I remember mostly the scene in the kitchen when I had to seduce Ian. I had wanted to make the scene more suggestive than it actually turned out, but as the episode was broadcast before the watershed they wanted it toned down. I also remember the party on the lawn and that there were problems with Tanya and her dress."

The final story of the second series was Martin Worth's New World, in which Greg flies away in a hot air balloon. Did Lorna already have an inkling at this stage of the dramatic stages planned for the third series? "The balloon was quite exciting. I had no idea that there was even going to be a third series. The character of the series changed a lot for the third series, becoming basically cowboys and Indians. I suppose they no longer knew what to do with it by then. I think I would have preferred to have stayed at Callow Hill for the third series. You should have been able to follow the developments taking place in the

community; crops, buildings and starting civilisation again. There was one story about producing methane gas (By Bread alone) but there should have been more.

Although Lorna did do some series three episodes, she no longer played such a prominent role. Why does Lorna think that not only her own, but many other regular characters got left behind? "The third series really consisted of people chasing around the country side and it lost the whole purpose behind the series. I really don't know why I didn't play a larger role in the third series. I could only assume that they had looked at the viewing figures and had decided that Pet wasn't very interesting and therefore decided that she wasn't needed. I have subsequently met people who would have wanted Pet to play a larger part. This series seemed totally disjointed to me. There were no rehearsals in London at all for these episodes, we would go straight to the location."

Did Lorna empathise with the underlying premise of the series, and does she feel that there is a place for a new series? "Yes, I do. That is really why I wanted to be in it. However, I'm not sure if a new series would work. There are so many young people watching television today who have never seen or even heard of the series that there would have to be a lot of explaining for them to be able to understand it. Also, there is so much violent and tragic news on TV today that no drama could equal it. Drama today has to be far more escapist and I fear that something like Survivors is more relevant today than it was twenty years ago, but any new series would have to be written properly. It would have to be written about people who care."