

Remembering Bob Switzer by David Tarrant



David and Bob

I first met Bob when I appeared on his daily show 'The Bob Switzer Show' at the old CBC Building located at Bute and Georgia in 1974.

Our first encounter was in the old lobby. I arrived the customary hour before air time, bumping into him and his Director on their way out to lunch.

I patiently waited in one of the Lloyd Loom chairs until some one came to find me and lead me to makeup, through what seemed like a rabbit warren of corridors.

Immediately after appearing on his live show he told me I was a natural for television! And from that moment became my TV mentor.

I became a monthly guest bringing potted plants and cut flowers to talk about from UBC Botanical Garden.

In that old building it was very easy to drive round the back, knock on the big garage doors to unload directly into the studio!!

In 1975 when CBC moved to its new broadcast centre at 1200 Georgia, his daily show became 'Switzer Unlimited' and my monthly appearances continued. He had a coffee table made for the set, which when the top was removed, became a box of soil in which I demonstrated how to plant various plants and bulbs. It was a bit like a giant kitty litter box, which we often joked about off air.

In the later 70's possibly early 80's we made a series, which I think was called 'BC Gardens' it involved traditional filming at out of town locations, like the Okanagan and Vancouver Island, our camera man for film was Ron Orioux and then the home based gardening segments were undertaken from the mobile unit which used for sports events. It was an enormous rig and quite challenging to operate out at various locations including UBC Botanical Garden. In those days our HQ was in the old Presidents Residence.

Then of course Bob's big claim to fame was getting 'The Western Gardener' to on air reality in 1982. It was of course taped at the new building in the roof garden.

The original garden eventually leaked into offices and studios below, and was totally overhauled to include raised beds for growing, fruit trees, flowers and vegetables.

We made many happy shows there. And quite honestly we were like the odd couple in the garden. Viewers related to our on air banter and camaraderie and really thought we were a couple!!



*David and Bob on the CBC Vancouver Roof Garden
at an Open House in 1985*

He would give me a really hard time for spending too much on what he thought were way too expensive plants.

He loved to eat everything we harvested. Sometimes his commentary would drive me crazy; I do believe people related to this and that is why they were our dedicated viewers. Often times when Bob was out shopping with Joley, people would of course not recognize her and immediately ask Bob how or where I was!

Bob had the gift of persuading people to do things. During those early years in the roof garden we would hold Mothers Day open garden on the set. He would get Jimmy Le Noble, a local orchid grower to make up orchid corsages for the visiting Mum's. He worked with Canadian Pacific Airlines to help sponsor the open garden and we held gigantic draws where the winning ticket would allow the winning mother along with her daughter or son to come on our overseas taping of our shows in Hong Kong and on another occasion in Holland!

He persuaded the local New Zealand consul to invite us to visit and tape gardening shows in New Zealand as guests of the NZ Government and Air New Zealand.

They were happy days indeed. I was always sorry Bob didn't write a book. He was full of stories about his old days of broadcasting, when we were on the road, both overseas and in Canada after the show had become a national CBC show 'Canadian Gardener' in 1986. During our off air times in the evenings his stories after a drink or two, (something which were both partial to) he would become quite forthcoming with his stories. Plus he would often take local hosts hands and read their palms telling them their future!!

It truly was an amazing few year's, we visited and taped shows in gardens all across the country.

It had a bonding effect with all Canadian gardeners and we were always warmly received wherever we went.

As a tribute to Bob, I really do appreciate my introduction to the world of television, through him, opening up the opportunity for me to have a long and happy TV career, which blended well with my regular employment at the UBC Botanical Garden.

I know it was difficult for him to accept his retirement from CBC and the show in 1993 and we did rather lose touch. However he did come to roast me at my retirement from UBC in 2007.

Thank you, Bob for all the happy times, both on, and off air. My life has been richer for knowing you.

David Tarrant
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