

# Chezzi Denyer

## *Television Producer & Keynote Speaker*

Let me start by introducing myself. I'm Cheryl Denyer, but I prefer to go by my nickname Chezzi. Growing up, I despised my name. It seemed like everyone I would meet had an old aunt or really old neighbour called Cheryl. I begged my friends to give me a nickname. They were quite unenthused after constant hounding, they offered up suggestions like Cereal, Celery, or the all-time favourite, CheZZAAH! Said in a real bogan-sounding voice. I really wanted something unique as I felt Cheryl was something I only shared with a lot of middle-aged Aussie housewives. Or that woman from Neighbours! It wasn't until I was in my late twenties, working at Sunrise that I was given a nickname that finally stuck. My Line Producer David "Dougie" Walters called me Chezzi, and I've been called that ever since.



I'm married to Grant, and we have two children - Sailor and Scout. We live on a farm outside of Bathurst in NSW. We have 27 acres, and up until last weekend, 3 cows, but more on that later!

I have a degree in Communications - Broadcast Journalism and Theatre Media. I've worked in a billion jobs, all very different. While I knew I wanted to work in media, I was confused about what exactly I wanted to do. I loved acting and performing, but I knew there were only so many jobs you could land in those fields, so I started to dream of a life working in News. I kind of forced my way into a job at my local radio station in Bathurst when I was 15. It wasn't much, but I loved it. I worked every Saturday from 9am until midday, helping Luke Bona field calls for his morning program. From there, I went to do some MC'ing jobs locally, and then I was offered some spruiking work with a Sydney-based company who also dealt with promotions. I spent more time concentrating on my work than my study, as I was still in High School, so needless to say, my grades were affected. So, to get into Uni to study, I auditioned for Theatre and Media - and got in first round!

While at Uni, I pestered my way into the Prime TV Newsroom, and offered myself to work for free for however long it took to get a paid job there. I created my own little work station in the Newsroom - a spare desk and chair! - And began working whenever I didn't have lectures or uni work to do. I made everyone coffee, took lunch orders, picked up dry cleaning, dusted the studio; I offered to sit in on edits so the journalists could write their stories. I did the ring around of local police, ambulance and fire stations to see if anything newsworthy had occurred. Anything I could do to make myself useful, I did it. For free. For nearly two years.

When I finally landed a job as a journalist working for Prime in Orange (the first time), I realised I

was NOT cut out to be a journo. I wasn't cut-throat enough. I had a good news sense, sure, but I was far too empathetic and my writing was deemed too "conversational" and "humorous" as opposed to "factual" and "newsy". So, I started doing colour pieces with humorous twists. There wasn't a huge call for these types of stories, but I was able to put them together easily and always leant towards finding them. And then ... I was asked to fill in for the Sports journo, and I failed miserably! I don't know sports lingo, I was too wordy - I found it really tough!

During this time, I worked at three local radio stations, recording voice-overs for commercials, program announcements, and sometimes would fill in hosting shows. It was so much fun. I loved voice-over, making up character voices and shocking people when I'd tell them it was me they were listening to. I loved it when they couldn't pick my voice! Between you and I, I've used this "skill" on the phone many times to trick pick my voice! Between you and I, I've used this skill on the phone many a time to trick people into thinking they had called the wrong number. I used to get a real laugh out of confusing my poor mum when she'd call the home phone. For some reason, she still falls for it today. Not that I still do that ... No, now I'm mature.

Fast forward to my first year out of Uni, and I was offered a job at NSW Parliament House under the then-Opposition Leader Kerry Chikarovski, for the Member of Davidson, Andrew Humpherson. That was a mouthful! This was super exciting for someone so green and so young. Assisting with writing policy and legislation was way over my head to begin with, but I soon got the hang of it. There's nothing quite like being at Parliament House when it's sitting. There's a real buzz unlike anything I've ever experienced. During my three years there, I saw a leadership spill, where John Brogden took the reins from Kerry. That was incredible. I felt like I was involved in the story at the time, as all staff had to go into lockdown. I had numerous political journo trying to reach me, to get to the bottom of what had happened, which was nerve-wracking!

It wasn't always like that, though, and more often than not, I found it incredibly lonely working at Parliament when the house wasn't sitting. I sat a lolly jar on my desk to try and entice colleagues in the building to call in for a lolly and a chat. It wasn't very political, but I made lots of friends from both sides, and from all different positions from the top to the bottom - library staff, mail workers, Media and Policy Advisors - all because of that lolly jar. Oh, and I should probably give some credit to my office pet - which, I didn't know at the time, but was illegal to have a pet in Parliament House, so he didn't last long - my Goldfish Pedro!

I decided to leave Parliament and search for a job back in Television. I studied more television presenting, and worked in a women's gym as an Endermologist (Cellulite Massage Therapist), random, I know! But that's me. After I finished my course at TV ProGlobal, I was offered a job with them, which I jumped at, helping train and place other budding TV peeps. From there, I was contacted by Channel Seven, with a job on the News Chief of Staff desk. I started out there at the Epping newsroom, and moved into Martin Place, working shifts assisting the News Chief.

I loved that job. Absolutely loved it! I loved the comradery. I loved the buzzing of the phones and journos talking and bashing away at their keyboards. I loved the excitement of pointing Journos and Cameramen towards their story each day. Watching the bulletins go to air and cheering with the rest of the newsroom when we nailed the ratings. This was a real highpoint in my life. At that point, I thought I wanted to be a Chief of Staff in a newsroom.

During my time in the Seven Newsroom, I was offered a casual role at Sunrise, and I quickly rose through the ranks to become a producer on the show. It was long hours. We were a small team with a tiny budget at the time, but we loved every minute of it. We were a family, and I dedicated the next few years of my life to the show and to the people I worked alongside. I was working on the show when we first out-rated The Today Show, and then we continued to beat them daily. It was incredible. I was also placed in charge of the Sunrise Soapbox, and I saw firsthand what an extraordinary position we were in - entertaining people daily, nationwide. Some people with no family of their own would reach out to use because they felt we were their friends - and we were. I spent my downtime trying to assist, or at least talk to as many people as possible on behalf of the show. For someone with a lot of empathy, I felt for each and every one of these people, and nothing made me happier than sending out signed fan cards of the hosts, mugs, or hats, to fans of the show that were at a low point in their lives. I also helped organise meet and greets with the hosts of the show if we were shooting out on location. I helped facilitate tours of the Channel Seven Martin Place studio for fans with terminal illness. Seeing how much it made them smile was tremendous. It's very difficult to explain without witnessing it firsthand, but all of this made me change my perception of the power of television, and just how great it can be. I worked in many roles during my time at Sunrise, and I was happy to start at 1am some days on my Assistant Line Producing shift, and then finish at 7pm after my Field Producing shift. I loved the show, I loved what it stood for, and I loved the fun, exciting, sometimes challenging work.

In 2010, I married my fellow colleague Grant, and we went back on the road as the Sunrise Weather team. We did this for a year until I fell pregnant with Sailor and was so sick I was unable to work, but we'll get to that dramatic episode later!

This is all just a snapshot of who I am. I've sold cars, I've worked as a Kangaroo mascot. I cooked sausages for radio stations. I worked at Cue clothing as a shop assistant. I managed a North Shore hotel. At one point, I even worked at Lane Cove National Park, in what my husband called my Ranger Stacey green uniform. Basically, I don't fit into any mould. I've had so many different experiences, many seemingly dramatic, that I was encouraged to start this website and share things with others who are just like me.

For now I am kind of housewife/ freelance producer / farmer and most importantly - I'm a mummy to two little delights. Two gorgeous girls, both very spirited! They certainly keep me on my toes. With my husband away more than he is home, things can be a little chaotic.

To me, this is just my life. I'm a regular Joe ... well, a regular Cheryl! Chezzi, though, we're sticking with the nickname!

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