



a new series
created by
Louise Shaffer & Jen Ponton

Queens of Daytime

PILOT SYNOPSIS

Sara Jo Adderson is in a pickle.

As the new producer of 1958's most popular daytime soap opera, *Tomorrow is Forever*, she's in charge of a magical, melodramatic world—complete with tearful leading lady, conniving rich bitch, handsome hero, and debutante soap model.

When her male lead is cast in a Hollywood Western (read: falls into 'a coma'), 'Addy' uses the seismic shift to make a change for the better. Impulsively firing her hammy head writers, she discovers her dream writer in the eleventh hour—Laurel Kessler, a fiery and skilled Columbia grad playwright with a portfolio of thought-provoking material on race, gender, and social issues.

{ In other words—someone who wouldn't be caught dead writing torrid love triangles and hand-wringing amnesia stories. }

But when Laurel is turned down—yet again—by another primetime producer in a suit who insists that she can only write girlish, soft scripts 'for the ladies,' she takes a meeting with Addy—whose Southern charm and passion for the medium are underscored by the freedom that women have in the soaps. Under little supervision by corporate sponsors, the women in charge are able to write and produce shows out from under the scrutiny of men and what they deem 'appropriate.'

Intrigued, Laurel takes Addy up on her offer, arriving on set the next day. When a guest actor is a no-show for the tearjerking final scene, leading lady Carolyn Lake frets to Jessie Norris, her housekeeper co-star, 'Sally.'

Recognizing Jessie from her off-Broadway work, Laurel insists to Addy that they change the script, giving Sally her first meaty scene opposite Carolyn—marking the first time an actor of color on the show will say something other than 'Yes sir, yes ma'am.'

Flowery, heavy-handed soliloquies turn to nuanced, simple, truthful dialogue in Laurel's deft hands. Erupting with applause after the final scene, cast and crew celebrate the brand new world that they are about to create—

in the capable hands of two women ahead of their time, hellbent on using their amplified voices to make a difference.



Tomorrow is Forever

SARA JO ADDERSON | PRODUCER

There's nothing less threatening to the patriarchy than little ladies at home in aprons, baking cakes, and watching their stories.

At least, that's what the ad men in charge of the burgeoning soap opera empire thought. As profits rolled in, sales skyrocketed, and expenses flatlined, it became a game—how to spend nothing and make bank. So they looked for more and more places to cut corners. Like firing the men as producers and replacing them... with women.

In the 1950s, boss ladies in the workforce were nearly unheard of—especially in the boys' club of television. But those ad execs unwittingly created a nearly unsupervised haven for female empowerment, bankrolling nationally televised stories for audiences tenfold the size of those who watched primetime heavy hitters like Sid Caesar or Milton Berle.

While those ad giants in Cincinnati were only distantly aware that they owned a television show, the women who'd been hired to write and produce were eagerly seizing their greatest opportunity. Under the radar, these **Queens of Daytime** could write stories that never would have made it to air under a more scrutinizing male gaze. Female-helmed soaps became the first programs to tackle racial integration, gay rights, women in the workplace, divorce, reproductive rights, reproductive health, and addiction.

Unlike most period episodics that focus on oppressive, archaic power structures, **Queens of Daytime** focuses on the progressive change that happened in soaps for many otherwise oppressed voices. And it's no fantasy—with progressive women in charge, it was a very real oasis of female leadership, with the power to affect an enviable demographic that primetime television could only dream of.

We are in a staggering historical moment, coming face-to-face with our societal illusions about equality across gender and race. In a time where women seemingly have to fight harder than ever to be believed, to be taken seriously, and to be valued equally to men—our 60-year-old timepiece of the **Queens of Daytime** is a restorative, inspiring, rallying cry.

(With a little hysterical blindness, too—just to keep things exciting.)

xoxo
Jen Ponton
Louise Shaffer

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Laurel Kessler

It's not often you'll find two people working side by side who are over 40 years apart—particularly in television..

It's extraordinary, and, we contend, it's no surprise that two women pulled it off.

Our country is in a remarkable moment, as the discussion of women in the workplace—and just how welcome we are in it—is at a fevered, frenetic pitch. Louise Shaffer (actress, writer, and '70s feminist) and Jen Ponton (actress, writer, and Millennial feminist) reached across the divide of the generations to collaborate on a show they both believe will move the needle forward. And it will be fun to watch.

We make an unusual—but very powerful—duo. Representing both ends of the continuum, we have something important to add to the conversation. As women, we brought to the table our skills, aspirations, and instincts. We listened to each other, applauded each other, disagreed, and compromised with each other. Oh boy, did we ever laugh. And we made a show—a show that is exceptionally timely and needed at this moment.

To be a working woman is to internalize something quite insidious; to be taken seriously and be successful, she must suppress her innate, feminine strengths to better emulate the men around her.

With all due respect, we say that's hogwash.

Our show is unique; it could only have come from a partnership like this, and from leaning into our innately feminine skill set. Inspired by Louise's Emmy-winning career in daytime drama, and shaped by Jen for today's audience, Louise provided a rich history, and Jen brought it into the present day with a modern storytelling approach.

The result?

Truly something something special.

- Louise & Jen

Louise Shaffer



Louise landed her first soap opera job in 1967, and she did her last daytime gig in 1994. During her career she worked on Broadway, Off Broadway, in national tours, and for primetime television, but she always came back to the soaps—including Norman Lear's *All that Glitters*, and her Emmy-winning role on *Ryan's Hope*. She was nominated three times for her work as Rae Woodard.

When she hit her mid-forties, the acting work dried up for her—because, as a producer informed her, at her advanced years she was “no longer sexually viable”. Defiantly refusing a face lift, she began a second career as a soap writer which she continued until becoming a novelist in 2001.

Jen Ponton



Jen's experience of soap operas begins and ends with the schlocky *Passions* while home sick in high school. But like Addy, Jen is quite passionate about the transformative power of television. *Queens of Daytime* is her fourth pilot script, and she has also penned two feature comedies. As a producer, she is the co-creator of the puppet sitcom, *The Weirdos Next Door*.

As an actress, Jen has worked multiple times with Tina Fey, is recurring on a highly-anticipated AMC series, and can be seen on most New York procedurals, as well as in films that have graced Sundance, Tribeca, and SXSW.

AUTOGRAPHS



Sara Jo Adderson (early 30s)

'Addy' is the recently-promoted producer of *Tomorrow Is Forever*. She's high energy, charming, warm, empathetic, and would never be seen in public without her lipstick. But all that grace covers a will of steel. Addy grew up poor in the rural South during the Depression, and was raised by her Gran to ask herself in any crisis, "What would Eleanor Roosevelt do?" She believes passionately in the soaps, and is determined to deliver quality entertainment to the women at home who watch them. It's not an easy task—as daytime and its audience are considered an afterthought by the men in the big offices—but Addy loves a challenge. While her home life is refreshingly not the focus of the show, Addy shares a solid, loving marriage with her husband, Peter. SERIES REGULAR.



Laurel Kessler (early 40s)

Fiery as hell and endlessly talented, Laurel is the show's new head writer. A native Manhattanite, she comes from a family of political activists and union organizers. Laurel is a Columbia graduate, with deeply held ideals about the role that television can play in shaping the culture—namely, to raise awareness, educate, and enlighten. She's particularly interested in writing about the Civil Rights Movement, for very personal reasons—Laurel's partner is Norah Hurston, an African American journalist who covers burgeoning civil rights movement around the country, often at great peril. While typical soapy fare would make Laurel cringe, with Addy's help, she sees a golden opportunity to change the world of *Tomorrow Is Forever*. SERIES REGULAR.



Sid Meyer (late 50s, early 60s)

The director of *Tomorrow Is Forever*. Sid has been around forever, himself; he's good at his job, and—despite his New York grit—he's fond of sweet, Southern, glass-half-full Addy, who was once his underling. His cynical shell hides a tender heart. But while he believes in what Addy and Laurel are doing—at his age—Sid mostly just wants to stay employed. SERIES REGULAR.



Jessie Norris (early 40s)

African-American, Jessie plays 'Sally,' the housekeeper for the wealthy Grants. Jessie herself is a charismatic, elegant lady from a well-to-do family, her father being a highly-appointed judge. She graduated from Bennington College, married a teacher, and has two kids. And Jessie's a terrific actress, well-known on the flourishing off-off-Broadway scene. But on *Tomorrow Is Forever*, she's a day player, limited to carrying party trays and saying, "Yes ma'am". While it's no cakewalk, Jessie is a realist—both about her industry and the era in which she lives. When Laurel comes in and turns the show on its head, Sally's role turns into something much more than anyone ever expected—including Jessie....SERIES REGULAR.

AUTOGRAPHS



Carolyn Lake (late 40s)

The star of our show since its inception, Carolyn plays leading lady Emily Anderson. Born on a farm as Carmelina Luchesi, she changed her name when she became a contract player at Warner Brothers, convinced that she was going to be a star. It never happened. After a disappointing five years, they dropped her. After ten more, she was ready to quit when she was offered a chance to read for the lead on a new soap called *Tomorrow Is Forever*. Her brand of solid, warm—but not terribly exciting—acting was perfect for the show, and Carolyn knows how lucky she is to have this gig. She cultivates her fans, and she protects her territory fiercely. Single and rather friendless—save for Jessie—the show really is her life. SERIES REGULAR.



Cornelia Babson Dolbs (late 20s - early 30s)

Probably late twenties, but who knows? Cornelia is a blonde, lock-jawed debutante who, once upon a time, did a spread of photos for a society magazine while in finishing school. That led to some modeling work, which eventually led to Cornelia becoming the face of the household products sold by Proger and Grayson, the sponsors of *Tomorrow Is Forever*. Five days a week, Cornelia shows up at the studio and sells P&G mop fluid, dish soap and laundry detergents during commercial breaks. But she has higher aspirations—Cornelia yearns to be a serious actress. She studies The Method with an acolyte of Lee Strasberg, and considers Grace Kelly her role model. SERIES REGULAR.



Maggie O'Hare (mid-70s)

Actress who plays 'Grand Dame' Florence Grant on the show. Salty, tough, and sharp as a tack, Maggie is on the back-end of a career that flourished as half of a vaudeville comedy act, Feldman & O'Hare. She never married—though the rumors of her and her partner, Murray, were numbered. She considers love a fool's game—and she positively loathes children. She spars with Patti and rubs elbows with Bette, who can hold her own with Maggie. In between stylish, aristocratic takes as Florence, she spouts lefty politics and curses like a sailor. RECURRING.



Bette LeFevre (late 30s - early 40s)

Bette plays Rhonda Grant, the show's resident 'rich bitch' nemesis. Bette started out as a Ziegfeld Follies showgirl—as she explains it, her perfect posture honed by wearing those huge headdresses makes her perfect for aristocratic bitch roles. Still something of a good time gal, she and Maggie are great friends. Although they always pull it together for air, they are our two resident clowns. RECURRING.

AUTOGRAPHS



Greta (early 60s)

When she was young she was a sweet-as-pie musical comedy ingenue best known for her role as The Girl In Rose-Covered Swing in *Broadway Babies* of 1922. Now, she's the show's wardrobe woman who takes no prisoners—her particular beef being with the actors, all of whom she considers to be mindless idiots. It's her job to make sure the clothes worn on the show—which are on loan from a department store—go back to the store unharmed. Greta's life is a constant battle against actor sweat. RECURRING.



Eddie Reynaud (mid-30s)

Ridiculously handsome, Eddie plays Charles, the second ill-fated husband of the soap's leading lady, Emily. Eddie is on his way out the door; he's just scored a starring role in a Western out on the Coast. He's cocky, ambitious—and he's a city slicker who will soon be riding a horse for the first time in his life. His character, Charles, dies in the first episode we see. Considered part of the *Tomorrow is Forever* family, the gang often watches Eddie in his new job. RECURRING.



Patti (9)

Patti plays Emily's daughter Amy on the show. She is a child actress, who, almost everyone agrees, will not be carrying on with this career when she reaches adulthood...or gets away from her smothering stage mother. While her adorable toddlerhood got her hired years ago, now Patti is a sullen, mouthy, bratty child—probably in considerable part to her being strong-armed into acting when she'd rather be playing outside. She and Maggie have an ongoing feud—and Patti can hold her own. RECURRING.



Norah Hurston (late 30s - early 40s)

African-American, Norah is Laurel's partner, and she's the solid, steady one in their relationship. Earthy, loving and levelheaded, when Laurel goes to extremes, Norah is her anchor. She is also her inspiration. Norah is a journalist for a small newspaper based in Harlem. She's a key reporter for the civil rights movement, often going on dangerous assignments. When Norah suddenly disappears for several weeks while covering an action in Alabama, Laurel funnels her distress into inspiration for a groundbreaking story for *Tomorrow Is Forever*—a story which, against all odds, makes it to air.... RECURRING.