

## Digging for the Truth's Josh Bernstein Gears Up for Round Three

Tonya Parker Morrison  
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He's a television host, an anthropologist, an environmentalist, a survival expert, a CEO and fledgling author, but one thing The History Channel's Josh Bernstein is not is Indiana Jones.

While it's true the straightforward Digging for the Truth host is a wearer of many hats, he's the first to point out that not one of them is a fedora.

"Maybe it's a hat thing, I don't know, but I've been wearing a cowboy hat - it's NOT a fedora - for the past 21 years. It has nothing to do with Indiana Jones."

The Manhattan native isn't any more comfortable with the comparison now than he was when the show launched in January 2005, but there's no arguing the image's impact. The swashbuckling simulacra of the alluring Bernstein as a modern day Indiana Jones, splashed across everything from buses to comic books, has helped DFT pull in some serious numbers.

In its debut season, it became The History Channel's number one original series of all time in the key 25-54 demographic, a fact echoed in Season 2. According to The History Channel, over 14 million viewers tuned in for at least a portion of DFT's 13 episodes during the 2006 season.

Those staggering numbers have made Bernstein a celebrity on the talk show circuit, where he charms the socks off everyone from Martha Stewart to Katie Couric. Lately, it's impossible to turn on a talk show or open a magazine without seeing Bernstein's ruggedly handsome face - usually shaded by his trusty cowboy hat - grinning back at you. He's also become frequent fodder for tabloid-type magazines that have eschewed his physical virtues and even named him "TV's Hottest Host," where he easily edged out contemporaries like American Idol's Ryan Seacrest.

It's no surprise then that his adorers regularly light up The History Channel's discussion board dedicated to the show and start websites in his honor, often waxing poetic about his unique blend of intellect, personality and pulchritude. He's the kind of guy men want to be and women love to dream about.

"I think that more of the attention exists in cyberspace than in person, but I'm still flattered and honored," he says with a modest laugh. He sees it as a reflection of women getting into history, not just him.

"Thanks for the support and enthusiasm and for letting The History Channel know that they have female viewers too! I always suspected that."

In fact, many of those female viewers are as interested in Bernstein's single status as they are in his DFT destinations. So, what kind of woman appeals to him?

"Intelligent, funny, witty, playful, confident, adventurous, loving, sexy, ambitious, spontaneous, giving, and willing to grow."

In fact, Bernstein said he hopes his schedule becomes more flexible once filming for the new season is completed so he can spend more time in one place to "start a family and be at BOSS more."

Alas, there is still work to be done. With degrees in psychology and anthropology from Cornell, the poised presenter manages to entertain and inform, but never tries to be something he's not.

"Well, I'm not an archaeologist - I just play one on TV," he half-jokes.

"But seriously, I think one has to make a distinction between archaeology and what I do. Archaeologists are researchers who sift - painstakingly - through stone, bone, sand, and earth to create a story from the debris. It's a science that very rarely involves the scuba diving, rappelling, and other physical challenges that I do on DFT. It takes years, not an hour, to reach some sort of resolution on something. So one shouldn't use DFT as a model for archaeology - more like a greatest hits that's compressed for entertainment purposes."

For the sake of the audience, Bernstein and a crew of about eight trek all over the planet visiting ancient sites everywhere from Egypt to Ethiopia. There are cultural differences, testy native animals and unpredictable weather to contend with - and that's on a good day. He's been peed on by a giant snake, bitten by deadly spiders and confronted with clothing-optional tribes. All in a day's work, but it does make for great tv.

Perhaps one of the jovial host's best qualities is that he made it all look easy. It wasn't.

"Traveling is hard enough on a body, but psychologically it's tough when you're living out of a suitcase and changing hotels every night. Honestly, there were times when we'd hit a different hotel every night for weeks. At one point, we were in five countries in six days!"

Bernstein is perfectly aware that few will pity him.

"I know it might sound very glamorous - and it is truly a wonderful experience that I wouldn't trade for anything - but when you have to push through so many different languages, time zones,

cultures and airports in such a short period, you miss the ability to just sit still and take things in for a few days."

Not that he has done much sitting since wrapping Season 2 in January 2006. Bernstein has spent the past four months splitting his time between promoting the show and running BOSS, the two Boulder Outdoor Survival Schools he owns in Utah and Colorado.

Though he's scarcely had time to unpack since January, he didn't hesitate signing on for a third season, which he left to begin filming the last weekend of April. No doubt the "organizational wizard" will once again give his Blackberry a workout as he heads out for almost constant filming for the next eight to nine months.

"The pressure for me has very little to do with ratings, marketing, or the show's success. I'm motivated by my own desire to do the best I can on each given day because I recognize that I'm fortunate enough to be the one who's actually there and - so help me - I'm not gonna let you down! Really. That's my motivation for getting the job done, so I give 100%. Once you're giving 100%, there's really no way to give any more of yourself, so status quo for Season 3."

Whether he's hosting DFT or leading a survival course at BOSS, the casual observer may think he's constantly pushing the boundaries of what is safe, but the outgoing adventurer knows his limits. With enviable discipline and proper training (which he always advocates on the show), he manages to do what he loves at both BOSS and DFT, and stay in one piece at the same time.

His survival training often comes in handy on the road. While filming Season 2, Bernstein had two experiences he hopes to never repeat. The first occurred while filming the Lost Colony of Roanoke episode, when he was bitten by a brown recluse spider while climbing a tree. The second time also involved a colony, but it was one that almost killed him.

As he hiked through the dense woods of northern Louisiana while researching America's Pyramids, Bernstein was bitten by over 40 fire ants. Within seconds, he was in the throes of a severe, life-threatening reaction known as anaphylactic shock.

"Swollen face, full-body hives, intense itching. It was horrible," he recalls.

"It was serious enough that we stopped filming so I could give myself a shot of adrenaline and, when that didn't fully reverse the reaction, I went to the ER. It was probably the closest I've come to death in my whole life."

The irony of emerging unscathed from volcanoes, cenotes and the Amazon jungle, then almost being brought down by some of the Earth's smallest inhabitants, does not escape him.

"Those TINY little fire ants apparently pack a big punch and have sent many people to an early grave. Fortunately, we filmed most of it and put it into the show, so people may know now to carry antihistamines with them when in the woods - they really can save your life."

Undaunted, Bernstein will be doing a lot of the same activities during Season 3 (hopefully sans the ER visits). There will be lots of horseback riding, diving, rappelling and powered paragliding, but he does hope to be doing at least some of them in places DFT has yet to explore.

"I'm hoping that we'll go farther East to parts of the world DFT hasn't visited yet. Perhaps India, China, Mongolia or Australia. Of course, we still have plenty to do in Egypt, South America and elsewhere, but I'd really like to go someplace new. Who wouldn't?"

As if traveling for the show for the rest of 2006 isn't hectic enough, Bernstein is busy taking notes for something beyond his History Channel online journals. Ever ambitious, he is tossing his non-fedora into the writing ring with his first book, a sort of tell-all tome about everything DFT, due out in January 2007. Bernstein said it should be available in time for the Season 3 debut (though it's already listed on Amazon).

"HarperCollins is publishing it and I'm busy writing furiously. My goal is to capture some of the most memorable parts of the first two seasons. It will answer a lot more questions than what you'll find in the shows, on the internet or in my online journals," he promises.

"This adventure has been so epic that I really feel the need to share it any way I can - to give back as much as possible. So the book is another way to bring the DFT stories and insights to people. Plus I can be a bit more revealing with how scenes were shot, who was there, what went wrong, etc."

In the meantime, fans of the show will just have to enjoy a summer of reruns and know that Bernstein and company will arrive on screen in January 2007, refreshed and ready for action.

"Well, that's another milestone, for sure. I'm definitely happy we were approved for another 13 episodes and I'm excited to look back one day at all 39 adventures of DFT. It's been great to be a part of it."

Until his DFT memoirs are relegated to the rearview mirror, however, there are plenty of globe-trotting adventures left for the compelling and cultured dynamo. As he packs and preps before each approximately nine day outing per episode, he is also ensuring he is ready - body and mind - for more feverish filming.

Enthusiastic as always, Bernstein is busy once again ensuring he is ready for his close-up.

"These first two seasons have been so hard on my body. I'm doing all I can to get back in shape and see if I can manage this next season without losing so much weight, strength and flexibility. Other than that, my bag, my hat and I are ready to go!"