



Pam & John

# The Journey from Producing Dog TV Shows to WOOF Signs

By Nancy Dewar

Pam Tomlin of Ipswich, Massachusetts has always been a huge dog lover but never imagined the part they'd play in her professional life as well. She grew up in Connecticut with poodles...Dolly, Poopette and Coco. Until COVID hit, Pam was a freelance television producer for more than 25 years working on programs such as *Montel Williams* and the *Maury Show*. In 1989 Pam met her husband, John Tomlin, while working on *Inside Edition*. John was the creator and Executive Producer of the show, and their paths crossed again years later at a convention. They dated for six months and were married six months later. Pam not only fell in love with John, but also with his dog Jake, a wonderful Vizsla.

Though John is now the Executive Producer of *This Old House* TV series, the couple originally came to Boston to do "Dogs 101," a show John created for Animal Planet. That's when Pam's love of dogs became intertwined in her professional life. "We did that, *Cats 101* and other spin offs for about five years. I had a blast working on *Dogs 101*. Each show was about a specific breed, giving details about the breed. In the middle of the show, we'd include a fun, real-life story about the breed which I produced."

Pam's first episode on *Dogs 101* was about Weimaraners. "I went to NYC and met the famous photographer William Wegman. For another segment I flew to Italy to do a story about Black Russian Terriers, a breed trained to jump out of helicopters to save people from drowning." Pam's husband John was

then commissioned to do the *Puppy Bowl* for Animal Planet, and they produced the show for about three to four seasons. It was taped in a NYC studio, and they flew dogs in from all over the country to participate in the faux football games. "He even interviewed Michelle Obama for one of the shows," Pam said.

Pam and John, who live in a wonderful river-front cottage in Ipswich, were devastated when they lost Jake several years ago. They now have two dogs, both Brittany Spaniels. Pam explained, "When we were finally ready to get another dog, John liked medium size dogs, and I liked little ones. We had done a show on Brittany's, and it was a breed that we both really liked. So, we got our first Brittany puppy and named him Jack. He is now 13 and slowing down a bit. Last November we got our puppy Cruiser.

Pam's career took a major change in 2020 after she made a hand-painted sign for her house out of nautical flags. The flags spelled "Clam Box," which is what the Tomlin's call their home. To stave off boredom, Pam began to make more nautical signs when things shut down in March 2020 due to COVID. On a whim, she posted one of her creations on Facebook and received ten orders the next day. Thus, the beginning of her new company, **Ipswich River Craft**.

In just two-plus years, Pam has shipped over 3,000 signs all over the US. Each letter block is hand painted with a colorful flag that correlates to the nautical flag alphabet. The blocks are adhered to a solid color painted MDO



Treat time



Pam, Jack & Cruiser



Pam painting



Brothers

**In just two-plus years, Pam has shipped over 3,000 signs all over the US. Each letter block is hand painted with a colorful flag that correlates to the nautical flag alphabet.**

wood plank, and the signs come in five sizes. Through her connections with the professionals from *This Old House*, Pam has gotten expert advice on the best quality of materials, the best paint (top of the line Benjamin Moore exterior!), cutting techniques and more. "Mauro Henrique, the show's painting expert, shared invaluable painting techniques. Tom Silva, the master carpenter, came over and showed us cutting and assembly techniques. These TV pros taught us how to do it."

Once an order is placed, Tomlin and her small crew get to work to make the custom sign. Johanna Corwin, one of Pam's artists, has been working with her since last August. "Johanna

is a single mother, so this is a perfect job for her as we do flexible Mommy-hours." The team paints about 120 signs a month. In addition to home names, which are often hung outside, many people order signs with last names, boat names, their dog's name, town name and more. "Many realtors give our signs as a gift to clients and what a wonderful gift to give a friend with a new dog or puppy," said Pam. They recently began making door

hangers with either "Woof" or "Meow" on them...another great gift for pet owners.

In terms of exposure, Pam got a big break in November 2021 when David Muir from ABC World News featured Ipswich River Craft on a *Made in America* segment. "We got around 700 orders that night for Christmas gifts. There were only four to five people working here then, so I hired about 30 local "elves" to help. Some days we'd start at 6:00 a.m. and some we'd work till 8:00 p.m. We had just gotten Cruiser that week, so we had all of this going on while we had the devil-dog new puppy," Pam said with a chuckle.

The business that started in her garage is now run from a rented home located next door. It is convenient, has wonderful water views and Pam's little pack loves to go to work with their mom. Jack and Cruiser, who are featured in many of Pam's Instagram videos, make the congenial work atmosphere even better than ever. They are now best friends though Pam said that when Cruiser first arrived, Jack was like "why did you get this dog?" When Cruiser was sent away to puppy boot camp, Jack was sad and lonely...and so happy when his bro came home.

In addition to work, the dogs go everywhere with Pam and John. From motorboat rides on the North Shore to overnights all over New England, Jack and Cruiser are their constant companions. Reflecting on her 25+ years of producing TV shows, Pam said, "I had the

best job in the world. It was a dream job, and the animal shows were our favorites. We'd fall in love with all the fur babies." Regarding her new business venture, "We're a little company that has a huge heart, and we're spreading the love. We're like a little family, and people are so happy when they get a sign. They're great for shower and wedding gifts, and new pet gifts, of course!"



Cruiser

But being a dog-mom is most important to Pam. "I'll always have dogs. Jack is older and easy. Cruiser - is sort of settling down. He ate the couch and a comforter and was kicked out of dog daycare. Now he has a morning play group and a dog walker in the afternoon. His problem is that he's smarter than Jack! He's a counter cruiser and eats mice! Jack is bird driven. Cruiser is bunny driven, and they both are just absolutely perfect."

(IpswichRiverCraft.com)

Woof & Meow doorhangers

