

“I pitched a one-liner to Showtime: suburban, widowed, pot-dealing mom,” explains *Weeds* creator Jenji Kohan, “and they told me to run with it. [Showtime] had a mandate at the time to make noise ... because they had wanted to come out from under the shadow of HBO. I guess this was noisy enough for them.”

Kohan became an “overnight sensation” after 17 years in the entertainment industry. She has written episodes for series including *Sex and the City*, *Gilmore Girls* and *Will & Grace*, which her brother David Kohan co-created. Throughout her career, Kohan wrote a pilot or two every year, hoping one would take.

“[*Weeds* was] my 16th or 17th pilot. And it’s like winning the lottery. I think there were shows I wrote earlier that were as good as or better than *Weeds*, but the stars didn’t align. For some reason, the stars aligned on this one.

“I had been working in network where everything was sort of black and white,” explains Kohan. “I wanted to do my outlaw show where everything functioned in a gray area. So I needed to come up with an outlaw and a crime.”

Between articles about the drug dealer next door and the medical marijuana initiative, Kohan didn’t have to look too far to find the right crime.

“[Pot] was something that was illegal but wasn’t taken that seriously. It was sort of like the gay thing for *Will & Grace*—there’s one in every family: a pot smoker. So, it just kind of worked out.

“I really wanted to write about characters who weren’t heroes or villains but somewhere in between, like most of us are,” Kohan explains.

Weeds debuted in 2005, and in August the show will start its third season. With 15 episodes, it will be the longest season to date. The phenomenal cast—led by Mary-Louise Parker (as aforementioned pot-dealing mom, Nancy Botwin) with an ensemble including Elizabeth Perkins, Kevin Nealon and Justin Kirk—more than does it justice. The brilliantly executed concept and the situations

these flawed, complex characters get themselves into—and out of—is what keeps the audience talking and coming back for more.

“I think the key is ... relatability,” she says. “There are certain standards that are set for people by their community or by their spouses or by themselves that no one’s living up to. So on a certain level, we all feel like we’re failing, but we’re trying our best. And I wanted characters who reflected that feeling.”

Kohan also wanted freedom as a writer.

“In television, if you want more freedom, you go to cable,” she explains. “You sacrifice money, but you get to do more of what you want. You don’t have to worry about advertisers and you don’t have to worry about as many layers of executives.”

Once Kohan got the “go” order from Showtime, they told her to find a studio to shoot the pilot.

“They were excited,” she recalls. “So I went to Lionsgate, and they signed on. They had wanted to get into the television business.”

In terms of casting, Kohan explains, finding the right leading lady was key. Once Mary-Louise Parker came on board, the other roles were cast—and everything fell into place.

“We shot the pilot in August in Calabasas and Stephenson Ranch [in California] in the sweltering heat with everyone melting,” Kohan remembers. “Then we waited and waited, and around December, I think, they picked us



up for nine more episodes, at which point I found out that I was pregnant.

“So it was like, ‘Congratulations, you have a show, and you’re going to have a baby.’ I already had two kids. But things get thrown in your lap, and you deal with them. I got a bed in my office, and we did the nine episodes. The baby was born on premiere night. It all worked out.”

Just Add Water

Weeds takes place in the fictional town of Agrestic—a “just add water” residential area outside the “valley” in Los Angeles. According



Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Mary-Louise Parker, Alexander Gould, and Hunter Parrish as The Botwin Family

PHOTO Peter Iovino

“I think you need to learn your craft, but I think a lot of it is also talent. What makes my staff so incredible is that they’re just great writers. And I guess if you know that you’re good, just write a lot.”

—JENJI KOHAN

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