

Australian Story

Out Of The Kitchen - Transcript

PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT: Monday, 2 June , 2014

DEBORRA-LEE FURNESS, PRESENTER: Hello, I'm Deborra-lee Furness. Tonight's Australian Story is about a woman I've come to know through our shared passion for kids. Jules Allen is a single mum and she's fostered dozens of kids over the years; three have actually become part of her family. But a full house of children did not prepare her for the high octane existence of life as a MasterChef contestant or the crash back to reality when she was eliminated from the TV show. This is her story.

JULES ALLEN: I've used food over the years to heal many children. In fourteen and a half years, I've had 29 foster kids. A lot of the kids who have come into my care have lacked enough food or you know good food, so there's a real urgency for them around food.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: I was so happy to move in, because I'd been living off like frozen food! And so this was just so good to just come to a house full of food!

JAY THOMAS, SON: All of a sudden there's a knock on the door and it was all the judges and Mum just like lost it.

(Excerpt of MasterChef Australia - 2013)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE: Jules.

JULES ALLEN: Oh my God.

MASTERCHEF JUDGE: You think you're good enough to get into MasterChef?

JULES ALLEN: I'm good enough to win.

MASTERCHEF JUDGE: Ooh.

JULES ALLEN: I was always waiting for something to happen, to show the world that somehow I was special or unique, and when MasterChef happened I assumed that that was it. You think it's just going to be this amazing mind blowing journey, and some of it is. But it also knocks you around. You're encouraged to sort of crack open. The problem is, at the end, there's no one there to put you back together. It's not just MasterChef, it's whether you're on The Block, or MKR or The Biggest Loser. On all of them, I mean the end result is it's a ritual humiliation on national television and the worst thing is, we signed up for it. Try reconciling that in yourself.

(Footage of Jules baking biscuits and walking up stairs to wake kids)

JULES ALLEN: Morning, morning! Wakey, time to get up.

DEBORRA-LEE FURNESS, ADOPTION ADVOCATE: I love Jules. When I first met her, I thought wow! She's fostered 29 children. And she's just like, "Oh yeah, like it's you know just a regular thing; I've just taken on you know all these kids and sort of nurtured them back to health really." And, I think I expected her to be a lot older. And here is this sexy babe who's sort of like a, a free spirit, joyous.

(Footage of Jules and kids laughing in the kitchen)

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: Jules's family as we speak is Alicia, she's 21, India who's studying year 12 and, the two boys, Jay and Ishi, who are 16. Jay is Jules's biological son. The rest have come to be under Jules's care and in her house through various means and reasons.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: My dad passed away when I was four, from cancer, and then when I was 13 my mum passed away from cancer as well.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: Jules was Indi's counselor at the school she was at. And, Jules was just compelled to give her the mother that she really needed.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: Without Jules, I would've gone down the worst path. I was on a bad path before she picked me up and brought me here. I have that fear that my family is going to leave me. It's a constant fear that's going through my head. But when it comes down to it, I know they're always there for me.

JULES ALLEN: I started fostering at about 24. Jay was two. There's a running gag about being the Australian Angelina Jolie, but I think I deserve it. I've got all the kids, the overseas aid work. I'm just missing nannies, an enormous \$60 million dollar budget to live on and Brad, which is a bit of a problem, but I'll work on that. Any offers? Can I put it out there? I so took for granted food in my house as a child. We were you know in the '70's and '80's growing up in Wantuna which was the boondocks of Melbourne. My mother was from Thailand and so in our place there was beautiful Thai curries. On Saturday nights, we'd often have dinner parties, so we'd cook on Saturdays. The whole house would smell, you could smell it down the street.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: Mum was different, I remember her making her own coconut milk when I was a kid because you couldn't buy coconut milk back then.

JULES ALLEN: I used to go to mates' places and they'd have chops and three veggies and I'd be so stoked. I'd go, "Check this out, chops and veggies!"

JOHN ALLEN, FATHER: Julie's competitive streak was evident when she was about 13

and fronted up to compete in a junior iron man competition. They wouldn't let her do so, because they said she was a girl. Ah she checked the rules, found out that there was nothing to say girls couldn't do it. Hence she dived in and blitzed the field. So her fierce competition and iron will was most evident on that occasion.

TONI HEMING, FRIEND: I met Julie in Wye River, south west of Lorne. Julie was in the surf lifesaving club. Jules was a real tomboy; she was out there surfing. There weren't a lot of female surfers then and she was just one of the boys and hung around the town. And she was just a character.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: Jules was a little bit wild there for a few years. I'd like to be able to recall it vividly, but I was a little bit wild there myself round the same time, so.

JOHN ALLEN, FATHER: Jules had Jay at a fairly young age and the relationship didn't work out. So she moved up north and then took part-time work working for DOCS (Department of Children's Services) in child protection, that's how she fell into fostering.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: These kids would be in the office on a Friday afternoon needing placement. So quite often Jules would just bundle them up and take them back to her place for the weekend, you know, and sometimes they'd stay longer. I think she saw it as a way of imparting on her son compassion, giving him some company.

JAY THOMAS, SON: Family life with Mum was like pretty nuts growing up when you're little and it was like one kid in the door and then there's another and then the first one goes and there's just heaps of other people coming in and out.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: She's always got by on a shoestring budget herself, like amazingly thin shoestring budget! But, you can make really good food with not much money if you know how to do it. Jules says, the food is part of the magic that binds families together.

JULES ALLEN: Actually my kids dared me to audition for MasterChef. The audition process was quite lengthy. It involves sort of doing a cold cook and a hot cook and a cook for the cameras and then an interview, and it was a lot of fun actually. One of the most exciting moments of my life was being handed that white apron; that was actually really emotional, 'cause that's when my kids attached to what was going on. And, suddenly I wasn't their mum, I was this person doing something really different from them. After having being accepted on MasterChef, naturally for me there was logistics of four kids and a household to run and being a single mum and I am so blessed to have the most beautiful brother in the world, who is my best friend

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: I jumped on a plane and went up to Lennox Head and

took over the day-to-day running of Jules's house.

(Footage of a MasterChef Contract)

MICHAEL LALLO, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER, FAIRFAX MEDIA: All contestants on a reality show have to sign a contract, and those contracts contain the most extraordinary terms and conditions. Last year's MasterChef contract, for example, contained a clause that required every contestant to give 15 per cent of any media earnings for the next three years after they left the show back to the producers.

JULES ALLEN: It was quite a lengthy contract, which of course none of us were not going to sign, because if you don't sign it, you don't get in. So, I don't I don't actually remember reading my contract just thinking, "Righto, sign away!"

MICHAEL LALLO, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER, FAIRFAX MEDIA: There is a complete imbalance of power here. These contestants are unknowns. They have no leverage, and if they don't like these terms and conditions and they don't want to sign these contracts there are a thousand other contestants who will.

JULES ALLEN: You know the adrenalin kicked in, the ego went berserk and off we went. I was so caught up in the fantasy, all I could think of was the bright lights and the and the excitement and the joy and cooking and having my kids be proud of me. I remember thinking, "Whatever you do don't go in there and take over". Episode One, there I am delegating and you're going to do this, and, and I was like, "Oh come on, can you not just you know simmer it down for once?"

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: I definitely thought she would be a force to reckon with. Jules is very competitive and she is an amazing cook. And, she's got a very big presence.

JULES ALLEN: It's really weird when you first see yourself on television

(Footage of Jules on MasterChef)

You're looking a little sweaty and stressed darling, are you alright?

JULES ALLEN (Reacting to seeing herself on TV): Oh God. No one told me I sounded like a bogan. None of my friends. No one I know. I'm like, "Guys, at what point didn't you say you talk like a bogan?"

(Footage of Jules Allen on MasterChef - 2013)

We're making a lemon tart for dessert. It's been baking in oven now for about 20/30 minutes, but they still haven't set, and I'm about to have a nervous breakdown.

(End of footage)

JULES ALLEN: I remember in the first few weeks a few of us referring to the fact that we felt like we were bipolar because of the enormous highs, and then sometimes just the excruciating lows. And they can all happen three times in a day.

ANDREW FULLER, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST: I suspect being a participant in a reality show is a bit like being a voluntary hostage in a program where you've got a series of examinations that occur almost daily. So it must be incredible stressful to do, I think.

JULES ALLEN: It's amazing how close you become really quickly with a little group, you know, because that's all you have. We are put in quite a huge house, you know, I think there was three bunks in our room and five to a bedroom.

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: They're basically cut off from the outside world; they're given limited phone calls, no internet access. So, all they do is live and breathe MasterChef.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: She didn't get any time to herself; she told me that she used to hide in the linen closet because that was the only place she could get away from everyone!

JULES ALLEN: You can't really get too close to anyone because you're competing, but you can't afford not to get close to anyone, because you need to survive. There are some of the most awesome moments of your life and they're the people you share them with, and then there's some incredibly difficult moments. And for me at times it was missing my kids and the guilt of having left them and you know that they were really dark times for me and not knowing who I was. So who do I turn to? You know I turn to the people who are my competitors and the complexity in that is insane.

MICHAEL LALLO, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER, FAIRFAX MEDIA: They have to work very long hours on the set each day; they have to film from morning 'til night.

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: One of the tactics of a reality TV shows use is to keep contestants tired and emotional and stressed to elicit an emotional response out of them.

(Footage from The Block, Watercress Productions)

CONTESTANT FROM THE BLOCK: I expect you to help me when I've had 6 hours sleep in two days.

CONTESTANT FROM THE BLOCK II: Oh, 'cause I haven't either?

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: Why do you think we see so many tears on these shows or people flaring up and having fights? That's because they're kept under a high pressure, stressful situations.

MICHAEL LALLO, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER, FAIRFAX MEDIA: There's this intense competition and they start to believe that their entire future hinges upon winning this competition and it's only a matter of time before you're that person who's falling to pieces over the burnt meringue.

JULES ALLEN: People who haven't lived in this environment don't understand, it becomes like life and death because that is all you have.

JAY THOMAS, SON: Yeah, when we all heard that mum first had to go away, we were all excited and pretty happy for her and you know supportive. And then that kind of faded when we started getting hungry!

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: Jay probably struggled a little more than the rest being Jules's natural son; I think he just really missed his mum. It was the first time they'd been apart for that length of time.

JAY THOMAS, SON: As it went on, um all the kids in the house just got a little bit wilder.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: It was definitely hard for us, I found, but for her, I know that she missed us so much. Like we were only allowed like a 10 minute conversation once a week,

MONTAGE REALITY TV SHOWS TITLES of House Rules, The Block, MKR, The Biggest Loser

JULES ALLEN: It's not just MasterChef, it's all reality TV. There's however many cameras filming for however many hours a day and then that has to be edited into a one hour program. Things are portrayed in a way to appeal to the audience and it may not necessarily be the way they played out, so surely people know that. I don't know, maybe they don't. Actually they probably don't.

MICHAEL LALLO, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER, FAIRFAX MEDIA: I've spoken to some reality show contestants myself who've complained about the editing and some of those complaints, ah, are quite valid. They say that, ah, "The producers have taken my response to one question and they've used it in response to another question", but of course the contracts allow the producers to get away with this.

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: This year we had, er, one of the contestants of The Block come out saying he didn't like the way he was being edited on the show, that he was, being shown to look slow and, and stupid.

JULES ALLEN: It's not only my experience that the audience gets a version of reality;

it's my experience that the audience gets a version of me. That's the bit that you find personally most confronting. I don't think they were too far off the mark with me. Whether I liked what I saw or not, at times yeah, at times, horrified, confronted .

(Footage from different reality TV shows)

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: Reality TV thrives on conflict. Viewers love it; they love seeing, you know, cliques form or people fighting or tiffing. You know, that's what makes good ratings.

JULES ALLEN: There needs to be a few questions asked in society around our response to reality TV and what's happening. And, why are we as a society so drawn to seeing people at their most vulnerable? Why does that entertain us?

(Excerpt from The Block)

CONTESTANT FROM THE BLOCK: I've had 6 hours sleep in two days and I'm probably just a little bit on edge.

JULES ALLEN: What the audience want to do in a very short amount of time is connect with the character, whether it be in a good way or a bad way. That's, that's what reality TV is about. The best way to do that is to expose someone's vulnerabilities and whether it's that they're a nasty person or they're sad about something, or they're emotional, or they've got a deep hidden pain or whatever. That's how we connect.

(Excerpt from MasterChef)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE II: The cook whose time has come to an end in the MasterChef kitchen is...

JULES ALLEN: We were told it was going to be really tough but you don't know what that means and then you experience it. Those people are your world, so when something happens to one of them you know like if one of your room mates who's in the bed next to you gets eliminated, you really notice they're, they're gone. You sit there and stare at the bed and then the fear, "Am I going to be next?" You know it's going to end badly cause it ends badly for everyone except one person; that's just the reality. We were told that you know, but you just always assume that you're the exception.

(Excerpt from MasterChef)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE III: Today you will be taking part in the first ever MasterChef ingredient auction.

JULES ALLEN: As soon as I saw the food auction I went oh God this is not going to go well. So I ended up with a crayfish, three Asian vegetables and a bowl of yoghurt and 30 minutes to cook it in. And it was about there that the meltdown began.

(Excerpt from MasterChef - 2013)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE II: C'mon, c'mon be strong. Be strong Jules. C'mon. Remember all those kids at home.

JULES ALLEN: That's why it means the world to me

(End excerpt)

JULES ALLEN: I was brought undone. That, that's my weakness is the kids, and at that exact point I was feeling, my greatest fear, whether it be rational or not, was that I'd let them down.

(Excerpt from MasterChef - 2013)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE III: Jules, 29 kids all those years giving to them, looking after them, you've let no one down.

JULES ALLEN: I'd received, the day before, a letter from one of my girls, Indie, and I had it in my pocket.

(Excerpt from MasterChef - 2013)

JULES ALLEN: Indie, my youngest girl. She was orphaned three years ago, and she wrote me the most amazing letter just the other day.

(Reads from letter)

You inspire me in so many ways to believe I can do anything to follow my dreams.

You've made the impossible possible and I thank you so much for doing that.

(End of excerpt)

JULES ALLEN: I think largely it's very much that you are so vulnerable in front of an entire nation and that's the basis upon which reality TV functions. For me, that was my most vulnerable, because I wanted to do so well and didn't. So, in front of you know national television you stuff up big time. There's shame attached to that. There's nothing worse than a camera being on you when you are in a place of shame. That's for me was what I struggled with the most that that was shown.

(Excerpt from MasterChef)

MASTERCHEF JUDGE: Jules, I'm sorry, you're going home.

JULES ALLEN: I am incredibly disappointed and incredibly grateful to have had this opportunity, to have the opportunities that are going to come from this.

(End of excerpt)

JULES ALLEN: So After four and a half months being on MasterChef, you're eliminated. You're gone. You're kaput. There's no transition at all. It's from that to that in the blink of an eye. It is so bizarre from having no contact with the real world to suddenly standing in an airport with your phone in your hand and the whole world going on. What you go to is no longer what you left, so you're spat out into a foreign world cause you're not the

person you were when you left. The world around you is not the same anymore. I remember feeling completely alone in that.

TONI HEMING, FRIEND: Julie's definitely changed since coming back from MasterChef. She was an extrovert, party girl, full of life. And, now she's just really an introvert. She doesn't want to leave the house, very rare to get her to come anywhere with me or go anywhere or do anything.

JULES ALLEN: I was a basket case really. I remember going shopping and pushing the trolley had no idea what I was doing; it was bizarre. I was thinking "What, what did I used to do here?" I had nightmares for weeks. That elimination went over and over in my head, as did a thousand other things. I was dying for the day I would wake up and not have had a MasterChef dream. Most of the contestants I kept in contact with found the hardest thing was the transition back into so-called normal life.

(Montage of nasty tweets)

JULES ALLEN: Um one of the things we were told to be quite mindful of when we left the house was being really wary of social media 'cause people are ruthless, and some people got slaughtered on social media um.

EMMA ASHTON, REALITY TV COMMENTATOR: It must be fantastic and ego-boosting when everyone's loving you, but if you're like the show's villain or culprit, you know, it must be soul-destroying.

JULES ALLEN: I didn't fare too badly, but, you know, one comment, one nasty comment, I think kept me awake half a night.

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: After Jules left MasterChef, there was support there if she wanted it with the psychologist counselor, which she used a couple of times.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: It took her months to like get over it. I'm not even sure she's fully over it, and so the family was quite disjointed from everything that had happened

ANDREW ALLEN, BROTHER: So on the same day that Jules was evicted from MasterChef, that morning Jay, her son, had been expelled from school.

JULES ALLEN: People who want their 15 minutes of fame and I was one of them you know obviously, you don't put much thought into the collateral damage. From what I witnessed when I returned, my kids hadn't coped. My brother did the best he could, but each of them in their own individual way had probably not handled me not being there very well at all. I still think it cost our family dearly, personally. I know in the times in my life that have been darkest times for me, that the main thing that's gotten me through that is

helping someone else who's worse off.

(Footage of Jules Allen serving breakfast)

We are at the beautiful Byron Bay foreshore doing the First Sun Biggest Breakfast.

(End of footage)

JULES ALLEN: The beauty for me is I've been able to pursue my work with charity with much greater vigour because of having a public profile and that's enormously important.

(Footage of Jules Allen serving breakfast)

Our stall in particular is a fundraiser for charity, and the money that we raise is going to run towards running a program that's teaching people who are living below the poverty line how to shop, cook and live on a budget.

(End of footage)

JULES ALLEN: There's things I can do now that I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to do, so I'm grateful for the experience. I don't ever want anyone to think that I'm not grateful for MasterChef. Straight after MasterChef one of the first things I did was go to Cambodia with the charity Hagar and work with children who have been victims of extreme human rights violations.

(Footage of Cambodia)

CAMBODIAN GIRL (subtitles): Before working for Hagar my life is terrible, I was trafficked for six months.

JULES ALLEN: That experience was incredibly grounding. To go from you know the bright lights of MasterChef to there, that was one of the best things I could have ever done, and I'm so grateful it just slammed home, ah there's your purpose, there it is, that's what you're here for.

(Jules Allen addressing to students at Camberwell Girls Grammar)

JULES ALLEN: At that point my world changed. And I realized that I could never walk away from this place the same again. And I could never walk away without making a commitment to doing something about changing this.

(End of footage)

JULES ALLEN: The other incredible things that have come out of MasterChef was I've been made ambassador for National Adoption Awareness with Deborah-lee Furness and Hugh Jackman. And Indi was appointed the first Youth Ambassador so that was really exciting for her.

DEBORRA-LEE FURNESS, ADOPTION ADVOCATE: Jules Allen, I met at our National Adoption Awareness Week 2013.

(Footage of Deborah-lee Furness speaking at National Adoption Awareness Week)

This has been years we have been talking about this issue and highlighting that orphaned and vulnerable children deserve to have a family.

(End of footage)

DEBORRA-LEE FURNESS, ADOPTION ADVOCATE: It was a big year for us because we got to go to Kirribilli House with Tony Abbott. And I think Jules and India being a part of that was empowering, that they're actually having an effect of changing the laws.

(Footage of India making a speech)

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: Hello, bare with me this is a little difficult...

DEBORAH-LEE FURNESS: For India, it was a big moment her speaking out about her story.

(Footage of India Grant making a speech)

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: ...the memories of my dad are blurry, a big cuddly giant. I remember his funeral; we let off balloons. He died of pancreatic cancer when I was four. My brother and me clung to my Mum; I didn't let her out of my sight (becoming emotional). Sorry...

DEBORAH-LEE FURNESS: She had to relive the vulnerability of what it was emotionally to lose your parents.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: I have told my story on numerous occasions, maybe not fully because, I have broken down into tears quite a few times, and Jules has to read it for me .

(Footage of Jules reading India's speech)

JULES ALLEN: Mum never stopped fighting and never once did it enter my head that she might die. The shock when she died two years later was beyond words. Jules reassures me often that this is home and always will be no matter what, and I believe her now. Our house is filled with love, laughter and of course good food. I am so incredibly grateful I can now get on with being the best person I can be, because I know where I belong and I know that I am loved no matter what.

INDIA GRANT, FOSTER DAUGHTER: Working alongside Jules she's inspiring, she's confident. She has so much love, and she's exactly the person I want to be when I'm older, basically! With a twist of myself of course!

JULES ALLEN: People say, 'Why do you do it?' and for me when I'm kicking back with my kids, when I see them all connecting with each other, I see them all happy, that's why I

do it. I haven't only given them a family I've given me a family too. It's not entirely selfless you know? I've ended up with this amazing family of kids, and I always go you know it's like I got the cream of the crop. I'm much humbler as a person now. I'm much more self-reflective now. Because I had this sort of deluded sense of grandeur going on and that needed to be knocked out of me and it was. So I'm now very clear on what matters to me in life.

INTERVIEWER: Which is?

JULES ALLEN: Food, family and service. Yep. Really simple. Food, family and service, being of service. Good to know.

END CAPTIONS:

Shine Australia, the producers of MasterChef, and Network Ten, say they take their 'responsibilities and duty of care to contestants very seriously indeed'.

Extensive support is provided throughout production, and after when required.

Many former MasterChef contestants 'remain in contact with Shine Australia, including working on program related projects and helping to secure future series contestants'.

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