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Tuesday, January 12, 2010

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## Donovan Wants Some Relief from 'Burn Notice'

By: Hollywood Exclusive by Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel Smith - Jan 8th, 2010



It's been a case of burnout for "Burn Notice" star Jeffrey Donovan. He admits the grueling work pace of his hit USA Network series has left him feeling so exhausted that changes must be made. "We start production of Season 4 in March, and they're going to try to diminish my presence in the show. It's been 95 percent. They're going to try to get it down to 80 percent," reports the affable star.

The action comedy-drama, in which he plays disenfranchised government spy Michael Westen, returns for the second half of its third season Jan. 21, with an episode that has his series mom, Sharon Gless, working with her former "Cagney & Lacey" cohort, Tyne Daly.

With all of Season 3 in the can, Donovan says, "I worked the last two hiatuses, and I was worn out. So instead of going after jobs this hiatus, I'm starting to develop projects myself, working with writers."

Donovan also spent some hiatus time "visiting troops in Iraq with Bruce," he says, referring to cast mate Bruce Campbell. "It was an amazing experience, meeting these soldiers. On the way back, we visited Walter Reed (Army hospital), talked to soldiers who'd been injured, who'd lost limbs — it was just heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking. It took every bit of strength I had not to lose it. Not because I felt sorry for them, but because of their courage. One thing they all said was that they felt bad they weren't back there helping their friends."

As far as what's coming up on the show, Donovan says that "Burn Notice" fans can expect lots of big changes. As far as complaints: "The ratings are great and I know the network is very happy — but the show doesn't get the accolades it should. I'm not talking about my performance at all," he insists, "but the writing on the show. The writers do such an amazing job. And I think Sharon should get every award for her work."

**SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT:** Kara DioGuardi predicts that "American Idol" fans will get a lot of enjoyment from watching the show's guest judges in action this season. She certainly has already. "AI" returns Wednesday (1/12), and DioGuardi says the new faces "brought a whole new element. We get a lot of these theater kids and we're telling them they have to tone it down, so to have people with a theater background like Kristin Chenoweth or Neil Patrick Harris chime in and say the same thing — it sort of made it feel like, 'OK, we know what we're talking about here.' We also had people like Katy Perry and Avril Lavigne, who could speak to them differently than somebody 10 to 15 years their senior."

DioGuardi acknowledges that "American Idol" is certainly different without Paula Abdul, who'll be replaced on the judges' panel by Ellen DeGeneres once the audition phase of the season is complete. Going through that phase without Abdul, says DioGuardi, "She was definitely missed. She was the heart of the show. She was very kind to the contestants and there were times when I felt like I needed to pick up where she left off and be more, not lenient, but if I was going to give a negative, then try to follow up with a positive."

Even though DioGuardi has been with the show for a year, she recognizes that people are still trying to get used to her presence. "Of course it's different. They had so many years together. They were like this great trio. They could almost answer for each other because they've been together for so long and then you add this new element. It's about rhythm," she notes. "There were times last season where my rhythm was off with them because I wasn't used to them and they weren't used to me. I talk a lot. I would talk over Simon and he wouldn't like it. I had to learn to pull back and figure out when to speak. It's not like a dinner conversation where you get heated and speak over everybody. You have to give everybody space."

**TOUGH DUTY:** James Franco will be putting himself to the test physically come March, when he begins filming "127 Hours" in Utah. Franco is starring in British filmmaker Danny Boyle's movie about real-life mountain climber Aron Ralston, who was hiking in a canyon near Moab, Utah, in 2003, when a boulder fell on his arm, crushing it and pinning the young man, who was all alone. After enduring days of his torturous plight, he was forced to amputate his own hand with a dull knife to free himself, or die. Casting of subsidiary roles is under way, including that of Ralston's beautiful girlfriend and of several other hikers who were in the area at the time and searched for him. Ralston himself, meanwhile, is busy planning to climb Mount Everest in September.

**INDUSTRY EYE:** How's this for a series premise? The in-the-works pilot for "Retired at 35" focuses on a workaholic New Yorker who becomes so enamored of the easy-going, recreation-filled lifestyle at his parents' retirement community, he leaves his job and moves there.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have "Save My Business," a forthcoming reality show in which experts will try to help struggling family businesses around the country to reinvent themselves.

With reports by Emily-Fortune Feimster

To find out more about Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel Smith and read their past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).

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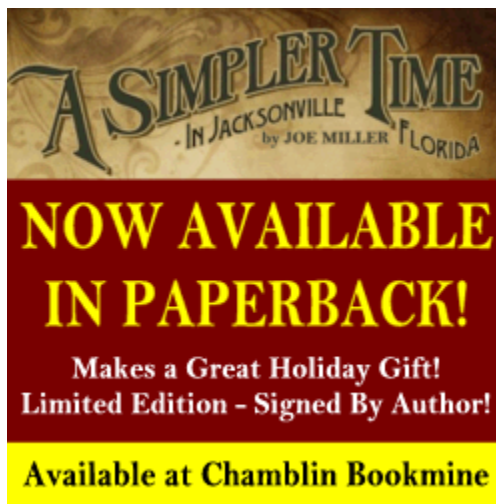
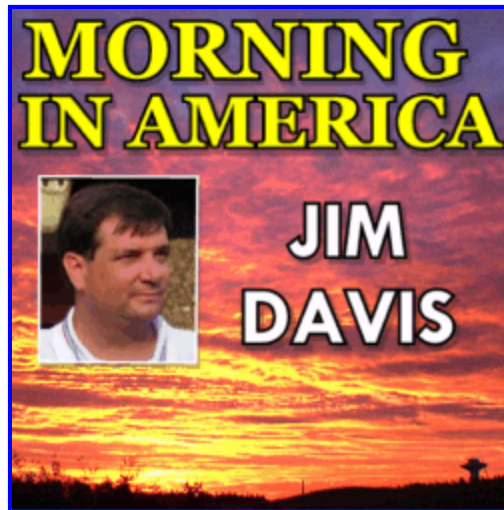
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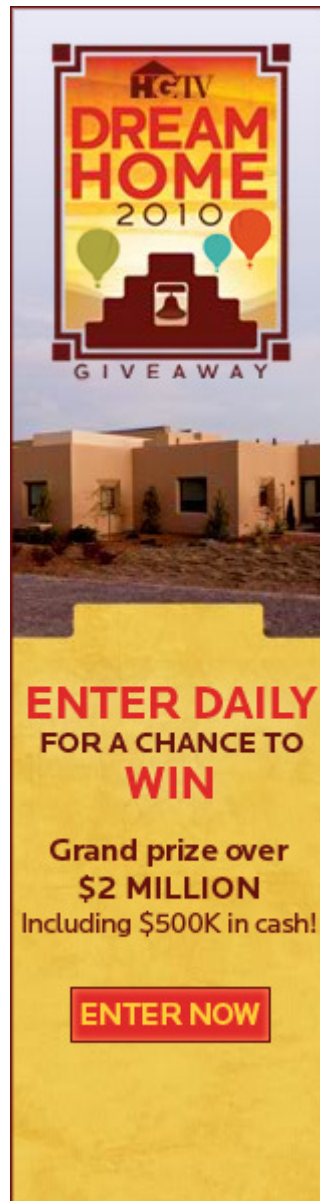
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