

Jan Crouch is Remembered as a Broadcasting Genius Who Leaves a Great Legacy

When I learned Jan Crouch had a massive stroke last week, memories came flooding back to me. When I learned she passed away Tuesday, I decided to share my thoughts as my way of paying tribute to a great woman.

I had known Jan and her husband, Paul, since the mid-1980s, only about 10 years after the Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN) began. It was already large then, but who would have guessed how it would grow to dominate and define Christian TV as it has?

I got to know the Crouches when I was a guest several times on their flagship program, *Praise the Lord*. I observed that Paul was the builder and consummate negotiator and businessman. No detail of their huge operation escaped his scrutiny.

I could also see Jan was the programmer and the decorator. The elaborate sets with the columns, gold leaf and French provincial look were her doing. Even though many thought the sets were overdone, I thought they were beautiful.

But that was Jan. She was beautiful—even if overdone—with her makeup, pink wigs and elaborate outfits.

At the same time, she was a spiritual woman. She loved the Bible and would read long passages on the air. She had a heart for the lost, and leading people to Christ was always a part of what TBN did.

Several years ago, I talked to an elderly, retired Assemblies of God missionary who knew Jan in the 1950s when Jan was a teenager at her father's church in Columbus, Georgia. Our

obituary of Jan tells of her roots in the Assemblies of God.

This missionary and her husband would occasionally preach for Jan's father. She said she remembers Jan being full of life and playfulness. Even back then, she would use food coloring to dye a streak of some odd color in her hair. Yet after the service Jan would be the first to the altar, seeking God's will for her life.

That anecdote to me was a foreshadowing of the personality Jan developed—a bit outlandish by the standards of many but a deeply spiritual woman.

Over the years, *Charisma* covered the Crouches. I even wrote a few of the stories.

Once, we wanted to shoot a cover picture while Paul and Jan were in Orlando shooting a special *Praise the Lord* show at a large church. Jan didn't want to be in the photo because she didn't like what she was wearing.

I tried to persuade her, assuring her she looked fine—besides, she was going to appear on national TV soon wearing that same outfit. But she said print photos were permanent and that picture would be around a long time. I found that an interesting perspective from someone who almost lived in front of a TV camera.

My articles told of the great struggles they had at the start and how TBN almost didn't make it. In the early days, TBN was considered smaller than Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcast Network (CBN) or Jim Bakker's PTL (which was "borrowed" from the Crouch's *Praise the Lord*). When Pat Robertson ran for president in 1988, CBN morphed into the Family Channel, and when scandal brought down PTL, TBN became No. 1 and has continued to explode, as some of our articles have documented.

Jan was undoubtedly a genius who put together the lineup of programs people wanted to see.

She was the one who suggested *Charisma* do a big special in 1990 for our 15th anniversary. More than 5,000 people attended a live taping at Calvary Assembly in Orlando. We had a few commercials in which we sold subscriptions, and we ultimately sold more than enough to pay for it. I was elated. For us, it was a huge risk, but it paid off.

When I started *Charisma*, I never thought we might expand into television. Not long after that, Jan suggested I host an interview program called *The Other Side of the Story*. We shot a pilot with Tammy Faye Bakker telling her side of the PTL scandal. It was a great interview, but I was out of my element and afraid we'd run out of people who had been pilloried in the press and needed this outlet to tell their side of the story. Jan must have felt the same way, as we mutually agreed not to continue beyond the pilot.

A couple of years later, we tried again with a 30-minute, journalistic, magazine-format TV program called *Charisma Now*. Over three years, we shot 100 episodes, many of them on-location by going to the offices of people like Bishop T.D. Jakes or Dr. Reginald Cherry. I hired a young freelancer named Matt Crouch (Paul and Jan's youngest son), who was then making a name for himself shooting TV programs like ours and who was beginning to shoot movies like *Megiddo: The Omega Code 2* and later *One Night With the King*, starring Omar Sharif and Tiffany Dupont.

We also went together to Toronto to cover the "Toronto Blessing" and to Pensacola, Florida, to cover the Brownsville revival. Once, while shooting in Dallas, Matt took me for a tour of TBN's impressive facilities and told me the stories behind how decisions were made to invest in various facilities. It was fascinating, off-the-record stuff I could never write about.

During that time, I flew with Paul and Matt to El Salvador and did a documentary on their Enlace network in Latin America.

Other times Matt came to Orlando to visit our facility. I told him we let startup churches use our large meeting room on Sunday. That inspired him to do the same at his facilities in the Hollywood area.

One of my most memorable experiences was on New Year's Eve in 1997, when I had dinner with the Crouches at Universal Studios in Los Angeles. I was there on business and asked Matt and Laurie if they wanted to have dinner. They were having dinner with Paul and Jan and invited me along. It was a pleasant and rather normal family gathering as I recall. Later that night, I went to a "watchnight service" with Matt and Laurie and met Dyan Cannon, the movie actress who had accepted Christ.

In that era, Matt and I became close friends. Now, since he's taken over the helm of TBN, I mainly see him only at the National Religious Broadcasters convention. That's also where I see his brother, Paul Jr., whom I admire and also consider a friend.

There's more I could say. I had frustrations doing a program for three years with TBN. As an entrepreneur, I was used to calling the shots. Anyone who works with TBN knows they have "rules." While our show was always in their top 10 shows, we always lost money. We don't take donations like most Christian broadcasters, so we didn't have a good way to monetize our expenses. I finally concluded television was not for us, and we went our separate ways.

But I've kept in touch and respect what the Crouches have accomplished. In 2007, TBN bought the Holy Land Experience in my hometown of Orlando. A couple years after the Holy Land Experience purchase, Jan sent word she wanted to give complementary tickets to my entire staff. So one weekend we had a staff outing at the Holy Land Experience. Of course, I've been there many times. It's spectacular. And you can see Jan's touch everywhere you look. (After she turned over the reins of TBN to Matt, Jan focused more on the Holy Land

Experience.) In a town that caters to tourists, TBN is representing the Gospel in a world-class way. If you haven't visited it, you must.

In early May, I talked about this with TBN UK's Leon Schoeman, who was interviewing me in London. I told him I hadn't seen Jan in a while and wanted to reach out to her. Little did I know she would be dead from a massive stroke just a few weeks later. I regret I didn't get to tell Jan how much I respect her legacy and admire her genius (even if I didn't understand everything she did).

Jan Crouch left a mark on Christian television that will long be remembered. Hundreds of thousands of viewers will miss her as well as family and friends like me who knew her.