



# Betty White

## Look At The Girl Who Was Never Going To Marry!

### The Pet Set

Among the canines who have guested on Betty's daytime show are three Tibetan Lhaso Apso puppies, accompanied by *My Three Sons*' star Beverly Garland. Beverly owns a Tibetan breed dog herself.

"Never," Betty White told me years ago. "Never. No wedding bells for me. I love being free, I love my life. I'm a loner, Janie. I'm a career girl, you know that, I have been all my life . . ."

Since she took her diploma from Beverly Hills High, started performing in Bliss-Hayden Little Theatre productions, and started knocking on the door of every radio studio in town, Betty White was very much a career girl. It took six years to graduate from such bit parts as the one-line "Merry Christmas" a benevolent producer let her utter on the *Girldeersleeve* program and the songs she sang for free on television (she finally raised her price to five dollars)—to the unprecedented situation in which Betty White was starring daytime on *The Betty White Show* for NBC-TV, and nighttime on *Life With Elizabeth* for the production company she had formed with producer Don Federson and writer George Tibbles.

Incidentally, and her blue eyes sparkle with fun when she tells you, she tried to get Don to let her do a new show as far back as 1951 very similar to today's so successful *Pet Set*. Why? Because she was crazy about pets. And she laughs when you say that, too.

"Crazy is the word. Allen stills says the only reason I married him was because of the dogs": Emma and Willie, two fluffy brown bears of poodles who sit on either side of Betty in the gay, beautiful living room in the Brentwood Farmhouse where she resides with the gentleman in question, Allen Ludden.

It was just before she met Allen that she gave me the word on marriage. "Look, I was married, for two years, to a very nice fellow whom you know." Lane Allen, casting director at Universal. He is a great, great friend. They met when she was just starting in her very first play at Bliss-Hayden—dated for a while, married "and then suddenly he wouldn't have any part of a career lady and I just couldn't give it up . . . I loved working. It's part of me. I love my freedom."

That was in the spring of '62. A month later, Betty took off for the Cape Playhouse at Dennis, Massachusetts, to play the wife of *Critic's Choice*. Her husband in the show was Allen Ludden. They had met once before, casually, on *Password*. At the Cape they started a rigorous routine of rehearsals, they'd work "like dogs" all day. At night, Allen would ask her to join him and his children for dinner. The Luddens were staying in a big house that had once belonged to Gertrude Lawrence and Richard Aldrich and Betty occupied the little cottage they'd used as a studio. Every morning she'd awaken "to find two little brown bears looking through my screen—Emma and Willie. They were four months old and nothing but tiny balls of fur."

Betty adored the poodles. She liked Allen's kids too. After they got into production and the days were free, they'd all go sightseeing together along the coast. And of course she liked Allen—everyone loved Allen except Betty's then current beau who came to see the play. He was just a marvelous fellow with warmth and humor. From the beginning however, Allen had something permanent in mind for him and Betty. He fell in love instantly and was a firm believer in marriage.

"I could understand that," Betty says. "He'd had a happy, wonderful marriage for sixteen years so he thinks everyone in the world should be married. I explained my point of view. It didn't deter him somehow. He didn't even say 'good morning,' when we'd meet. He'd say 'hello, will you marry me?' After we finished at the Cape we were scheduled to do the show at Skowhegan, Maine. I think it was even before we went there that Allen bought my wedding ring. He put it on a chain and wore it around his neck so that if I saw it

often enough, maybe I'd give in. We were on the beach a lot and he got suntan oil and sand in it."

The kids knew all about Betty and Allen of course. "There are no secrets in Allen's life," Betty says. "Whatever is in his mind comes right out, which is good. If he had had to turn to his youngsters and say 'We have a surprise for you' I think I would have died. But actually, we were all together all summer. Allen was doing a beautiful job of courting, and they would see him put his arms around me, or kiss me, and they'd sort of keep score, check that off as a point on their side. But I still wasn't saying yes, although Allen must have seen some weakening in my forces before he bought that gorgeous ring."

The summer ended, Allen went back to his *Password* chores in New York, Betty came West. She was doing all the game shows. *Password* came West only twice a year but Allen came zooming out in between and finally he sent her a bunny wearing diamond earrings. Earrings like this would get to any girl, but it was the bunny that captivated Betty. That's what she says at least; but pin her down and she'll tell you what actually won the day for Allen. "Just what I couldn't resist. The strange wonderful chemical reaction that happens to people. You can't explain it. I really had to face the fact that living without him wouldn't be any fun at all." So she said her yes by long distance.

She and Allen were married in Las Vegas. They had a three day honeymoon in La Jolla, returned to New York and Monday night when they did *Password*. Jack Parr came on as Betty's opposition.

Allen's present to her was a hundred-and-fifty-year-old farmhouse standing in the middle of a hundred-and-seventy-five acres of land with an old mill pond. They both had fallen in love with it at first sight but Betty wouldn't say yes until there had been a family conference.

The Luddens moved into their new house. Everyone was responsible for choosing the things for their rooms, everyone took part in the redecoration. They all loved this house and they settled down to the joys of rural living—well almost. Between the two of them, Allen and Betty made thirty-nine round trips to California. And when they finally moved West, it was not because Betty loved California, it was because everything that was happening for Allen was happening out West.

The move was the one worry Betty's ever had as Mrs. Ludden. Allen was such a New Yorker. He loved the farm, he loved their apartment in the city, she worried. She came out West first and looked at twenty-five houses before she found one so similar in feeling to the farm house, so alike in layout, that they never had to buy one stick of furniture. And how did Allen react? "In ten minutes he became totally converted, a Californian to end all Californians. He's become a gardener. He plows around, right now he's trying to become a rose gardener."

And of course, they're together on everything, that's the great advantage of marrying someone in show business—they can understand each other's problems. "You need that," Betty says. "Here I am the tremendous loner and I've discovered that I really enjoy being alone only when it's a luxury rather than a necessity. I know it sounds corny, but we're so close, I can't imagine getting involved in something Allen isn't involved in or vice versa. Of course you know he's executive producer of *Pet Set*. We both are completely involved. And Allen says, 'If you ever stop working I'll have to find another girl'

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live.

"I don't know if there is such a thing as happiness. Actually, happiness means nothing to me. I never expect to have it.

"All that I am interested in doing, and again, this is going to sound corny and trite, but all I want to do is to be able to carve my own path. I don't want to be told what to do.

"I hope that as time passes there is less need to prove myself. I want a mental security which allows me to be much freer. Yes, that's what I want, a greater sense of freedom. I'm beginning to feel that now and I hope that continues."

Bruce Martin looks up and smiles. And despite all those protestations, it seems to be a happy smile.

By M.J. Bevans

### BETTY WHITE

(Continued from page 47)

because you'd be miserable to live with without a challenge.' Whatever writing there is, I do. I put together a skeleton script with the lead-ins and the lead-outs, and what we want to cover in each segment. This show is just such a natural because people have such a love for animals and there are such interesting things about them." Stars who have never been known to go on any guestings, show up on this one: Doris Day with her dogs, Jimmy Stewart, with his, Jim Brolin with his horse. You name them and they're sure to be seen on Betty's program—and they all end up (I've been looking through the guest book) falling in love with Betty.

What they can only know if they've known her before, is how much Allen's love has done for her. She was always vivacious, always warm and very feminine; but there is something about her now that is totally joyous. When she swings open that front door, you see what every girl really wants to be, a happy and fulfilled woman. Even the house reflects her. It is filled with bright colors, filled with sunlight, filled with flowers and magnificent pieces of crystal (all shaped like animals of course).

Betty is a girl with a great deal of love to give. She always was. What she wonders now is "Why did it take me so long to get smart about marriage? How I glamorized the joys of freedom!" She was lucky. She ran into a man who wouldn't take no for an answer—he knew a good wife when he saw one.

By Jane Ardmore

### MCLAUGHLIN-WEST

(Continued from page 27)

January 3, February 4, we were married."

They were married in Juarez, to Bobby's great delight. He was best man and as he told all his friends, "Gee, whiz, my mom's marrying a guy I really like!" That night back at the Hilton in El Paso, a musical group played in the dining room, and Jeff joined them on the organ and Bobby played the drums. (Bobby also plays guitar and a little piano and Jeff taught

him to play the organ). "It was a perfect time. In the spring Jeff made a picture in Spain and Bobby and I were able to be there during spring vacation.

"We had such fun and such laughter. He wrote music and I wrote lyrics, and we had a house full of people because Jeff loved people. I've really never known anyone like this man, if we hadn't fallen in love, we would have been the closest of friends, we had that kind of closeness. Both of us were Saggitarians, our birthdays six days apart. He always knew where I was in the house. I always knew where he was.

"I suppose that's why one day, en route to rehearsal, I had this funny feeling. He hadn't been well all weekend, he wouldn't admit it, but I knew . . . and when I got to rehearsal, I called home. A friend of ours answered the phone. He said, 'Don't be frightened, but Jeff has had a fall. He was on a ladder and . . . I drove home eighty miles an hour. Jeff was unconscious and I called the fire department. He'd hit his head and I knew it was bad but I didn't know how bad until we got to the hospital.

"He lived for fourteen hours. I don't know if he ever regained consciousness. I don't know if he understood me. I talked for fourteen hours, hoping he would. Once he raised his hand, I don't know if he understood or not." And this is the woman who has had to hold her television husband in her arms in almost exactly the same situation, all the while *his* wife was dying! It can only happen on soap operas? Don't you believe it. It happens in life, which is why audiences identify with the shows. This is how life is.

Emily kept right on working. Without work, she would have been lost. There was somewhere to go, something that must be done, and a set full of people who are like family to her, especially a tall, good-humored redhead named Martin West who had the happiest marriage in the world and who *knew*, had known from their first date that his beautiful Carol had Hodgkins disease (cancer of the lymph glands). Martin and Carol's romance had not been unlike Emily and Jeff's. They'd met one night at the Daisy, he'd taken her out to a movie the next night, and they'd gone back to his place and talked. Before the evening was over, she could see how serious he was and warned him, there was something he ought to know—she couldn't live very long. So Martin was very sympathetic to Emily in her trouble. The whole family of *General Hospital* closed ranks around her in a way, let her know they cared.

Child-parent relationship is another thing she and her TV husband Martin West have to talk about between scenes. When Martin fell in love, he fell not only for Carol but for her young son Paul. Paul is nine now and one of the heartbreaks with which Martin is coping is not only the loss of Carol, but his separation from this boy to whom he feels like a father. Naturally Paul's own father loves the boy