

THE ROCKY OF TALK SHOW HOSTS

How Ieden Wall fought his way onto mainstream TV

By Lorenzo Amandos



On a late-summer afternoon in Toronto, with thin light slipping through the blinds, Ieden Wall sits alone in his home editing suite, surrounded by scattered notes and the hum of aging equipment. He looks exhausted — the kind of tired that comes from carrying something for a long time. Season 7 of JWeekly Canada is days from premiering on OMNI TV, and Wall is doing what he has done for decades: adjusting frames, rewriting lines, rewatching clips until they feel right. No staff. No studio machine. Just one man preparing a show that, by all logic, should never have survived — but somehow did.

Hollywood is about to release a film about the making of Rocky, revisiting Sylvester Stallone's improbable rise from obscurity to cultural icon. The timing is accidental, but uncanny. Stallone's story — the poverty, the grit, the refusal to quit — has long been shorthand for a certain kind of artistic perseverance. And, in its own quiet way, Wall's journey mirrors that arc. Not in boxing, not in spectacle, but in the stubborn belief that a dream conceived in adolescence could survive decades of chaos and still find its way to a screen.

The chaos began early. In 1990, both of Wall's parents were undergoing emotional breakdowns, and he and his brother were left to fend for themselves. At 15, Wall was navigating a world that no longer had functioning adults in it. The void of stability and supervision was filled with a dream. Not just any dream, an outlandish desire to host a national TV talk show.

Welfare became his lifeline. Odd jobs filled the gaps. He learned how to stretch a dollar into a week. But even survival has logistics, and one of them was shelter. How does a 15-year-old secure a residential lease in Toronto? In an act of desperation, he walked into a rental office wearing a fake moustache, hoping the disguise would convince a landlord to let him sign for a bachelor apartment. It worked — and the apartment became the first stable room of his life.

In that space, Wall began building the earliest version of JWeekly Canada — whether he knew it or not. He created his own after-school talk show. He interviewed local personalities, teachers, small-town celebrities, anyone who would say yes.

Keeping the show alive for 12 weeks required ingenuity. He filmed segments wherever he could, borrowed equipment and convinced classmates to act as crew members even when they didn't fully understand what they were crewing.

The show didn't pay for groceries. Or the rent. So Wall did odd jobs, and the income allowed him to move out of his cockroach-infested bachelor apartment and into a one-bedroom condo.

The show itself grew in fits and starts. When the principal informed him he could only continue producing it if he raised \$10,000 for a local charity, Wall didn't panic. He strategized. He convinced his Jewish peers to donate their bar mitzvah money in exchange for "future equity" in a YTV show he hadn't yet made. It worked.

He wanted legitimacy, so he set his sights on Marilyn Denis, one of Canada's most recognizable broadcasters. He wrote weekly letters to CityTV for 20 straight weeks. He knew very well that coaxing her into being a guest would give him credibility. She finally said yes to a phone interview — partly to get him off her back, partly to conserve ink and postage. But she said yes.

After high school, Wall took his talk show on the road — renting small theatres across Canada, performing in pubs and clubs, trying to convince audiences to attend a format no one understood. In Thornhill, Ont., hypnotist The Incredible Boris watched Wall take the stage at Comedywood and saw something unusual. "His remotes were daring and edgy ... and his talent for conversation was crazy good," says Cherniak. "His show was tailor made for TV."

For 15 years, Wall toured his traveling talk show across Canada, performing in pubs, clubs, back rooms and rented theatres, all while mailing out pilots and proposals to broadcasters across North America. He collected more than 1,800 rejection letters. One of them came from television pioneer Moses Znaimer, who dismissed him with a line that stung for years: "No thanks leden. Good luck in going where thousands and thousands have gone before you."

Wall kept fighting, long after the world told him to quit. He built stages where none existed. He created audiences where none were available. He kept moving, kept performing, kept shaping the thing he believed would one day matter.

The Season 7 premiere reflects Wall's evolution as a poet. It opens with STAY, a spoken-word piece filmed in a Toronto park for World Suicide Prevention Day. It also premieres Before I Leave the House, a poetry film confronting the fear many Canadian Jews carry in the wake of rising antisemitism.

JWeekly Canada now reaches 139,000 weekly viewers, more than half a million each month, and more than half the audience is non-Jewish. The show operates on one-tenth the budget of a standard network talk show. No large staff. No elaborate set. Wall has interviewed 10 Order of Canada recipients, alongside caregivers, activists, survivors, artists — ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Outside the United States and Israel, JWeekly Canada is the only weekly Jewish television program on mainstream broadcast TV. Selected episodes will reach BC in 2027 on JoyTV.

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