



## Boaz Frankel un-roadtrips his way to a TV series

Published: Tuesday, August 17, 2010, 4:10 AM Updated: Tuesday, August 17, 2010, 2:16 PM



**Peter Ames Carlin, The Oregonian**

Get a cup of coffee with Boaz Frankel. Ask what he's been up to for the past 12 months and then tighten your seat belt. It's going to be a wild ride.



Beth Nakamura

Boaz Frankel prepares to start his un-journey in 2009

We're not even talking about the **Un-Road Trip**, Frankel's two-month journey across and up, then down, the United States via every conceivable (and un-) transportation mode except the gas-powered automobile. If only because that ended 13 months ago and doesn't count.

So we'll move right to the Smithsonian videos he produced about the quirkier modes of mail delivery used by the U.S. Postal Service.

Then his work as U.S. project manager for the 2010 Earth Day celebration. And the documentary he's making about the severely endangered endangered Salt Creek Tiger beetle, whose 200-not-so-strong population lives entirely within the confines of Lincoln, Neb.

All of which certainly pale in comparison to with the new cable TV series about his Un-Road Trip journey, that Frankel is producing and hosting for the Halogen Channel.

So that's it, right? Close your notebook, gather the cups for the trash and ... no, that's not it.

"Oh, wait, we forgot about the new kazoo museum!"

And Frankel is only getting started.

Frankel, now 28, grew up in Southwest Portland, graduated from Wilson High School, then headed to New York University to study theater. He produced and starred in a campus (and eventually Internet) show called "Clips & Quips," which featured bizarre encounters with the likes of George Clooney (who talked about suspenders) and Samuel L. Jackson (who displayed his tooth-flossing style).

Frankel worked as an intern on "Last Call With Carson Daly" at NBC and made regular on-camera appearances as part of an intern competition on "Today." A brief residence in Seattle led to Frankel producing Internet videos and playing kazoo in a jug band called the Dexter Street Stompers. Which led to his obsession with collecting the buzzy wind instruments.

Then came the two-month Un-Road Trip in the spring of 2009. And after spending the summer in Portland teaching filmmaking at a day camp, Frankel gravitated to Washington, D.C., where he landed a freelance job with the Smithsonian Institute, producing videos describing some of the U.S. Postal Service's more eccentric mail delivery processes. Donkeys and dog sleds, OK. But missiles?

"I think that was a Cold War thing," Frankel says. "Like, we've got so many of these things stockpiled we don't even know what to do with them."

From there Frankel fell into a job with the Earth Day celebration's national organization, serving ultimately as U.S. project manager with responsibilities ranging from video production and event coordination for 40 cities to the creation and writing of educational materials for schools.

Along the way, Frankel learned about the dark prospects of the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle, a small, unbelievably swift ("you couldn't step on one if you tried") bug whose entire, ever-diminishing population lives only within the city limits of Lincoln. Recent estimates show fewer than 200 currently surviving; a grim situation that Frankel calls an object lesson in how man's manipulation of rivers can have unexpected consequences.

"Re-channel a river and fill in the wetlands, it's not just the beetles who suffer. Suddenly you've got terrible problems with floods," Frankel explains.

Can anyone save the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle? Maybe not. "Technically, having fewer than 200 alive means they're already extinct," Frankel says. And even if the 10- to 15-minute documentary he wants to produce comes too late, he's still hoping to tell the story in a memorable way.

"I'd like to do something wacky with it. They're small and kind of unattractive. They're not as exciting as a real tiger."

Frankel is still going through with the footage he took, hoping to edit it down to a short film he can submit to documentary film festivals, if only to see what that experience is like.

Meanwhile, he's already making some serious headway in the world of documentary TV series.

Frankel had been fiddling with the video footage he shot during his un-roadtrip Un-Road Trip through the fall and into the winter, occasionally getting in touch with executives or producers at cable networks, including the Discovery Channel, whose executives wouldn't quite commit, but were still, as he says, super-nice, and eager to keep in touch. Then he heard about Halogen, a new secular off-shoot from the Inspiration Networks, which focus exclusively on Christian-based programming. Halogen, which is available to 14 million homes around the country, including Comcast channel 231 in Portland, keeps its cameras closer to the ground, in search of what they call "socially empowered entertainment."

"We're looking for shows about people finding purpose, beauty, justice and connections in the world," says staff producer Todd Lewis. When program director Marshall Nord got the gist of the story Frankel had to tell, he flew him to North Carolina to meet with Lewis, who liked what he saw, and grew even more enthusiastic the more he saw how Frankel's personality wove into it.

"He's unlike anyone you've ever met," Lewis says. "He has these huge ambitions, jumps on them and just goes. But he's so light-hearted, and has such a sense of humor, and such a wide-eyed look at what is possible."

Halogen licensed Frankel's footage, and signed him to produce, co-write and host a 10-episode series of 30-minute shows describing his Un-Road trip. The writing and editing process came to a kind of climax in late July when Frankel flew back to the network's North Carolina studios to help perform the intro segments he wrote for the series.

The intros (shot in a faux-Oregon rustic wood cabin that once served as a general store in Jim and Tammy Bakker's Heritage, USA amusement park) featured Frankel, two of his real-life friends and an actress hired to fill in for a third friend who got sick at the last minute, all of them pretending to listen to Frankel describing the slides he's taken on the real Un-Road Trip. Their (often-sarcastic) responses lead into actual video vignettes, which then form the core of the series.

Will there be a second season? Halogen is already talking about it. But you never know until the first episodes air (probably in June 2011) and the ratings come in.

And even if it flops, Frankel is still the owner of one of the world's biggest private kazoo collections, now housed in glass cases freshly installed in a special building at the Kazoobie Kazoos factory in Beaufort, S.C. There's only space for 80 pieces in his 200-piece collection, but who knows where it will lead.?

Frankel's unpredictable life knows no bounds.

-- Peter Carlin

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