

## = The Puppy Episode =

" The Puppy Episode " is a two @-@ part episode of the situation comedy television series Ellen . The episode details lead character Ellen Morgan 's realization that she is a lesbian and her coming out . It was the 22nd and 23rd episode of the series ' 4th season . The episode was written by series star Ellen DeGeneres with Mark Driscoll , Tracy Newman , Dava Savel and Jonathan Stark and directed by Gil Junger . It originally aired on ABC on April 30 , 1997 .

DeGeneres began negotiating with ABC in 1996 to have Morgan come out . When word of the negotiations got out , DeGeneres found herself at the center of intense speculation about when she or her character , or both , would come out . With DeGeneres hinting at her and her character 's coming out both off @-@ screen and within the show , the rumors were confirmed when the episode went into production in March 1997 .

Despite threats from advertisers and religious groups , " The Puppy Episode " was an enormous ratings success , won multiple awards and became a cultural phenomenon . Regardless of the episode 's success , DeGeneres and her show quickly garnered criticism for being " too gay " ; the series was canceled after one more season and DeGeneres and guest star Laura Dern faced career backlash .

## = = Plot = =

Ellen goes out to dinner with her old friend Richard , a reporter who is in town to cover a story . His producer , Susan , joins them for dessert and she and Ellen hit it off . Ellen goes back to Richard 's hotel room . He comes on to her and , uncomfortable , Ellen leaves . She runs into Susan in the hall and returns with her to her room . They continue to enjoy each other 's company until Susan tells Ellen that she 's gay and that she thought Ellen might be too . Ellen denies it and suggests that Susan is trying to " recruit " her . Susan sarcastically says that she 'll have to call " national headquarters " and let them know Ellen got away . ( " Damn , just one more and I would have gotten that toaster oven . " ) An agitated Ellen leaves Susan 's room and returns to Richard 's room , determined to have sex with him to prove to herself she is not gay .

The next day , Ellen tells her friends at the bookstore that she and Richard had amazing sex . She tells her therapist the truth , that she could not have sex with Richard . Ellen laments that she just wants someone that she clicks with . Her therapist asks if she has ever clicked with anyone and Ellen replies , " Susan . "

A message from Richard that he is leaving town ahead of schedule sends Ellen rushing to the airport to see Susan . Ellen tells Susan that she was right and struggles to say the word . Finally , Ellen is able to say , " I 'm gay , " inadvertently broadcasting her announcement over the airport 's public address system . Ellen assumes that Susan will be leaving with Richard but in fact Susan will be staying in town for several more days .

Ellen has a dream in which she is grocery shopping . She is offered a special lesbian discount on melons , her sexuality is announced to the other shoppers , she is offered a granola bar , she is beckoned toward a checkout lane with a pink triangular sign reading " 10 lesbians or less " and given her grocery total of " a lesbian twenty @-@ nine " ( \$ 11 @. @ 29 ) . She discusses the dream with her therapist and realizes that she 's been suppressing her sexuality for many years . Her therapist encourages her to come out to her friends but Ellen is worried about not being accepted .

Ellen has her friends over to come out to them . Before they arrive , she comes out to her gay neighbor Peter . When everyone else arrives , Ellen balks at telling them but Peter outs her . Ellen confirms that it 's true and her friends are all supportive of her , although her friend Paige is hesitant .

The next day Ellen and Susan are at the bookstore . Susan tells Ellen that she does have feelings for her but she is in a long @-@ term relationship . Ellen is heartbroken and Susan leaves . To cheer her up , her friends take her to a lesbian coffeehouse . There Ellen mistakenly thinks her waitress is coming on to her and is chagrined when a woman flirts with Paige instead of her .

Under the closing credits , Susan leads Ellen over to Melissa Etheridge , who confirms that Ellen is

gay and , after completing the necessary paperwork , awards Susan a toaster oven .

= = Production = =

By the end of the third season of Ellen , producers were becoming frustrated by the series ' lack of focus and the lack of interest that the character Ellen Morgan displayed toward the standard sitcom tropes of dating and relationships . One producer suggested that since the character showed no inclination toward dating , she should get a puppy . " It was an indication of just how lost the show was that network executives would be excited by Ellen buying a puppy " , said executive producer Mark Driscoll . It was this suggestion that served as the source of the coming out episode 's name . In the summer of 1996 DeGeneres and the show 's other writers opened negotiations with ABC and its parent company , Disney , to have Ellen Morgan come out during season four . Word of the secret negotiations leaked in September of that year , sparking a storm of speculation as to whether the character , the actress , or both would come out . The LGBT media watchdog group Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation ( GLAAD ) launched a " Let Ellen Out ! " campaign , including an " Ellen Watch " website . Disney rejected the first draft of the script , with Disney executive Dean Valentine stating that it did not go far enough . Director Junger reported that Valentine said " ' If we 're going to do it , let 's do it . ' Once he said to go as far as we could , it became great fun to write . " Once final approval from Disney was secured , ABC announced on March 3 , 1997 , that Ellen Morgan would be coming out . " The Puppy Episode " went into production on March 7 . Guest stars sought to be a part of the project . According to writer / producer Driscoll , " Suddenly all these talented actors were lining up to be in the episode . It had a buzz around it that it would be an historic episode . When Oprah came on ? and she was so wonderful and open and giving ? it suddenly had this great weight to it . "

With word of the episode out , backlash began . The studio received at least one bomb threat and Driscoll received a telephone call informing him he was going to Hell . DeGeneres was followed by car to the studio on at least one occasion by a " suspicious man " . Some within the entertainment industry assumed that the coming out was simply a ratings stunt , to which DeGeneres responded , " I did it selfishly for myself and because I thought it was a great thing for the show , which desperately needed a point of view . "

DeGeneres began dropping hints in the episodes leading up to " The Puppy Episode " that she was planning to come out in real life and have her character come out as well , including such sight gags as Ellen Morgan stumbling into an actual closet so that she could come out of it . She also invited comment with her off @-@ screen actions , as when she kissed k.d. lang while presenting her with an award at a Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center function in early 1997 . DeGeneres finally officially came out in Time magazine , with an April 14 , 1997 cover emblazoned with the words , " Yep , I 'm Gay " . She appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show with then @-@ girlfriend Anne Heche the day " The Puppy Episode " was set to air .

DeGeneres commented on her months of hinting at her sexuality and the media frenzy within the episode itself , giving Ellen Morgan 's friends lines like " Ellen , are you coming out or not ? ! " and " Yeah , quit jerking us around and come out already ! " Morgan 's therapist comments that if Morgan does not come out she will " continue to have these dreams and then it 's going to show up in your waking life as these little clues that get more and more obvious . And eventually tiresome . " She also says that Morgan cannot blame her reluctance to come out on the media .

= = Reception = =

" The Puppy Episode " and DeGeneres 's attendant coming out generated enormous publicity before the show aired . Right @-@ wing groups like the American Family Association pressured ABC to drop the storyline and Ellen sponsors not to advertise ; two occasional advertisers , J. C. Penney and Chrysler , decided not to buy time during the episode . Another sponsor , Wendy 's , decided not to advertise on Ellen again at all . Despite these losses of potential advertisers , ABC turned away ads from two LGBT @-@ oriented sponsors , the Human Rights Campaign ( HRC )

and lesbian vacation company Olivia Cruises . Jerry Falwell called DeGeneres " Ellen Degenerate " , to which DeGeneres responded , " I 've been getting that since the fourth grade . I guess I 'm happy I could give him work . " GLAAD organized " Come Out With Ellen " house parties across the United States and HRC created " Ellen Coming Out House Party " kits that included invitations , posters and an Ellen trivia game . HRC had initially planned to send out about 300 kits . Deluged with requests , they ended up sending out about 3 @, @ 000 . ABC affiliate WBMA @- @ LP in Birmingham , Alabama , citing " family values " , first sought ABC 's permission to move the episode out of prime @- @ time to a late @- @ night slot . When ABC declined the request , the affiliate refused to air the episode at all . Local LGBT organization Pride Birmingham arranged for a satellite feed of the episode and rented a 5 @, @ 000 @- @ seat theatre for a viewing party , with about 1 @, @ 000 people attending . Local activists circulated a petition requesting that Abilene , Texas @- @ area affiliate KTXS @- @ TV not air the episode but were unsuccessful .

" The Puppy Episode " was the highest @- @ rated episode ever of Ellen , drawing some 42 million viewers . " The Puppy Episode " won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series and a second for Outstanding Multi @- @ Camera Picture Editing . The episode won a Peabody Award and DeGeneres won a GLAAD Media Award in 1998 . Ellen Morgan 's coming out has been described as " the most hyped , anticipated , and possibly influential gay moment on television " . GLAAD credits Ellen with paving the way for such LGBT @- @ themed programming as Will and Grace , The L Word , and Ugly Betty and it has been suggested that Ellen and these other series presenting LGBT characters have helped to reduce societal prejudice against LGBT people . The episode was ranked # 46 on TV Guide 's list of " 100 Greatest Episodes of All @- @ Time " .

Following " The Puppy Episode " , Ellen was renewed for another season . ABC prefaced each episode of season five with a parental advisory warning . DeGeneres strongly criticized ABC for including the warnings , saying in an interview with Entertainment Weekly , " It was like this voice like you 're entering some kind of radiation center . It was very offensive , and you don 't think that 's going to affect ratings ? " DeGeneres further noted demonstrable hypocrisy on the part of ABC , citing episodes of ABC series The Drew Carey Show and Spin City which included two men kissing ( the Carey episode was even promoted using the kiss ) . " There 's no disclaimer on [ the Carey show ] at all , because it 's two heterosexual men , and they 're making fun of heterosexuality ... [ Spin City aired without a disclaimer ] because neither ( Michael J. Fox nor Michael Boatman ) is really gay in real life . " Episodes after " The Puppy Episode " dealt with Ellen 's coming out to her parents and boss , quitting her job at the bookstore and finding a series of new jobs . Other episodes dealt with her search for a romantic partner and learning more about the LGBT community . Even some gay people began criticizing the amount of gay content in the series , including Chaz Bono , formerly known as Chastity Bono , who was at the time working for GLAAD . Bono was quoted as saying , " [ Ellen ] is so gay it 's excluding a large part of our society . A lot of the stuff on it is somewhat of an inside joke . It 's one thing to have a gay lead character , but it 's another when every episode deals with specific gay issues . " Bono would later say that the comments were taken out of context . Ellen was canceled after its fifth season .

With the cancellation of Ellen , DeGeneres focused her energy on stand @- @ up comedy , where she had begun her career . She returned to network television in 2001 with the short @- @ lived The Ellen Show , in which her character Ellen Richmond was openly lesbian from the start , before finding renewed success with her talk show The Ellen DeGeneres Show .

Guest star Laura Dern faced backlash over her appearance on the show . In a 2007 interview for Degeneres 's talk show commemorating the tenth anniversary of " The Puppy Episode , " Dern stated that she did not work for a year and a half because of playing Susan . Nonetheless , Dern said that she was grateful for the " extraordinary experience and opportunity " of being a part of the episode . Speaking of her experience , DeGeneres said , " It was a huge step in my life . I think people sensed the honesty in it . I think it helped a lot of people , and still to this day I hear about parents and children being able to have an honest conversation through watching that show . That 's ultimately what television can be : It can get conversations started . "