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## Jeff Smith, 1939 - 2004: "Frugal Gourmet" was popular on PBS

By **Judith Blake**  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*

Jeff Smith, the once-celebrated "Frugal Gourmet" TV chef who fell from grace, was a hard man to peg.

To some, the Seattle-based Smith, who died Wednesday, was a "genius" of food and the culture surrounding it. His high spirits, acts of generosity and stalwart friendship, they say, were the true measure of the man.

To others, he was a tyrant of the public-TV production set, a tireless self-promoter and a chef of mediocre culinary talent.

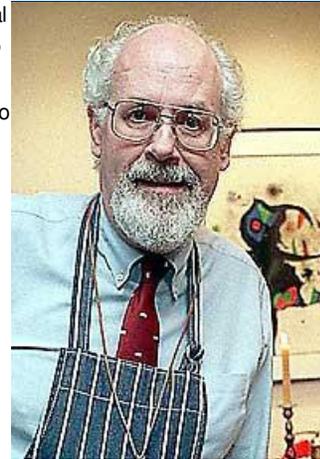
He was accused in three lawsuits of sexually abusing some of the young men who worked for him, ending his television career in the 1990s.

When Mr. Smith died, at age 65, those questions still surrounded him.

His business manager, Jim Paddleford, said Mr. Smith died in his sleep of natural causes. He had long had heart disease.

He lived in a condominium in the Pike Place Market area and also maintained a home in Tacoma.

"I felt the man was a total food genius," said Kathy Casey, a Seattle restaurant consultant and a freelance food columnist for The Seattle Times. "He knew more about food and culture than anybody I know in the food world."



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She and Mr. Smith were friends for some 20 years, beginning when she was a young but rising chef at Seattle's now-closed Fullers Restaurant.

"I don't think people knew how generous and supportive he was." He took her on a trip to Chicago — where his "Frugal Gourmet" show was first filmed for a national audience — giving her a chance to work with him and appear on the show.

He also contributed large amounts to Seattle charities over the years, Casey said. Even after the abuse allegations led to his fall, he continued to cook for numerous charitable fund-raisers, she said.

A Tacoma native, ordained minister and one-time chaplain at University of Puget Sound, Mr. Smith once told The Times that he had "taken my pulpit to television," helping spread a message of the "joy of feasting."

A student of international cooking, Mr. Smith maintained that food was an avenue toward understanding among cultures. He especially loved Chinese food and for many years cooked a big feast for his friends to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

But he had his culinary detractors, such as Chicago food and wine columnist William Rice, who wrote, "I've tried to cook his stuff, and let's say it was hit or miss. Some things worked and others didn't."

Some also contended Mr. Smith was no expert on international cuisine, and that he delivered inaccurate information in his show and books.

A tall, lanky, white-bearded man in wire-rim glasses, he was known for enthusiasm, given to talking loudly and waving his arms for emphasis.

But he also was known for crankiness with his crew during the filming sessions of his TV show, both in Chicago and later in Seattle, after he moved production here.

However, a Seattle chef who worked for him as a prep chef for one season on the Seattle set remembers him as congenial and easy to work with.

Mr. Smith was considered remarkable in his ability to film his shows straight through without stopping to re-shoot because of mistakes. He once told The Times he wanted the show "to feel as live as possible. If I make a mistake, I just say, 'Oh, my God, look what I did.' "

Of his blend of high spirits and irascibility, he said, "My emotions are always on the surface, and I'm not embarrassed by that. I think it's the only way I can prevent ulcers."

Long in love with cooking, he left his college chaplain's position to start a deli and cooking school, the Chaplain's Pantry.

The "Frugal Gourmet" television show started around 1973 at Tacoma's public-TV station KTPS-TV. In 1983, a Chicago PBS invited him to film there, and soon other PBS stations around the country began picking it up.

Eventually, his show was seen by millions, and he wrote a string of popular "Frugal Gourmet" cookbooks to go with it. Returning to his home state in the late 1980s, he moved production to Seattle.

In 1997, seven men filed a lawsuit alleging they had been sexually abused by Mr. Smith as youths. Six said the abuse occurred while they worked for him at the Chaplain's Pantry.

The seventh alleged Mr. Smith abused him after picking him up as a hitchhiker in 1992.

Mr. Smith denied the allegations, but he and his insurance companies settled the case out of court.

In his later years, following the end of his TV career in 1997, he continued to entertain friends at home and cook for fund-raisers.

Pike Place Market merchants said he was often seen shopping there, sometimes walking but often riding a motorized cart because of declining strength.

About eight months ago, Casey said, Mr. Smith called her and said he wanted to give her his collection of about 100 antique cookbooks.

Earlier, she had purchased his vast set of cooking equipment and props for his one-time cooking show.

Survivors are his wife, Patricia; son Channing and wife, Yuki; son Jason and wife, Lisa.

The family plans a private service.

*Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.*

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