

# Fat Cat: the inside story

A collection of characters has entertained kids, with Fat Cat still wishing us goodnight in 2009.



Trina Brown with Percy Penguin.

**C**aptain Jim Atkinson, Seaman Colm O'Doherty, Taffy the Lion, Percy Penguin and his friend, Fat Cat. And with them Carolyn Noble, Trina Brown, Sandy Baker, Judy Thompson, Debbie Allanson, Alison Carroll, Gabrielle Hammond and Sharon Dale.

They were the kings and queens of the kids, from TVW's first days on air. Thomas the Turtle, Shortsighted Seymour, Sonny Sandgroper, Fat Cat's mum. The list goes on.

Keith Geary spent many years as producer and presenter of children's TV in Perth and knows them all well. But it's true that he knows Fat Cat best. Particularly, he knows Fat Cat's alter ego, Reg Whiteman, very well, and cannot say enough about the man's dedication to his job.

"Not many people know that Reg originally was a dancer," he says. He was an inaugural member of the WA Ballet Company, with Kevan Johnston, and also worked on TVW's variety program Spotlight as part of a dance

troupe called Guys and Dolls. He danced on the opening night of TVW and also the opening of Channel 2 a year later. And he was the mute Fat Cat's inhabitant for more than a decade.

The arrival of Fat Cat — his name was Francis Aloysius Tom Cat — was eagerly awaited by the children's audience of the time. He arrived by plane, naturally in a crate, and was greeted by an outside broadcast of the event.

Fat Cat stories are legion. There's the time Mr Whiteman was almost overcome by heat during a Christmas Pageant. But, ever the trouper, he didn't succumb to what must have been an overwhelming urge to unburden himself of Fat Cat's head, and taste some cool breeze. He'd never, Geary agrees, have allowed himself to cause what would have been untold anguish to "the Cat's" youthful fans, who would have been traumatised by seeing him headless.

"We did a show in Carnamah one year, on a flatbed truck," he recalls, and another in Port Hedland when the temperature similarly had soared.

"Reg had to keep disappearing off-stage to cool down. We just played along: 'Oh no, the Cat's disappeared — where are you, Fat Cat? Oh there you are, back again. What have you been doing? Eating all the food?'"

Later Fat Cat costumes were better designed for hot weather, and his disappearing was less frequent.

Fat Cat still puts the kids to bed every evening and appears in person at times. He's a Telethon regular, for instance, though Fat Cat's mum and his friend, Percy, have not been seen in a while. 7

