

# My Kind of Town

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It's not a secret that "certain" local persons were seen at the auditions, and the thought of them "representing" Ellenville caused eyes to roll upwards in trepidation. So, seeing that respectable businesspersons, community leaders, and others who knew the stakes, were planning to go was already reassuring to some degree.

Dianne and I thought about wearing Ellenville shirts and hats; I particularly considered wearing the 2005 *Blueberry Festival* shirt (possible free advertising to millions of viewers!), but re-thought that any T-shirt would look too sloppy, and unlikely that it would even be readable on camera. Just as well, since the show didn't air, as originally thought, before the 27<sup>th</sup>! We settled on two different Ellenville hats, instead.

A final pre-show dinner was held at the school cafeteria Friday evening, catered by *Aroma Thyme*. It seems not everyone got the last-minute invitation, which caused concern that there might still not be enough attendees. But Saturday morning, by 10 AM, a long line was already snaking through the school auditorium's lobby on the way to the provided breakfast. Why the delay? Well, first, IDs had to be checked; only those over 18 who lived, worked, or went to school in Ellenville – or who were immediate family of those who were (which explained why there were some unfamiliar faces in the crowd) – could continue. Then, everyone had to have a uniform digital mug shot taken, to be used in the show's final contest, we later discovered.

Only then could we enter the cafeteria. But we *then* had to first READ and sign (and initial each page of) the long, LONG contract, as I suggested, it gave ABC and Monkey (the British production company) everything, and us nothing. All rights to everything said or taped were theirs, including showing it in Europe (!), and the rules for the final game were spelled out in excruciating detail. IF we revealed what occurred before the actual airing, we could forfeit anything won! And they didn't have to deliver any prizes until 120 days AFTER the show aired, which left many of us concerned that IF the show never aired, they wouldn't have to deliver them at all!

Most unnerving, though, were some lengthy paragraphs that said that YOU might be publicly embarrassed by things aired on the show, and that YOU have no recourse if so! That ABC, etc. were not liable for any consequences of such embarrassment... tough! And they *weren't* going to *make fun of us*!! So why this legal protection? Hmmm. Any way, everyone signed, although I doubt many read it as thoroughly as I did.

One side note: anyone running for office within a year of the show's airing could NOT appear on the show, which precluded at least one person who showed up; another couple was axed because their son worked for the Disney company, owners of ABC, even though in a totally different area of the corporation.

As requested, people came wearing bright colors, but no shorts. Among the ironies: funeral director Allan Loucks, usually seen in dark suits, sported a bright orange golf shirt; I, usually attired in hi-tech tropical nylon, wore a navy blazer and khaki slacks. Indeed, I turned out to be the ONLY person other than the TV host wearing a dress coat! But, I reasoned, at least *someone* from Ellenville would be dressed in proper "casual business" attire!

We were each assigned a bus number and a "handler" from the crew (to prevent mutiny aboard the busses?). We waited over an hour in the heat before actually boarding; I got a second-row seat, to better observe the "handler." Sometime after 11:30, all four busses left the school lot. Rumors were already circulating that a select few had already preceded us down to the city in a *limo*! Were they involved in some special contest or gag? Was that fair?

After a brief intro and orientation, the handler began sorting through the signed contracts (the busses were organized alphabetically) checking that *each page* was initialed! Whew! They weren't kidding! We almost got to preview the new Geena Davis TV series, but we couldn't get the VCR to work; seems the bus's toilet was not functioning too well, either. Oh, for a limo!

Though certainly the first TV show for some of the riders, surprisingly, this was the first trip to The City for some. But to no avail, as we were immediately herded from the bus to the slightly dingy Skyline Hotel on 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. for lunch (This must have really frustrated the visitors from Alabama and Wisconsin, who flew all that distance and still never got to *see* the Big Apple up close! Indeed, after the taping, they went right back, by bus, to the airport to fly directly home!). Box lunches! Including the greenest green



bananas anyone had seen. Pass! For some reason, we hung around for roughly two hours. Are we having fun yet? Mutter, mutter.

I spoke with Sean Grogan, who was one of the limo riders. It seems MKOT wanted about nine persons to be filmed coming out of the limo at various places (like Times Square and Central Park), to use in the intro of the show... or was this a devious ruse? Oh, and they already had a *first* lunch at the Four Seasons Restaurant! Grrrrr! (If there's any consolation, he and others said that packing nine in a limo designed for six, with no toilet and little air, was no fun, and they'd rather have been with us on the bus! Gotcha!)

Finally, by 4 PM, we headed the several blocks to the Sony Music Studios, where Monkey's previous hit, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" originally taped; it was also where the bedroom scenes of the film "The Exorcist" were filmed! Tip #1: don't make the mistake of going directly to the soundstage without first making a pit stop! Three hours later there were many a strained bladder!

Loud music blared around us as we filed in. Everyone was told *exactly* which seat to go to! Uh, why? (We'd find out!) The set was made up of photos and bits and pieces of "small town" imagery, but nothing looked even remotely like Ellenville stuff; there was a large garage door that said "Ellenville Fire Department" on it, but it was not from any actual FD door we recognized. (They use this prop for all the shows; they just change the name each week!) A stand-up comic named "Q" welcomed us, and introduced us to the band in the loft area above us, to the stage managers, and to Michael Davies, the head honcho, who introduced the host, the ultra-caffeinated Johnny Vaughan, who seemed to relish going into an Elvis impression at the drop of any hat. Speaking of hats, we were told we couldn't wear any; some, because of possible advertising, others, because it just blocked faces.

We were given rules on how to cheer and applaud, and practiced the different ways to respond. After a few false starts (we were NOT supposed to applaud just because Ellenville was shown on the map on the big screen) we got the hang of it. Why did Johnny first come out of a fake door in the middle of the stage? (We didn't know, until the first show aired, that he was going *into* a door in his filmed musical intro to the show; so much for "reality" TV! Indeed, and I really can't go into the details – remember the contract? – but there's very little real "reality" in making a TV show! The host reads from cards or a teleprompter, or from cues in his earpiece, and if they don't get a clean "take," we have to shoot it over, even more than once, and repeat our "surprise" or glee, as if it were the first time! Don't worry... in the final edit it will appear magically seamless; but now you know not to believe anything you see on the screen for what it appears to be! Oooops.)

The first order of business was to show a pre-filmed intro about Ellenville. I doubt non-locals watching it will get some of the humor based on knowing who and where the shots covered. I also wished they could have shown and told some more *about* the com-