

“What’s A Breadbox?”

Caroline McCaskey sat in the lobby of the Hollywood Holiday Inn, somewhat nervously scanning the crowd. It was filled with the sort of denizens that you might expect in the lobby of a Hollywood hotel at 10 AM. When the woman that McCaskey was waiting for strode through the front door and announced “Anyone here for ‘I’ve Got A Secret?’”, every hand in the lobby shot up toward the ceiling. There was a slight, uncomfortable pause, as everyone cautiously appraised everyone else who, just moments before, had nothing in common with themselves. The day had suddenly become very different, indeed.

McCaskey, an eighteen-year-old college student from Stockton, had answered an internet posting on Craigslist seeking game show contestants “with an unusual talent, collection or secret” for a revival of the 1950’s game show. After creating a five minute videotape audition and some back and forth emailings with Neta-Le, an associate producer for the show, McCaskey had been invited to a night’s stay at the hotel, and was instructed to wait in the lobby for just this moment.

Julie, the van driver with a walkie-talkie earphone seemingly permanently affixed in her left ear, suggested that, since she had driven to Hollywood, McCaskey should just drive to the studio for the taping rather than pay another \$17 for hotel parking. She was one of many that would be encountered before the day was out, most of them named Julie or Julia or some variation thereof, and every last one of them wearing the walkie-talkie thing. She gave McCaskey directions to the studio, which was only about a mile away; practically next door by Southern California standards. When she reached Lot D, as directed, the friendly Filipino security guard apologized for the lack of space and directed her around the corner to Lot B. There appeared to be more than enough available spaces, but, this being the Land of Illusion, McCaskey complied. A block’s walk through the February sunshine would be refreshing, in marked contrast to the tropical pounding that the windshield took coming over the Grapevine during the previous night’s drive, dodging big rigs and darned near running out of gas. The Lot B attendant, still yawning off some of last night’s fun, greeted her and told her to park anywhere that suited her. After reading the various names painted on the spaces “Flaherty, Martin, Thomas” McCaskey settled into a space marked “M. Short.”

“Am I gonna get in trouble parking in this guy’s space?” inquired McCaskey.

“Today that is *your* space,” politely but firmly replied the attendant, with a slight bow.

Striding somewhat uncertainly in the general direction of the studio gate, McCaskey was suddenly accosted by yet another earpiece-bestudded young woman, another associate producer, uncharacteristically named Lindsay, who apologized profusely for the misunderstanding with the guard in Lot D.

“Did you have any trouble finding the place?” Lindsay perkily inquired.

“No, no trouble at all,” lied McCaskey, glossing over the inadvertently thorough tour of the residential neighborhood surrounding the Hollywood Center Studios.

Lindsay, in her fashionably faded blue denim jeans and a belted brown and tan sweater that practically skimmed the pavement, led McCaskey through a white iron gate, past the Center’s Stage #1 (“The George Burns Stage” – practically everything in Hollywood has a bronze plaque indicating its historic significance) and whisked her into Building 17, all the while simultaneously talking into the walkie-talkie (“it’s ok, I found her and I’m bringing her in now”) and cheerfully talking up her newly-located charge.

Up the stairs and into the fabled “Green Room,” which is never actually green – beige, it turns out is more calming – and Neta-Le’s outstretched and walkie-talkied hand suddenly appeared in greeting. “Hi, great to finally meet you, would you like anything?” came the rapid-fired, but sincere inquiries.

Neta-Le would occasionally break off in mid-sentence, clap her left hand to her ear and start speaking into her right lapel, not terribly different from a Secret Service Agent, but without the sunglasses and machine gun. Hers was one of countless wireless communication devices that were in use in and around the sound stage, making most of the people that one encountered appear to be a prototype of the Star Trek 'Borg' beings. Her walkie-talkie, which would have been the envy of any Marine Corps unit in World War II, but is now invisibly taken for granted, was labeled with its various channels. "Production, Open, Producers, Hair/Makeup, Wardrobe, Props, Grips, Lighting and Transport."

"I'm on channel three – go ahead. I've got them here" she said, moving her hand to her head in a fashion that would have indicated a sudden migraine if you didn't know about the earplug.

Neta-Le, an associate producer, one of evidently hundreds of them associated with the show, described herself as a freelance, going from show to show as the work becomes available, networking all the while, a sort of video gypsy. "You keep in touch with everyone, stay available," she said "and it sort of builds." She has to give the walkie-talkie back every time, though. McCaskey later hoped that the earplug removal didn't require surgery.

The Green Room had a quality about it that made one think that they had just wandered onto the cover of the Door's "Strange Days" album. The various contestants, now that they knew that they all weren't just colorful hotel lobby decorations, began the process of getting to know each other and to exhibit their various secrets, some altogether gregariously, while others were somewhat measured.

The first to open up was Steve McGranahan, a fellow that McCaskey had quietly thought to be either a Pie Eating champion, as his looks might hint at, or something less obvious, such as a World Class Knitting Expert. Standing six feet tall with shaved head, arms that look like legs (they're 22 inches around) and a neck diameter larger than his head, McGranahan tips the scales at over 300 lbs., and looks like someone who could knit something out of whole sheep. McGranahan, "Call me Steve," took a first place in the Indoors Masters Nationals shot-put, which really shouldn't surprise anyone with eyes, who can plainly see that he could probably throw the truck that he arrived in.

McGranahan likes to break the ice by handing someone a sixty-penny steel nail, which is about as big around as your forefinger and twice as long, with an invitation to bend, break or otherwise deform it. Once the hapless attempter returns the proffered item, McGranahan proceeds to fold it into a V-shape, not effortlessly, but far more casually than one might expect, to the amazement of anyone within a 10-foot radius. As one might have gathered after such a spectacle, McGranahan's specialty is hand and wrist strength. After warming up a bit by lifting things such as logs and large stones, McGranahan will break pliers and forged steel wrenches with a resounding snap. He once bent a horseshoe into a heart shape with his bare hands as a gift to his wife.



Steve McGranahan wows the Mauldin Brothers

Although his accent hints that he is originally from North Carolina, McGranahan currently hails from western Pennsylvania, where he puts his talents to use inspiring youngsters and coaching middle-school wrestling teams, six of which went onto

championships. His business card proudly proclaims itself “Heaven *Bent* Ministries” and features a quote from Philippians 4:13 (“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”). If this fellow said “Come to God,” you’d do it *now*. Once McGranahan lifted an impressive 2,030,400 pounds in 24 hours for a mission trip fund raiser.

McGranahan’s mission this day, however, was to attempt to break his own world record by biting 11 decks of cards in half in under 30 seconds. This may be a bit of a misnomer, however, as he is actually holding the stack of pasteboards in his teeth while he tears it with his hand. McGranahan prefers to call it the “one-handed rip.” Whatever anyone calls it, most people couldn’t accomplish this with two axes and a chainsaw. Toward this end, McGranahan arrived bearing more decks of cards than one would typically find in a casino, and a stack of heavy-duty aluminum frying pans. The 14” frying pans were essential to his most bizarre stunt, which was to invite someone to remove their wristwatch, at which point McGranahan would claim that he could pass the entire frying pan through the watchband. After allowing about ten seconds for amazement to pass through the watch owner’s mind, only to be replaced by skepticism, McGranahan would grasp the metal pan in his meaty hands and “roll it up like a burrito,” which easily passed through the three-inch diameter watchband.



McGranahan, McCaskey and 60d nail

Eleven AM brought a call through the walkie-talkies that it was time for a quick rehearsal and everyone was escorted past Stage One through the tangle of the studio lot’s various makeup and wardrobe trailers into sound stage seven by a cadre of production assistants. Passing through a double-door airlock with a sign proclaiming “Do Not Enter If Red Light Is Flashing”, the entire contents of the Green Room were led past a table barely bearing up under the weight of the largest assortment of calorie and sugar-laden snacks that Craft Services could muster, all with the intent of keeping the crew fully energized for the massive effort that lay ahead. It should be noted that there were a few healthful items among the vast array of M&Ms, Reese’s Pieces, candied almonds, malted milk balls, Hershey’s Kisses of all sorts, allsorts of all sorts and calories of every stripe. The standard Green Room fare of bagels, donuts and granola bars paled by comparison. As one might expect of Hollywood, bottled water was found in abundance.

The lot itself is central to Tinseltown’s history. Founded in 1919 by a refugee from Chaplin Studios, John Jasper, the lot has seen its share of big names: Harold Lloyd, Howard Hughes, Clara Bow. It was there that Mae West was ordered to clean up her act after Paramount was chastised by the Hays Office. Twenty-one Hopalong Cassidy films were shot there, and United Artists used the facility extensively up through the 1940s. Television production overwhelmed the lot in the 1950s and 60s, churning out such familiar series as “The Addams Family,” “The Beverly Hillbillies,” “The Lone Ranger,” “Mr. Ed,” “Ozzie And Harriet,”

"Perry Mason," "Petticoat Junction" and the popular Western/Aviation adventure series "Sky King" among hundreds of others.

The sound stage, a dark, cavernous affair, is one of twelve such facilities on the lot. Besides bringing life to IGAS, the lot is now a spawning ground for other television series such as "Celebrity Cooking Showdown," "Infinity," "Lucky Louie," "Mad TV," "Mind of Mencia", "That's So Raven" and "The Suite Life Of Zack & Cody." Feature film production has also infiltrated the lot in the form of such blockbusters-to-be as "Horrorween" and "Scary Movie 4." Watch for them soon on your local airline.

All of Stage Seven's 80 tons of air conditioning equipment was silently pumping out refrigerated air at a furious pace in an attempt to pre-chill the 80 by 100-foot area before the heat of the bright lights took their toll on everyone. Without the countering effect of the lights, however, it felt as though the stage was moonlighting as a meat locker.

As the various contestants settled into the bleacher sets, awaiting their turns for makeup, wardrobe, microphone placement and rehearsals, one of them delicately moved to the upper reaches. She discreetly faced the blank back wall while her companion made repeated adjustments to her blouse. Lori Barghini was becoming frustrated with her own secret: her nipples wouldn't stay in place. Lori, along with her companion (and now sister-in-law) Julia Cobb are the inventors of BodyPerks nipple enhancers, which they describe as a "boob job in a box." Evidently the studio wasn't quite as cold as it had appeared.

Their inspiration springs from a "Girl's Weekend" trip to Las Vegas in 1999, when one of their friends stuck two shampoo bottle tops into her tank top before heading out for a night on the town. "We noticed that we started getting a lot more free drinks and getting into places free," proudly states Barghini. "The extra attention was unmistakable." The eye-catching molded silicone product has brought both Barghini and Cobb a modest return on their investment, but seems to mainly be a launching point for their careers. The notoriety that the product brought Barghini, a salesperson for several Minneapolis companies, and Cobbs, an independent marketing consultant, has been parlayed into a three-hour, five-day-a week radio talk show on radio station WFMP in Minneapolis/St. Paul, the appropriately named "Twin Cities." A monthly television appearance has also resulted, and their "Lori and Julia Show" can be found streaming along the internet, now in a four year run.

Fortuitous product placement hasn't hurt their cause any, either. Being featured in an episode of "Sex and the City" yielded sales of over 800 pairs of BodyPerks in one New York City boutique alone. The self-styled "Nipple Chicks" have now turned sales efforts over to a marketing firm. "Yeah, they take the money and don't do anything," complained Cobbs, rolling her eyes toward the catwalks 24 feet overhead. Somebody must be doing something, however, as a cadre of more than ten regional representatives are moving thousands of sets of BodyPerks in the US, Canada and Europe, as well as online distribution.

"Cameras to headsets!" boomed the stage's public address system, resembling the Voice of the Almighty. A large studio television camera, bearing a bulky TelePrompter on its front, hove into view, as a smaller, remotely-operated "jib" camera on a boom swung in from overhead.

"Standby, Bil," barked Stacey, the often gruff and grim-visaged Floor Manager.

IGAS' host, Bil Dwyer snapped to attention from his casual conversation with a crew member at center stage.

Dwyer, a likable fellow with a lively, friendly demeanor and a perfectly fitting suit, is one of those actors that one is sure about having seen them, somewhere, but can't always place the circumstances. One of his most notable long-running appearances was as the play-by-play announcer of the Comedy Channel series "Battle Bots," in which various contestants build electromechanical devices with the intent of pulverizing other people's electromechanical devices. Dwyer has also appeared mostly in other television series and

specials, among them “Ultimate Fan League,” “Dirty Rotten Cheater” and “Extreme Dodgeball.” He is usually cast as a host or color commentator, and he appears to settle quite naturally into the role. Dwyer has also surfaced in shows such as “101 Most Unforgettable SNL Moments,” “101 Biggest Celebrity Oops” and “Win Ben Stein’s Money,” which he evidently did 100 times fewer than his other appearances.

On his cue, Dwyer crossed the stage to a display of highly-decorated toilet seats: flames, teeth and techno-pop were the standouts. With titles appropriate to their motifs, such as “Bite Me” and “Gas Station,” these commode cappers were the handiwork of contestant Wendy Gold of San Rafael, California.

Gold, a 32-year old artist and designer, has been decorating toilet seats for five years, which, for anyone that has visited a gas station men’s room, makes her a relative newcomer. The difference, however, is not only in the gender, but in the medium. “I’ve always done decoupage,” says Gold, even when her main media were electronic. As a professional, Gold has designed corporate web sites, marketing media, health and beauty product packaging, material for films and work for WalMart and Wells Fargo. Some of her favorite work was for a toy company, which lives on in the form of the “Blues Clues” board game and a line of glow-in-the-dark toys. Bearing a degree in Industrial Design, Gold similarly decorates bathroom scales, but the real notoriety is mined in toilet seats, which naturally offer more potential for humor and puns. While she does make some standard scale designs, her toilet seats are always bespoke, and carry a price tag to reflect that, ranging from \$300 to \$1,200. Her work has been featured in such diverse publications as *American Way Magazine*, *Aishti* (a Lebanese fashion magazine) and *Celebrity Living Magazine*. Clearly, these aren’t for just anyone.

Back at the host’s console, Dwyer was still running through introductions with the contestants.

“Stand closer to her, Bil,” boomed the Voice of the Almighty. “Watch the glare. Just slide into the seat, it’s on a mark.”

It was 12:45 PM, and the set was still being pounded together by a teeming knot of electricians, carpenters, lighting people, manlifts, grips. Incident light meters were being furiously waved around like someone trying desperately to find a cell phone signal. This would continue up into the last seconds before taping began. Most of the concern appeared to be directed toward the lighting inside the panelists’ console. It was a flurry of wires, tape and various colored gels.

“I’ve Got A Secret”’s (often abbreviated as “IGAS”) origins hark back to the so-called “Golden Years of Television.” Premiering June 19, 1952, the show was a creation of Allan Sherman and was produced for CBS Television by Mark Goodson and Bill Todman. Sherman, in his comedy career outside of television production, is probably best remembered for his song about a boy’s letter home from a fictional Camp Granada summer camp (“Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah”) and also co-produced Bill Cosby’s first three albums. The team of Goodson and Todman have produced a legion of television shows, most of them games. Among them are such stalwarts as “Beat The Clock,” “The Price Is Right,” “To Tell The Truth,” “Concentration,” “The Match Game,” “Super Password” and “What’s My Line?” of which IGAS is often considered a knockoff. Their “The Price Is Right,” still in production, holds the title of the longest running game show in history.

A weekly show, IGAS was originally hosted by Garry Moore, who was replaced by Steve Allen in 1964. Allen was the host until the last broadcast on April 3, 1967. While the show’s list of panelists eventually settled down into a consistent stable of celebrities, many familiar names have appeared over the decades. Some of the original panelists, Orson Bean, game show host in his own right Bill Cullen, actor Eddie Bracken, singer Kitty Carlisle, and actresses Faye Emerson and Jayne Meadows eventually rotated out in favor of some newer names. This helped make household words out of Betsy Palmer and former Miss America Bess Myerson. Acerbic comedian Henry Morgan was with the show for almost its entire run in one capacity or another, either as a panelist or as a wise-cracking substitute host.

The format of the show was, and still is, fairly straightforward: a guest is brought out, introduced and enlightens both the host and the viewing audience as to the nature of their secret. The panelists are then given a brief opportunity to interrogate the guest in an attempt to ascertain their secret, although the questions have always been limited to the yes or no variety. Contestants who manage to confound the panel are awarded cash and other prizes. Adult contestants were always given a carton of Winston cigarettes in the original series, as Winston was the show's sponsor. IGAS has been considered a more lighthearted version of its sister show "What's MyLine?", and been described as "a variety show masquerading as a game show." Call it what you will, the formula works, and often.

IGAS was briefly revived a few times, hosted again by Allen in the 1972 – 1973 television season and for a summer run in 1976, hosted by Bill Cullen. It was also brought back out of hibernation for the Oxygen! cable channel as a daily show in 2001, hosted by Stephanie Miller and featured Amy Yasbeck and Teri Garr among the panelists.

"Ok, let's try that again," boomed the Almighty.

"Can you try to stay behind the white lines on the floor, please," offered Stacey the Floor Manager. "We need you to stay behind there until you go across, ok? The lights won't be on you if you don't."

While Steve McGranahan relaxed in the bleachers by biting more decks of cards in half, the Mauldin brothers were attempting to step through their act on the stage in a manner that the cameras could adequately capture. The crouching, waddling, strutting, head pumping motions and bizarre sounds emanating from their throats stopped most of the crew in their tracks and left them applauding and shaking their heads in resigned laughter. No one was shocked, however; this is still Tinseltown, now and forever.

Once the details of the brothers' bizarre act were worked out, everyone was escorted back to the Green Room once again. This time, everyone was politely, but firmly, asked not to leave unless absolutely necessary, and under no circumstances to hang around anywhere outside of Building 17. This was evidently a hangover from the quiz show scandals of the 1950s. Both the friendly but firm demeanor of the production staff (at least in this area) and the boilerplate legalese of the contestant's contract leave little doubt that no one wants to run afoul of the 1950s quiz show scandal laws, still leaving their mark. While the contestants had some degree of freedom of movement, the panelists were kept quite isolated while on the lot, "almost in a vacuum," according to the staff. No chances were to be taken; it's a secret, after all, right?

Meandering back up the stairs, McCaskey found the Mauldin Brothers wailing away on guitar and blues harp, and "Banana George" Blair dancing, more or less, with Lori Barghini.

The Brothers, Doug and Draper, are blond twins from northern Mississippi and claim that they "grew up'n the woods, literally, since weez two years old." Resembling nothing more than a younger version of Luke and Owen Wilson, the



Barghini, Blair and one-half of the Mauldin Brothers get down to some country blues

pair had driven to Hollywood straight through from their rural Lyon home for their appearance, and were slightly the worse for wear, occasionally napping on the Green Room couch. Doug is the older of the pair, by five minutes. He describes them as “musicians, composers, comedy actors,” but their real talent is turkey calling. These two, described by several of the other contestants as “the Future of Hollywood,” are not only National, but World Champion Turkey Callers, bar none. Their calling, completely unaided by any sort of device or artifice, is, by turns, impressive, startling and somewhat puzzling. Judging by some of the photographs that they were passing around, it is absolutely convincing, especially if you are a wild turkey. Proudly explaining several of the photos, Doug, or Draper, would proudly indicate the heavily wooded location (often “out back o’ the house”) and the enormous spread of the turkey’s tail fan, which looked like something out of a taxidermy catalog’s “Best Of” page. Describing their expertise as mere vocalizing would hardly tell a fraction of the story; while they gobble and trill they are also a veritable carnival of strutting, bobbing, flapping and everything else that a tom turkey overcome with lust might do.

Converting this native ability into a career has led them into some less-than-conventional arenas: “outdoorsman shows, turkey seminars” and a gig in front of five thousand attendees of the International Cotton Traders FMC in Destin, Florida. Naturally, too, they have done work for a famous brand of bourbon whiskey. Telling of several encounters with Wild Turkey’s 71-year old Master Blender Jimmy Russel of Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, one of the brothers remarked that “he kin party lack yew wooden believe; like ‘til fahve in the mornin’!”

“Naw, Drape, it wuz six. Yooz passed owt awreddy!” corrected his sibling emphatically.

Draper told of the time that the twins were scheduled to make an appearance on the David Letterman show, right after an appearance with “Regis and Kelly,” but were called at their hotel and informed that they had been bounced from the schedule at the last minute. “They threw us over in favor uv a guy who wuz only a national winner who used a diaphragm an’ all,” said Draper in a mixture of distaste and wonder.

“We had that happen to us in Munich,” commiserated Cathie Jung.

“Wull, we made some good limmenade that tahm, tho,” Draper went on. He explained that their agent, who was also handling Jessica Simpson, had vowed to make it up to them. The brothers opened the next time that Simpson appeared on Letterman’s show and they “jammed with Paul Shaffer and *rocked* the Ed Sullivan Thee-ater!”

The mention of Letterman spiked the conversation somewhat in the Green Room. “We’ve turned down Letterman five times,” volunteered Nancy Featherstone, as her husband Don nodded in agreement. “The last time was just a couple of weeks ago.” Nancy Featherstone considers herself to be somewhat outspoken, and said that she just plain didn’t like the way that Letterman has treated some of his guests in the past. “I just knew that I would wind up telling him so right on his show,” so they declined. “They invited us as a Valentine Couple; weren’t even going to pay us! Ahhhhh---“ she said, waving her hand dismissively. Husband Don smiled and nodded, apparently in full agreement.

Steve McGranahan weighed in with his Letterman experience. “The last time I was on there they paid me \$617. Before I even got my check they had taken out over a hundred dollars that I’ll never see again for city and state taxes. Geez, and I ate \$150 worth of food that one day in the city. It takes a lot to fuel this,” he said, soundly slapping his palms against his ample abs. “I don’t think I’ll be doing that again.”

Cathie Jung was peeved with the Miami airport security people when she arrived in Hollywood, and remained so a day later.

“They took me aside, made me take everything off, including my corset, to check me. Then, after I got dressed again, they wanted to wand me. I told them they were just stupid! There’ll be a couple of letters about this, you can count on that!” Her husband Bob, nodded in bemused agreement. Being involuntarily taken aside for closer examination is the sort of thing that is still bothersome, even for someone like Jung, who is often examined quite voluntarily. There was little wonder why it happened, though. Not only did the steel ribs in Jung’s corset trigger the metal detector, but the fact that her waist is about the diameter of a dill pickle jar naturally arouses curiosity, particularly among the professionally curious. At 5’6” tall and weighing 135 lbs., Jung’s 15” waist is startling to see. Jung, who spent ten years in what she describes as “corset training”, is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as having the World’s Smallest Waist. Beginning with an interest in Victorian costuming, Jung’s training began in earnest after her three children had grown. Beginning with a 26” waist, she would continually cinch the corset tighter, wearing it virtually all day and night, until it was time to switch to something two inches smaller. The process was continued until her lower “floating” ribs got out of the way, too. X-rays on her website confirm this. She owns more than 25 different corsets of wildly varying materials. Her business cards picture her in a loaned corset made of sterling silver, made to fit her by an art student. It resembles a queen’s parade armor.

The Green Room group wondered if Steve McGranahan could bend her, too, but when they realized that his bicep was seven inches bigger around than her waist, it was decided that she would probably just snap like a twig. Despite the fact that a pinched, “hourglass” waist was considered an ideal even up through the 1920s, it evokes a disturbing reaction in many today. Some consider it grotesque, and wonder aloud where her stomach and intestines went. Jung smiles serenely and points out that her guts move around in a fashion identical to what happens during pregnancy, “except that there is nothing sticking out.” She claims that it is a perfectly safe practice “as long as one isn’t overzealous.” She credits persistence with her success, but also concedes that exercise would be “counter productive.”

The Jungs had been passing through Miami on the way from the Bahamas, where they spend half of the year on their boat, “The Bobcat.” Jung’s husband, Bob, is a retired orthopedic surgeon, and is the “Bobcat”’s skipper, possessing a U.S. Coast Guard 100 Ton License. He earned this while practicing in New London, CT “because I didn’t play golf or tennis.” After service in the U.S. Navy, Bob Jung’s early career was spent in the Albany, NY Medical Center, eventually moving to New London, where he specialized in joint replacements. “Hips and knees pretty much equally, but some shoulders,” he explained. If practice makes perfect, as his wife’s efforts might indicate, Bob must be pretty good. Performing roughly 6 joint replacements per week, he would often be swapping out human joints at the rate of 200 – 300 per year. He is



The Mauldin Brothers and Cathie Jung

often accused of having altered his wife surgically, but he proudly points out that the training is something that she has done entirely on her own.

Proudly passing around some recent photos, Cathie said that her favorite activities while on the boat are fishing for “tuna, wahoo, mahi,” and is particularly proud of the 200 lb. marlin that she landed. Not only did this fish considerably outweigh her, but was probably a bit larger in diameter, as well. She and Bob take the “Bobcat” up the east coast for half the year, and spend the warmer weather in their Old Mystic, CT home. They continue to travel the world for personal appearances in Europe and Japan and to attend an annual ball sponsored by “Les Gracieuses Modernes,” a society devoted to costuming, corsets and “wasp-waists.”

Don and Nancy Featherstone had two secrets when they arrived in Hollywood, but one didn’t seem particularly occult. The Fitchburg, MA couple often cause double-takes when people notice that they are dressed alike, at least to the point of her dress and his shirt being made from the same loudly-patterned cloth. They have been doing this every day for the last 28 years. “We only did it on weekends for two years before that,” informs Nancy, who makes all of the matching duds, some of them quite intricate and artful. When asked how she can find the time to make so many articles she proudly replied that “I dropped out of the workforce when I earned my M-R-S.” Her tastes in color run toward electric pink, and for good reason. That color has been very good to the Featherstones. Husband Don invented the plastic lawn flamingo, an American icon currently celebrating its fiftieth birthday.

Featherstone went to work for lawn ornament manufacturer Union Products of Leominster, MA as a sculptor in 1957, fresh out of the School of the Worcester Art Museum. The flamingo was one of his earliest projects. Pigs, dogs, nativity scenes, gnomes and turkeys almost real enough to fool the Mauldin brothers soon followed, nearly 800 in all. “My first project was actually a duck,” he said, claiming also that it is anatomically correct. “We probably sell more ducks than flamingos,” he marveled, but the flamingo is what people think of when someone says the words “lawn ornament.” His breeding program has obviously been successful: he bought the company in the mid-1990s. In 1986, the bird’s 30th birthday, the original flamingo design was updated to include Don’s signature on the bird’s rump as a mark of authenticity. He has since sold the company and retired into a life of appearances before an adoring public. The bird was later revamped, with the signature removed, fomenting a minor outcry among devoted fans who call for a boycott.



Double secrets and double vision – Don and Nancy Featherstone

When asked if he had any flamingos in his Fitchburg yard, Featherstone stated outright that they would look silly in his yard “out of place in the snow.” He did allow that he kept two white versions of the birds – he

calls them “Snowmingos” – in his yard in the wintertime to keep the flock of plastic penguins company. The pink flock doesn’t make its appearance until more clement weather arrives in the summer.

Don and Nancy met at the International Hardware Trade Show in Chicago, which has had his handiwork on display every year for over forty years. “How many things can you say that about?” asks Don.

“Ok, everybody get hungry!” came the perky announcement from yet another perky, wired-up production assistant. The Green Room Gang was led eastward through the maze of buildings, past the “I Love Lucy” stage and it’s “Babalu Café”, and along a trail of temporary signs erected exclusively for them, to the catered lunch. A no-frills presentation of what would be pretty frilly food elsewhere was spread before all: sandwiches, pasta, multi-lettuced salad, risotto balls and cakes and cookies seemed to please everyone.

At one point, a woman wearing a paint-spattered fatigue jacket that could easily have been mistaken for a homeless person verbally assaulted McCaskey, barking at her that she “shouldn’t be eating in it,” and stalked angrily away. It turned out to be the Wardrobe Mistress merely expressing concern for some of her inventory that McCaskey was wearing.

A quick glance at Cathie Jung’s plate revealed something on the order of five tablespoons of fare, mostly salad. Steve McGranahan’s plate more than averaged it out, both in calories and bulk.

Just about everything in Hollywood has become commoditized. Just as studio companies supply studios, caterers supply food, and booking companies supply talent, there is a company that supplies television studio audiences. “On Camera Audiences” is, according to their web site “constantly searching for quality people to participate in those studio audiences,” even going as far as to recruit charitable organizations through fund raising events. OCA places laughing, clapping cooperative backsides in seats for such shows as “American Idol,” “Best Damn Sports Show Period,” “Family Feud,” and “Skating With Celebrities.” They have now added IGAS to their lineup of trophies.

By 3:30 pm, the audience was being “loaded in,” filling the 200 or so seats in the studio and being warmed up by a latino stand up comedian, arguably the hardest-working guy in the entire production. His name was Gilbert Esquivel, and he worked the crowd for all he was worth, plying them with jokes, bribing them with Starbucks gift cards and candy bars, anything that could get the crowd of Hollywood civilians into the right mood. While a Johnny Depp-as-Captain-Jack-Sparrow-styled grip leaned against one of the cameras, Esquivel pulled out every crowd control trick he had in order to keep the crowd at just the right degree of frenzy. This included pulling audience members out of the stands for an impromptu version of “American Idol” while technicians took an hour to swap out and calibrate a nonfunctioning camera. Perhaps this wasn’t as difficult as it sounds. This was, after all, Hollywood, and almost everyone in the audience seemed ready, willing and able to be “discovered.”

A warm-up veteran of more than a dozen television shows, Idaho-born Esquivel has adopted the persona of a reformed gang member, which he says is altogether autobiographical. His adolescence was spent in Pacoima, CA, where he “spent years doing the wrong things.” He credits his turnaround to when, “as a gang member of 16 years old, I went to church just to hang out with a girl I liked and ended up accepting Christ.” Esquivel now uses his comedic abilities to inspire and “educate teenagers about life’s different options,” including through Prison Ministries, much like Steve McGranahan, but without bending anything except, perhaps, reality. While essentially a clean comic, his material ranged from gang and drug humor, family reminiscences, improvisational riffs with the crowd to claiming how, whenever he gets pulled over, he “claims to be Filipino,” because he “thinks that the police won’t beat him up quite so badly.” This gets big yocks from the crowd, who nod in agreement, possibly from experience.

Bob Jung sat back in his chair, looked around at the studio monitors and cameras and chuckled. “This is nothing, *nothing* compared to what they have in the FujiTV studios in Tokyo,” he remarked. “It’s so far

advanced beyond this, and they have floor after floor of it in the FujiTV building. Monitors everywhere. Hundreds of them!” He said that Cathie has made several appearances there in the last few years.

Esquivel’s vamping went on until almost 5:00 pm, when the panelists were finally brought onto the set, even while the stagehands continued to hammer, wire, paint and primp their console. As they were being seated, the makeup and wardrobe staff went to work wiring, painting and primping them.

In this newest incarnation of IGAS, the panelists themselves shared, at least previously, a secret of their own. They are all out of the closet now, however, and on their way to the bank.

The first panelist, Jermaine Taylor, shares a name with a heavyweight prizefighter, although it is unlikely that they will ever be mistaken for each other. This Taylor, is a Broadway actor and dancer, slender and openly, flamingly, swishingly gay, while the prizefighter is built more along the lines of Mike Tyson. Broadway’s Taylor also appears in sketch comedy revues around NYC.

Standup comedian Suzanne Westenhoefer, in the second panel position, describes herself as “a sort of a gay Kitty Carlisle,” according to the Fredericksburg, VA Freelance-Star, adding “I’m going to have to go out and get some earrings.” Bearing more than a passing resemblance to Princess Di, Westenhoefer didn’t really play up the gay angle on the show, providing a respite from the antics of at least two of her fellow panelists, but make occasional references to her girlfriend, nonetheless.

The third chair was amply filled by Frank DeCaro, a portly fellow with a shaved head, dark-rimmed glasses and a perfectly-fitting suit. These features are difficult to see on his radio show on the Sirius satellite network, but are more apparent during his appearances on “The Daily Show.” DeCaro has made numerous television appearances on shows such as “Win Ben Stein’s Money,” “Showbiz Tonite,” the “Super Secret Movie Rules” miniseries and “Craft Corner Deathmatch,” almost always appearing as “Himself.” This makes DeCaro the very essence of celebrity: he is famous for being famous.

Batting cleanup was, appropriately, former major Los Angeles Dodger (and later Detroit Tiger) outfielder Billy Bean. Bearing a noticeable resemblance to Henry Winkler, he has appeared in a few television “Arli\$\$,” “Totally Gay!” and “Playing the Field: Sports and Sex in America.”

A little after 5:00 pm, taping began in earnest.

An audience is at least as much a part of the cast as the panelists. Whipped to a near-froth by the flashing applause signs and Esquivel’s pleas (“C’mon, really BIG, folks, my job is on the line!”) a properly enthusiastic entrance was manufactured for Dwyer, who took two tries to hit his marks.

After some witty repartee with the panelists, Cathie Jung, was introduced, to more Esquivel-encouraged applause. She was wearing at least two rather bulky sweaters. As she whispered her secret into host Dwyer’s ear it was simultaneously displayed on the monitors for the audience to react to. As this was their first time



The panel, and panelists, get a makeover

through, the audience gave her less of a response than hoped for, but technical wizardry would correct this later.

Dwyer reminded everyone that, if the contestant stumped the panel, they would be rewarded with “dinner for two in Beverly Hills and a thousand dollars” and threw the panel a couple of softball clues. Each panelist was then given forty seconds for questioning, witticisms and off-color puns, before the buzzer sounded. They naturally took a bit longer, but this would be remedied in the editing process. The show will air at 11 pm, and, while Dwyer remained fairly straightforward on camera, the panel was not at all concerned with Family Hour rules. This effect built considerably over the course of the next two episodes.

Once Jung’s secret was finally revealed, she stepped around the host’s console and removed her sweaters to reveal her low-cut, purple brocade dress and 15-inch waist.

“My thigh is bigger than that!” exclaimed Westenhoefer.

“So is mine!” agreed DeCaro.

Reassuring the viewers that “we’ll be right back after these messages,” Dwyer escorted Jung to the edge of the set and another flurry of vacuuming, dusting, adjusting, painting and wiring was set in motion, for both the set and the panelists themselves. They were also given something to drink through straws, presumably so that their often-replenished makeup didn’t suffer any harm. The three-minute commercial break took about twelve minutes.

“Ok, now when the secret is revealed, let’s really go crazy about it, ok?” pled Esquivel. “And when you clap, clap faster, because it sounds like it’s a lot louder.”

The audience did their best to comply, and the main camera gave a close up of Dwyer, who introduced the next guest as someone who “played sleazy lawyer Arnie Becker on “LA Law,” would you welcome, please, *Corbin Bernsen!*”

The 5’11” actor, clad in blue jeans and slightly scruffy brown leather jacket and t-shirt, strode across the set to a hearty handshake from Dwyer. Bernsen, a 1972 Beverly Hills High School graduate, is a well-known local fixture, having appeared in such widely-varied productions as “The Waltons,” “Star Trek: TNG” and “Murder on the Iditarod Trail,” besides his most famous lawyer role. His mother, actress Jeanne Cooper, has made over one hundred appearances in films and television, and has a recurring role on both soap operas “The Young and the Restless” and “The Bold and the Beautiful.” His father is television and film producer Harry Bernsen.

Bernsen’s secret was a real long shot: he owns one of the largest collections of snow globes, nearly six thousand of them. When the panel’s questioning had subsided, a curtain on the set was drawn back to reveal few dozen of them, gleaming and shining like DeCaro’s head. Bernsen made some small talk with Dwyer about them, thoughtfully and carefully mentioning some small detail about each and holding up one after another for close ups. He was particularly proud of a special edition of globes that he had commissioned for his Millennium Party guests. It was imprinted with the date and had a perpetual calendar built into it.

When he was thanked and production broke for another round of commercials, painting, primping and watering, Bernsen wandered over to the audience with the Millennium globe in his hand. He challenged the crowd to name a movie other than “Citizen Kane” that featured a snow globe. When an audience member far in the back of the stands shouted out a suitable answer, Bernsen shouted an enthusiastic “Yes!”, gave the globe a casual underhand toss toward the lucky winner, and fled toward the door. As time seemed to shift into slow motion, several dozen hands shot up toward the fragile orb, seemingly marking it for doom. Miraculously, unlike a prize home run ball, there was no struggle, and the trophy was safely delivered into its rightful hands.

After another applause sign-fueled frenzy, it was McCaskey's turn.

"She's a college student from Stockton, CA, please welcome Caroline McCaskey!"

The petite coed, spotlights highlighting her wavy blond hair, slipped out from behind part of the set and took her place next to the host. Evidently sensing her penchant for short answers, the host and panelists made pleasant banter about Stockton's AAA League baseball team "The Ports."

"The Ports? What kinda name is that?"

"The what?"

"I didn't know that they had a team."

"I didn't know that they had a port!"

"I knew that Stockton had white port!" Esquivel offered as an aside to the audience.

It was impossible to tell what she actually whispered into Dwyer's ear, but when her secret appeared on the monitors for the benefit of the audience they responded with an appropriate blend of enthusiasm and puzzlement.

When the questioning began, the panelists toyed with the subject the way that a cat plays with a mouse before finally dispatching it. Of course, sometimes even a slightly damaged mouse can get away from an overconfident cat.

When the round ended, McCaskey was prompted to reveal the breadth and depth of her secret. Producing a large metal carpenter's saw and violin bow from beneath the console, where it had been stashed several hours before, she proceeded to demonstrate how she became a champion musical saw player, currently ranked second in the world. Host Dwyer felt the need to lean back a bit during part of her demonstration, owing to a sense of self-preservation and the urge to keep his head attached to his neck. The bowed saw produced an eerie tone or two, similar to a theremin or perhaps a UFO.

During the next commercial/primping break, Dwyer and McCaskey crossed over to stage right, where the curtain was drawn and a stool was produced, and she sat down. Light meters were produced, camera movements were run through and ten minutes later the audience enthusiastically welcomed everyone back for the closing.

Dwyer said a few words of reintroduction and invited McCaskey to perform a tune to close the show. As the first few notes of the "Star Spangled Banner" rung out, an uncharacteristic thing happened on the sound stage: cast, crew and audience all froze and became absolutely silent, the better to hear the unfamiliar and fascinating sound, and all eyes were turned to watch the girl wearing her signature purple glove.

The panelists seemed uncertain as to how to react at first, until they realized that one among them would have the answer. It was Bean that stood up and put his hand over his heart, just like he had done at the start of every workday for many seasons. Even while chuckling at the surrealism of the National Anthem being performed on an item that could be found at practically any construction site, Bean's fellow panelists followed suit.

Dwyer, however, decided that he should sing along, which is usually acceptable, but only if you know most of the words. This time, as sometimes happens even with professional vocalists in times of stress (such as singing in front of 60,000 baseball fans), Dwyer forgot the words. Trying to make the best of it, Dwyer unsuccessfully attempted to improvise some lyrics, while McCaskey played in earnest. This juxtaposition caused some chortling among audience members, but the show went on. At the end of the tune, Dwyer did his usual closing and the applause swelled and died back down.

At this point, a tall fellow with light curly hair, who had been standing in the shadows for most of the day sauntered easily across the set toward Dwyer, his hands in his pockets. It was Burt Dubrow, the Executive Producer. Even from across the set, the look on Dwyer's face belied the fact that he knew what was about to be said. Evidently Dubrow could read Dwyer easily, and what appeared to be a casually slow, diplomatic series of suggestions were made to the host, whose head had already begun to nod culpably.

Dubrow had come by his easy-going attitude honestly. A veteran television producer of such phenomena as The Mike Douglas Show, he is also the fellow that brought two relative unknowns into the living rooms of America: Sally Jesse Raphael and a local news commentator named Jerry Springer. Success didn't come instantly to Dubrow, however. He got his start as road manager for "Buffalo Bob" Smith, better known as Howdy Doody's creator. This first gig fueled a long-time passion for collecting television, and especially ventriloquism, memorabilia and kinescopes of old shows. Not only has Dubrow won multiple Emmy and Cable ACE awards, he seems to know what people want to see on their small screens, producing "The New Tom Green Show" for MTV and "Alf's Hit Talk Show" for Nickelodeon, as well. One might scoff, but ratings don't lie: "Alf's" was renewed, and more episodes were ordered.

As Dubrow strolled back toward his corner of the shadows, rolling his eyes slightly but looking satisfied, Dwyer gritted his teeth and, grinning a nervous grin, offered his mea culpas to the audience, vowing not to try to sing again, to scattered applause from the crew. The second take of the Star Spangled Banner was flawless and even awe-inspiring, leaving the audience on their feet, cheering and applauding wildly along with the stunned crew, even more so than before. Barely audibly over the raucous crowd was an unrecognizable voice saying "Play Ball." Bean was suspected. Dwyer thanked everyone and did his usual closing again, leaving an aura of satisfaction emanating from Dubrow's part of the shadows.

McCaskey had intended to perform the same song that had helped propel her to the lofty heights of musical sawyership, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." When Dubrow's production company attempted to buy single-use rights to the tune they discovered that it would run "a couple of thousand dollars," which could help explain Harold Arlen's descendants' smiles. McCaskey was persuaded to use something in the public domain. "Danny Boy" is perhaps the quintessential musical saw tune, but it was determined that it would not leave a single dry eye in the house. "We're looking for something a little more upbeat," suggested Neta-Le, and the ever-inspiring SSB was selected.

"OK, Bil, let's get some of the fill-ins," commanded the Voice of the Almighty. "Let's start with the 'yesses.'" The studio monitors showed a tight shot of Dwyer, looking slightly off to stage left, toward the panelists.

"Yes."

"Mmmhmm, yeah..."

"YES!"

About every three seconds he would do it again.

"Yes! Right!"

"Yeah, you could say that, yes."

"Uh-huh, yeah."

He was starting to get a little giddy about it.



Esquivel, Bean, DeCaro, Taylor and Westenhoefer — more cutting up than Jack the Ripper

“Yes.”

“Yes!”

“YES!”

“OH, YES, YES!”

“HELL YES!”

The Almighty cut him off right at the border of “When Harry Met Sally” territory.

“OK, fine, thanks, Bil. How about the ‘no’s, now?”

“Sure. I mean, no.”

“Noooooooo.”

“Nope.”

“No, I’m sorry, no.”

“Ooooo, (inhaling through clenched teeth), no, sorry.”

“Well....no, huh-uh.”

“No.”

“Ok, thanks, Bil, got it,” spake the Almighty. This routine was repeated after each episode. These shots could be inserted into the show as needed during the editing process. Since the host and panelists have a complete wardrobe change after each show, a lack of continuity would be jarring to the viewers.

Also a part of the cast, the audience was prompted by Esquivel and the often-dour Floor Manager to give their all in terms of sound fill-ins. Furiously prompting with hand signals and flashing signs, they put the crowd through their paces, making the applause rise and fall into crescendos and crashes, washing over the departing panelists like audible surf.

During the wardrobe break before the day’s final episode, an audience member located Esquivel in his corner of the shadows, and introduced himself, asking if he was *the* Gilbert Esquivel.

The Gilbert Esquivel’s face lit up as though his wet fingers had just found the 220 volt circuit that he had been looking for. The audience member complimented Esquivel on his body of comedy work, and began, haltingly, to ask for an autograph (for his son of course.) Then he realized that Esquivel was no longer there. Momentarily taken aback by this sudden desertion, he was equally startled when Esquivel instantly reappeared directly in front of him and was pressing an object into his hand. It was his newest DVD, a live show at a Los Angeles-area comedy club.

“Give this to him, man!” said The Gilbert Esquivel, still grinning from ear to ear. The audience member was visibly befuddled now, but somehow managed to squeak out the autograph request that he had originally intended. “Sure, man, what do you want it to say?”

A suitable inscription for the DVD was arranged, hands were shaken, backs were patted and both parties walked away, evidently equally pleased with the encounter.

Meanwhile, McCaskey, basking in her moment backstage, was invited to slip into the studio audience to witness the taping of the next show. Now, suddenly no longer an abject rookie, she casually shrugged and said “Sure.” She had hesitated approximately one nanosecond before responding. Perkins itself, personified as a Production Assistant, first led her past the groaning Calorie Table backstage, pausing while

the newly-minted pro glommed a heaping mittfull of gummy worms, and then “loaded her into” the second row of the audience, in between Bob Jung and the Featherstones.

The applause signs flashed, The Gilbert Esquivel whipped the crowd into another frenzy of applause, and then another delay was announced. It was short-lived, however, but not so short that Jung couldn’t get off another crack about FujiTV. The panelists, now clad in their fourth set of clothes that day, entered and, sensing the delay, began to cavort to the music that Esquivel had cranked up, engaging in some cutting up, clowning, off-color gestures and dirty dancing. It seemed to come quite naturally to them. Suddenly the music was cut off, and they took up their appointed stations.



The panel’s dirty dancing at halftime

The cycle began anew: Dwyer made his entrance, hit his marks, crossed over to the panel, some witty bantering ensued and he returned to his console to introduce the next contestant. It was Lori Barghini. As the “clue” for Barghini’s segment, a small, velvet bag was passed to the panel, with instructions not to take anything out of the bag, but to place their hand inside and feel around. Much mayhem resulted, with the product eventually exiting the bag only to be stuck onto DeCaro’s head like two nascent horns. Host Dwyer eventually placed a pair of the synthetic nipples beneath his shirt when no one was looking, only to reveal them after the second contestant’s appearance.

“Banana George” Blair was born in Toledo, Ohio in January of 1915, and he hasn’t looked back since, except to say that he has enjoyed it all. Every darned bit of it, from his days as a banker, baby photographer and drummer (“played with Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington, too”) to his current standing as the “World’s Oldest Barefoot Water Skier.”

Just about everyone in the United States and a lot of the world has seen Blair doing something noteworthy, usually wearing his trademark “Chiquita Banana” yellow outfit. His appearances in print media include such diverse outlets as Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, Time, USA Today, Auto Week, Smoke, Transworld Snowboarding, Ski, National Scholastic News, the Wall Street Journal, Men’s Health, AARP, Prevention and Reader’s Digest. His television commercials include sponsors as far-flung as Armor All, Nike, Chevy Malibu, Cheerios, the Florida



McCaskey and “Banana George” Blair

Lottery and the “New York State Visiting Nurses,” according to his business card, which is the size of a postcard. Names like Brokaw, Letterman, Oprah, Povich, Dr. Ruth, Regis & Kathy, Bill Cosby, Linkletter and Ripley are like scalps hanging from his belt. He has also been seen on television in the UK, Canada, France, the USSR (which even he outlasted), Japan, China, Gibraltar and Turkey.

Lest anyone think of him as some sort of elderly one-trick pony, Blair also loves to enumerate his other pursuits, and the age that he tried it for the first time: Barefoot water skiing, age 40; flying solo, 53; camel riding, 68; snowboarding, 75; race car driving, 81; skydiving, 82; surfing, 83. Learning to ride a bull at age 85 was the one that left him the most sore. “No padding, nothin’” he said, nostalgically rubbing his backside, indicating that it might still be sore six years later. He was in the Cypress Gardens, FL water ski show for 38 years.

Fielding the panel’s questions as diplomatically as when he was the mayor of Cypress Gardens, Blair kept everyone in the house amused. Perhaps thinking back to the previous contestant’s product, one of the panelists asked if his secret involved and “special equipment.” Blair charmed them with “Well, I guess everyone could always use more equipment, eh?” This brought applause and howls of laughter from the crowd.

Billy Bean, in a nod to television’s “Golden Age,” asked if the equipment was “bigger than a breadbox,” Steve Allen’s oft-used line. It wasn’t.

“I’ve had the most fantastic, fun life,” stated Blair bluntly, and it was pretty clear that he intended to go on making it even more so.

A videotape of Blair doing several activities that would scare the hair off of anyone’s mother was presented on the huge studio monitor, and the crowd bellowed their approval. “Banana George” was escorted off of the set while clasping his hands high over his head, as though he had just knocked out Jermaine Taylor – the *other* Jermaine Taylor.

The final segment brought a visitation by the Mauldin brothers, whose pinstriped suits might have misdirected the panel’s questioning if their tieless long collar points and thick-as-molasses accents hadn’t spoken volumes about them. Their demonstration of their turkey calling, strutting and posturing talents wowed the audience.

“I’ve made two turkeys,” announced Don Featherstone quietly to his adjacent audience members. He concurred that it could lead to some humorous misunderstandings during turkey season.

The Brothers’ big finish ended with them clambering atop the panel’s console and doing what wild turkeys do right in their faces.

Another round of fill-ins with Dwyer was followed by some quick promotional spots for the Dish and Game Show Networks, with some quite colorful asides by Dwyer and the panelists, undoubtedly to be edited out later. The audience was also led through their fill-in paces, this time without Esquivel, who had to scurry off to another gig across town. It was after 7 pm, and his



“real” job was about to start, as if he hadn’t wrung himself out already today.

The contestants were led out of Studio 7, weaving their way through a maze of Porsches and other less noteworthy cars and back toward the Green Room for one last visit. Some of them paused for a moment in front of Stage 4, where another production had wrapped and its set was being struck with extreme prejudice. Large forklifts were tearing great chunks out of it, picking them up and unceremoniously dumping them into a waiting line of huge dumpsters, with a resounding crash. *Sic transit Gloria*.

While costumes were being changed out of and belongings and props gathered, the various contestants exchanged contact information and offered each other encouragement and handshakes. Draper Mauldin had an impromptu orthopedic consultation with Bob Jung, evidently not as retired as previously thought. Steve McGranahan offered to help out the Brothers with both body building and career building. McCaskey was evidently the least “professional” of the lot; not in her abilities, but in her readiness to cash in on them. She had no business cards, websites, books, “How To” CDs, endorsements, sponsors, imprinted t-shirts or any representation. Even the Mauldin Brothers had an agent, “M.A.C Management, 1800 Century Park East, Suite 600, Los Angeles, Ca” – not bad for a couple of good ol’ boys. McCaskey would remedy within a few days.

On the way out of town, McCaskey stopped for a quick meal before hitting the long road north, selecting the Mel’s Drive In half a block off of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. While awaiting the arrival of her avocado burger – doesn’t everyone in Hollywood eat like this? — she decided it was time to remove her makeup. She spent more than twenty minutes in the ladies’ room, scrubbing, scraping and prying off the heavy layers of pancake. Although made to resemble a long-time local fixture, Mel’s Drive In had only been in this location for about four years, according to the cashier. It had been carved out of another building that had been reclaimed, leaving only its beautiful stone and aluminum façade. Ironically, McCaskey was removing her makeup in the former Max Factor building.

As she drove toward the freeway, the scene in the rearview mirror was that of tents, scaffolding and acres of red carpeting being readied for the Oscar broadcast in just a few days.

Did the panelists manage to divine McCaskey’s mystery? As luck would have it, among the hundreds of lines of tiny type on her contract with Burt Dubrow Productions, there lurks a clause forbidding her to reveal such matters under threat of a hefty financial penalty (“... I agree that One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) is a reasonable estimate of the amount of damages BDP and GSN are likely to suffer in the event that I breach this paragraph...”) This would represent about one hundred times her compensation for appearing – not a good deal. At least until the show airs, tight-lipped McCaskey can still claim “I’ve Got A Secret.”



McCaskey, McGranahan, Jung and Dwyer pause between shows