

# "Tracey Takes On..." Season 3 Episode Guide, Review and Commentary

## Part 1: Episodes 1 through 5

Compiled by Roger Reini ([roger@rreini.com](mailto:roger@rreini.com))

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This is a detailed episode guide to, review of, and commentary on episodes 1 through 5 of the third season of TRACEY TAKES ON ..., the award-winning HBO series starring Tracey Ullman. Sprinkled throughout the guide are my commentaries and reviews of the various episodes, sketches and bits.

### OTHER EPISODE GUIDES

Episode guides to other seasons can be found at <http://www.rreini.com/tracey/>, as can a concise episode guide for all seasons (no commentary, one-line descriptions of sketches).

Episodes are listed in the order of their original airdate on HBO.

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## 1. Marriage (Jan 04 1998)

*OPENING:* Tracey describes what she wanted in a husband (an older Cockney tape, a la Michael Caine, who's ready to settle down), and she found him in Allan McKeown. We are then taken back, via home video, to their wedding ceremony, which was enlivened by a "Groucho-gram" sent by a friend of theirs. But "Groucho", aware of all the producers and big shots there, would not leave. She wanted to give "Groucho" a "Harpo-gram" at *his* wedding, with plenty of horn toots!

*COMMENT:* That "Harpo-gram" would have been a sight to see!

### *SHORT BITS:*

Chic doesn't have a problem with gay marriages so much as a problem with marriage in general. For marriage requires that you have sex with your spouse, and only your spouse, for the rest of your life, and that's unnatural!

*COMMENT:* I'm not surprised to hear this from Chic. But I admire his honesty in implying he wouldn't be able to honor marriage vows, so he wouldn't make them in the first place.

Hope is the maid of honor at her best friend Toby's wedding, and she's somewhat put off by the fancy traditional ceremony and her "let's pretend I'm Barbie" dress. When she gets married, she wants to have the ceremony in the tropical rain forest, surrounded by nature, where the reception

will consist of giving rice and other food to the local indigenous people (who will have been invited to the ceremony, of course). But they'll honeymoon in Paris...

**COMMENT:** She's not dumb <g>! This got the biggest laugh of the evening from me.

#### *LONGER SKETCH:*

The scene: the prison at San Quentin -- Death Row, to be exact. Convicted serial killer Kurt Allan Rasmussen is being visited by his attorney, Sydney Kross. Rasmussen is definitely a nutcase (he has an American flag tattooed on his forehead, and he disposed of his mother's remains in a most gruesome way), but Sydney knows how to handle him. She's preparing his appeal to the governor for clemency, and she wants to find a way to humanize him to improve his chances. Is he married? No -- but he does have a pen pal, Kay Clark. Sydney comes up with the idea that Kay should marry Rasmussen. Kay is understandably reluctant to do this, but Sydney convinces her to give it a try, through the force of her personality (and of her hands around Kay's neck). So it's off to San Quentin (just like *Thelma & Louise*, except they don't drive off a cliff) to meet Rasmussen. Kay's put in a very uncomfortable position, so she says no. Rasmussen understands; he doesn't hold it against her. He doesn't deserve her, he says; she should marry a king, who's not in prison. This is the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me, says Kay. She will marry him after all! The ceremony is a rather touching affair -- except that there wasn't any touching, since bride and groom were separated by a security partition. Under the circumstances, there's no honeymoon -- and there won't be anything else, for Rasmussen's clemency has been denied. It's the gas chamber for him now. But Kay requests a last moment alone with her husband, and she does something she's never done before: she gives him his first (and last) glimpse of her breasts. He'll take that last memory into the Afterlife. Poor Kay -- bride to widow in less than 24 hours.

**COMMENT:** This was a very interesting sketch. Although it ended on a downbeat note with Rasmussen's death, it was still pretty good. I'd consider it to be a contender for the season-ending "best of" special. Who would have thought that Sydney could control a psychotic serial killer like that? Hm -- could Sydney be a little close to the edge herself? We know she likes to eat raw meat for that killer instinct in the courtroom (see last season). And she did fantasize about committing murder (also see last season). The wedding ceremony was touchingly awkward (or awkwardly touching, I'm not sure which). The gas chamber scene was poignant yet not without humor (the bosom-baring and Rasmussen's reaction to same). Will Kay **ever** get -- and keep -- a man? But we must give her credit for finding a way to quiet Sydney: describing Mother's ailments in excruciating detail (I don't want to know what that doorstep is composed of).

#### *SHORT BIT:*

Erin and her manager (Mo Gaffney) discuss marriage and rock & roll being a bad mix (or was that her last album which had a bad mix?). Your typical rock star will abandon his family and run off with a supermodel, and after he gets out of rehab, he wants to get back with his old lady, except she's probably run off with a bigger rock star. This is why Erin will never marry a musician. But she did marry her first drummer, on Fiji (Stephen Stills lost a toe to a rattlesnake).

**COMMENT:** What would Erin do without her manager? I'm curious to know what she was like before the incident which screwed up her head.

### *LONGER SKETCH:*

Ruby's settling in for a night of TV-watching when there's a knock on the door. It's Milou, a Filipina woman. No, she's not delivering carryout, she's Buddy's mail-order bride! Ruby is surprised; she had no idea Buddy had done this. But Milou has the bill to prove it: \$3400. Buddy's not home, says Ruby; he's joined up with a separatist group, the Army of Armageddon, and is in their besieged compound. Ruby questions Milou's motives but will allow her to sleep on the couch (she unplugs the phone and takes it with her, just in case). When morning breaks, what was a messy house has become spic and span, thanks to Milou! And she's fixed a hot breakfast for Ruby and proceeds to give her a foot massage. Maybe Milou isn't so bad after all, thinks Ruby. She'll take her to Buddy. They drive to the besieged compound, where only one officer, FBI agent Ivan Hamel, is on duty. No need for the full SWAT team approach here; just cut off the power and sewer and let events take their course. Ruby tries to coax Buddy out, but she's having little luck. Meanwhile, Milou and Ivan are becoming **very** friendly. Ruby gets Buddy to come out by singing the Tasty Bread song (as a boy, he appeared in Tasty Bread advertising). Turns out he's not wearing any clothes. And it also turns out he's not going to be a husband; Milou now loves Ivan. So Ruby tells him to send the \$5000 to her (note how she raised the price). Hm -- this mail-order bride business could become an interesting racket.

**COMMENT:** Ruby's not dumb, either. We see her prejudices showing when she takes the phone with her and gives Milou a hard time, but we also see her lay them aside when she sees how useful Milou can be around the house (those must be great foot massages!). Her son Buddy's been dealt some bad cards in life, but she still loves him and cares for him. There were a couple of lines in this sketch that got a big laugh out of me, but decency prevents me from mentioning them here.

At LAX airport security, a newlywed couple is passing through the metal detectors. The bride sets off the alarm. Security guard Sheneesha Turner tells her to empty her pockets (she has none) and take off her ring and go through again. No problems this time. This proves the ring was cheap, says Sheneesha, for 24K gold would not have set it off. At the same time, the groom's luggage contains a suspicious item. It turns out to be a cordless massager, which could have some other uses (as a sex toy, perhaps?). Sheneesha then proceeds to give them some advice on love (using the example of her husband and herself) before sending them on their way (but she still razzes him about the cheap ring).

**COMMENT:** This is Sheneesha's first appearance in the series (not counting the opening performance of "They Don't Know"). She is black. She's the first black character Tracey has done since the third season of "The Tracey Ullman Show", where she portrayed Carol, one of the riders stuck on a subway train. I'm not sure what to think of Sheneesha yet. She may turn out OK.

### *SHORT BITS:*

Trevor tells how he and Barry were considering going to Hawaii to get married, until the legal climate changed there. So, they made do with a ceremony in their backyard in England, where it rained (not unexpectedly). No roasted pig at the luau, but they did put pineapple rings on the sausages and watch "My Best Friend's Wedding" afterwards. This prompts a fantasy about Rupert Everett (shame on you, Trevor; you're a married man).

**COMMENT:** I hope we can look forward to someday learning how Trevor and Barry met

Linda begins to describe her marriages. Number one was to glazier (glass-repairer) Earl Rheat, who decided he didn't want to be married to a working woman. Number two was to choreographer Troy Wilson, who learned on the honeymoon that he was a latent homosexual. By the time they returned to the Burbank, he was no longer latent and got arrested after taking liberties with a baggage handler. Those divorces went well. Number three, retired furrier Carl Harrison, sold Linda's jewelry and spend the proceeds on overweight Filipina prostitutes. This divorce didn't go well; he had to be bodily evicted by George Peppard and Dirk Benedict (of "The A-Team" fame). Oops, out of time -- but she's only gone up to 1981!

**COMMENT:** I'd like to hear the rest of the story myself sometime.

**LOST BIT:** The episode guides available online (at [HBO's Web site](#) and [TTO's Web site](#)) mention a bit featuring Fern, where she doesn't want to talk about marriage because of the tragic end of her marriage to Harry. According to these guides, something will happen to Harry in a future episode, which may explain why this bit's been excised from this episode. It may turn up in a future video release, however.

**OVERALL COMMENTS** (Jan. 5, 1998): This was an interesting episode to start off the season. There weren't many belly laughs tonight, but there were a number of smaller laughs and a few sly "a-ha's". The sketch featuring Kay was very bittersweet; she finds love, only to have it snatched away from her permanently by death. Ruby's sketch was interesting in concept (so was Kay and Sydney's).

There seems to be a common theme with season-kickoffs -- the first season began with "Romance", the second season started with "Sex", and this season began with "Marriage". What can we look forward to next year -- "Babies"? "Children"? "Divorce"?

When looking at this season's episode summaries, one character is conspicuously absent: Virginia Bugge, wife of now-former British Cabinet minister Timmy (due to the 1997 election which voted Labour in and the Conservatives out). Might Timmy be a former MP as well? We'll never know -- not this season, at least.

## **2. Hollywood (Jan 11 1998)**

**OPENING:** Tracey tells us how she, like many Britons, enjoy the sunshine of southern California (witness what it did to David Hockney's art). Then she is discussing some of the famous relics of old Hollywood, such as the Rexall drug store, which is now a video store. Then there's the Max Factor museum with its extensive toupee collection -- but sadly, that's closed down too (now she's depressed).

**COMMENT:** I won't even mention her thoughts on Veronica Lake!

### **THE STORY:**

We see a cab in New York City. In the back of the cab is Penny Marshall (herself), who is reviewing a film script. Driving the cab is Chic. He recognizes her from his earliest days in America, when he was learning English (he especially remembers the "L" on the tops she wore

on "Laverne and Shirley"). He wants to know how he can get into the business. You gotta have a hot property or know someone, she tells him. His cousin in North Hollywood once laid carpet for David Hasselhoff, so he's in (ha ha)! "Do movies with great parts for women," she tells him. Chic already has a great part for women (ha ha), but she declines the invitation. When she leaves, she's forgotten her script....

...so Chic is off to Hollywood with a hot property! As he leaves the airport, he encounters two young ladies. Do you want to be in my movie, he asks? Show me your tits! And they do! So it's off to his Maserati (sure)...

**COMMENT:** It's nice to be a producer!

Meanwhile, Fern Rosenthal has also flown into town. As the winner of the Loving Hair contest (Miss Sorrento with brass bands), she's won a guest appearance on "Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman." But she's disappointed by the van sent by the production staff; she was expecting a limo. And she doesn't want to sit in back, and she's got a sore shoulder, etc.

**COMMENT:** Picky, picky....

Meanwhile, Huell Hauser is interviewing Ruby Romaine for a documentary. Given her long career in Hollywood, she's bound to have many stories. She points out the spot where the subway diggers caused parts of Hollywood Blvd. to cave in, and she questions the ancestry of Claudette Colbert. They stop at the famous Musso & Frank Grill to wet their whistles....

**COMMENT:** Once again, we see things to like and dislike about Ruby. When she's talking about the cave-in, she refers to the Hispanic laborers in an uncomplimentary way. Then when she's talking about Claudette Colbert, she's the knowledgeable, ego-bursting woman who's seen it all. Tracey has said (on the Rosie O'Donnell show) that she'd like to feature Ruby in a movie someday. I say go for it!

Meanwhile, Chic has found Mrs. Noh Nang Ning's donut shop. He's admiring the photos of the stars on the walls. Shannen Doherty? She was discovered right in her shop! (sure) She shows him a picture of Arnold Schwarzenegger in his "T2" role. It's not signed? No problem, she signs it right there: "To Mrs. Noh --Hasta la donut, baby! Mr. Freeze." Chic leaves, but he didn't buy anything, not after seeing that cockroach have a baby on a cream donut. Mrs. Noh is extremely upset; she runs a clean establishment. After they trade insults, she runs him off. "Foreigners!" she says in disgust. Besides, that was no cockroach, that was a fly....

**COMMENT:** "Hasta la donut, baby" indeed! It's funny how she ridicules Chic as a foreigner, for she's not native, herself. However, she is patriotic -- why else would she call her shop "Yankee Doodle Donuts"?

Meanwhile, on the set of "Dr. Quinn", Fern is continuing to carp. Lose the glasses, remove the lipstick, put on the bonnet -- it's too much. She goes over to Jane Seymour's trailer and complains. One of the crew pulls Fern away and leads her to her scene. She's told she'll be ladling water to the children, water which is contaminated. She doesn't care for this at all, as it'll show the Jews in a bad light again. She also doesn't care for the bonnet she's supposed to wear, for it'll cover up her contest-winning hair.

**COMMENT:** She's really out of her element here -- never satisfied with anything. A demanding extra -- now that's a contradiction in terms.

Meanwhile, Chic is walking down the street (in Hollywood?) when we see a car pull up. It's Sydney Kross. She likes what she sees. Can she give him a lift to Candy Casino's office? Sure she can. Might a love connection be in the making?

**COMMENT:** Chic's comment (which I won't repeat here) is hilarious!

Meanwhile, the documentary crew is filming near Joan Crawford's old house. Ruby used to work for Joan as an on-call makeup artist. Yes, she saw some of the things that went on there (the "Mommie Dearest" events), but she sided with Joan. After all, she was the one who signed the checks. This must be near Candy Casino's office, as Sydney drops off Chic. He and Ruby don't get along very well.

**COMMENT:** A moral dilemma -- to help the kids or keep the job. Ruby chose the job. It makes you think to yourself "What would I have done had I been in that situation?"

Meanwhile, Chic makes a call on agent "Candy" Casino (Seymour Cassel), who used to be a client of Chic's in his drug-dealing days (recall the "1976" episode). Candy's in a very important meeting (a foot treatment being given by an attractive young woman), but he does take care of his former drug dealers (even the one who's running a studio!). He gives Chic a ticket to the Lady Legends of Hollywood award show taking place that evening, and he tells him to get a nice tux. Chic returns the favor by giving some advice of his own (watch out for the bubble gum!).

**COMMENT:** Candy had a nice line -- "I don't do anything I like anymore"

Meanwhile, back at the ranch -- er, the "Dr. Quinn" set, Fern's scene is ready to shoot. She ladles the water like a good Jewish mother. Unfortunately, she wasn't supposed to speak, so the take is ruined. On the next tape, everything goes well until Joe Lando (himself), in character as "Sully", runs into the scene to knock the ladle from Fern's hands. She screws up again by tipping the water barrell on Joe and ruining his buckskins. Something has to be done: another extra will ladle the water, and Fern will go over by the saloon -- **way** over by the saloon. She doesn't care for the treatment she's receiving and quits in a huff.

**COMMENT:** Let's be honest -- she kinda deserved the treatment she was getting.

Meanwhile, Ruby and crew are at the base of the Hollywood sign. She says that the most popular letter to jump off from to kill oneself is the "D". She makes more uncomplimentary references to Mexicans. What will the crew be able to salvage?

Meanwhile, Chic (now wearing a nice tux) visits Sydney's place. The look is basic black, and the room is dominated by a portrait of Sydney done in the style of Andy Warhol's famous portrait of Marilyn Monroe. Where's Sydney? In the bathtub, taking a bubble bath. She's got the hots for Chic. The movers and shakers will come later, she says, so let's enjoy ourselves beforehand. Never one to turn down an opportunity, Chic undresses. But he has to coax "himself" into being ready; normally, that's a given. Soon, Sydney reveals that there aren't any big shots coming; it's just him and her. Chic wants no part of this (he compares her unfavorably to the La Brea Tar Pits) and leaves.

**COMMENT:** This was a hilarious, raunchy scene!

Meanwhile, at the awards show, Linda Granger has arrived with Candy as her escort. Melissa Rivers (herself) is interviewing Linda, who's there to explain the voting procedures. In the middle of her discussing the various ribbons she's wearing, everyone's attention is diverted by the

arrival of Courteney Cox. End of interview.

**COMMENT:** There should be a rainbow ribbon. Since it contains every color, the one ribbon would serve for every cause.

Meanwhile, Chic arrives to take his seat. It turns out that his ticket is for seat-warmers, who fill in the empty seats in the theater. He fills in the seat next to Joan Van Ark (herself) and proceeds to hit on her. She leaves.

**COMMENT:** I'm not surprised.

Meanwhile, the ceremony has begun. Backstage, on a monitor in the makeup room, Linda is giving her explanation of the voting procedures. Ruby's comment: "collagen city", referring to Linda's lips. She's doing Jane Seymour's hair. Jane (not herself -- voiced by Tracey) gets up and leaves, but Ruby was still working on her hair, so a long chunk of it was left behind. Hm, you can get good money for some European hair...

Meanwhile, Sydney calls security at the venue. She says there's a terrorist with a bomb in an envelope and identifies Chic as the terrorist. "Nobody doesn't f\*\*\* Sydney Kross and get away with it!"

**COMMENT:** Psycho Sydney gets ready to strike....

Meanwhile, Chic is trying to interest Erik Estrada (himself) in his hot property. Just then, security arrives and removes Chic from the theater. It seems he's had problems like this before; he makes it a point to stay 10 blocks away from the World Trade Center. The theater empties in a panic. Linda and Erik almost have a love connection. And Bea Arthur is missing....

**COMMENT:** the one-liners and references are flying in this scene -- "no such thing as overblown" (hoo boy), the Trade Center remark, etc.

Meanwhile, Sydney's holding an impromptu press conference. Chic's property was destroyed by the bomb squad. She's representing him in his action against the city, state, the awards committee, and the anonymous tipster. Hooray for Hollywood!

**COMMENT:** What gall to sue the "anonymous tipster" -- for we know she was the tipster!

**OVERALL COMMENTS** (Jan. 13, 1998): This was a wonderful episode. The unified format of bringing the characters together and interweaving their storylines really opens up the possibilities. The Las Vegas episode from the second season did just that, and I considered it one of the best of the season. I have a feeling this will be true of the Hollywood episode

### **3. Smoking (Jan 18 1998)**

**OPENING:** Tracey describes how she started smoking at a young age but had to kick the habit when she arrived in California. Why? There are no ashtrays in the whole state! Alitalia Airlines doesn't have that problem -- the "no smoking" sign goes off almost as soon as the plane takes off!

**COMMENT:** Personally, I've never seen the appeal in smoking.

**SHORT BITS:**

We see Hope in a restroom stall, sneaking a smoke. She's mortified that she's been caught, but

she 'fesses up to her habit. Yes, she has a monkey on her back, and its name is Newport 100's. Why, she's now up to two smokes per semester!

**COMMENT:** Hope, the tobacco fiend <g>! Let's be honest -- two cigarettes a semester does not a habit make.

Mrs. Noh Nang Ning really likes Joe Camel (the now-banned mascot for Camel cigarettes). Why, she even put a poster of his in the window of her shop, so all the schoolchildren would see it. No, she wouldn't give them cigarettes; that's illegal. She puts nicotine in the donuts....

**COMMENT:** Now that's a very intriguing idea: nicotine donuts! You've got nicotine patches and nicotine gum, so why not nicotine donuts? They can clog your arteries **and** destroy your airways at the same time! I'm amazed somebody hasn't thought of this before.

#### LONG SKETCHES:

Kay asks her co-worker Darnetta if she knows where one can buy marijuana -- for medicinal purposes for Mother, of course. Her doctor won't prescribe it for her. Darnetta does not know, proving that Jamaicans don't necessarily know where to find good ganja. But Kay's not discouraged; she goes to a seedy bar in the barrio, looking for Carlos, who'd done some work for her in the past. The patrons are reluctant to help, but Kay reassures them; she's not with the INS, and she's not pregnant. Carlos (Cheech Marin) emerges from hiding (can't be too careful). She tells him her plans. He's surprised (especially by the fact that Mother's still alive) and somewhat impressed. He'll get her some good pot. Later, at Kay's home, he delivers the goods. But is the stuff any good? Guess she'll have to try some (and so will he). He thinks it's good stuff. But will this first puff lead Kay down the road to ruin? We don't know that. But we do know that before long, Carlos and Kay are having a great time, playing and/or massacring "I Am The Walrus". It's not long afterwards that Kay puts a turkey in the oven; she's got the munchies. This leads to more massacring. Unfortunately, she forgets about the turkey, which catches fire. The fire department comes and puts it out; the police arrive and confiscate the pot and take Carlos away (he's an illegal alien). Some time later, at the Mexican border, Kay crosses back into the country after ostensibly researching alternative medical treatments for Mother in Tijuana. She's only brought back a few souvenirs -- and Carlos, riding in the trunk. She wants him to build a tall fence to hide her new crop....

**COMMENT:** This was a pretty good sketch; it might even be a contender for the best-of special. Kay can be very surprising at times. You wouldn't think of her as a fan of action films and special effects movies or Joseph Wambaugh (all of which we learned last season). Now she's become a small-time coyote (illegal alien smuggler) and dope grower -- but it's for Mother, of course. The vamping on "I Am The Walrus" was absolutely hilarious -- "I'm starving". In keeping with the altered perceptions, that scene was filmed with a lens that distorted the image.

Linda Granger is addressing another group of recovering addicts. What they're recovering from is never mentioned, but nearly everyone in the crowd is smoking. Linda describes how all of her problems stemmed from that first cigarette she smoked in high school. Flash back to 1950-something and a small-town high school (Sammy Davis Jr. Senior High School, to be exact). Linda Wartkowski is the new girl in school, and she's getting a hard time from her classmates. But it's Johnno to the rescue. He asks if she smokes; she doesn't. There's always a first time, he tells her, and he gives her her first smoke. There's always a first time for a lot of things .... Later,



we see Linda Warton (she hasn't settled on a stage name yet) getting on the bus to New York. She's going to try and make it on Broadway. We see Linda Wainscott in a dance studio, auditioning for Bob Rosse (Joseph Malone). He thinks she's in need of some personal guidance.... some **very** personal guidance.... Cut to Rossi's bedroom, where he and Linda have had a wild evening of sex and cocaine. But she has to leave before his wife comes home -- but before she does, she'll take those pills to bring her down from the coke. She then strikes out for Hollywood for Linda Westlake, but it's more of the same. There are pills for everything. One time, she actually passes out. Luckily for her, it's in the lap of an ABC programming executive, who signs her up for "VIP Lounge". Stardom beckons at last for Linda Granger ("Granger" comes from Granger DeLisle, hairdresser, confidante and coke dealer). We see her at the height of her career (illustrated by scenes from the 1976 episode), and then we see where she ends up: freebasing with Richard Pryor the night he has his accident. Then she gets cancer, which proves to be the motivation she needed to kick her other habits. And she's been clean ever since -- mostly clean, at least. And she blames it all on that first cigarette that "Johnno" John Gotti gave her. She wants everyone in the room to put out their smokes. They don't want to, and they don't care for her suggestion. In fact, they chase her from the room.

**COMMENT:** I wasn't too keen on this sketch upon first viewing, but I find that I appreciated it more after seeing it again. This is more of an "interesting concept" sketch than a "loads of laughs" sketch, but it does provide a valuable insight into who Linda is and where she came from. It also allowed us to see some more of Joseph Malone's choreography.

Ruby is applying the finishing touches to the woman who is playing "corpse number 2." As she finishes, Ruby lights up a cigarette. The woman asks her to put it out, as the smoke will ruin her voice (she sings in a production of "Rent"). Ruby puts it out. She tries to light it up again later, but a crewperson directs her to put it out. She does. She goes to the toilet, but even there, she can't light up. Only when she arrives home is she able to light up in peace. She's going to finish that cigarette if it kills her. She pours herself a drink, then proceeds to go to the couch, cigarette and drink in hand. What a relaxing combination -- and soon, she's asleep. However, the cigarette is still lit. It drops from her hand, falls to the floor, and suddenly, the carpet begins to burn. Will the house go up in flames? In her quest to smoke in peace, will Ruby end up resting in peace? No; the drink glass falls, putting out the flame. Ruby will live to smoke and drink another day. And she may never know....

**COMMENT:** It is getting harder and harder to find a place to smoke nowadays! And the lengths some people will go to get their nicotine.... The toilet scene (most of which had been shown on the Rosie O'Donnell show a week earlier) was hilarious! On a more serious note, Ruby has to count her blessings, for she came *this* close to burning her house down. She got **very** lucky.

#### **SHORT BIT:**

Chic does not allow anyone to smoke in his cab. Period. No exceptions! He once rescued Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis from their disabled limo, but he put them out after they lit up some fancy cigars. And he threw out Halle Berry of his cab once for daring to light up. He doesn't want his cab to smell like camel dung!

**COMMENT:** He means business! I would not have figured him on being so gung-ho against smoking.

*LOST BIT:* Trevor tells about the deathbed request of his uncle Stan, who was a serious chain smoker.

*OVERALL COMMENTS:* One great sketch, a pretty good one, and an interesting one. Not bad.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said about the closed captioning. I'd turned it on so that I could catch some things I might have missed (like spellings of names). But I found so many misspellings, garbled words and missing words... I was shocked. Doesn't anyone proofread them before they're broadcast? It's not like they're being done on the fly on a live broadcast.

#### **4. Loss (Jan 25 1998)**

*OPENING:* Tracey tells the story of her dog Dottie making off with the remnant of Mabel's umbilical cord and enjoying it as a snack. It was devastating.

*COMMENT:* As a man, and as someone who's never been a parent, I may be unable to fully appreciate how devastating this could be. When a mother's gone to the trouble of saving such a special remnant of the physical link between her and her child, only to see it devoured by a stupid dog...

*SHORT BITS:*

Ruby describes the time she lost her remote control. She looked around for it but could not find it. But when she sat down in her Barcalounger, the channel changed. Yes, she was sitting on the remote. She was able to make the volume change, too, and fix the hue. But she's never been able to do that since....

*COMMENT:* I enjoyed her comment about how she looked high and low for the remote -- "mostly high."

Her Royal Highness meets the Rolling Stones. She observes that zombies in horror films have more color than they do. Everybody's lost things since the 60's (and not just teeth and hair) -- the royal family has lost the respect of the British public, and the band's lost Bill Wyman, who, according to HRH, is now a waiter at a burger bar (he owns it, actually). At one time, there were those who wanted the band publicly flogged to death ...

*COMMENT:* Having less color than zombies -- good line. Actually, one could confuse Keith Richards with a zombie (though he still plays a mean guitar).

Janie describes how an inadvertent mixing of anti-depressants led to the complete loss of sexual sensation -- a sexual root canal, as it were....

*COMMENT:* I don't even want to think about it!

*LONG SKETCH:*

Fern is enjoying being a grandmother. She's sitting poolside with Jobie (Julie Kavner), caring for her grandson while Harry is out golfing. I'm a golf widow, complains Fern. That's not real widowhood, counters Jobie; it's been four years since her husband Saulie passed away. You never know what you have until it's gone, she says. While Fern looks for a diaper for the baby, she receives a disturbing phone call from the golf course. Harry is missing and can't be found.

Leaving the baby with Jobie, Fern rushes to the golf course. Harry's clubs and shoes are there ... so is his hat, which was fished from the water ... there are footsteps leading to the water ... and Fern catches a brief glimpse of an alligator before it sinks into the water. There can be only one conclusion: Harry's been attacked and killed by an alligator! Fern is devastated, as you would expect. Several days pass. Fern's in bed, still overcome with her grief. The body has not yet been found, so she'll hold onto this slim hope. She's turned to pills to help her get through it, but they're no solution. Jobie suggests that Fern put on Harry's watch, as a constant reminder with him. That's how you can tell the widows -- they have the clunky wrists. The memorial service is held at the golf course, and it goes well. There is now a fence at the water line -- the Harry Rosenthal Memorial Fence. Now Fern begins the rest of her life....

**COMMENT:** When I first saw this segment, I thought it was quite poignant. The death of a spouse is a life-changing event (now there's an understatement). I saw what it did to my mother after my father passed away. Some can survive, others can't. I have a feeling Fern is going to be a survivor. The sketch is not without humor, especially poolside with the baby (what a way to look for diapers). But there's an aura of sadness throughout the sketch, as there should be. But is Harry truly dead? Stay tuned....

#### *SHORT BITS:*

Trevor's having his hair and mustache done, and he describes the results of a bad treatment: some of his hair fell out! Now he can appreciate what Barry goes through, as he's been consistently follicularly challenged. But it's not all bad; think of all the things that can be done with those hats....

Mrs. Noh observes how everyone is so interested in losing weight. Then why don't they try the solution in her homeland: swallow a worm. While passing through your system, it'll eat you from the inside out. If you pass the worm before you've lost enough weight, just pass it through again!

**COMMENT:** I don't think so!

Sheneesha isn't concerned about reports linking airport x-ray machines to impaired fertility. She's been at her job nine years, and he's had seven children. "Piece of [bleep]"

**COMMENT:** Well, there goes another contraceptive down the drain (so to speak)!

#### *LONG SKETCH:*

Rayleen's husband Mitch has died. While in costume on the set of *The Lost World*, he choked to death on a burrito. Rayleen is taking it hard, as you can expect. He was a good man to her. The hearse comes in, does a spin, ejecting the casket and stopping right on the mark. Always a pro, even in death. She bears the casket herself into the hall. During the service, Rayleen describes how she met Mitch at a dwarf-tossing contest. She won a clock radio and the man of her dreams, she says. When she's too overcome with emotion to continue, she has Linda Granger come up to sing a song written especially for the funeral. The song is in very questionable taste (though it's sung with good intentions). During the song, Rayleen talks to a little woman seated next to her. Her name is Raquel Gibson -- Mitch's first wife. More to the point, she's Mitch's legal wife. He never divorced Raquel when he walked out on her in Winnipeg. Rayleen's in a very precarious position. Raquel knows this -- and so does her attorney. As Mitch's legal survivor, she's entitled to everything. And she takes everything except for a pickup truck and half of Mitch's ashes.

Later, in a secluded spot, Rayleen plans her final tribute to her late "husband". With the help of special effects wizards, she puts the ashes into a rocket and launches it skyward. But something goes wrong, and the rocket returns to earth. It smashes right into the pickup truck! Now Rayleen has absolutely **nothing!**

**COMMENT:** Mitch may be dead, but the actor who played him, Danny Woodburn, is alive and well and starring in the new (for 1997) *Conan* TV series. That prevented him from continuing as Mitch, obviously. As for the segment itself, we see Rayleen demonstrating the patience of Job. By the end of the segment, she's literally lost *everything* -- her husband (and she never legally had him, anyway), her property, her possessions -- everything! But there's no need to fear for Rayleen; she's a survivor. She will triumph over this adversity. She still has her dignity, her faith -- and her stunt skills.

**SHORT BITS:**

Chic describes his personal lost-and-found policy: you lose it, he keeps it. Tough [bleep]!

**COMMENT:** Don't lose anything!

Hope muses on why people refer to "losing one's virginity". It's not like you leave it at the library by mistake.... Anyway, she describes in great detail how she will lose her virginity with her boyfriend. She's got it all planned -- almost.

**COMMENT:** Whatever happened to spontaneity?

Sydney and her client are awaiting the verdict of the jury. Sydney's very confident; she's never lost a case. Until now. The jury has found her client guilty of first degree murder. She thinks she misheard the verdict, but she didn't. To use the words of John Cage (of *Ally McBeal*), Sydney is troubled by this development. She finds it hard to live with (her client doesn't have a choice), and she storms out, blaming everyone else, including her client, for her failure.

**COMMENT:** Psycho Sydney strikes again. She can dish it out, but she can't take it. On another matter -- I wonder what would happen if Sydney ever encountered "the biscuit" (Cage) in court? With his unusual habits, I bet he could drive her crazier (she's already kinda crazy).

Kay muses on her lost youth and the life she could have led, had she not been caring for her mother for all these years. The adventures she could have led -- mountain-climbing, sailing, working with giraffes on an African game preserve. That's not to say that life at the Van Nuys S&L hasn't been adventurous, what with two armed robbery attempts and the antics of a woman strung out on angel dust (the only casualty: the loan officer's toupee)

**COMMENT:** I would not have figured Kay for the adventurous type. But beneath that meek exterior lies a mysterious woman.

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** Due to the subject matter of two of the sketches (death of a spouse), one wouldn't expect many big laughs in this episode. There weren't. But they wouldn't have been appropriate, anyway. There are certainly humorous moments, but they are tempered by the grief and the pain that Fern and Rayleen are suffering. Both of them have lost their husbands, and Rayleen ends up losing everything she owns. Fern comments on the circle of life -- how one dies (Harry) so another may be born (their grandson), and Rayleen is demonstrating a patience and acceptance worthy of Job as her world falls apart. One rarely sees such philosophical matters discussed on television. To slightly paraphrase the book of Ecclesiastes (and the song "Turn!

Turn! Turn!"), there is a time to laugh and a time to think.

This week, the closed captioning was much better. I didn't notice any mistakes. And that's the way it should be.

## **5. Agents (Feb 01 1998)**

*OPENING:* Tracey describes and contrasts some of her previous agents -- a British agent who was very low-key, and an American agent, who was so hyper....

*COMMENT:* In case you hadn't noticed, that American agent's personality is the basis for Sydney Kross. And so is her voice, for that matter. In fact, I wonder who's more psycho: Sydney or that agent? On another matter, I find that I prefer the second season openings (where Tracey generally walked into the scene before starting) to this season's (where she's having a one-on-one with someone off-camera). In the second season, she spoke directly to the camera and, thus, directly to us viewers. We become part of the action, in a sense. But with the third season openings, we're witnessing portions of a conversation between Tracey and the person off-camera, so we viewers are more removed, more detached.

### **SHORT BITS:**

Her Royal Highness meets Pierce Brosnan, who has assumed the role of James Bond. She then proceeds to dismiss Timothy Dalton and Roger Moore and say that Sean Connery was the only real Bond. Why don't they simply reissue his old Bond films so Brosnan can go back to his "Remington Shaver" ads?

*COMMENT:* What, no comment about George Lazenby? HRH may have a point about Connery as Bond, and this may be the first and only time I find myself agreeing with her about something. But I wouldn't characterize Roger Moore as "sweet" and as someone who should be working in men's socks at Harrod's. "Remington Shaver" -- what a hoot!

Birdie describes the products she sells from the "Militia M'Lady" line. Some of the products: camouflage teddies, control top ammo belts, etc. -- they'll really make the little soldier stand up and salute!

*COMMENT:* I don't think I want a Militia M'Lady party anywhere in my neighborhood.... No, I know I don't want it!

### **LONG SKETCH:**

Fern is still grief-stricken over the apparent death of husband Harry. But she's getting by with help of friends Bella and Jobie (Julie Kavner). They're helping her sort out her finances. It seems that Harry left everything in order. Plus, he was covered by an over \$800,000 life insurance policy. Fern should be set for life. But insurance agent LaSalle arrives with bad news: because of the nature of his death, and the lack of a death certificate, the insurance company won't pay the benefits. Maybe in seven years, they can have Harry declared legally dead, and then the policy will be paid off. This news devastates Fern, as you can imagine. But she's set for the basics. In the meantime, agent LaSalle does some checking around, and he's found a few things. He invites Fern down to the docks, to the boat she and Harry owned. They never used it that much, says Fern. Not so, says LaSalle; in fact, Harry's been to Belize. There's a receipt from there, some

navigational charts -- and a new condom. What can this mean? What secrets was Harry keeping from Fern? Then she remembers that their former maid Marietta was from Belize. Harry was giving her English lessons. Did Harry run off with Marietta? Fern and Jobie fly to Belize to check for themselves. On the beach, we see a bar called "Harry's." It turns out that "the late" Harry Rosenthal (Michael Tucker) is not dead after all. He did run off to Belize with Marietta. Sparks fly when Fern confronts him. Why did he leave? Well, when he was teaching Marietta English, one thing led to another, then another, then he found himself in love with her. Plus, he'd had enough of Fern's dislike of sex (i.e., he wanted more than she was willing to give). But he cared enough for Fern to fake his death so she'd be well provided for. She doesn't buy it; she's still P.O'd, and she starts to chase him. As the chase moves to sea (Harry on a windsurfboard, Fern in a pedal boat), agent LaSalle shows up. He heard about Fern's plane trip and suspected collusion. As we see Harry trying to sail away and Fern in hot pursuit, it's plain to see that there's no collusion. Suddenly, Harry loses his balance and falls into the water, where he's attacked and eaten by a shark! This time, Harry is truly dead, and Fern does collect on the policy.

**COMMENT:** What a range of emotions Fern must have been feeling -- grief, surprise, anger, shock, etc. To go from believing that your husband was dead to learning that he was alive and had run off with another woman, only to see him killed -- that had to have been a terrible emotional burden. But Fern will survive. All of Tracey's characters are survivors, in my opinion. It was great seeing Michael Tucker return to the role of Harry, even though (barring resurrection or a major continuity lapse) we won't be seeing Harry again. George Segal was OK as Harry last season, but to me, Michael **was** and always will be Harry Rosenthal, just like Sean Connery was and will always be James Bond.

#### **SHORT BIT:**

Trevor describes the time he worked for a travel agent. He once was a courier on a bus trip to Italy. One of the passengers got sick and tossed his barf bag out the window, but he'd tossed his false teeth. So the bus had to backtrack and Trevor had to retrieve the choppers. The travel agent's life was not for him....

**COMMENT:** I don't blame him.

#### **LONG SKETCH:**

The scene is the office of Hollywood agent Candy Casino (Seymour Cassel). As he's on the phone, in walks his client Linda Granger. She's not happy. She's tired of hearing about all the roles she felt she was perfect for but didn't get or didn't even hear about. Candy tries to settle her down, but it's no use. She needs a change, she says, and she'll start by changing agents. But finding a new agent proves to be difficult. One won't take her, not wanting to offend Candy. Another didn't know who she was except as a member of his mom's AA sessions. It gets to the point where she has to pose as her own agent (Sandy Bickford of the "Bickford Agency"). But that doesn't increase the number of parts she's getting. In fact, all she is hearing is the unvarnished truth from the casting directors, and the truth is not pretty. They spell out in detail why they don't want Linda: her lips are way too big, she's extremely brash, etc. It's very ego-damaging. Soon after, she's back in Candy's office, begging him to take her back. She's learned her lesson. But he won't be her agent anymore. No, he'll now be her personal manager. What's the difference? Five percent....

**COMMENT:** The truth hurts. On another note, we learn that Linda and Candy had been lovers at one time.

**SHORT BIT:**

Ruby describes how, in the 50's, she was recruited by J. Edgar Hoover to spy for the FBI on movie sets, looking for suspected Communist agents. She had a radio transmitter implanted in one of her teeth (the FBI dentist gave her quite a drilling). One day, she was on the set with Larry Parks and John Garfield, and she positioned herself to hear the conversation. The technique required that she keep her mouth open in a certain way. Garfield took this as an invitation for a certain something. Things happened, and the transmitter blew (among other things). So that was the end of Agent Romaine's career. But she worked on all of Garfield's other pictures....

**COMMENT:** That Ruby! What hasn't she done? This was a hilarious capper to the episode.

**LOST SKETCHES:** These two bits were mentioned in the episode writeups on the TTO and HBO Websites but never aired. In one, Mrs. Noh talks about some additional usages for Agent Orange. In the other, Chic talks about his cousin in the adult film business, and how he tried to get a job as "Johnny Deep."

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** Another interesting episode, as usual. Now that Harry is truly and definitely dead, what will become of Fern? We shall see in the next few weeks.

[Commentary on TTO Season 3, Episodes 6-10 plus the "Best Of" special](#)

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Roger Reini ([roger@rreini.com](mailto:roger@rreini.com))

<http://www.rreini.com/>

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Created by [Roger Reini](#)