

# "Tracey Takes On..." Season 4 Episode Guide, Review and Commentary

## Part 2: Episodes 7 through 12 plus the "Best-Of" special

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This is a detailed episode guide to, review of, and commentary on episodes 7 through 12, plus the "best-of" special, of the fourth 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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[Commentary on Season 4, Eps. 1-6 of "Tracey Takes On..."](#)

### 7. Books (Feb 10 1999)

OPENING: Tracey describes how she'd surreptitiously rearrange the book displays at airport book stores to give more prominence to her book. She figures she could have gained more sales of her book if she'd put Princess Diana, a swastika, and the Titanic on the cover.

*COMMENT:* I wonder how many authors would do the same thing -- switch the displays around. Now if you had two authors there at the same time, thinking the same thing ...

#### SHORT BIT:

Trevor is skimming "The Royals" by scandal maven Kitty Kelley. The book is banned in England, so he's bringing home a copy for his aunt Iris. If only a quarter of what's in it is true, the whole lot should be guillotined, he says. When another flight attendant sees him with the book, he says he confiscated it from a passenger, and she dumps it in the trash. After she leaves, he recovers it. "There's only one queen on this flight, and he's not amused."

*COMMENT:* Here's to freedom of the press....

#### LONG SKETCH:

Linda arrives at the recording studio for a Books On Tape session. She's so pleased to be able to do something for the blind. When the recording producer tells her that Books On Tape are not just for the blind, she says "oh yes, and for the deaf too." He explains that she'll be reading Chekhov today. But Linda thinks he meant Chekov, the Star Trek character, which prompts her to reminisce about Sulu and Chekov trying to board her like a Klingon warship... No, no, the producer explains, not the character but Anton Chekhov, the Russian writer. Now that that's cleared up, she begins. Unfortunately, she has a terrible time pronouncing the Russian names. The session proceeds fitfully as she reads for a while, only to be tripped up by another difficult name. Eventually, the producer decides to end this session and have her read another book: "Chekov's Enterprise." And guess what? She's in the index!

**COMMENT:** I can see how she'd be tripped up by those Russian names. But she does give it her all. You cannot say "Linda Granger" and "quitter" in the same sentence -- unless you're referring to quitting all sorts of addictive substances.

#### SHORT BIT

Janie's always liked writers. When she first came to this country, she lived with a poet, whom she describes as "beautiful in an undernourished sort of way." But after eight months, he still wasn't published, so she dumped him and moved on. As she puts it, there's a very fine line between genius and loser.

**COMMENT:** C-c-cold....

#### LONG SKETCH:

Kay is at the library, looking for the latest Physician's Drug Reference. Someone else is also looking for the PDR, and they run into each other when reaching for it at the same time. His name is Gil (Chris Elliott), and the parallels in their lives are amazing. Their mannerisms are very similar; Kay works at the Van Nuys Savings and Loan, while Gil works at Tarzana First Union Savings; they both care for their bedridden parents (mother in her case, father in his); they both have similar jackets and helmets (for their presumably similar mopeds); and they'd almost given up hope of meeting someone who'd understand their lives. Could it be love?

Simultaneous pages intervene, and they have to head home, but not before making another date at the library for next Saturday at 1. Hector, the car wash operator and former surgeon in Guatemala, can watch Mother for a few hours. When Saturday comes around, we see Kay all dolled up in anticipation. Mother's not too happy about it, but Kay won't let anyone rain on her parade, as we see in a big production number. They meet at the library, where Gil tells her the wonderful news: his father died, and he's free! He's bought two tickets to Hawaii to celebrate. But unfortunately for Kay, Mother has not died, so she must decline his offer. Her parade has indeed been rained on.

**COMMENT:** Once again, just when Kay is on the threshold of finding love, something comes along to dash it. In this case, it's Gil's liberation from his burden of caring for his now-deceased father. He's now free to enjoy himself, but Kay isn't. She's still trapped by her duties to her mother. If and when there's a final Kay sketch, I want to see her riding into the sunset with her true love after her mother's finally passed away. She deserves it. This could be a good candidate for the best-of special.

## SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja says she's been approached to write a book. Perhaps it would be called "Call Me Madame", and what stories it would have! She's got lots of information in her not-so-little black book -- peccadillos, preferences, etc. If it were to come out, it would cause a panic in Hollywood -- many of her clients have married her girls, and they've become stars themselves (but the parrot says "They're all sluts!") Hm -- perhaps she convince clients to pay her *not* to publish.

**COMMENT:** As I've said before, this is a woman you do not want to cross.

## LONG SKETCH:

Fern, Bella and Phyllis (Liz Torres) are talking. Bella reports that Ruth Bernstein has died. Fern's thoughts are not so much for the bereaved widow Sol as for the autographed copy of "Valley Of The Dolls" she'd lent Ruth a few months ago. She went through a lot to get that, she says, and she'll do anything to get it back. She goes over to the Bernstein's apartment to try and recover it, but the housekeeper won't let her in. It's a bad time for Sol right now, she says. Later, we see the funeral at the swimming pool (no swimming during the services). Fern feigns being overcome by the heat and heads inside. She tells the front desk attendant that the sewers are in danger of backing up, and he leaves to investigate. She takes the key for the Bernsteins' apartment and heads there to recover her book. She wasn't counting on their having such an extensive library, which includes such selections as "Sexual Positions for the Elderly" and a copy of "Breakfast at Tiffany's" that was 40 years overdue at the library. Suddenly, she's interrupted by noises at the door, and she hides. It's Sol and his housekeeper, and it seems they had a deal. He was having an affair with her, and he killed his wife in order to marry her so she can bring her sons from her homeland. While Fern overhears this, she sees her book being used to prop up a table. As she retrieves the book, the table falls, and she's discovered. She's heard too much, declares Sol, and he's going to silence her -- forever. They fight. He takes a pillow and tries to smother her, but she's able to retrieve her book (a weighty tome, in paper if not in substance) and hit him on the head. She's got her book back, and Sol and his mistress are under arrest. That "beach book" saved her life, and she's not lending it out again!

**COMMENT:** There were several interesting observations and comments in this sketch, such as when Fern said the only other person she'd waited in line to see other than Jacqueline Susann was Golda Meir, and Jackie was more attractive (with Phyllis pointing out that Lyndon Johnson was more attractive, too). Note that the housekeeper was played by the same actress who's Darnetta in the Kay sketches.

## SHORT BITS:

Chic says he read a book once -- "it was green."

**COMMENT:** We know what Chic looks for in the way of stimulation, and it isn't intellectual stimulation he's looking for!

Birdie is preparing the grill for the Godsen annual book burning barbecue. On the grill or next to it, we can see such titles as Howard Stern's biography, Hillary Clinton's "It Takes A Village", and a recent Jackie Collins novel. At the barbecue, they invite all their good Christian neighbors to bring all the offensive material they've confiscated from the schools and libraries during the past year, and they roast a pig over the flames. This demonstrates to the children that a delicious

meal can rise from the blazes of evil. Whoops -- how did that Pat Boone book get in there?  
*COMMENT:* Birdie hasn't changed a bit, unfortunately.

Rayleen demonstrates her technique for getting in good with the guys on the set of a new film. She takes out a large phonebook, complains to all within earshot that it's the wrong one, then proceeds to rip it in two in mock anger. Sure beats challenging them to a fight!

*COMMENT:* Hey, if it works, why not?

LOST SKETCHES: Sydney keeps a journal

*OVERALL COMMENTS:* Not a bad episode at all. And in one sketch (Kay's), we went from the highest of emotional highs to the lowest of lows -- one of the best of the Kay sketches.

## **8. Road Rage (Feb 17 1999)**

OPENING: Tracey says she's experienced road rage, such as when stuck behind an elderly person who can barely see over the wheel....

*COMMENT:* We can all sympathize with her, as we've been in similar situations. But one day, that elderly person who can barely see over the wheel might be us....

THE STORY (all storylines are interwoven and intertwined):

Sydney is at her friendly Hummer dealer, all but salivating over the red Hummer in the showroom. Eric the salesman arrives to complete the deal. Don't waste the sales-speak on her, Sydney warns; let's get the deal over with. But first, she wants him to scratch his back. No, this isn't a quid pro quo situation; she doesn't want sex or a kickback on the Lojack, she wants him to scratch her back when she signs the paperwork....

*COMMENT:* The Hummer is the ultimate vehicle for the type A personality, and here we have the ultimate type A personality (Sydney) buying one. A match made in heaven -- or should that be hell? Notice how blasé the salesman was about offering to close up the shop and have sex with Sydney, and catch her reply: "If I have sex with a man, I need enough time to make him cry!" <shudder>

Meanwhile, Fern and Jobie (Julie Kavner) have landed at LA International Airport and are waiting to rent a car. They're going to do a Jewish LA tour -- the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Museum of Tolerance, the University of Judaism ("can't miss that," notes Jobie) etc. Jobie had some misgivings about Fern's driving ability -- only one incident, Fern points out, and the guy wasn't killed, just crippled. "That gardner wanted to die," she retorts. Carol the counter clerk serves them in the typical perky southern California way. They're going to get a two-class upgrade, lavender. Just take the tram to the lot and you'll be set, says Carol. Unfortunately, Fern has a problem with trams -- a "safety/filth/fumes/strangers" thing (they're still talking about her at Epcot), so they'll take cab.

*COMMENT:* "That gardner wanted to die" -- that cracks me up.

Meanwhile, Ruby is preparing her makeup kit for a job: to makeup Mickey Rooney for a Friar's Club roast. She'd done his Japanese makeup on "Breakfast at Tiffany's," and he's asked for her ever since. It should have won an Oscar, she says (but the Asian community disagrees,

strongly). On the TV, we can see and hear live aerial coverage of a police chase, courtesy of channel 6 and Chopper Tim. Ruby likes to watch these chase reports, but she has to leave, so she decides to pop a tape into the VCR. Not having a blank one handy, she decides to record over the tape of her granddaughter giving birth to her "mulatto" daughter. She's never going to watch that, she figures....

**COMMENT:** If it were baby's first steps that she was recording over, I'd be quite upset with Ruby. But since it's a birth video, I'm not that upset. I question whether something like that should be put on video in the first place. But I digress. It's interesting how she likes to watch those police chases -- then again, all of America watched the O.J. Simpson chase.

Ruby gets ready to drive off to her job. But she doesn't pay much attention as she pulls out of her driveway, as she pulls right into the path of an oncoming VW Beetle (new). The Beetle stops in time. Inside the car, we see that the passenger is Hope. Her boyfriend Roberto is driving, and he's a bit peeved by Ruby's inattention. As they move off, Hope suddenly notices a car in the driveway across the street. It happens to be the first car she ever owned, a car she received for her 16th birthday. It's an old VW Golf (formerly bright green, now somewhat rusted) named Kathy in honor of Kathy Acker, the raw postmodern feminist writer who'd recently died of breast cancer in an alternative clinic in Tijuana. Hope has many fond memories of the car, which had been stolen 2 years ago.... We see her receiving it from her parents for her 16th birthday, and we see her about to engage in some heavy petting with her then-boyfriend. She also recalls some bad times in the car, like the time she was drinking with some girlfriends and got sick and had to throw up. When she sees the current possessor of the car (perhaps the thief?), she's bothered.

**COMMENT:** Note the bumper sticker on the car: "Subvert the Dominant Paradigm."

Meanwhile, the chase continues, and Chopper Tim (Charles Rocket) is covering it all for his viewers. He is milking it for all it's worth (probably more than it's worth, actually) -- the chase could result in a devastating collision where many innocent drivers could end up "car-becued". It turns out that he's got a passenger today: Linda Granger. They're on their second date (the first was at the Queen Mary). The conversation begins to heat up when Chopper Tim (don't call him "Tim") realizes he left his mic on. This gives Linda a chance to say hello to the "News 9 Now" team (unfortunately, this is channel 6). The chase has left the freeway and moved onto the surface streets. At an intersection, the bandit repeatedly rearends a car. This arouses Linda.

**COMMENT:** Is there anything that doesn't arouse her?

Meanwhile, Midge (Kavner) and Chris are in the car being rear-ended. The bandit passes. No damage is done, but Midge is really ticked off. She sets off after him, right in front of the police cars which had been chasing him. It's white-knuckle time for Chris, who points out to Midge that she's suffering from road rage. That's right, says Midge; "I'm on the road, and I'm in a rage." When the bandit makes an illegal U-turn, Midge does likewise. He's not going to get away. Chris begs her to break off, to let the police handle it. Suddenly, gunshots ring out!

**COMMENT:** Who hasn't felt like doing what Midge is doing? Most of us don't resort to such tactics.

Meanwhile, Linda has been looking down with binoculars, and she's seen something: Morgan Fairchild, who's gotten her hot tub fixed -- not to mention her ass!

Meanwhile, reason finally catches up to Midge as she pulls over and lets the police handle things. That was really scary, says Chris, but it was kind of sexy, too. When they get home, they'll have to play "Angry Motorist"....

**COMMENT:** When their relationship is good, it's good!

Meanwhile, Fern and Jobie finally arrive at their rental car. It's not what they expected, though; instead of a Bonneville or Regal or equivalent, they're stuck with a Geo Metro. Fern is quite upset, but Jobie (who's been pushing the luggage cart) is willing to take it.

**COMMENT:** Notice how Fern says once again that she has no upper body strength, and how she expects Jobie to retrieve the cart after it begins to roll away.

Meanwhile, Sydney is enjoying her new Hummer. It's even better than a penis, she says; after all, you can't break the speed limit with a penis. As she approaches a red light, there's a Range Rover waiting to proceed. She fantasizes about ramming the Range Rover into traffic, then running the red light, with the explosion providing a distraction. But the light turns green, so it'll have to wait for another time....

**COMMENT:** There's no doubt about it, the Hummer is Sydney's ideal vehicle. It's a get-the-hell-out-of-my-way-or-else vehicle, which is a pretty good summation of Sydney, too.

Meanwhile, the chase continues. The bandit pulls into a parking lot, abandons his car, and takes off on foot. Chopper Tim observes that he's running at a pretty good clip. As he runs toward an intersection, we see Ruby driving toward the same intersection, enjoying a cigarette while listening to an accordion rendition of "Downtown." She drops the cigarette, which rolls out of reach, so she has to pull over. This is a mistake, as the bandit runs up and carjacks her. She's agitated, but she insists on retrieving the cigarette, as it could cause the car to go up "like a Korean kid's costume on Halloween." Chopper Tim and Linda have seen the whole thing; he speculates that the victim, based on the vehicle vintage, is either a senior citizen or from Mexico ("my gardener has a car like that," observes Linda). Ruby can't get out of the car, for the belt appears to be stuck. Suddenly, we hear sirens! The bandit now forces Ruby to drive off. She observes that it doesn't sound like he's thought things through.

**COMMENT:** She's definitely right about the bandit. Notice how she's keeping her head in this situation, how she's not panicking.

Meanwhile, Hope tells Roberto she'd all but given up hope (no pun intended) of ever seeing Kathy 1 again, but she wore the key on her bracelet as a talisman, just in case. And now, here's her chance to retrieve it. Over Roberto's objections, she gets out and runs up to the car. She tries the key in the passenger door -- it works! She gets in, slides over to the driver's seat, starts her up and pulls out. As she and Roberto take off, the current owner/possessor comes out, sees what's happening, and is P.O'ed.

**COMMENT:** Kids, don't try this at home!

Meanwhile, the chase continues. Chopper Tim describes it as "every Angeleno's nightmare." Linda says her heart goes out to the victim. But Ruby's doing okay under the circumstances; she hears the chopper and realizes it's Chopper Tim. If she'd known she was going to be part of the chase (she's taping it at home, remember), she'd have done her hair in back. The bandit tells her to shut up. Ruby points out, quite accurately, that if he shoots her, the car won't have a driver --

like Herbie the Love Bug (a good picture). He wants her to turn onto Sunset, but Ruby says that's a bad idea because the Strip will be jammed with all the hookers out for rush hour.

**COMMENT:** She is definitely able to keep her cool. Then again, might that be due to the perpetual low-grade blood alcohol level she probably has? Not the best idea for driving, that. But if it's due solely to her personality, then that's something to admire about her.

Meanwhile, Sydney's still enjoying her Hummer. She runs into several trash piles, and she comes close to hitting a pedestrian. "Missed him!" she exclaims. But at least she doesn't have to go to the car wash.

**COMMENT:** The Hummer may be Sydney's ideal vehicle, but the other drivers on the road may think otherwise. She's a hazard to navigation.

Meanwhile, the chase continues. Taking one hard bump reminds Ruby of *Smokey and the Bandit*, which reminds her that she did Burt Reynolds' makeup on that film. He was a lot of fun back then, singing, grabbing her ass, pulling down Dom DeLuise's pants.... That was before he went crazy, taking all those 'ludes which made his balls dissolve.

**COMMENT:** That was hilarious!

Meanwhile, Hope's pulled over, as has Roberto. She walks back to the Beetle. She's having second thoughts about repossessing her old car, for there's a baby seat in the back. Maybe it was being used by a poor family who'd bought it from the lousy thief, she says. Perhaps she'll return it to the people who had it -- after all, she does have a nice RAV4 now, so it's not like she needs the car. As she's mulling over her options...

...Sydney is still enjoying the Hummer. If she'd been in Kuwait, she'd have metal-pedaled it all the way to Baghdad and kicked Saddam's Iraqi ass!

**COMMENT:** The next time Saddam rattles his sabers, we'll just send Sydney over to take care of him! If it were only that simple.

Meanwhile, Fern and Jobie appear to be lost. Did they turn east when they should have turned west? West is toward the ocean, Jobie reminds Fern; it's the opposite of Florida.

Hope decides to take the car back; it's the right thing to do. Suddenly, Sydney zooms past! Fern makes a left turn on a red light, which she's not supposed to do. Suddenly, they're on a collision course with Sydney! Sydney is not going to back down. Everyone swerves. Fern and Jobie collide with Hope's car! They're not seriously hurt, but both cars are heavily damaged. Hope and Roberto decide to check out that new Kurdish film at the Laemmle.

**COMMENT:** RIP, Kathy 1.

We now see Ruby and the carjacker heading towards Sydney, who'd spun out but has suffered no damage. The carjacker tells Ruby to make a left turn, and she does. Suddenly, the passenger door flies open, and out flies the carjacker onto the street! As he rolls to a stop, the police catch up to him and arrest him. As Ruby says, the door has a screw loose -- just like the carjacker!

**COMMENT:** Way to go, Ruby!

The aftermath: The police are guarding the bandit and taking statements. Fern's suffering from a bit of whiplash, while Jobie tells her she's the absolute worst driver around. "I was hit by a

parked car," complains Fern. Sydney wants to complain to the police chief about the Jewish tourists from Florida. Ruby's being interviewed by Chopper Tim, who's landed to cover the aftermath. She explains that she was able to keep her cool by recalling her experiences working in live television in the '50s. Linda wants to give her a bug, but she refuses; she remembers that it was Linda who got her fired from *Vegas Vixens* 23 years ago. She was a slut then, and she's probably still a slut today. Then Tim gets word that Mayor Riordan wants to talk to Ruby, the hero of the hour.

**COMMENT:** Fern's comment was great - "I was hit by a parked car."

We see Ruby at home, and we realize she's watching the tape of the chase coverage (remember, she'd started the tape running earlier). Suddenly, there's static on the screen! It seems that Buddy's taped something else over her reception from Mayor Riordan, so she gets a bit upset. This had better be good, she warns. It turns out to be a monster truck competition, which is OK by her.

**COMMENT:** Imagine Sydney with one of those monster trucks. No, on second thought, we'd better not. There are things that man is not meant to see, and that's one of them.

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** All of the interleaved episodes to date have been good, though I still think the first, Las Vegas, is the best.

## **9. America (Feb 24 1999)**

OPENING: Tracey displays her passport (still British) and her green card (vintage '80s), observing that she was required to show an ear in the picture. It makes her look like someone from Star Trek, she says. Then she notes the contrast between being in the UK for a couple of weeks ("sedate, quiet, British, inhibited") and coming back to the USA where you get greeted with a big herpes commercial on the radio on the way home from the airport. When she was in India a few years back, she was in Bangalore and saw women in saris living in huts watching *Baywatch* courtesy of satellite television. And finally, when clearing customs back in the US, the agents say to her "Hey, welcome home!"

**COMMENT:** American culture is definitely everywhere, no doubt about that. I speak from experience -- Toys R Us in France, Borders bookstores on Oxford Street in London, the world's northernmost McDonald's near the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, Finland, etc. Whether or not this is a good thing, well....

SHORT BIT:

Kay is glad that Mother's catastrophe happened while they were visiting America. If she (Kay) had remained in England, she'd have turned out to be "a lonely, frumpish, dotty old spinster," but America has brought out the "wild, free spirit, stylish active woman" we see today.

**COMMENT:** She has had a few wild experiences over here, to be sure, but -- if she considers her life here to be wild, imagine what it would have been if she'd stayed home. No, on second thought, let's not imagine that; it's too depressing.

LONG SKETCH:

A documentary film crew from the university is preparing to film Ruby for her memories of the

McCarthy era. She has nothing but kind words to say about Senator Joseph McCarthy and his cause, calling him a great American and saying he was afraid of nothing -- nothing except walking down the aisle with her. Yes, she says, she was romantically linked with the senator. But that's not her main story today. She's going to describe the time she flew to Washington with Bogart, Bacall and Hepburn (Katharine) to do their makeup as they prepared to testify. We flash back to the '50's, and we see the young Ruby sitting in a plane, listening to the stars plan their testimony. She decides to write it down so she can give it to the senator. Later, we see Ruby and McCarthy in bed in a motel room, watching the testimony of Robert Taylor, who's singing like a canary. Ruby asks McCarthy when he's going to leave his wife; after the investigation is finished, he replies. Ruby's heard this before, and she presses him to leave his wife now. She did bring him the autographed picture of Loretta Young (now she won't be subpoena'd). There's a pause in the story while Ruby sips her vodka, the only thing Russian she approves of.. Back to the story: days pass, and Ruby has not heard from the senator, so she takes action. She's not doing this alone, for she knows she's pregnant with his child. Bombshell city! She bluffs her way into the hearing chambers, where she takes the stand and confronts McCarthy. He's flustered, denies knowing her, and orders her removed from the chamber. Seven months later, her daughter Desiree was born. She's never told Desiree who her father is. Just then, the film runs out. But Ruby's got plenty of stories to tell. So they'll all get reloaded....

**COMMENT:** I was hoping that Ruby would be featured in a flashback sometime, and now it has happened. May she be featured in some more. Note her comments that Loretta Young had to be a Communist because her real name was Gretchen and she treated everyone on the set as equals. Hm -- would that make Thomas Jefferson a Communist then? But I digress.... FYI, Tracey also provided the voice for Katharine Hepburn in this sketch.

#### SHORT BIT:

Erin has nothing but unkind words for America: "They ripped me off!" Manager Dusty (Mo Gaffney) asks if it was the tax audits. When Erin mentions the Grammys, Dusty realizes that she's complaining about the band America. Seems that Erin used to go out with the lead singer, Danny. She has another name for him now: the last four letters are "head," and the first four letters are Dennis Miller's favorite four-letter word. The reason for Erin's bitterness? She says she wrote key parts of some of their songs ("A Horse With No Name," "Tin Man") but never received credit or royalties.

**COMMENT:** We haven't seen Erin become this passionate over anything in some time. She does not care for "bleep-head" at all!

#### LONG SKETCH:

Fern and Phyllis (Liz Torres) are at a restaurant, debating the merits of homeopathic remedies (being a pharmacist's widow, Fern doesn't care for them) when a man approaches. He asks if she's Fern Rosenthal, and she suddenly realizes who he is: Sam Orkin (Jeffrey Tambor), a Jewish mobster. She remembers the first time she met him.... Flash back to the late '60s, when Harry (Michael Tucker) had just opened his first pharmacy and Fern was pregnant with Sheila. Suddenly, a man brandishing a gun runs into the store. It's Sam, and he's agitated. The Rosenthals are scared, but Sam's not going to rob them. He wants treatment for his wounds. Fern is very scared, but Harry keeps his cool and treats the wounds. He encourages Sam to go to

the hospital, but Sam has no intention of doing that. Move forward a few years to the mid-'70s, and we see Fern and Harry at a restaurant. It's a popular restaurant, and there seems to be a problem with their reservation. That is, until one of the waiters whispers something to the maitre d', who then shows them to a table. It happens to be Sam's table, and he and his "associates" make the Rosenthals welcome. He hasn't forgotten what they did for him way back when. He even asks about their daughter Sheila. He tells his associates that young couples starting out, like Fern and Harry were, they are the real American heroes. They're good people. Back to the present -- Phyllis leaves, allowing Fern and Sam to be alone. As they talk, she realizes that he is the reason why they never had any problems in expanding the pharmacy chain -- no problems with permits, gangs, etc.; he was looking out for them all along. He is clearly taken with her, and he admits that, if he did it all over again, he'd bump off Harry and woo Fern himself. But he has to leave now, and it's doubtful he'll be seeing her again. You see, in the parking lot, Sam's companions put handcuffs on him. They're FBI agents, and he's going to prison.

**COMMENT:** This ended up being an unexpectedly touching sketch. Fern's got many reasons to be afraid of him -- the circumstances under which they met, his occupation, etc.; she's not sure she wants to know him. And when she realizes that he was looking out for their interests, she's still a bit concerned by his methods. But there is a part of her that reacted positively to his interest in her. How would her life have turned out had he indeed bumped off Harry and married her?

#### SHORT BITS:

Birdie is dressed as a drum majorette, performing an old routine she used to win the Miss Tiny America pageant in "nineteen hundred and none of your business." She was hooked on pageants from a young age; she shows a photo of herself carrying her daddy's rifle that she used in a routine one time. She accidentally shot one of the judges, but no harm done; he even gave her extra points for exemplifying an aspect of American life. Her husband's calling....

**COMMENT:** I liked the way she said "nineteen hundred and none of your business"; beyond that, I won't say any more.

Sheneesha knows that America is number one. Just look at the quality of the carryon luggage you see at the checkpoints. There was a time when she and Hellura (Adele Givens) had to work at the international terminal, and you should have seen what those people used for luggage: taped-up boxes, Mervyn's bags stuffed to the brim, even Bounty paper towels and tape. When a bag wrapped in newspaper comes through, Sheneesha tells its owner (who appears to be Asian or Mexican) that she's in the wrong place, that she wants the international terminal. America is number one!

**COMMENT:** Not all of the international luggage is like that, but I know something of what she's speaking about.

**LOST SKETCHES:** Rayleen's story on how she came to America; Sydney's comments; Hope's campaign speech; why Janie won't become a citizen; Linda's proudest moment as an American (info from HBO site)

**DEDICATION:** The episode was dedicated to the memory of Willi Anna.

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** Not a bad episode at all.

## 10. Hype (Mar 03 1999)

OPENING: Tracey describes the biggest hype she's been involved with: a huge billboard near the Fox offices during the days of *The Tracey Ullman Show*. The photo used for the billboard had undergone quite a bit of touching up, and she didn't care for the results (something about looking retarded).

**COMMENT:** I think she mentioned this in a TTUS episode at the time; I recall a reference to a "painted lady." Well, we like her just the way she is....

### LONG SKETCHES:

Her Royal Highness is doing some gardening (flower trimming is more like it) while conferring with her aide Pip (Alistair Duncan). He tells her she's to meet with a Mr. Jarvis, a media guru. No, not the so-called holy-man kind of guru, but a public relations expert -- a spin doctor. This is because the royal family is perceived as remote. HRH think that's absurd. After all, whenever there's a national event, don't they go to their balconies and wave to the populace, who wave back with their little flags? That's no longer enough, says a poll. Not a Pole, but a poll. When Pip says that the young wish the royals to shed some of their expectations of deference, HRH thinks that's absurd, too. Doing that would mean becoming more like the royalty in Holland or Scandinavia, who've taken to wearing jeans and riding bicycles in the street. But times change, and she is willing to adapt. There are some things she absolutely will not do: visit Canada, wear a kilt, attend a sporting event unless horses are involved, or be in a photo session with the Spice Girls. However, she will consent to forgoing the white gloves. As the scene ends, we see Pip making a frantic call: cancel the 11 o'clock appointment!

**COMMENT:** It's hard to believe, but this was the first appearance of HRH this season. But it was worth the wait. Some of her comments were rather wicked, especially the ones about Roman Polanski ("the five-foot Pole you wouldn't want to touch") and the Grimaldis, the royal family of Monaco (they sound like jugglers). Her attitude may be horrible, but it's funny. This may have an outside chance of making the best-of special.

Ruby is watching an ad for a car dealer. In the ad, he offers a brand new Ford pickup to the person who can keep at least one hand on the truck for the longest period of time. Ruby calls to her son Buddy to get prepared; he's got a truck to win. This is one of the few things he can do; besides, he likes trucks -- he lived in one for two years. There's a circus atmosphere at the dealership as the contest gets under way, with all sorts of radio and TV coverage. Dealer Al explains the rules: keep one hand on the car at all times, except for a five-minute break each hour to eat, use the restroom, or whatever. Ruby takes Buddy to the truck, places his hands on the liftgate and tells him to stay. One of the other contestants comes from a very religious family, as we can hear hymns being sung. Ruby sits down and takes a nip as the contest begins....

### SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja observes that America likes to talk to itself like no other country on earth. You frequently hear "Hey, America!" or "Wake up, America!" or "What do you want from a truck, America?" Would you ever hear "Hey, Poland!" or "What's happening, Slovakia?" No, you wouldn't. There's something else she doesn't like about America: coverage of the Olympics. All

too often, the coverage only focuses on those events where Americans are winning. She also doesn't care for Jello salad.

**COMMENT:** What she says is true. I can't picture any other country "talking to itself" in the way she describes. Well, maybe Canada, but not to the same extent. And her comments about American Olympic coverage are right on the money. I'm fortunate to live near the Canadian border, where I have viewed the Canadian coverage of the last few Olympics. As for Jello salad, the less said about it, the better. This might be a dark-horse candidate for the best-of special.

#### RUBY'S SKETCH, pt. 2:

After 12 hours, the contestants get a break. But Buddy still hangs on to the truck while Ruby feeds him Twinkies and Yoohoo (it's less confusing for him that way). What about bathroom breaks, asks a TV reporter. The solution is a super-absorbant diaper, Ruby replies, like the one used by Tony Curtis in *Trapeze* when he couldn't get down from the heights. After 36 hours, it's dark, and Ruby's napping. Suddenly, one contestant collapses. He's out! Ruby gives Buddy some licorice for him to suck on. While she's talking to him, she's got a lit cigarette in her left hand. She brandishes it near one of the other contestants, who's clearly bothered by it. Before long, she has to sneeze. In doing so, she removes her hands from the truck -- she's out!

**COMMENT:** I'm not certain if Ruby's cigarette was a deliberate tactic or not. I'm tempted to think not, but it did come in handy. Also, notice that she's taking very good care of Buddy, as a good mother should.

#### SHORT BIT:

Fern observes that the after-death market is terribly overhyped in Florida. Why, they even have the nerve to call right after *Touched By An Angel!* She's acquired three caskets, which are now residing in the condo due to termites downstairs. One of them came along with a time-sharing vacation condo deal. The casket's got more room than that condo's master bedroom, she says. The second one was almost sold off, but the prospective purchaser recovered from her liver transplant. As for the third, she's come up with an ingenious use for it: as a flowerpot.

**COMMENT:** Very practical thinking from Fern. But notice how she complained about being in the sun too long without her SPF 75 sunscreen? Here's a bit of trivia for you: on the Jan. 8, 1999 Tonight Show, we saw an outtake from this bit where somebody had climbed into the first coffin, giving Tracey a shock when she opened the lid.

#### RUBY'S SKETCH, pt. 3:

At 64 hours, we see a contestant being taken away on a stretcher. There are only three other contestants in the running, one of them being Buddy. Ruby gives encouragement to her son and disparages the "Virgin Mary", whose supporters have been constantly singing hymns. "Mary" (her real name is Marge) is offended and draws her hands together in prayer. She's out! Ruby celebrates -- hallelujah! She decides to take a little nap, but what she sees next makes her change her mind. It's her uncle Shep, whom she hasn't seen in years, and for good reason: he's a scoundrel. He was passing through town, heard about the contest and Buddy's participation in it, and came by to give encouragement to his boy. Yes, in addition to being Buddy's great uncle, he's also his father. Seems Ruby and he had an encounter one hot day by the swamp.... Ruby questions his motives for being there and tries to keep him from influencing Buddy. But the urge

to sleep is too strong.... Hours later, dealer Al wakes Ruby. He has good news: Buddy won in the 76th hour! But because he thought Buddy seemed a little slow mentally, he signed the truck over to his father, and they drove off some time ago. Ruby, fearing the worst, heads right for home -- where we see Buddy on the front steps, fishing gear in hand. His daddy uncle's driven off for bait -- with the new truck. And he's not coming back for a while. Yes, it appears that uncle Shep's swindled Ruby and Buddy out of their new truck. But don't blame Buddy, for he did all right.

**COMMENT:** A bittersweet ending to a very interesting story. We were prepared to celebrate Buddy's victory, but then along comes that no-good uncle daddy Shep to steal their winnings. And we had a major revelation about Buddy's parentage -- of course, it's not clear whether Shep is a blood uncle to Ruby or only an uncle by marriage (I suspect the former).

#### SHORT BIT:

Sheneesha and Hellura (Adele Givens) are complaining about the new airport terminal. We see malfunctioning x-ray machines, buckets for catching water leaks, and luggage getting stuck inside the machines. As Sheneesha says, "this new terminal is [bleep]!" The designers were really hyping it up, saying it'd take passengers to the 21st century. Hell, it can't even take them to the Sunglass Hut; the people mover's not moving anyone. And the less said about the automatic toilets, the better. Maybe they should find a new job.

**COMMENT:** For a while, I almost thought they were talking about the terminal at Detroit Metro Airport -- the *old* terminal -- the *very old* terminal....

#### LONG SKETCH:

Linda and her agent Candy Casino (Seymour Cassel) are having lunch with Bev Mellis, a PR rep for the new movie *V.I.P. Lounge*, which as you might suspect is a remake of Linda's old TV series. But Linda's not recreating her role; Cindy Crawford will be taking over. Bev maps out a publicity strategy: first, get Linda some interviews in the gay press. That won't be a problem, as she's a gay icon. At the same time, Linda should play the martyr and badmouth Cindy; this is called reverse marketing (it's worked for *Mission: Impossible* and the *Brady Bunch* films). But Linda likes Cindy and can't think of anything bad to say about her. No problem, says Bev; we'll invent stuff and attribute it to you. The deal clincher: a chance to sing the theme to the movie and to make a video. Some time later, Linda appears on the Leeza show. With her gay brigade in the audience, she tells Leeza Gibbons (herself) her story of showbiz betrayal. Leeza quotes from some of the comments she made about Cindy, comments such as "no-talent slut" and "someone who couldn't act her way out of a bulimia clinic." Linda's been uncomfortable about this campaign all along, and she finally says enough is enough. She reveals the whole scheme. She really likes Cindy, and if this means the video won't be shown, then so be it. Leeza and the audience celebrate her honesty and warmly applaud her. And the video will be seen at least once, right here, right now. In the video, entitled "Danger In The Skies", we see Linda and two of her dancers from her Vegas act singing and dancing on the wing of an airplane in trouble. Midway through the song, she's relegated to the background while a rap group takes center stage. During the video, Cindy Crawford calls the show and speaks to Linda. Apparently there's no hard feelings, but Linda won't fire Bev; she'll leave that to Cindy.

**COMMENT:** Once again, we see that Linda's basically a good person who resists doing

anything intentional to hurt anyone. She had misgivings about the campaign from the start. Even though she was persuaded to take part, she eventually quit when she saw what was happening.

**LOST SKETCHES:** Erin promotes a new album; Trevor talks about his personal grooming wand; Chic deplores the remaking of Times Square

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** I thought the episode started off rather strong and tailed off somewhat toward the finish. There were some segments that might be candidates for the best-of special, such as HRH's sketch and Nadja's short bit.

## **11. Obsession (Mar 10 1999)**

**OPENING:** Tracey describe some obsessions of hers: seeing elderly Germans while on holiday and asking them what they did during the war (they couldn't all have been ski instructors, could they?); washing the hands, and making sure the kids have washed theirs (when you know where a 6-year-old boy's hands have been, you'd be obsessed with getting them clean, too); and the 1998 World Cup.

**COMMENT:** Having once been a 6-year-old boy myself, and having gotten caught up in World Cup fever when I was in Europe last June, I know where she's coming from! At least she didn't start singing "Vindaloo" <g>....

**SHORT BITS:**

Chic tells us about a fragrance called "Absession," which is supposed to be the same as Calvin Klein's "Obsession", only at half the price.

**COMMENT:** If it had been called "Abcession," it would have been perfect for Kay's mother....

Hope recalls a recent sociology class where the professor lamented America's obsession with youth. In other societies, the elderly are revered and sought out for their wisdom and experience. But here, they're put away in homes and serve as objects of derision in film and TV. And how did the class feel about that? They're glad they're not old!

**COMMENT:** It's true; what can you say?

**LONG SKETCHES:**

Sydney is wolfing down her lunch while reviewing her mail. Suddenly, one envelope catches her eye. It's the invitation to her 20-year high school reunion. She is positively ecstatic about the invite; it seems she's been looking forward to it for a long time. She calls in her assistant Jordan, who is leery of getting too close. When she uses his tie for a napkin, we see why he was leery. She asks him to make an appointment to get her hair done for the reunion. At the reunion, Sydney talks to a few of her classmates. From what she has to say to them, she doesn't really consider them friends. Take Justine, who has three children. How did Sydney know this? She's kept tabs on her classmates, especially ones who spread rumors that she had a tail. Then there's Gordon, a former lab partner who caused an accident with a Bunsen burner that burned off Sydney's hair. When the woman at the registration desk tries to get her to sign in and get her nametag, she refuses. Everyone already knows her, she says. She's the person they tripped in the cafeteria, the one they humiliated in gym class, the one they tried to sell to slave traders to

raise money for cheerleader uniforms. And with that, she springs a plan into action. Slam! go the doors, which are then guarded to prevent anyone leaving. She throws the DJ off the stage and starts singing "The Way We Were" to the accompaniment of photos of some of her classmates, then and now. One of them (Gordon), she shows in a compromising sexual situation. She shows a picture of Justine and her three children -- make that three brats. She reveals a secret about a third, Alan: although he says he's in sales, he's really a janitor. And lastly, she shows herself. From being declared "The Scariest Of Them All" to making more money than anyone in the room, and reveling in it! She's exacted her revenge.

**COMMENT:** I can *easily* understand why she was called "The Scariest Of Them All." She's showing her psycho side tonight. At the same time, you can't help but feel sorry for her, as she wasn't that well-liked in high school. She didn't deserve her shoddy treatment at the hands of her classmates. And when she proceeds to humiliate her classmates, exacting her revenge, part of you is cheering her on. Then again, another part is probably aghast at what's taking place.

Trevor tells a tale of how an obsession with Latin dance once strained his relationship with Barry (Michael McKean). Flash back... One evening, while Trevor's returning home from the airport, he sees Barry's car parked in front of a dance studio. Since it happens to be Barry's regular night for bridge, Trevor is curious and pops up to have a look. It's a Latin dancing class, and Barry's thoroughly enjoying himself. The instructors are Marigold (Tracey) and Johnny (Noel Harrison), a couple from Ruislip who've won 42 trophies for their dancing over the years. When Trevor and Barry arrive home, Barry explains why he took up dancing. His life is so predictable, he complains. And when Tanya, his dental hygienist, needed a new dance partner, he decided "why not?" He never liked dancing when he was younger. On the other hand, Trevor loves to dance, though he hasn't done it for a while. Maybe they could partner up? No, says Barry, you need a woman for this. At the next class, we see that Trevor has joined. His partner is Josie (Finola Hughes), who happens to be Tanya's sister. They're enjoying themselves, but the same can't be said of Barry and Tanya, who resent the intrusion of Trevor and Josie. They all decide to enter the big Thames Valley amateur dance eliminations. This is a big deal for Barry, who's never won anything before in his life. Over the next few weeks, we see them getting ready. Finally, it's the big night. Marigold and Johnny offer some last-minute pointers, including a tip that the final sweep by the judges' table is crucial. The competition goes well until both couples decide to do the sweep in the same place at the same time. Marigold and Johnny, who are also the judges, see what's about to happen but are powerless to stop it. Crash! Tanya and Josie collide. The mood is spoiled. Suddenly, they're at each other's throats! Trevor and Barry wisely stay back. Some time later, we see Trevor arriving home from the court and Barry preparing dinner. The girls were fined £500 and given six months probation, Trevor reports. As for him and Barry, all is back to normal.

**COMMENT:** All of the Trevor/Barry sketches seem to fit the same basic pattern: something comes along that threatens their relationship; things are strained for a while, but everything is eventually resolved and life goes on. In the first season, it was Trevor's being asked to be a surrogate father; in the second, it was a tiff over dinner; in the third, it was a realization about aging; and in the fourth, it's Latin dance. But by the end of the sketch, their differences are resolved, and everything goes back to normal. That might be the recipe for bland, formulaic sketches, but not in this case. The Trevor and Barry sketches are always enjoyable. The first one made the first season best-of special, and this one is a good candidate for the fourth season's

special.

#### SHORT BITS:

Ruby has been watching the movie "Magnificent Obsession", which makes her cry every time she see it, even though she worked on it. She says Rock Hudson hadn't gone gay yet and was all over her, while Jane Wyman never said more than two words to her throughout the production. As an aside, she mentions her theory that disco music made people gay. She also spoils the plot for everyone.

**COMMENT:** Disco music making people gay -- that's a good one.

HRH says that the royal family does not indulge in obsession. Neither do they indulge in flamboyance, spontaneity, volatility, impulsiveness or enthusiasm. Italian aristocrats engage in all of the above, sometimes in the space of an entire evening. The Spanish aristocrats are much the same, but they can sleep it off in the afternoons. She doesn't know much about Japanese royalty, but their airlines allow smoking, which is something to be said for them.

**COMMENT:** No comment is necessary.

#### LONG SKETCH:

Sheneesha is doing a body search on a passenger when she wonders to Hellura (Adele Givens) about the man who wanted to have sex with Steven Spielberg. She questions Spielberg's attractiveness, specifically mentioning his "sorry white butt." But he better look out when his stalker is released from prison. Perhaps he should get an ass alarm -- like a car alarm, it'd warn when somebody got too close. "Step away from the ass", "you're standing too close to the ass," etc.

**COMMENT:** This is borderline tacky, but I liked the idea of an ass alarm.

#### SHORT BIT:

Kay talks about how she became obsessed with collecting Beanie Babies. It started off with Bongo the monkey in a McDonald's Happy Meal. Next came Snip the cat from Walgreen's; she "heard" it purring next to the Metamucil. Then came another, and another and another -- Hoppity, Legs, Bubbles, Army, etc. She paid \$300 for Peanut the elephant, driving out to Fresno on her lunch hour to pick it up. One day, her mother overheard her talking to her "grandchildren", got very upset, took a scissors to Peanut and gutted it. She made Kay get rid of her collection, which she did by leaving it at a local preschool. But she saved Bongo and keeps it at work. "It" has some not-very-nice words to say about Mother...

**COMMENT:** I have some not-very-nice words for her mother, too! Once again, she's acted to dash her daughter's hopes, to crush her spirit just a little bit more. You can see that Kay has a love-hate relationship with Mother. She does need to get away, even if it's only for a short while. If she'd only taken that Hawaiian vacation with Gil (from the Books episode)...

**LOST SKETCHES:** Comments from Madame Nadja; Fern and her resemblance to Sandra Bullock (?); Linda and her struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** Another pretty darn good episode.

## 12. End of the World (Mar 17 1999)

OPENING: Tracey says that she'd want the world to end all of a sudden, not in a long drawn-out affair of either burning up or freezing out. She'll think about Armageddon from time to time, but her husband would rather change the subject to food.

THE STORY (all interleaved):

Upstate New York on Sunday morning: Hope is on the air at the college radio station, reading an announcement about a meeting that evening to denounce sexism in "The Smurfs." Suddenly, her boyfriend Roberto pounds on the window to get her attention. She lets him inside the studio, and he has important news: some hackers have gotten into the Pentagon, and they've learned about a huge meteor shower, the Himmelfarb shower, heading straight for Earth. Hope is skeptical of this report ("it's so summer movie"), suspecting it might be a plot by him to get her to lose her virginity. But another student comes by to confirm the reports. She says the president is speaking to the nation.

**COMMENT:** I liked Hope's comment about the meteor shower being "so summer movie." But I detect a problem with continuity here. In the Road Rage episode, Hope and Roberto were in L.A., and there was no reference to them having traveled out there, the implication being that they go to college out there. But this scene clearly establishes that they're attending college in upstate New York. Which is correct?

East Hollywood: On Ruby's TV screen, we see the president calling for prayer. We also hear a reporter quizzing him about hitting on Celine Dion; he doesn't deny it -- it is the end of the world, after all. Ruby complains about the continuous coverage interrupting the *Barnaby Jones* marathon. She thinks this is a hoax, just like Orson Welles and the *War of the Worlds*. She recalls doing Hedy Lamarr's makeup in Algiers when that program aired; they ran and hid facedown underneath the makeup trailer. When they learned the truth, Hedy (who is part-gypsy) put a gypsy curse on Orson; that's why he got so fat, claims Ruby. Flipping the channels, she discovers that the shopping channel's still on.

**COMMENT:** Ruby is Ruby; she's taking it awfully well -- no change in her behavior.

Bob Costas (himself) is the anchorman for the news coverage, and he reports that all across America, people are seeking solace in their families and loved ones. An ethereal calm seems to be settling over America. Not in Boca Raton, where Fern is distraught. "It's the end of my world," she wails. "It's the end of everyone's world," says Jobie (Julie Kavner). While Fern tries in vain to cancel her spa appointment that she's going to miss, Jobie complains about the fact that the apparent instrument of humanity's destruction has a Jewish name (Himmelfarb).

Meanwhile, in London, Trevor and Barry (Michael McKean) are watching the news. Prime Minister Blair is hosting a small dinner party, with such guests as the Archbishop of Canterbury and some members of Oasis. Barry is going through the photo album, recalling the time he and Trevor went to Venice. Trevor remembers getting food poisoning and being laid up for a few days, only to recover and see Barry becoming friendly with an 18-year-old glassblower. He tells Barry that it's no time to wallow in nostalgia. Thanks to his airline job, they can go anywhere they want. Barry confesses to an ongoing fantasy based around *Thelma & Louise*....

**COMMENT:** Trevor and Barry's sketch this week partially breaks the pattern they've had (see the Obsession episode for details on the pattern). There is still a threat to their relationship, but unlike in past sketches, it doesn't drive them apart prior to reconciling. Then again, this threat is far more serious.

Back in America, Bob Costas announces that the meteor is 24 hours and 11 minutes away. In Atlanta, Birdie and her children are deep in prayer, praying that God's got spots reserved in Heaven for them, and offering their services in punishing Jews, Muslims and Catholics.

**COMMENT:** She almost looked possessed....

Meanwhile, back in L.A., there's pandemonium in Sydney's law office. We see a couple making love on the desk. Her assistant Jordan is on the phone with her; she's on the road in her Hummer. She wants him to locate the file marked D-Day in her private files and fax her something: a ticket for a special flight of the space shuttle. There's a government plan to save the most important people on the planet by transporting them to a space colony where they can build a new race of superhumans. The ticket was actually for Jackie Onassis, but Sydney acquired it when Jackie O's belongings were auctioned off. As the fax comes through, Sydney takes the opportunity to tell Jordan that, as an assistant and a person, he has been totally lame. When he tries to respond, she cuts him off.

**COMMENT:** She's handling the crisis well -- she's covered (she thinks).

Meanwhile, in Mule Creek, New Mexico, we see Trevor and Barry driving in a convertible and pulling into a restaurant. With their duded-up outfits, they attract attention from the other patrons. The waitress suggests the Blue Plate End of the World special, which contains all of the heavy and fatty foods you can think of.. One patron asks about their accent (English, of course). Another, a big biker type, asks if they are faggots. Trevor admits it; after all, with the end only 14 hours away, there's no real point in denying it. Why are they there, the biker asks. In an eloquent speech, Barry tells of his lifelong dream to visit the American West. His story is so moving that the waitress tells them their meals are on the house. Trevor continues; they'll eventually drive their convertible off of the Grand Canyon, like Thelma and Louise did.

**COMMENT:** Love that "End of the World" blue plate special!

With 12 hours and 4 minutes to go, Bob Costas reports that the Yankees have been awarded the American League pennant. Meanwhile, in Beverly Hills, Candy Casino (Seymour Cassel) is tearing up his office, looking for some acid he stashed back in '68. That's how he plans to face the end of the world: in the middle of an acid trip. But Linda wants to go out singing; she wants to give a farewell performance for her fans. She tells him to contact the Jazz Bagel and set everything up. But he's preoccupied with finding his stash....

With 9 hours and 17 minutes to go, the asteroids are hurtling toward Earth at 27,000 miles an hour. Meanwhile, there's pandemonium on the streets in New York City. Traffic is gridlocked, and in the middle of it is Chic, who like thousands of others is trying to flee town. He's complaining about it when he acquires a passenger: Janie Pillsworth, who's carrying a partially-drunk bottle of liquor. Chic recognizes Janie from Stage 24 back in '76, when he got her into the club. And he refreshes her memory of the incident -- "show me your tits." Then she remembers and is mortified. But in her slightly intoxicated state, she does find him somewhat

attractive (with a "reptilian magnetism") and proposes to have some meaningless sex with him. Perhaps its total meaninglessness will make it meaningful, she muses. Chic doesn't care for the philosophical aspects; he just sees a woman who wants to have sex with him. Of course, he agrees. He drives the cab onto the sidewalk and heads for his place.

**COMMENT:** Under normal circumstances, Janie would have absolutely nothing to do with anyone like Chic. Indeed, she said she'd sooner stick pins in her eyes. But these are not normal circumstances....

Bob Costas observes that the youth of the world are throwing the world's greatest party. And why not? Their dreams and desires will never be realized. We then observe Hope and Roberto in her bedroom, where he is trying to fulfill his greatest desire: to possess Hope. But it's doubtful that her greatest desire is to be possessed by Roberto, for she is still reluctant. She'd like to get to know him better; for instance, what's his favorite color? And shouldn't they get ready to help the injured, bandaging their injuries, etc.? He convinces her that there won't be anyone left to bandage, so she agrees to make love to him. But she insists on his using a condom. While he goes to find one, she awaits.

**COMMENT:** Hope is sticking to her principles to the end; that's admirable.

Meanwhile, we see Kay coming from her mother's room. Mother's died, she says. She's held on for so long, but with the end of the world approaching, she's given up the ghost. Perhaps Mother wanted to beat the rush to the Pearly Gates, she says. Then she suddenly realizes the implications of Mother's death: she's got her freedom! It may only be for 3 hours and 14 minutes, but it's freedom! But is the Canoga Park over-40 singles club open on Tuesdays? Never mind; she dashes off.

**COMMENT:** This is a development I have wanted to see for some time. But what lousy timing for Kay, who has only a few hours to enjoy the rest of her life. More comments on this are in the overall episode comments.

Meanwhile, Birdie has cracked under the strain. She's on the couch, smoking up the house and drinking up a storm. She tells the children to come inside and light her cigarette. Better yet, come on in and have a smoke! They don't want to enter, not when she's firing her revolver.

**COMMENT:** It's said that you get to see the true mark of a person's character by how they react to crises. By this measurement, Birdie has been found wanting.

Meanwhile, Sydney's on the space shuttle, all suited up and ready to go. In fact, she is so anxious to go that she's not willing to wait for John Travolta to board or for Bill Gates and Arianna Huffington to sit down. She pushes the button for launch, and they're off! Her last words on earth: "So long, suckers!"

At the airport, there's complete chaos as would-be passengers overwhelm the security gates. Sheneesha takes matters into her own hands by grabbing a guard's pistol and firing a warning shot. Now that she has everyone's attention, she tells them to go home and make love to their spouse or significant other like it's the end of the world -- which it is. The crowd takes her advice and disperses. She tells Hellura (Adele Givens) to find her T-Bone, and they have an emotional farewell. Then Sheneesha calls Jerome on the radio and tells him to get ready for some of her sugar.

**COMMENT:** Sheneesha is certainly handling herself very well in the crisis.

At Le Jazz Bagel, Linda is singing some serious music, stretching her wings a bit. The applause is underwhelming; as one drunken fan puts it, all he wanted was to spend these last few hours "wrapped in the familiar arms of her feelgood blend of pop and show tunes." She agrees and starts singing "Last Dance." Meanwhile, Candy has found the acid and is tripping.

**COMMENT:** A trouper to the end -- that's Linda for you.

Bob Costas reports that there's trouble along the Israeli-Palestinian border. Meanwhile, Fern and Jobie are engaging in a major pigout. The cherry cheese ice cream is so good, declares Jobie, it's like having an orgasm. "Who remembers?" counters Fern as she realizes she's going to have to find her fat pants.

Meanwhile, Sydney is adrift in space, having been kicked off of the shuttle. Fortunately for her, she's right next to the Mir space station, and she demands to be let inside.

**COMMENT:** I don't blame them for kicking Sydney off.

As the meteors tear through what's left of the ozone layer, Fern and Jobie have started on the herring, Trevor and Barry are speeding to their doom, and Linda's still singing "Last Dance."

The final seconds: "ten... nine... eight..." Ruby's fallen asleep in her recliner. Bob Costas takes out a bottle of whiskey.

"seven... six... five..." Hope removes her nose ring.

"four..." Trevor and Barry are still speeding to their doom.

"three... two..." Bob hides under the anchor desk.

"one..." Ruby is asleep in her recliner.

"zero!" BOOM! Suddenly, there's a loud crash! Ruby wakes up and wonders what's going on.

The radio announces the good news: the meteors didn't hit! The world is not going to end! Trevor slams on the brakes, and the car stops right on the edge of the canyon. They are relieved.

When Hope hears the good news, she's jubilant. Now there's time to get to know Roberto better. What's his favorite color? Blue, as in the color of his balls.

**COMMENT:** I applaud Hope for sticking to her principles. At the same time, I feel sympathy for Roberto, 'cause he's feeling very frustrated right about now.

Bob is very upset right now. Never has he had so much egg on his face as right now, he exclaims. Meanwhile, Fern and Jobie are suffering from the after-effects of their gorging. Fern thinks she's put on at least 10 pounds, and she asks to borrow a mumu from Jobie.

**COMMENT:** Why am I reminded of that famous Alka-Seltzer commercial that went "I can't believe I ate the whole thing"?

Meanwhile, Janie is utterly mortified at what she has just done with Chic in his filthy, flea-ridden apartment. Now that the world's not ending, she's going to have to live with this horrible

memory. But it can't have been too horrible, as she gives him her private phone number. Never use the switchboard, she tells him. As she leaves, he tells her to mind the goat.

**COMMENT:** The less we know about the goat, the better!

Bob Costas reports that the meteor shower missed Earth by hundreds of miles. The only known incident is in east Hollywood...

... where Ruby is holding forth with the media in her front yard. Also in the front yard is a glowing rock. Yes, a meteorite landed in her front yard. When she heard the crash, she says, she thought that it was a dump of toilet waste from an airplane, which had happened before to her (there's still a bit of smell). But when she looked outside, she saw this red-hot rock in the yard, burning up the grass. She was able to light her cigarette on it. She's having Buddy run a small museum where they can charge the local Mexicans to see the meteor.

**COMMENT:** That's Ruby for you.

Meanwhile, Birdie is telling the children that they saw nothing and they heard nothing. "Praise momma, praise daddy, praise Jesus!"

**COMMENT:** They'll remember.

Meanwhile, in the Mir space station, Sydney is broadcasting a plea for help. She's trapped in a broken-down space station with three Russian "retards", and she wants out of there -- NOW!!

**COMMENT:** Serves her right.

**OVERALL COMMENTS:** I found the episode to be even funnier on its second viewing than on its first. It was a fine episode on which to end the season. But there is a major development with implications for next season: with the apparent death of Kay's mother, what will happen to her? Will we see her enjoy her new life? Will we even *see* Kay next season? Might she be "retired," as Virginia and Mrs. Noh appear to have been? Or will Fate have a cruel trick in store for her, meaning that her mother might not be dead after all?

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