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## Chapters And Verse

### Who Wants To Be A Millionaire

A U.S. TV network operation is a behemoth. ABC, the North American home of Who Wants To Be A Millionaire is no exception. Next door to Central Park, the rambling office and studio complex looks more like a Disney construction of rabbit warrens for a Bugs Bunny cartoon, all of which house those busy and brainy bunnies that create World News Tonight, 20/20, The View and much else. Canadians, I might add, are well represented in the ranks of anchors, hosts, and reporters.

As I wander through the scarred and paint chipped halls, past the garbage and loading docks - voila!- the glittery, high tech home of Millionaire presents itself. The studio, the set and even its charming and effervescent host are much smaller in real life than the image projected on screen. I know how that works – I’m 5’10’ on TV but not so lucky in real life.

The air conditioners blast away and there I am draped in a sweater, freezing on the hottest set in TV. I wish I had a moment to take a stroll through the Park, dine on the oysters Rockefeller at the Park Plaza or check out the summer sales at Bloomingdale’s. But outside, there’s a heat so stifling and oppressive that any sensible New Yorker with train fare or a subway token would willingly flee one of the world’s most amazing cities.

So I opt for the frigid flash of the studio and am grateful for a little more rehearsal time. Culture, celebrity and cash are New York City’s lifeblood. And, for many of the lucky American Millionaire contestants who’ve have been flown into town, this is their bite of the Big Apple. There’s no way to explain NYC or translate the feel, the crush, the pulsating sounds and the throng of people – cell phones at their ears – and the hurried jostling for space and speed.

It reminded me about a new discovery I read about the other day - something called Synesthesia - which means that the stimulation of one sense elicits an experience in another. These uncanny links between or among the different senses mean you can, for instance, see red when you hear a musical instrument or smell cinnamon when you see a certain colour. This “condition” is often experienced, not surprisingly, by artists.

The University of Waterloo has just published a study suggesting that synesthesia may have a neurological side, too and that synesthetic experiences can be prompted by ideas as readily as external sensory output. They should have done the testing here - New York gives you plenty of sensory input. It is a city of ideas and creativity and you can feel it in the air, on the streets - you can sense your own brain being triggered by the sights and sounds of ideas.

As usual, I have digressed, but the surreal atmosphere of being a part of the one of the world's most popular phenomenon's – and TV shows – is exhilarating.

Meeting with the Millionaire team, and of course the contestants – hearing their stories - and their plans for the million should they win it – is fun. This is not a program, as some of the cheap knock-offs imply, about greed.

This is about the possibility of a dream realized. The contestants I met want the money for a child's education, or to pay off a debt, help a troubled family member or maybe take a holiday.

They're neat people. The philosophy of the programme is to do whatever possible to make the contestants comfortable and confident. The folks at Millionaire make this an experience to remember, whatever the outcome of the fastest finger competition!

As the Canadian host of two CTV Special Editions of Who Wants To Be A Millionaire, (to be broadcast September 13 and 14), I feel a little like a unknown relative that drops by for a visit. The conversations could have been awkward, but it doesn't turn out that way. Instead, the American crew in New York treat me like a queen, with a dressing room right next to Regis'. There's hot and cold running snacks, and any number of producers, assistants and camera folk offering advice, assistance and encouragement.

With all my years in the news biz, the executive producer, Michael Davies (the brash, very bright, young Scotsman who imported the idea into the U.S.A.) fears I may know too many of the answers. Can I keep a poker face? For my part, I'm worried about "mounting" the chair and remembering to say "Is that your final answer?". This is not an option. Nor is it simply Regis' signature line. It's a legal and technical necessity. I may just stick a little post-it note on that NASA spaceship of a monitor as a gentle reminder!

More later from New York.....daily diary notes begin on September 5th!