

SEAN HAYES THE INTERVIEW HE NEVER GAVE

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Eight years of great laughs

By Jim Colucci

In a memorable 2002 episode of *Will & Grace*, Jack becomes Kevin Bacon's personal assistant, and his first task is to find Kevin's stalker—that is, himself. As a comedy writer who'd been hired to write the companion book to the landmark sitcom, I could identify; for years I'd been stalking the show's producers, hoping to get a job on one of the sharpest-written comedies of the decade. And as a gay man, I would have been honored to contribute to a true TV milestone: the first mainstream network program specifically created to have a gay lead character.

In that unfortunately brief, hopeful epoch between Ellen's coming-out and Janet's popping-out, when TV last dared to be daring, *Will & Grace* made history. For as many times as we'd seen sitcom permutations of straight family life—wait, in this one, he's the smart one and she's the slob!—it had taken nearly a half century of network broadcasting before TV brought us the first depiction of another age-old relationship, that of a gay man and his best straight girlfriend.

But being a pioneer can be a thankless task. Critics, many of them gay, have criticized *Will & Grace* for portraying a seemingly sexless Will and a flamboyant, flighty Jack, and for the negative messages these "exaggerated"

characterizations must be sending to the straight world. Well, I don't know about you, but I'm often as square as Will and as airheaded as Jack all in the course of one afternoon, and I don't care if straight people know it. What I do know is, during the show's first season, my straight, blue-collar cousin told me during Thanksgiving dinner that he never missed an episode of *Will & Grace*, and for once we had something to talk about—even if we did have to share our favorite moments over the roar of some stupid football game.

Now that eight hilarious seasons have come and gone, I hate that we're saying goodbye to my (and my cousin's) favorite show, one of a dwindling few appointment-viewing half-hours. But I've decided to find consolation in the fact that *Will & Grace* will live on in constant rotation in local syndication, on Lifetime, and on DVD. And even if the show does fade from memory just a little bit, there is an upside. On those inevitable occasions when I steal one of Karen's put-downs and try to pass it off as my own off-the-cuff brilliance, I just might be able to get away with it. ■

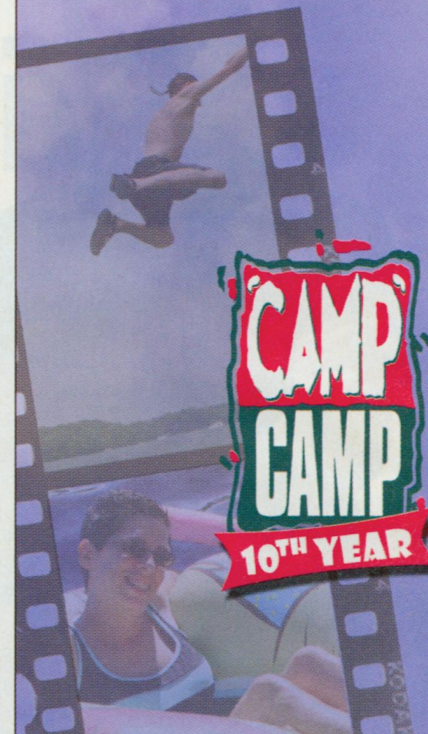
Colucci is the author of Will & Grace: Fabulously Uncensored (Time Inc. Home Entertainment) and the upcoming Q Guide to the Golden Girls (Alyson Books).



■ Will cuts footloose with guest Kevin Bacon, to Jack's subtle chagrin.

HAYES: NBC/PHOTOFEST; HAYES, MCCORMACK, AND BACON: CHRIS HASTON/NBC

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