



WINDY ACRES QUOTES (2004)

"It's a scream! Great work!" –**A viewer from Winooski, VT**

"Terrific show. This is the first time in 20 years I am excited about a TV program."

–**A viewer from Waitsfield, VT**

"Fantastic show! We were truly impressed with all aspects of this new, truly Vermont comedy. We wish it were 1 hour long and really hope that it makes it beyond its first season. Thanks!"

–**Viewers from Barton, VT**

*"We love **Windy Acres** and hope you will continue with the series. It falls in line with some of the English comedies we enjoy. THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!"*

– **Viewers from Wilmington, VT**



WINDY ACRES (2004) WHAT'S FUNNY?

By Jay Craven

During the 1970's, magazine editor Norman Cousins developed a crippling and usually irreversible disease. He turned to the Marx Brothers. He swears that comedy helped him recover.

The UCLA medical school is studying how humor affects health and Dr. Lee Berk published results in the American Journal of Medical Science, showing how blood samples from subjects who watched comedy videos showed significant reductions in stress hormones and enhanced immune function.

Playwright Samuel Beckett says comedy is about other people's unhappiness. Mel Brooks goes a step further. "Tragedy is if I cut my finger," he says. "Comedy is if you fall down a manhole and die."

Vermont humor is rooted in irony, understatement, and wry observation. A Northeast Kingdom farmer deflates a boastful Texan who scoffs at the Vermonter's puny acreage. "Heck, my ranch is so huge I can't drive all the way across it in a single day," he says. The Vermonter gives the Texan a dry look. "I had a car like that once. But I got rid of it."

So, comedy is different things to different people. Woody Allen's neurotic shlub plays to a different audience than Jim Carrey's hyperactive rubber man. Decades after their films, fans still debate their preferences for Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton.

I've thought a lot about comedy as I've prepared and produced *Windy Acres*, which plays Wednesday evenings this fall on Vermont Public Television. We started with a simple story—the city mouse and the country mouse, really—then worked to find fresh potential in an oddball ensemble of characters.

Comedy resides in character not plot. In exaggerated character perspectives that are stretched way beyond normalcy. Think of Inspector Clouseau and secret agent Maxwell Smart--always in jeopardy as the ultimate bumbling. Or Oliver Hardy, of Laurel and Hardy, who absurdly fancies himself as a ladies man. We'd never buy these guys as the real thing—yet we can see something of ourselves in them.

In *Windy Acres*, the fictional Vermont Tourist Commissioner is a self-conscious bureaucratic drone. He wants nothing more than to marry a beauty queen and be thin enough to wear a muscle T-shirt to the Price Chopper.

Comedy thrives on Beckett's notion of "truth in pain." In *Windy Acres*, Rusty DeWees' love-starved Lucien LaFlamme fights an uphill battle to save his flagging farm. He depends on his uncle UG to help with chores, but UG has other ideas. He'd rather surf the internet, broadcast a pirate radio show, and plan a movie starring local nightcrawlers.

Three hundred miles downcountry, hapless and humiliated New Yorker Stephanie Burns gets publicly fired. She finds UG's bogus web site for agricultural tourism, stuffs her two reluctant daughters into a borrowed car and sets off for a Vermont vacation that's nothing like she imagines. It's painful. The characters are vulnerable. Good.

Then we mix-in seven episodes of steady conflict, a dose of each character's flaws and humanity, and a tone and setting that's rooted in Vermont.

Tonight marks our debut with this television series experiment. The stage is set, the curtain is rising, and we're holding our breath. It's also game four for the Red Sox in the World Series and the night of the lunar eclipse. Now, that's funny!