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On a Friday in February 2005, with my parents at a taping of the fourth-to-last episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, I saw Ray Romano, Patricia Heaton, Brad Garrett, Doris Roberts, Peter Boyle, and Monica Horan at work, but I was more interested in watching director Gary Halvorson at the quad split, a monitor on a strongly-built cart that showed what each of the four cameras was seeing (we weren't sitting where I could directly see it, but I knew what it was). Directors have always interested me more than actors, going back to when I was in middle school and obsessed with movies. Give me the title of a movie and I can probably tell you who directed it.

When Halvorson went to confer with the actors, be it on the far right side of the stage, where Ray and Debra's bedroom was, or on the far left side of the stage, where the kitchen was (the living room was in the middle), there wasn't much to see since the view was mostly blocked from where we were sitting. The episode, "Sister-in-Law," was about Ray bothered by his sister-in-law Amy's (Horan) interruptions while he's just trying to watch TV, and it didn't seem like much to me. I had seen a few episodes of the show in the past, but wondered how people could laugh so much at episodes about PMS, or not putting away a suitcase, or intrusive in-laws (all the time, as it were), or anything else that makes up our daily lives. We live it. Why would we want to relive it?



Watching *95 Miles to Go* from Tom Caltabiano, Ray Romano's friend, one of many writers on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and fellow stand-up comedian who opens for him on an eight-day tour, I get it now. With only Romano on the stage, I see it now. People laugh because it's cathartic, because a lot of those things are hard and we need to laugh. But what makes them laugh is how Romano looks at life. He considers angles that people can't see in the frustration, in the trying times, or hadn't even thought of in the way Romano thinks about it. In one moment of footage from the main show, which is actually culled from the Kansas City date (28 minutes of which are featured separately on this DVD), he talks about how, when you're married long enough, you don't have to worry about sparing each other's feelings if sex isn't going to happen. You'll live through it. You've lived through it long enough already. I also think I wasn't able to understand the appeal of *Everybody Loves Raymond* before, because I've always latched on to stand-up comedians who are so delightfully outlandish in their thinking, like Patton Oswalt, or recount situations in their lives that aren't about family or marriage, like Ron White and John Pinette. My favorite comedian in Las Vegas is the seemingly insane The Amazing Jonathan, who does magic, but doesn't care if you see how it's done. These are my people.

95 Miles to Go makes me want to try *Everybody Loves Raymond* again, remembering how Romano breaks down situations in our lives by looking at them in ways that just seem oddball, yet they make perfect sense. Because our lives are that oddball, and so is Romano and Caltabiano's road trip, starting with Romano's "mind bets," and going on with how they travel, how they behave in the rental car they're driving, everything seen by the cameras set up by Roger Lay, Jr., who Caltabiano met at the University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television, and who was working as an intern at *Everybody Loves Raymond*, when Caltabiano recruited him for this, which takes place after the fifth season of the show has wrapped. We see life on the road for stand-up comedians, signing autographs, posing for pictures, waiting backstage, unwinding after a gig, the kind of life Romano likes more than acting. It's what he's always done, and it seems like what he hopes to do for the rest of his life. In an interview for a CBS affiliate backstage at the Jackie Gleason Theater in Miami Beach, he tells the reporter that he considers himself a "stand-up comedian/maybe actor." I agree, because his performance on *Everybody Loves Raymond* is an extension of who he is. It works well. It's funny. *Welcome to Mooseport*, in which he co-starred with Gene Hackman and Maura Tierney, is an unhappy contrast because he's just playing the same guy, but for a longer amount of time. What's funny on TV, what made him one of the highest-paid actors in television, doesn't work in a movie. In stand-up, he can work alone. On television, in movies, he has to work with others. It's the only way he's good. Yes, he worked with others in *Welcome to Mooseport*, but he was the lead. Not

good.

This documentary will make you think about how you travel, how you make yourself comfortable in a car or on a plane, complaints you have along the way, interactions with your fellow travelers, everything you go through. Romano and Caltabiano have that effect. Both of them are continually funny and there are unplanned bits, comments during their travels that make you consider traveling in ways you never thought of. For example, after eating at Cracker Barrel in Macon, Georgia, Ray's stomach bothers him and he desperately needs a bathroom. There's no bathroom available in a shopping center, so he pays \$40 at a motel to use the bathroom in one of the rooms. Yes, really. And it's also funny to watch him watching *Everybody Loves Raymond* on the flight from Los Angeles to Miami on American Airlines. I know it's American Airlines because a flight with my family from Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles in April 2003 had the movie *Brown Sugar*, and then episodes of *Still Standing* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

This is the kind of DVD that other stand-up comedians would absolutely kill for. Tom Caltabiano has made a Criterion Collection-level offering, which is possible only because *95 Miles to Go* is 79 minutes. There's a novel video commentary that shows Romano and Caltabiano sitting at the right side of the screen, seemingly looking off into the distance, but they're watching what we're watching, with it projected behind them because that's how we're watching it. They describe scenes as they're watching, which is moot since we see those scenes anyway, and they should be talking more about their experiences on this trip. They do, though it comes sporadically. There's also a few good jokes. Then there's an audio commentary by editor Cheyenne Pesko and cinematographer Roger Lay, Jr. which is one of two technical tracks, Lay describing the cameras used and the filming methods and both talking about the opening animated sequence, the company that made it. The other technical audio commentary track is by composer Adam Gorgoni and Caltabiano, with Gorgoni describing the music he composed and the songs used.

We're hardly done yet. There's two post-screening Q&As, one from the Comedy Magic Club in Hermosa Beach, California, which is better than Romano and Caltabiano's video commentary because just like the stand-up tour, they're in front of an audience. They have to talk, they have to explain, they have to joke. People expect this. The most interesting tidbit gleaned from this Q&A is that 130 hours of footage were shot, whittled down to 79 minutes. Then there's the South by Southwest Q&A in Austin, Texas, which has the great bonus of Brad Garrett showing up. In the back of the theater, he shouts out in a more nasally voice that he has a question, and then you can hear his distinctive rumble, asking Romano and Caltabiano, "What the hell were you thinking?" He then goes onstage and does a stunning, dead-on impersonation of Bill Cosby. As a future resident of Las Vegas, aware of his comedy club at the MGM Grand, it makes me want to see his show whenever he's there.

There's also nine deleted scenes, an alternate editing, and camera outtakes from Roger Lay, Jr., which total 47 seconds. 12 photos make up the photo gallery, including two on the set of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and you can watch 28 minutes of Romano's stand-up show in Kansas City, Missouri. My favorite line from that is, "I had my cholesterol level checked. Boy that's annoying if you like to eat food."

Fans should go nuts for this. I still don't consider myself a fan, but I respect Romano for what he does. This is a lot of fun.