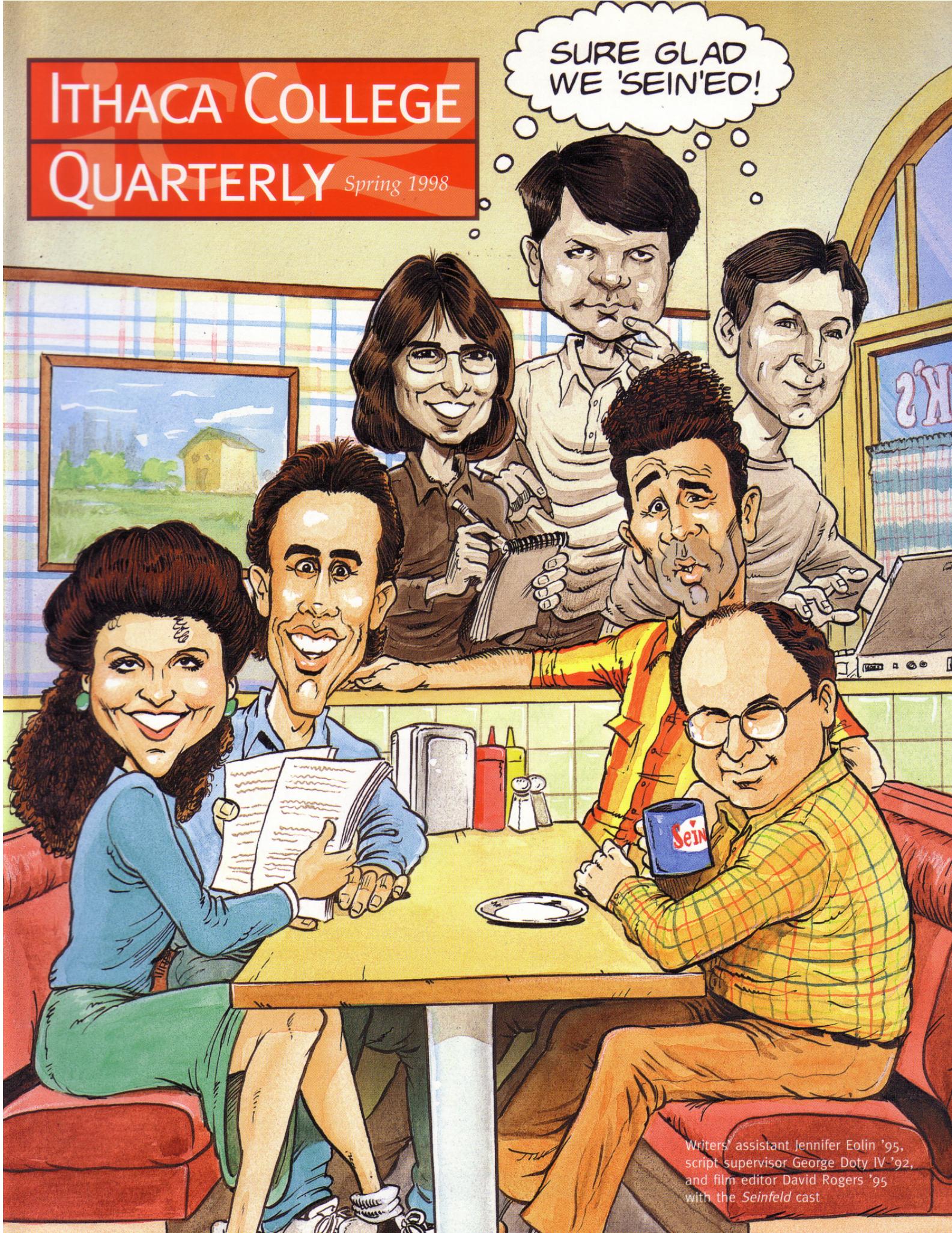


ITHACA COLLEGE QUARTERLY

Spring 1998

SURE GLAD
WE 'SEIN'ED!



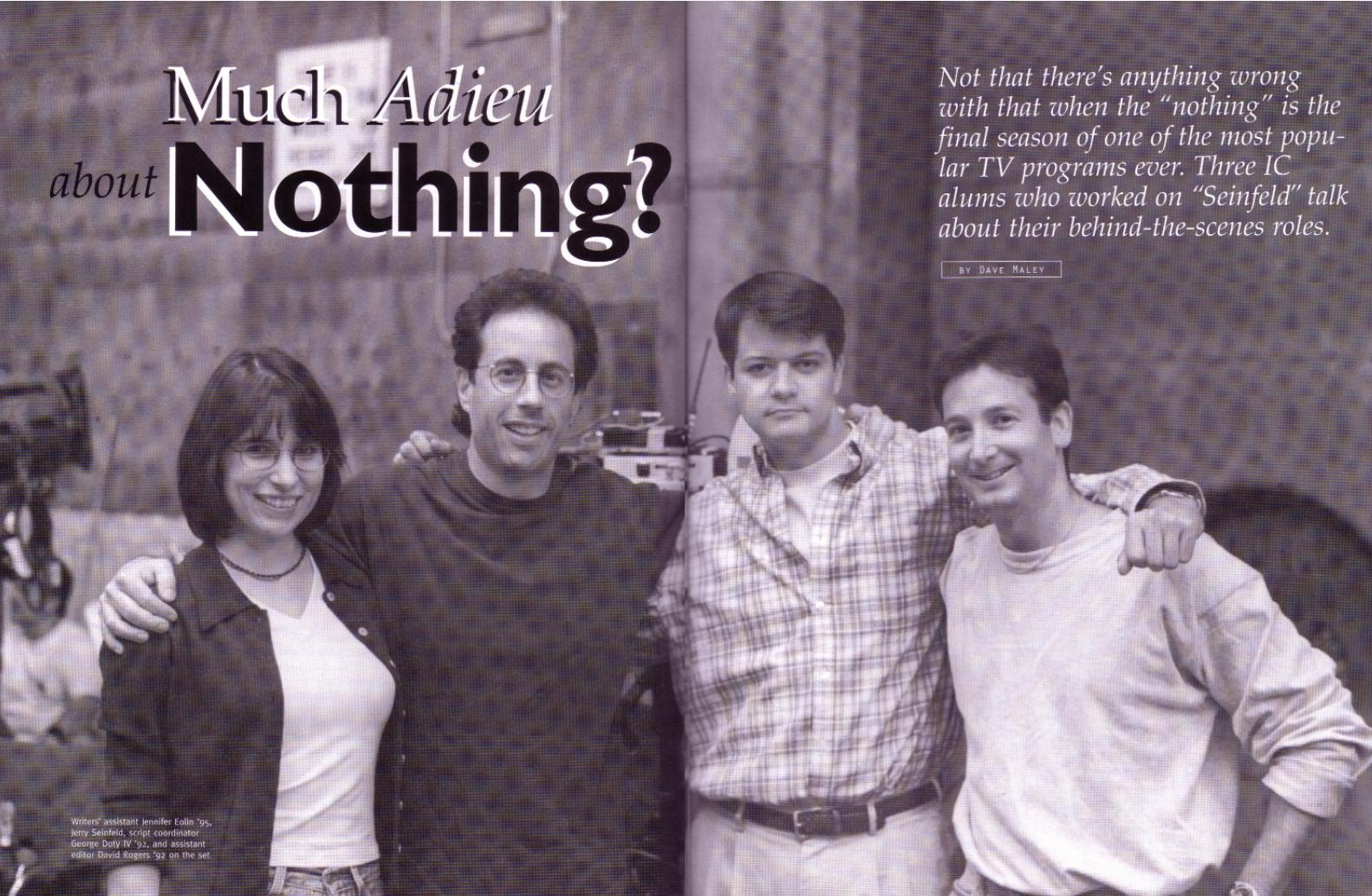
Writers' assistant Jennifer Eolin '95,
script supervisor George Doty IV '92,
and film editor David Rogers '95
with the *Seinfeld* cast

Much Adieu about Nothing?

Not that there's anything wrong with that when the "nothing" is the final season of one of the most popular TV programs ever. Three IC alums who worked on "Seinfeld" talk about their behind-the-scenes roles.

BY DAVE MALEY

Writers' assistant Jennifer Eolin '95, Jerry Seinfeld, script coordinator George Doty IV '92, and assistant editor David Rogers '92 on the set.



Jerry Seinfeld, the character, loves to eat cereal. So, apparently, does Jerry Seinfeld, the actor who portrays him on his eponymously titled television show. He was working on a bowl of Lucky Charms at three o'clock in the afternoon when I was introduced to him one day in February. He dropped in as I was wrapping up my interview with three people whose names are a tad less well known than his and whose contributions to television's top-rated comedy you wouldn't know unless you watch closely when the credits flash by at the end of each week's *Seinfeld* episode.

Script coordinator George Doty IV '92, writers' assistant Jennifer Eolin (pronounced Oh'-lin) '95, and assistant editor David Rogers '92, all graduates of the Roy H. Park School of Communications, took some time out of their work on *Seinfeld*'s final season to talk with the *Ithaca College Quarterly* about their experiences. Though aired on NBC, the show is actually put together at the CBS Studio Center, a collection of

37.
(P)

SEINFELD
"The Yada Yada"
Shooting Script
Mar 05 1997

ELAINE
I've yada, yada-ed sex.
GEORGE
Really?
ELAINE
I met this lawyer, we went out to dinner. I had the lobster bisque, we went back to my place-- yada, yada, yada-- I never heard from him again.
JERRY
You yada, yada-ed over the best part.
ELAINE
No, I mentioned the bisque.
GEORGE
Well, I've got to do something.
AS GEORGE EXITS TO THE BATHROOM, KRAMER ENTERS.
KRAMER
Well, I've got to do something.
JERRY
George is already in there.
KRAMER
Mickey and I can't work it out.
(MORE)

soundstages, office buildings, bungalows, post-production facilities, and dressing room trailers in the Studio City section of Los Angeles. Castle Rock Entertainment, the production company that makes *Seinfeld*, is located in building five, and the directions from the front gate read like a road map of television history: go down Mary Tyler Moore Avenue, past Gilligan's Island Road and St. Elsewhere Street, to the intersection of My Three Sons Street.

The interview took place around the same table where each week for nine seasons was created the world of Jerry and his pals George Costanza, Elaine Benes, and Cosmo Kramer. Not to mention memorable characters like the Soup Nazi, J. Peterman, the Bubble Boy, and Newman. And of course there are the catchphrases that have found their way into the lexicon of *Seinfeld*'s 30-million-plus weekly viewers: "Not that there's anything wrong with that!" "spongeworthy," "shrinkage," "yada, yada, yada" . . .

It may be a bit unusual for three Ithaca alums to be working at the same time on a show whose final episode was seeking a record \$2 million per 30-second commercial spot. How they got there,

"We're all climbing the ladder together, not climbing over one another to get ahead."

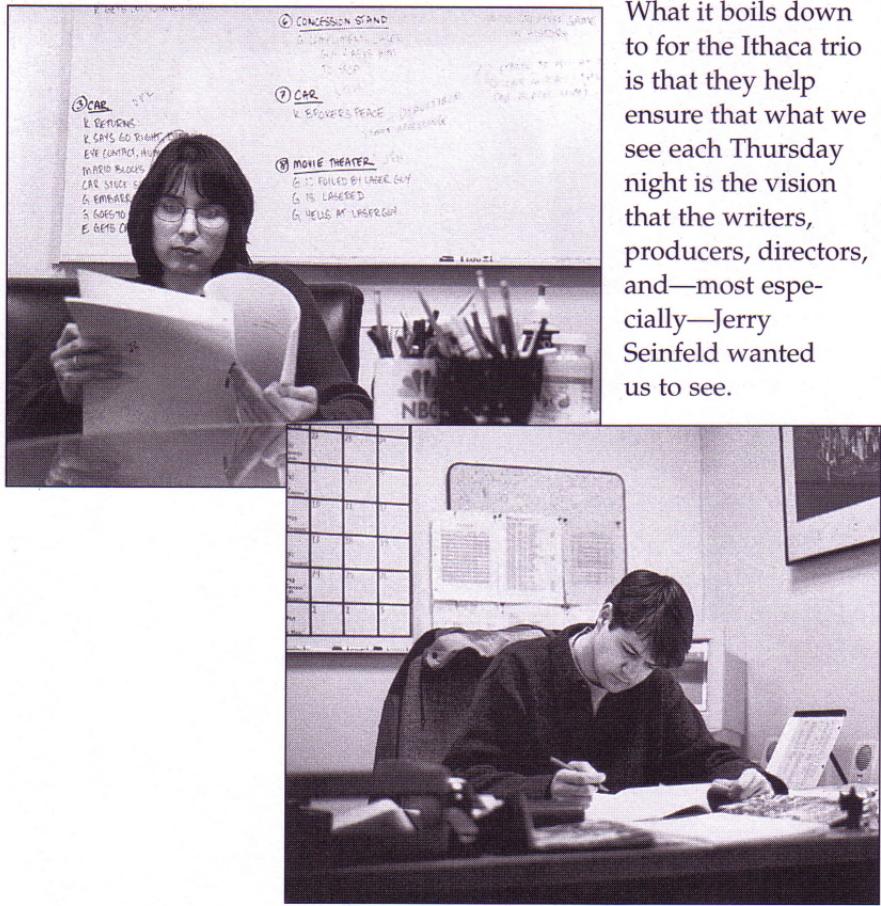
however, is typical of how Ithaca graduates look out for one another, especially in Lotus—and Lexus—land: Hollywood.

"I was working on a show called *Save Our Streets* and before that had interned in the writers' department at *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*," says Eolin, who had attended the Park School's Los Angeles program. "George was already working at *Seinfeld*, and when a job for a writers' assistant opened up he called the L.A. program, where they knew I was interested in that kind of position. They told me about the job, I put in a résumé and went through the interview process, and . . . I won!"

Just as Doty helped Eolin, both he and Rogers had learned about the openings that led to their own *Seinfeld* jobs through classmate Steve Mesner '92, the postproduction supervisor on another Castle Rock sitcom, *The Single Guy*. Originally hired as a writers' assistant himself, Doty was later pro-

of Michigan grad, walks into the room. Before he can even be introduced, Doty questions him: "Where did you live freshman year in college?" "The Towers," comes the answer. "And when we went out, we'd go to the Dugout or Micawber's."

As other coworkers stroll in and out of the room during the course of the interview, it is clear there is a camaraderie amongst the crew. Good thing, since putting together what *TV Guide* has hailed as the best comedy ever takes a lot of effort by a lot of people every week.



Making "Must-See TV"

"George and I are in the room with the writers as they work over the script in what's called prewrites," says Eolin. "After they make changes, we stay late to proofread it, pull the parts together, compile the short rundown, and make sure department heads are aware of the revisions. We hand the scripts off to the production assistants. They stay even later to photocopy, then drive all over creation delivering these scripts—to the four main cast members, director, first assistant director, producers, and any large guest-cast role."

Those people next get together for the "table read," where the script is read aloud, and Doty

and Eolin are once again responsible for keeping track of any changes. Following that are a couple of hours of rehearsals on the soundstage, then a dry run of the show that's watched by executives from Castle Rock and NBC.

"For a lot of other shows, executives will come by and tell you all the things you have to change, but they don't for *Seinfeld*," says Doty. "They watch, they maybe throw in a suggestion—and if it's not taken that's okay—and then they go away. They have faith in the people here, so they'd rather spend their time working on the shows that need a little more help than waste time here."

After the run-through, everyone convenes back at the office to talk about what worked and what didn't. At this point they'll add or drop—everything from an entire act to a scene or a character. "That meeting can last anywhere from a half hour to five hours," says Eolin. "We have to take meticulous notes, so after they've decided everything George and I can put the changes into the final version of the script. Then we are responsible for calling casting, props, the art department, set dressing. Every little thing . . . down to if a garment is supposed to tear in the middle of a scene we need to have the wardrobe department ready with six or seven identical shirts available. Literally and figuratively, we need to get everybody on the same page."

After another set of rehearsals, the cast and crew are ready to film the show in front of a studio audience. Since getting each separate shot just right can require several "takes," Eolin says she and Doty keep track of which ones the writers think work best. "When the filming is over we put together a shooting script in which we mark all the takes and hand that to Dave, who collates it with the script supervisor's notes into a packet for the editor. We usually wrap around 11:00, although the latest was 1:30 in the morning—the staff comes back to the office and talks about the show for a while."

Seinfeld is shot on film, because of its higher picture quality, then transferred onto video tape for editing. Rogers enters each frame from the four cameras into a digital editing system and combs his database for any "stock shots" that might be needed for an episode: a building exterior or a city street, for example. The editor, using the script, notes taken during shooting, and his own instincts, takes a first pass at assembling the show.

"Depending on our schedule, the editor sometimes asks me to work on the assembly," says



Rogers. "I'll put together some scenes and afterwards he'll go over it with me and critique it. The typical half-hour TV show may have 400 to 500 separate edits; we have sometimes a thousand. The pacing of *Seinfeld* is bam, bam, bam. We don't waste any time."

In fact, with only about 22 minutes, 40 seconds of actual "show" time during *Seinfeld*'s half hour, the rough first assembly might run 6 or 7 minutes too long—time that will have to be cut without losing the essence of the story. As with the writing process, revisions at this point become a group effort. The writers will work with the editor on a second pass; then the director gets a shot. Finally, it's up to the boss himself to sign off.

"Jerry's a writer, an actor, and a producer of the show," Rogers notes. "Just one of those alone is enough responsibility, but he sees everything before it hits the air. He inspires the rest of us to try for perfection by his example. On the set, he always hits his marks and rarely messes up his lines. We look for these things in the edit bay."

And how is it to work alongside such a big star?

"We don't think about it, that we're sitting in a room with Jerry Seinfeld every day," Eolin claims. "When I worked on the *The Tonight Show* it was a fabulous crash course in getting used to the people, because every day it was three new huge stars walking around. You can usually tell the people who are starstruck in these jobs, and they don't last long."

"Every once in a while you can freak out," admits Doty. "I was sitting next to Jerry watching

the Winter Olympics and he turned to me and went, 'Do you really trust Swatch to be the official timekeeper? Seiko I can see, but Swatch? Doesn't look very accurate.' That's when it came to me and I thought, 'That's right, you're Jerry Seinfeld, you're funny, you're not just reading someone else's lines.' "

Last year Seinfeld's costars

"We don't think about it, that we're sitting in a room with Jerry Seinfeld every day."

Jason Alexander (George), Julia Louis-Dreyfus (Elaine), and Michael Richards (Kramer) were chastised by some critics for demanding hefty salary

increases to continue with the show. "The actors make a lot of money, and some people think that's outrageous, but the great thing is that they do share it," Doty says. "Last Christmas we got Bose radios, and the year before, the four of them gave mountain bikes to everybody."

"I came into the edit bay one night and opened the door and there was a mountain bike," adds Rogers. "The card said, 'Happy holidays, David, from Jerry, Julia, Jason, and Michael.' "

"There's a lot of generosity," says Eolin. "They know we're not living in mansions with our eight Porsches out front. It makes it easier, to work with people who understand and aren't caught up in what they are."

When the News Broke...

"I was home for the Christmas holidays. When I woke up my mom had left me a note at the kitchen table: 'It's been announced. You're out of a job. Good luck!'

That's how Eolin found out. The news had leaked to the world that Jerry Seinfeld wasn't going to continue his show after the current season. "In all fairness," she adds, "I did get a message back here on my machine apologizing, saying that the word got out early."

"And who was the message on the machine from?" Doty prods. "Jerry. Mr. Seinfeld. It was a very nice message saying the announcement wasn't supposed to have happened that way."

Doty was still in the office, working the day before Christmas Eve, when he was told the official news. "Jerry first called up all of the

execs at NBC and Castle Rock and told them; then at the end of the day he pulled me in and said, 'Hey, we're done.'

Of the three Ithacans, it was Rogers who actually had the first scoop. "I came upstairs and people were still here working. I went into the kitchen to get a snack and I overheard Jerry, who was talking to a couple of the executive producers right outside. So picture this: I'm eating a Ding Dong and all of a sudden I hear Jerry saying, 'Yeah, it's just right. This is the time. It just feels right.' I'm, like, shocked. A few minutes later I see a writer and I ask, 'Is he just saying what I thought he said?' He goes, 'Yeah, just wait for the official announcement.' I thought it would be a few days, and then the story broke the next day on CNN. I hadn't told a soul."

"The worst thing was that everybody I knew wanted to know immediately what my plans were for the future," says Eolin. "I go out to dinner with my parents back home and everyone is saying, 'Oh, my god. What are you going to do?' And I'm like, 'I don't know, I'm just trying to eat my dinner. I haven't planned that far. I don't even know what dessert is yet.'

Even as April 8, when the show's finale would be filmed, approached, none of the three appeared

overly concerned about finding post-*Seinfeld* employment.

"Jen and I both want to be writers," says Doty. "Our goal is to be staff writers on a show next year. For those kinds of jobs it's not a traditional thing where you send out a bunch of résumés. You write some spec scripts and take them to agents, and the agents get you meetings, and you shop yourself that way. The writers here have been very helpful to us, reading our work and recommending us to people."

"Part of the joy of working with [the *Seinfeld* writers] is that you learn a new way of thinking, of putting together a story," adds Eolin. "It has seasoned us as to what is funny and how to put together something to make it funny." Eolin intends to stick with comedy—"I've tried dramatic and it just comes out sarcastic"—while Doty would like to eventually sink his writing teeth into drama.

"My situation is a little different," says Rogers. "I have a good relationship with *Seinfeld*'s editor and we've worked together on some pilots. So if he goes to another show, he says I'm welcome to join him. Editing is 75 to 80 percent in the eyes and the rest is just pressing buttons. I can show someone, 'This is how you mark it in and how

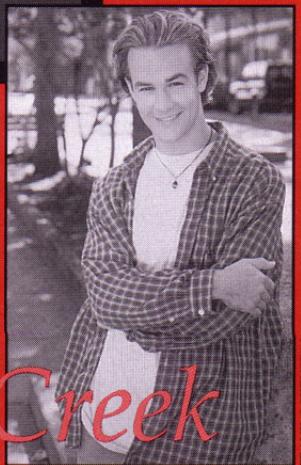
In Their Prime

The 'Seinfeld' gang are not the only IC alumni working in prime time. Here's a short list of others with current gigs. (Let us know about those we've missed!)

Dawson's Creek

Ilke Rivard '94,

production supervisor



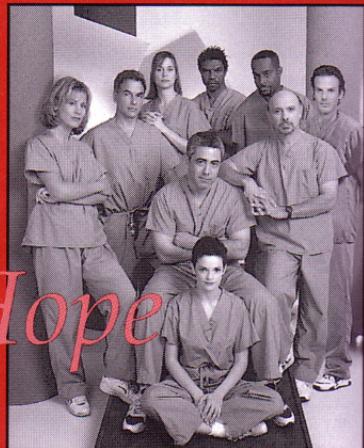
FRANK OCKENFELS

Dawson's Creek

Chicago Hope

Bill D'Elia '69,

executive director



Ally McBeal

Ally McBeal

Peter Burrell '68,

producer

Dharma & Greg

Gregg Moscot '94,

production manager

Dharma & Greg

you mark it out, and that's how you lay down a cut,' but what makes an editor is the artistic decisions. In my filmmaking courses at Ithaca we learned the aesthetics and the creativity involved with editing, and without that knowledge I couldn't do what I'm doing now."

"You Know, You're Not Very Funny"

While acting may not be in their futures, the three Ithacans managed to get some *Seinfeld* screen time as extras. In the "Yada, Yada, Yada" episode, Rogers can be seen sitting behind Jerry, George, and Kramer at a wedding. "That pasty-looking girl behind the orange woman in the coffee shop, that's me," says Eolin about her appearance in this season's "The Strong Box." Doty's one scene this year was left on the cutting-room floor, but he can be spotted, sort of, in an episode from several seasons back in which Kramer is carried out of his apartment in a sack.

"That was actually me playing the body in the sack," says Doty. "I kept going up to the director, saying, 'I don't really feel good about that take—can I try it again?' I'd only been here about two months and they were like, 'You know, you're not very funny.'"

Despite the adulation heaped upon it, not

everyone finds *Seinfeld* itself funny. Is it, as some contend and the principals themselves admit, a show about nothing?

"Yes, but it's a show about nothing else that you ever see on television," Eolin suggests. "It has very original stories, situations, and character development. If you turn on other sitcoms, you see a formula. One thing I like about this show is that you

"Jerry . . . pulled me in and said, 'Hey, we're done.'"

cannot watch the first couple of scenes and say, 'I know what's going to happen next.'

What happens next in our interview is that Jerry—Mr. Seinfeld—walks into the room. After polite patter—"Hi. How ya doin'? I've driven through Ithaca a couple of times."—it becomes clear that this isn't an opportunity to interview the man himself.

"Need the room, boss?" asks Doty.

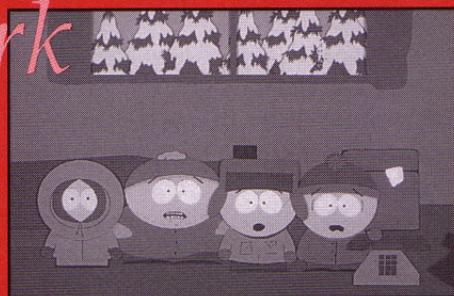
That's my cue to hit the street. My Three Sons Street, to be precise.

George Doty IV shares more "inside Seinfeld" stories as the keynote speaker at Reunion '98 on Saturday, May 30. **[ICQ]**

South Park

South Park

Karin T. Perrotta '97,
production assistant
Scott Oberholtzer '95,
assistant to the director
of animation



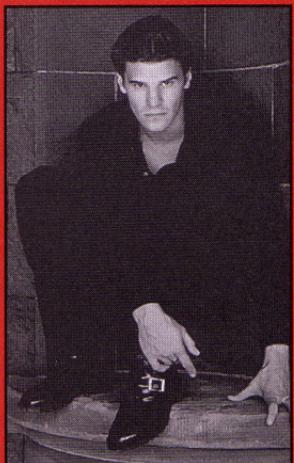
And on the screen in . . .



Buffy, the Vampire Slayer

Buffy, the Vampire Slayer

David Boreanaz '91, actor, plays "Angel," a 243-year-old vampire "with a conscience," whose presence as love interest for Buffy makes for some interesting stories—he's a vampire and she a vampire slayer. Boreanaz has a huge following, especially among young female viewers. One such viewer writes on her Web site devoted to the handsome actor: "You would never have to worry about getting bored when you are around this hunk because he is always full of energy!" And: "You can find this gorgeous guy anywhere there is green—a football field, baseball field, a park, but especially a golf course. Golf is his fave sport."



FRANK OCKENFELS