

They made me an offer I could refuse

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I answered the ringing phone about 6 p.m.

“Hold please, for Spike,” the voice said, “from Undiscovered Productions.”

“I’m not interested in whatever you’re selling. Please take me off your list.”

As I peeled the receiver from my ear, I heard an urgent voice at the other end: “Wait. This is legitimate. I’m calling from Burbank. We want you to do a show.”

“I don’t know any Spikes from Burbank.”

“I produce documentary reality shows for television. You know like, real people in danger—loggers, coal miners, Alaskan fishpersons. We want to do a show around you. Call it, *The Funny Farmhand*. Something like that.”

“You’re nuts!” I said.

“This is Hollywood. A coy no always means yes.”

I’m about as coy as a dump truck. “Not interested,” I said.

“I see another green light in front of me,” Spike responded.

I began to wonder whether Hollywood Spike had trouble processing two-word sentences. Or, maybe too much sunshine had impaired his ability to distinguish red from green. Or, maybe Verizon had installed a scrambler on my phone as my newest unwanted upgrade.

“Spike. Listen to my words. It’s not be, babe. I try to avoid danger. I don’t fight with people who work for me. I can’t remember the last time I pulled a 16-foot-long alligator out of the pond next to the house. Arctic seas never crash over my deck, and I don’t count wealth by the number of big crabs I have.”

“That’s why you’re our next guy,” Spike said. “We’re expanding our reality concept. No more rock-’em-sock-’em conflict staged for our cameras. No more teasing an audience with the prospect of injury or death. The future is not the past...”

“Hang on. Let me write that down before I forget it.”

“And why are we changing concepts in mid-season, you may ask? Simple. You represent an older demographic that we think still has some pop, purchase-power-wise. Lots of Boomer retirees want to relocate to the

country. They're hypnotized by a moo-moo here and a bah-bah there. My job is to monetize those old eyeballs."

"I need a barf bag."

"We've changed," Spike said. "Now, we want to show the quiet, humble humdrum of rural life as the new chic, the place to be. You're chic. You're cool."

"You're crazy. I'm as chic as a mud fence."

"Which is very green," Spike said. "'Sustainable' is mud's middle name. Julia Roberts has several legally imported and natively dressed Mongolians building one around her pool as we speak."

"No one is going to watch pastures grow," I said. "Do you think people will want to watch me type? There's no drama in the humble humdrum of my rural life."

"Drama...is where my eye sees it," Spike said. "We'll shoot you in drought, flood and death at the waterhole. America will hang on your next mortgage payment. If you're surrounded by rabid, toothless neighbors with AK-47s, so much the better. The little people of America's outback are seething in high drama just waiting to be discovered, and I will bring that drama to their fellow citizens through you."

"You have no idea how wrong and ugly this is," I said. "Why don't you do a show on the dozen guys who are buying presidential candidates by funding super PACs?"

"No audience for it," Spike said. "They're not green. They're not endangered. They're not oppressed. They're just rich guys signing checks—boring. I'm in the entertainment business. The market still wants fear, but it now wants silent suffering instead of raucous danger. Media must serve the people what the people want."

"Go away," I said.

"Don't you want to be a celebrity? Famous, hither and yon."

"I can imagine worse fates, but not many. Celebrity destroys. By the way. Why don't you do a reality series on reality productions, from concept to reruns. Give us the real inside stuff. You'll be a star."

"Do you really think people would care about...about me?"

"Sure. Americans are big-hearted; they'll feel your angst as you grovel before potential backers and pout over losing your grips. You can throw scripts at writers and stab them in the back with their own pencils. You're the man to show reality television with it best foot forward."

"You're right. I'll have my people call my people."

"Attaboy, Spike. So long and best wishes. Undiscovered Productions will never be forgotten." I hung up.

It's not every day that it's so easy to turn down a bad opportunity.

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant, columnist and author of **How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property**, available at www.curtis-seltzer.com where his columns are posted. His latest books, Land Matters , Blue Grass Notes, and Snowy Mountain Breakdown are available through his website.