



SCRIPPS HOWARD

# The Kentucky Post

## Want to be in pictures? Agent has tips for kids

### Undiscovered stars turn out at seminar

By Shelly Whitehead  
Kentucky Post staff reporter

New York talent scout Peter Sklar looks up at yet another adorable youngster who has taken the hot seat across from him hoping to answer all his questions right and have all the right qualities to become his next big find.

Sklar, a tall man who rarely cracks a smile, looks at her intently and says, "What's a blonde say when you blow in her ear?" The very perplexed and very blond young lady simply looks a little stunned.

"Thanks for the refill," replies Sklar with a chuckle and adding under his breath, "I dare them to prepare for my interviews."

Indeed, little could prepare the several hundred local kids who showed up to appear before Sklar's selective eye for the strange dose of acting-world reality they got.

In all 220 children between the ages of 5 and 18 attended two free seminars Nov. 8 at Dynamic Expressions Studio in Crescent Springs hoping to become one of the scout's latest and greatest finds.

Sklar is a New York producer and leading talent scout whose proteges include Ricky Schroder of television's "Silver Spoons," Allison Smith of "Kate and Allie" and Zachery Bryan of "Home Improvements."

He is also very "New York" and very blunt about the realities of the world of television and film for young stars . . . so blunt, in fact, that some at Sunday afternoon's seminar left early, presumably unenamored with his style.

The first thing Sklar slapped his wide-eyed crowd with was a cold hard splash of the reality of rip-offs in the world of television, film and modeling.

Modeling school training, said Sklar, is completely irrelevant to talent scouts. He discouraged the crowd from investing in the programs or the often very expensive photo portfolio.

Sklar said real talent scouts need nothing but a snapshot and a lot of natural "kid".

"It's very, very easy to get into this business. It's very easy and it's very inexpensive," said Sklar.

"You do not need a portfolio for this business. Nobody in this business looks at portfolios. There



Lora Lee North, 6, and her 14-year-old sister, Melissa, both of Bellevue, meet actress Mercedes Ruehl on the set of "Lost in Yonkers" in Ludlow this summer. Both girls were selected last week to attend an acting workshop with talent scout Peter Sklar.

are a lot of kids making a lot of money in this business with nothing but a home snapshot."

Sklar said most kids can get noticed by talent agencies with simply a good close-up photo of the face with minimal make up and maximal smile.

He said the sole purpose of the photo is not to "sell" the child, but simply to remind the scout of the child's general looks.

The interview, he said, is the real area for kids to shine when seeking commercial or film work.

Even then he emphasized that what's important is not a perfectly poised, modeling school-trained child, but rather a perfectly natural child.

"In casting it's who you are not what you can do. It's who you are — your emotions, feelings, background, and we can assess that very quickly in an interview. The interviews I do are 25-30 seconds," said Sklar.

"I'm many times asked, 'What is the best training?' and I say, 'A normal, happy childhood.' What

is that special something? It's self-esteem, kids who like themselves, kids who aren't guarded, kids who are comfortable with recognition. The child who likes herself walks in the room and we can tell — it's electrifying.

"If she tries to work at being more outgoing because her parents pressured her to do it, I'm going to see through it."

On the subject of stage parents, Sklar holds nothing back. He says simply, parents are unimportant to the "talent" and the talent scout.

"This business is like a pajama party. (Parents) you find out where it is, drop them off, and when it's over pick them up and ask if they had fun. Nobody cares about you. You guys are excess baggage. You are chauffeurs. You are not important," he said.

Parents who sat through that lecture, then had to sit patiently outside while their offspring were interviewed one by one by Sklar. The interviews were as atypical as everything else.

Six-year-old Kathleen Hennessey of Villa Hills took the hot seat with a huge tooth-barren smile and a nose full of freckles. Sklar just had to know why she had no teeth and she responded simply that they got loose and she pulled them out.

"Why did you pull your teeth out?" asked Sklar in seemingly real disbelief. She responded, "I wanted to make some money."

As you might have guessed she was one of 20 who made the final cut.

Another 6-year-old, Lora Lee North and her 14-year-old sister, Melissa, also were interviewed and both eventually were chosen.

It was a dream come true for Melissa, who Sklar referred to as simply "gorgeous."

"I love acting. . . I went down to see 'Lost in Yonkers.' I was there every day," said Melissa.

Many of the 20 chosen from the afternoon seminar said they were definitely going to attend Sklar's eight-day workshop in December.

At the workshop, they will be coached in acting by leading New York teachers and directors. Sklar, who makes his money by taking a commission on each child's jobs, said most kids who go through his program come out with the interest of at least one agent.

"This is the chance to be discovered," said Sklar, but he emphasized again that the real ambition has to be in the child and they've got to have a lot of it.

"There are no children working, doing well in this business, who are not really happy and enjoying it. They like it and it shows. That's why they work."

### Costly lessons, portfolios often aren't needed

By Shelly Whitehead  
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So what's the story on portfolios and modeling schools? Are they worth the money? Will they help your child get work?

Well, that depends says Joe Guerrero, agency director of John Casablancas Model Management in Cincinnati. Some kids (and you know who you are) are just born to be hams. Others, he said, shine in front of familiar faces but go stone cold when they become the focus of a brigade of lights and cameras.

"Last fall we had a program for children and we decided to discontinue it and just take the kids with the right look, but maybe not the training," said Guerrero, who recalled the first photo shoot with untrained kids.

"Those who never had been in front of the camera just clammed up and screamed and cried. The third though was no problem because he'd had training. So we decided to reinstate our program."

Jennifer Kress, fashion director with a leading local studio, agreed. At Austin Bewsey Studios, they photograph about 70 kids a week for 10 local advertisers.

"What (kids) need training in is not the movements, but the experience of having everybody focused on him and the lights and everything, and still be natural," said Ms. Kress. On the matter of portfolios, Guerrero was firm. He, like Sklar, says they just aren't necessary for young kids.

"We work off of polaroids. They change so rapidly. They grow. Their teeth fall out. For children, their work can be their portfolio."

Guerrera said between Kenner Toys and Procter & Gamble there's a good deal of work here in town for child actors and models. But don't quit your day job. He said there's really just enough work to make a little extra cash, certainly not enough to fully support the youngster or his family.