

# Highlander Down Under: Los Angeles Bureau

by John Bierly

*"You know, this fellow Scot said something about the plans of mice and men."  
- Duncan MacLeod, "Band of Brothers"*

*"Technical difficulties. Please stand by." - Adrian Paul, May 10, 2003*

I wanted to go to HLDU5. But too many car problems, computer problems, and other expensive odds and ends meant that I'd never afford it. HLDU founder and con organizer Carmel Macpherson did everything she could to convince me, but I just couldn't swing the considerable airfare and the time I'd have to take off work to go.

Many of the most amazing experiences of my life have had something to do with the Highlander universe and the people I've met because of it. And I really, really wanted to go to HLDU5.

Carmel knew it, too, and made one of those offers that no human being could possibly refuse.

"John," she asked with that tone of voice you use when you know the person you're asking is really going to like what you say. "Is there any way you could make it to Los

Angeles during the weekend we'll be having HLDU5 in Brisbane?"

At that point I didn't know exactly why she would ask me that. But I did know that I'd probably like the answer.

"Yes," I said.

"Good," she replied. "Because I'd like you to be the liaison for Adrian and Elizabeth." She didn't mean Adrian Jones and Elizabeth Smith. She meant Adrian Paul and Elizabeth Gracen, who would be beamed live via satellite to con-goers in Brisbane from a videoconference suite in L.A.

"Yes," I said. Not because that's all I had to say, but because that's the only word I could get out around all the excitement that was exploding like fireworks inside my head. Arrangements were made. The plane ticket was purchased. And life was especially good.

Carmel and I also recruited Kareem Dimashkie, a good friend of mine who lives in Los Angeles. He helped keep the Green Room running for the Reunion convention in August 2001, and is well known to Highlander fans for his enthusiasm and his maturity. Kareem,

just 19 years old, acts like he's 34; I've often told him that I'd give anything to have had my head as firmly in place at 19 as he does.

When Kareem and I gladly accepted the assignment in March, May seemed forever and a day away. But before we knew it, Kareem

was picking me up at the L.A. airport Friday morning, and we were on our way to check out the videoconference suite. After all, it would kind of defeat the purpose for Adrian and Elizabeth to arrive on Saturday while Kareem and I wandered around Los Angeles trying to figure out where we were supposed to be. We introduced ourselves to the videoconference crew, then waited with eagerness and impatience for Saturday afternoon to arrive.

BOOM. Like a Quickening-hot flash of white light the new day was upon us. Kareem and I arrived early to wait for Adrian and





Elizabeth to arrive. As we stood in the parking lot by Kareem's car chatting about comic books and movies, we couldn't help but notice the short, sleek, platinum-blond hair of the woman who drove by. For me, it was like that feeling you feel when the roller coaster rockets down that first big hill.

Lizzie parked by a meter and hopped out of her car. She looked like a million bucks, and I'm not just saying that because I'm Big John and she's Elizabeth Gracen. She was wearing a funky blue jacket over a pink sleeveless low-cut shirt, faded blue jeans, and a green and blue lace scarf. Taking off her glasses, she exclaimed, "BIG JOHN!" When I hurried to meet her, she gave me a huge hug. I introduced her to Kareem, whom she greeted graciously. Or, I should say, "Gracently."

"Where should I park?" she asked, sizing up the street. After Kareem and I showed her the parking lot, she zipped into a space. We helped her unload her camera equipment and the swords Adrian would be signing. Lizzie had two katanas in her backseat, and a large Claymore was delivered while we stood around chatting in the parking lot. She wanted to know how my parents were doing, and what Kareem and I had been up to. She was really interested in Kareem's film school plans, asking if he was interested in acting. (He's more interested in the directing/scriptwriting end of things.)

Then she talked about how she's retired from acting, and how happy she is pursuing her art. After being around Elizabeth many times, I honestly can't say that I've ever seen her so content or so excited about anything. She's always had a big interest in art; now she has the time and energy to practice her talent. Lately she's been working on mosaics.

Kareem and I gathered up Elizabeth's things and headed into the studio, where our technology guru, Shaela, was putting the finishing touches on the satellite connection. Shaela - pronounced "Shay-la" - is a porcelain-skinned redhead who's every bit as lovely as her name. After I introduced her to Elizabeth, she went back to work while Lizzie, Kareem and I settled down in the reception area, talking about *X-Men 2* and Lizzie's husband's comic book collection (which Kareem and I would really like to check out sometime).