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TV

To Be Real

"I'M GOING TO BE THE MOST FAMOUS GAY GUY IN AMERICA!" jokes Dan Renzi, who's looking forward to the attention his part in the fifth season of MTV's *The Real World* is sure to bring. (New episodes air on Wednesday at 10 p.m. and are rebroadcast on Saturday and Sunday.) Of course he's looking forward to it. Why else would Dan—the show uses only first names—agree to live in Miami for five months with a houseful of strangers and let cameras record every argument, every discussion, and every moment of silliness?

One such moment: Dan sits in the middle of the living room and sings "I'm a Little Teapot" at the top of his lungs. "And one day we were playing Truth or Dare," he remembers, "and I somehow went from not wanting to play at all to marching around the living room in a pair of red bikini underwear shaking my genitals back and forth so Cynthia could watch them move." Along with Cynthia, Dan lived with two "really cool white guys," Joe and Mike, and three other girls—including Flora, whom Dan describes warmly as "one of the most complicated and self-destructive people that I've ever met in my life."

And Truth or Dare isn't all they'll see, since Dan also models, writes articles for the local magazine *Ocean Drive*, turns 22 years old, and dates Johnny. "My parents are going to see me kissing this guy," Dan says. "And not only my parents but the Ku Klux Klan is going to see it, Bob Dole is going to see it,

WORLDVIEW: Renzi
is out on MTV.

every single person who has ever hated me for whatever reason is going to see it. And yeah, they could change the channel, but the chances are that they won't."

Dan was happily surprised to realize that going on *The Real World* was the best thing he could have done for his parents. He says they changed from "don't ask, don't tell the neighbors" to being more supportive than ever. "They showed up during the show," Dan recalls, amazement in his voice, "and I have no idea what happened to them still, but they were like boosters for PFLAG."

A "Midwestern mutt" who grew up mostly in Kansas, Dan vividly remembers being "glued to the screen" during high school when openly bisexual Norman Korpi appeared on the first edition of *The Real World*. Lesbian Beth A. joined the second *Real World* season midway through, and late gay AIDS education activist Pedro Zamora appeared in the third season. While Dan loves the prospect of having the same positive impact on someone else, he also tries to keep his role in perspective. "Every time I did something wrong I thought, Oh, God, I've just dealt a vicious blow to my people! I became so paranoid sometimes about screwing up because of the sociological implications, when what I should really have been worried about was that I just looked like a dumb ass."—MICHAEL GILTZ

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