



Interview with Ronnie Kroell

By Bill Pritchard

When Bravo's 'Make Me a Supermodel' season one came to the end in April, 21-year-old Holly Kiser from Coeburn, Virginia came out on top besting Chicago's Ronnie Kroell and 12 other contestants.

Kroell, from Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood, was the last remaining male model receiving the second most votes. Openly-gay, Kroell was a viewer favorite and repeatedly received enough votes to keep him in the competition to the very end.

The 24-year-old has since returned to his hometown of Chicago where he is making a number of national and local appearances including About Face Theatre's Wonka Ball, Thursday, May 15th ([event details](#)) and an appearance at Circuit Night Club on May 29th in support of his 4+1 Productions, a charitable organization.

ChicagoPride.com's Bill Pritchard recently had an opportunity to interview his long-time friend.

BP: You're now a national sex symbol. How does that feel?

RK: (Laughs) It feels great!

BP: How was your reality TV experience? Was it what you expected?

RK: It was unlike anything I have ever done before. Going into the show I expected to learn more about the modeling industry and about myself. I achieved that and more thanks to Bravo and all those that worked on this incredible project.

BP: You said that you loved New York, but you're in love with Chicago. Are you glad to be back home?

RK: Chicago will always be "home", but I am willing to travel and/or live wherever I must in order to pursue my career in modeling.

BP: Much was made about your Bromance with Ben. Was it overplayed for the cameras?

RK: After being able to watch the show I do not feel that it was overplayed, but rather it was reality. Ben and I developed a strong friendship that became stronger with each passing week. We learned from one another and we helped each other grow and stay focused on the competition rather than the drama in the house.

BP: Was your attraction to Ben a distraction for you?

RK: In the beginning it certainly was, but I became wise and refocused my energy on the competition where it belonged.

BP: Had Ben not been married, do you think something might have happened?

RK: Is the sky blue?

BP: How hurt were you when Ben made his homophobic comments?

RK: I was very hurt by Ben's comments, but I think I was more surprised than anything.

BP: You handled the situation well. In confronting Ben, did you feel pressure to remain good role model?

RK: More than anything I felt the pressure to simply be honest with Ben because he was my friend. If I didn't take the time to speak with Ben it would have eaten me up inside and certainly negatively affected my performance. It felt good to clear the air and moreover our friendship was strengthened because of it.

BP: Do you plan to stay in touch with Ben and his wife?

RK: Is Tom Cruise gay?

BP: How frustrating was it to have the judges continue to say you were "All American" and too commercial?

RK: Hearing those comments over and over drove me to drink, but I enjoy an adult beverage now and again so it wasn't that bad I guess. (laughs) Seriously though, it was frustrating being picked apart for something and not knowing what to do to correct it. Eventually I was able to ask the right question, get some solid advice, and bounce back edgier than ever.

BP: Though you ended up in the bottom a number of times, you were definitely a fan favorite and kept getting the votes. Was this encouraging?

RK: Being in the bottom three was never a fun experience, but each time it strengthened my desire to learn, grow, and above all else-- stay in the house. It sounds strange, but I appreciated being in the bottom three because I never took my time in the competition for granted. It was certainly encouraging to know that I had America on my side via the vote and I did not take that for granted.

BP: What was your favorite photo shoot?

RK: Between being suspended in air and being in the tank of water with "Lemon" the snake.

BP: You never seemed to click with Holly and even exchanged words. In his blog Tyson said he thought you or Ben would win. Do you think Holly deserved to win?

RK: Holly and I actually got along very well throughout the show until the end when the competition became very intense. As much as I would have loved to have won the competition, America made up their mind and that's all that matters.

BP: Do you plan to pursue modeling?

RK: I plan on being in this business for quite some time. I recently signed a contract with NY Model Management and look forward to the projects ahead.

BP: What about your political aspirations and 4+1 Productions?

RK: My political aspirations and dreams will come into fruition when the time is right and after I have had time to learn and grow worthy of such positions. 4+1 Productions and our vision of, "Bridging Diversity through the Arts" is growing stronger every day. We have been blessed with an abundance of support through emails, letters, and donations and look forward to serving the community for years to come.

BP: Which people have been the most influential and close to you through your experience?

RK: I am very close to my family, especially my Mom, Charlene Sonenberg. She and I have been through a difficult road together, but our relationship only gets better with years. She is my biggest fan and I am hers!! Also, I would be lost without my dear friends, Jessie, Christian, Julie, Sarah,

Dawn, Steve, and Mike. They have been by my side and supported me no matter how crazy I was. (laughs)

Outside of my family I have been blessed with numerous mentors (that I have adopted as family), without whom I would not be where I am today. I would especially like to thank, H. Walker of 21st Century Consulting, Todd Hatoff of Allen Brothers, Joe DiCosola, Michael Leppen, Patrick Sheahan, and you Bill.

These men are true leaders and have a genuine interest in making a difference in our community not only in words, but through their actions.

BP: So what's next?

RK: That is the million dollar question isn't it. Well, the decision to relocate to NYC is becoming more and more of a possibility over the next few months. Outside of that, I plan on working every day, following my dreams, and inspiring others with the words of my late Grandma Lee, "Just be You".

ChicagoPride.com and 1035 KISS FM will host an event to meet Ronnie Kroell on Thursday, May 29th at Circuit Night Club, 3641 N. Halsted. ([event details](#))