

A cathartic cup of coffee for 2 old TV neighbors

JAKE COYLE - AP Entertainment Writer - Associated Press

For two old TV neighbors, all that's needed for a therapeutic reunion is a ride and a cup of Joe.

On an emotional season finale of Jerry Seinfeld's Web series, "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee," Michael Richards recalls the infamous heckling incident in 2006 that he says "broke me down." The episode, which was shared with The Associated Press ahead of its online premiere Thursday evening, is a cathartic get-together for Richards, whose Kramer was hardly separated from Seinfeld by a door in the nine years of "Seinfeld."

It's one of the few times Richards has appeared in anything since, during a stand-up routine, he answered a heckler with racist slurs. Years later, Richards is clearly still scarred from the incident, for which he has repeatedly apologized and which essentially caused his withdrawal from show business.

"I busted up after that event seven years ago," Richards tells Seinfeld over a cup of coffee in Los Angeles. "It broke me down. It was a selfish response. I took it too personally. I should have just said, 'Yeah, you're absolutely right. I'm not funny.'"

The title of "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee" relates its simple premise: Seinfeld, an avid automobile collector, picks up his guest in a car befitting the guest's personality. For Richards, Seinfeld selected a rusty 1962 VW bus with an interior patched together by duct tape.

"This is you, Michael," introduces Seinfeld.

Seinfeld launched the series with little fanfare, letting it pop up on the Internet on its own site, on Facebook and on the Sony Corp.-owned digital network Crackle. With guests like Ricky Gervais and Alec Baldwin, the 15-minute episodes offer a stylized snapshot of comedians in conversation. One guest, "Seinfeld" co-creator Larry David, observed that Seinfeld had "finally done a show about nothing."

But the heartfelt and tender Richards episode is an exception. It begins, though, with Richards exuberant at being back together with his old co-star. (In 2009, both also joined in the "Seinfeld" reunion on David's "Curb Your Enthusiasm.")

"Being around you, Jerry, I'm going to turn into that crazy character," says Richards, who later adds that he could have played Kramer "for the rest of my life."

In true Kramer fashion, Richards leads Seinfeld to what he claims is the boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard's home, calling out "Sugar!" from outside. It's quickly revealed that Richards neither knows Leonard nor where he lives, and that the house is, in fact, comedian Jay Mohr's. Richards also dons a blond wig as a disguise

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and, bizarrely, is immediately met by someone with strikingly similar hair.

When they start exchanging memories from the "Seinfeld" days, Richards transitions to the heckling incident. He thanks Seinfeld for "sticking by me."

"Inside, it still kicks me around a bit," says Richards.

The conversation winds down after Seinfeld urges Richards to try to lay down his guilt, having carried it so long. The episode concludes with not more talking, but an elegiac, soundless montage of Richards interacting with fans who approach the two. Shuffling his feet with Kramer panache and playfully taking photos, it's a reminder of Richards' comedic gifts, undimmed if now largely unseen.

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