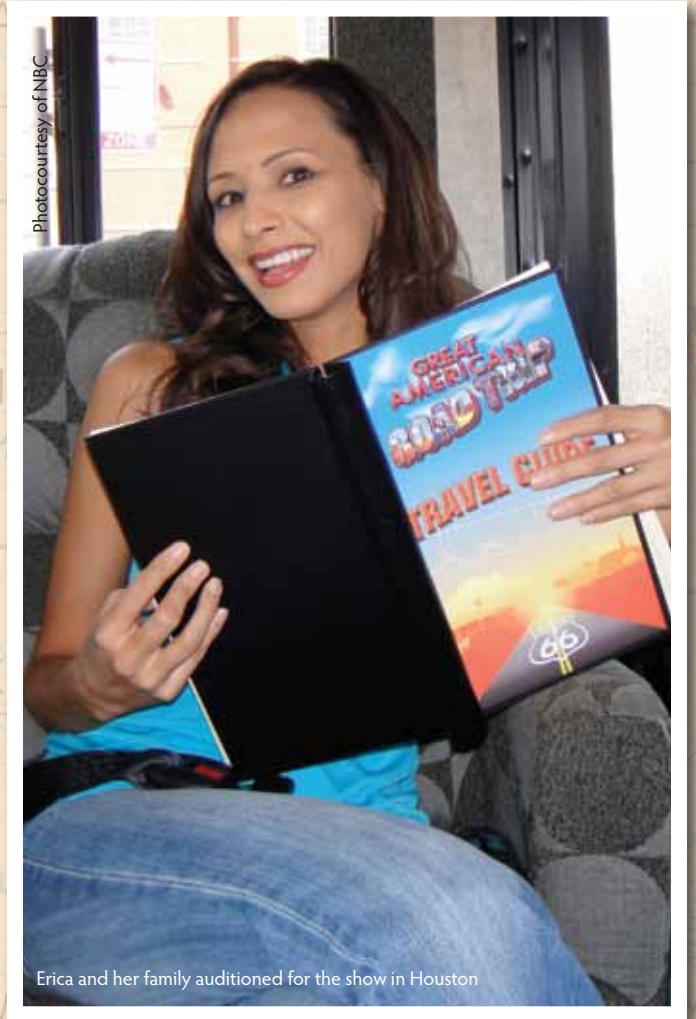




Photo by Marisa Hugonnet

Ricardo and Erica at home with their children Danielle and Rickey

Reality Road WARRIORS



A Katy Family Competes on NBC's Great American Road Trip

Written by Heather Lowrie

Imagine... grabbing your family and jumping into an RV, traveling the infamous Route 66 from Illinois to California, and having cameras there to capture your every move. Forget about your computer, cell phone, television, and anything else that needs an outlet; you're leaving those at home. The experience is all about the family adventure, and Ricardo, Erica, Danielle, 13, and Rickey, 8, from Katy were chosen from over 2,300 other families to literally unplug and reconnect on the wide open road along with seven other families on The Great American Road Trip. Ricardo says, "We spend a lot of time together as it is, but it was getting away from everything that made it special."

The Rico family spent eight weeks in an RV, competing at historical spots along Route 66



Photocourtesy of NBC

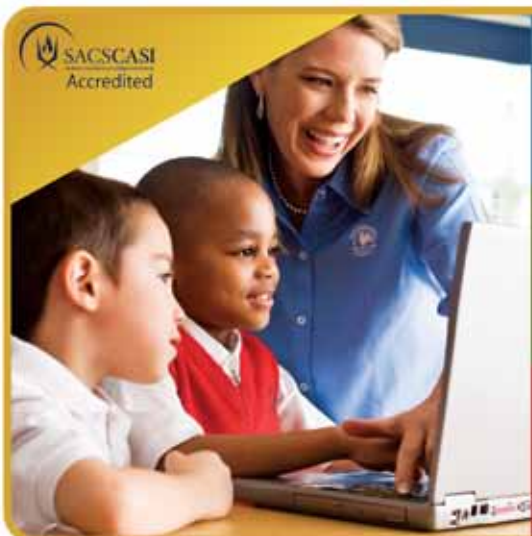
Casting Call

A casting call held at the Galleria in Houston was their first step toward reality TV stardom. They received a call back and were asked to make a video for the show's producers. The family used their creativity and came up with a clever spin-off based on their family dynamics, and it guaranteed them a ticket to the next round. Erica remembers, "It was the video that got us through, they kept calling us and telling us how great the video was. It truly showed off our family's personality." Once they passed the psychological and physical test requirements, they were on their way to the road trip of a lifetime.

The Adventure Begins

If the thought of spending eight weeks cooped up with your family in an RV gives you a claustrophobic feeling, try cramming in the sound man, camera person, and producer and all the equipment necessary to document your adventure. "It's almost like they are living in your house, so if you get someone with a personality clash, it's not going to be any fun. Thankfully we had the best crew and they became part of our family," says Ricardo.

Before the road trip began, all the contestants were gathered into a room in Chicago to go over the rules of the game. During that time, the families were clearly sizing up the competition; after all, a 100,000 dollar prize was at stake. They were all complete strangers coming together for the same purpose - to win. This is where things get interesting because who they thought people were based on first hand impressions turned out to be completely wrong. A lasting life lesson was learned for all the families on that first day. In real life, away from the cameras and the task at hand, they were just people who loved their families and wanted to make each other proud.



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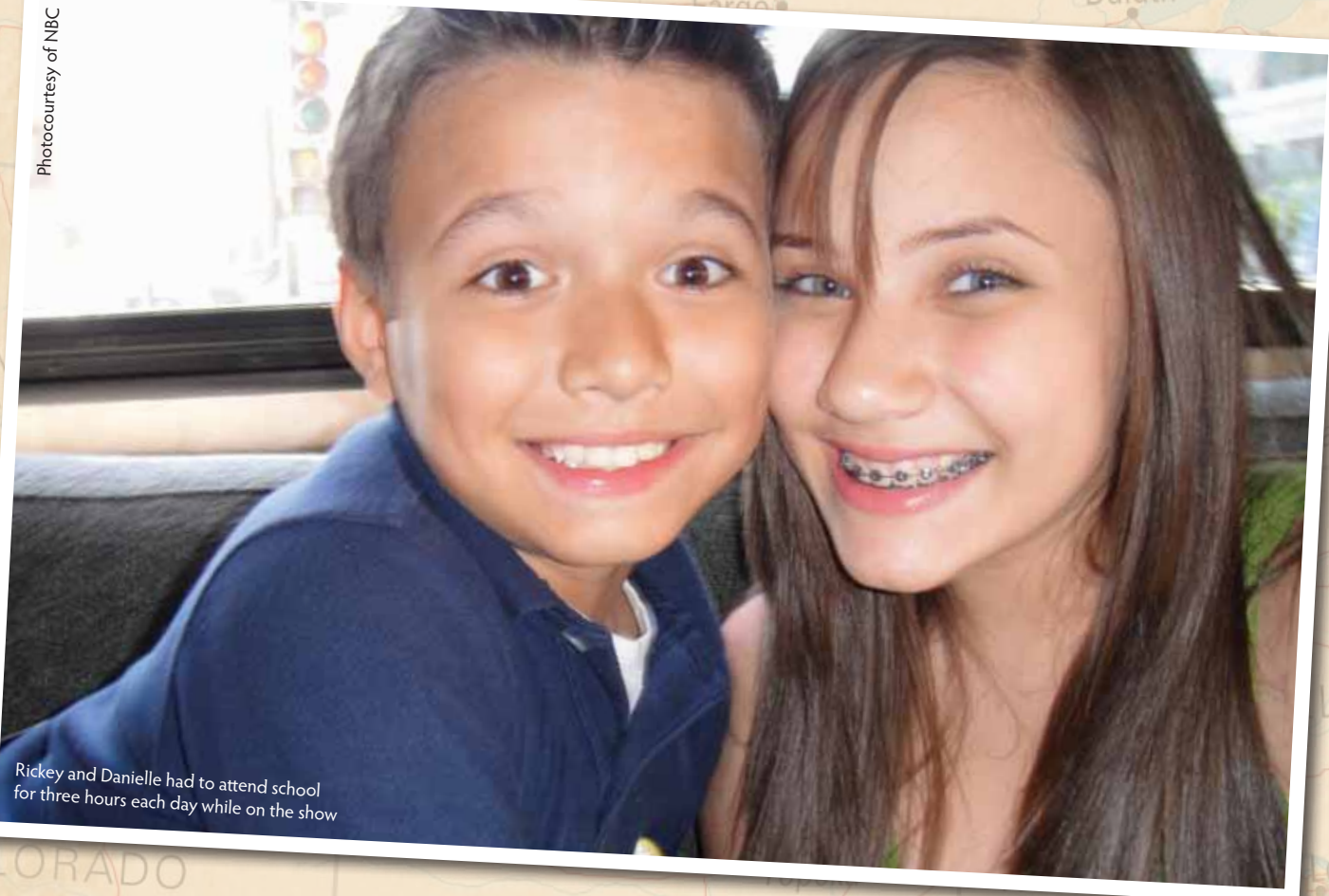
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Rickey and Danielle had to attend school for three hours each day while on the show



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Photos by Marisa Hugonnett

Historical Route 66

For the Rico family, the show was about more than just spending time together; it was also about seeing sights across America rather than reading about them in a text book. They had a first-hand opportunity to explore the historic sights together and make memories that will last a lifetime. The official historic site of Little House on the Prairie was one of their favorites. It was a reenactment of life in the 1800's based on Laura Ingles Wilder's book and the family had the chance to wind a 100-year-old clock and be mesmerized by the baby buffalo. Erica says, "The kids realized just how blessed they were not having to live in a one room cabin or drink water from a well." From putting the kids in control of their dad, to wearing a giant president's head, and numerous other outlandish challenges, there was one thing that was clear throughout the trip: the Rico family made Katy proud.

Lasting Friendships

The casting directors of any reality show are responsible for creating drama, and it certainly doesn't take long for it to appear. But some families truly did form friendships amidst the competition. "We actually had three hours of school each day and we had a chance to really get to know each other," Danielle says. Rickey's favorite memory was clear when he excitedly replied, "Meeting my best buddy, Aaron Pollard." The two boys had an instant brotherly bond that started a friendship between the two families, and a Rico-Pollard reunion is in the works.

End of the Road

An unfortunate injury didn't help matters during the larger-than-life End of the Road Challenge, and more than just Ricardo's leg was hurt. People who are fans of the show were heartbroken to see this genuine family wave goodbye. The Rico Family is the real deal and something that can't be duplicated by reality television. If the casting directors were looking for a loving couple, encouraging parents, incredible kids, and a true joy that radiates from within, they got this one right.

HEATHER LOWRIE is a kindergarten teacher and mother of two. She is married to her high school sweetheart, James. She is a freelance writer and author of The Inspired Wife who enjoys the opportunity to encourage people through her writing.

Does your Katy family have what it takes to compete on reality TV? Check out these websites for local casting calls.

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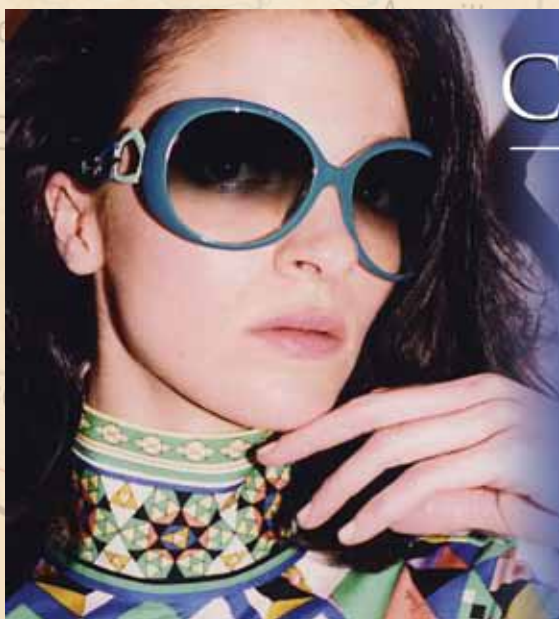
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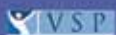
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