

From Reality TV to REALITY

Manhattan's Brandon Bellinger is sweating on the family farm after starring in the jungles of Central America

By Kasha Stoll
The Capital-Journal

Brandon Bellinger changed his cell phone message last Thursday.

"Hi, it's Brandon. I'm in New York right now, but I'll be back on Saturday. And yeah, I know. It (stinks)."

Bellinger, of Manhattan, was the ninth person voted out of the CBS reality show, "Survivor: Guatemala." He flew to New York City for a Friday interview on CBS's "The Early Show," then returned to Manhattan on Saturday. His plans for the week involved giving interviews, cultivating the ground at the family farm and planting winter wheat.

In person, Bellinger exhibited the same quick wit and sense of humor that earned him a lot of screen time on "Survivor."

"I haven't eaten corn since I got back," he said, after giving an involuntary shudder. "We'll give it a few more months."

But, he said with a smile, "I'll still tear up some chocolate."

While in Guatemala, Bellinger ate crushed and cooked corn kernels for basically every meal. The chocolate comment refers to the day his team gorged on vast amounts of chocolate after winning a rewards challenge.

Another example of Bellinger's humor and absolute candor came when he described how his priorities changed in Guatemala.

"You change your mental aspect of things," he said. "Your priorities are completely different. Like, you don't think about sex. There are a bunch of half-naked women running around, but you're hot. You're thirsty and hungry and tired, and you both stink."

Judging by some of the Survivor fan message boards, female viewers of the reality show reacted favorably to Bellinger's unwashed, scruffy look. One woman even created a Web site dedicated to her favorite survivor.

Bellinger said he looked at a few of the message boards, but he has been too busy working on the farm to read most of them.

His dating life has picked up, though, since returning to Kansas.

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't," Bellinger said, with a slight smile.

A frequent complaint among television viewers is that reality TV is only as real as the editing. Bellinger said many of the shows were "very accurate," although others were less so.

"Personalities, they hit pretty good," he said. "What you see is what you get, for the most part."

One of his team members was fellow Kansan Danni Boatwright, of Tonganoxie. Boatwright is a former Miss Kansas, Miss USA runner-up and an international model.

"I never really trusted Danni at first," Bellinger said. "I mean, here's this Miss Kansas, beautiful woman. I thought she would try to use her appearance to get further in the game. But she was really the opposite of what I thought."

Bellinger said he and Boatwright formed an early alliance and had plans for an all-Kansas final two. Those plans were dashed with Bellinger's ouster last week, but Boatwright remains in the competition.

Just before Bellinger left tribal council, he gave Boatwright a hug and said, "You're like the sister I never had."

On Tuesday of this week, Bellinger also spoke highly of Amy O'Hare, of Revere, Mass.; Bobby Jon Drinkard, of Troy, Ala.; Margaret Bobonich, of Chardon, Ohio; and Gary Hogeboom, of Grand Haven, Mich.

He even had kind words for Jamie Newton, of North Hollywood, Calif. On last Thursday's show, Newton was vocal about the fact that he and his former team members were voting Bellinger off the show.

"I kind of like the dude, believe it or not," Bellinger said. "He's an all-right guy deep down. But still, he opens his mouth a little too much."

In true Brandon form, Bellinger changed his cell phone message again this weekend. After greeting the caller, he says he has the car back and is still trying to sell it.

FYI, there is no car. There never was. That's just Brandon being Brandon.

INSIDE SURVIVOR

Two or three days of activity are condensed into 45 minutes of airtime for each show. Brandon Bellinger, of Manhattan, provided the following tidbits that didn't make it onscreen.

- He was approached on day two by Danni Boatwright, of Tonganoxie, and Margaret Bobonich, of Chardon, Ohio, to form an alliance. Bobby Jon Drinkard, of Troy, Ala., and Blake Towsley, of Dallas, were pulled into the alliance to form a majority.
- Bellinger and Boatwright argued the classic Kansas State University / The University of Kansas debate a few times, but it was all in fun.
- Bobonich and Amy O'Hare, of Revere, Mass., tormented Bellinger by trying to braid his hair, which was long during the show.
- Jamie Newton, of North Hollywood, Calif., helped Bellinger look for the individual immunity idol that was hidden somewhere in the forest. The men agreed that if they had found it, the idol would have gone to Bellinger.
- Bellinger suffered from muscle cramps following the 11-mile hike on day one.

CATCH IT

Danni Boatwright, of Tonganoxie, still is in the fight for the \$1 million prize. "Survivor: Guatemala" will air at 7 p.m. today on CBS, cable channel 12 in Topeka.