

An Oil Portrait of the Director:

MICHAEL A. HOEY

Almost Became Douglas Channing on *Falcon Crest*

Interview by

THOMAS J. PUCHER (*German FALCON CREST Fan Club*)

Among the many staff members I have interviewed over the years, there have only been a few directors — Reza Badiyi, Harry Harris and Michael Preece. It is always most interesting to hear their points of views as directing jobs are episodic assignments... so, naturally, directors oftentimes watch the set from a healthy distance and with a more realistic approach in contrast to the regular staff. With that in mind, I was particularly happy when I got in touch with Michael A. Hoey, who directed a dozen of episodes over three seasons between late 1986 and 1988, particularly as it was a time when *Falcon Crest* had just undergone a major overhaul and, at the end of his assignments, went into yet another era. We scheduled an appointment for a phone interview on a Sunday morning and stepped right into a pleasant conversation as if we had known each other for a million years.

How Michael Landed the Job

"What I would like to know first," I started, "is how you got your job on the show."
"Well, there were two reasons actually," Michael started, "because of the friends that I knew. One, of course, was Earl Hamner. Earl and I had met very early in both our careers when he wrote and I produced the movie at *Warner Bros.* called *Palm Springs Weekend*, and we have remained friends throughout, and we are still friends. We communicate... not on a regular basis, but quite frequently. And I saw him not too long ago. The other one was Jeff Freilich, who was the executive producer of the series at the time that I came on board. Jeff and I had been on a committee together at the *Writers Guild* during one of the early strikes back in the '70's, I guess, and I had started directing on *Fame* — and I guess my name must have come up and Jeff recognized it. I went in and met with him, and they gave me, I guess, just one assignment at that point. I came on board sometime in late 1986 actually although I think the episode wasn't released until the following January. It was called something like the childhood poem: 'When the wind blows, the cradle will rock. When the bough breaks, the cradle

will fall.' " he began to recite from *Rock-a-bye Baby* and referred to *When the Bough Breaks* (episode 142 <6.15>), which first aired on CBS on January 23, 1987; the subsequent episode, by the way, was entitled *The Cradle Will Fall* as an allusion to the poem Michael quoted.

"The show was in its 6th season when you joined. How did you get all the necessary background information?" I wanted to know.

"Frankly, I hadn't watched it," Michael admitted. "I had just been on *Dallas*, which was sort of one of its competitors. When my agent called and said, 'You're going to do a *Falcon Crest*,' as I recall, I probably watched whatever episode was current at that moment. Once I got the assignment, I asked the associate producer to give me some episodes to look at. You know, having done *Dallas*, it struck me that there wasn't a tremendous difference in the way one treated the show because, again, it was a large group of characters all interacting with one another, and that's sort of a continuing storyline of basically any nighttime soap opera. So it wasn't a big job for me to do the show."

Likes and Dislikes

The director's first experience on the set brought us to our next big topic — what he liked about the series and what he did not like.

"I remember my first day on the set, I was directing Jane, as a matter of fact, who was in the opening shot, and Ana - Alicia, who was — at that point — confined to a hospital bed. I think Jane loved Ana," Michael laughed, "but she said: 'Well, you sure picked a great first day. You got Ana - Alicia all day long in a bed!' Which is a challenge because... how do you shoot that kind of a sequence to make it interesting? But it turned out well, and I actually became very good friends with both of them. I had great admiration for Jane Wyman. In fact, I wrote a lot about her in my book, *Elvis, Sherlock & Me*. I had come off a rather bad experience with the lady whose name suddenly went right out of my head — on *Murder She Wrote*."

"Angela Lansbury?" I asked.

"Angela Lansbury," he confirmed, "who sort of exercised her royal prerogative and treated me rather badly towards the end of the shoot. I thought that I would probably be dealing with another, you know, movie star, who came up through the system and who expected to be treated like a queen... Jane wasn't like that at all! She was very down to earth. I adored her actually, and we got along extremely well. She used to call me when the new script would come out and she'd have a problem with it. And it wasn't always problems with her, you know — she had a great overview of the series, and she would often make suggestions regarding other characters, but that would be good for that character's through-line. So I was an enormous fan of her. I thought she was one of the nicest and most professional ladies I ever met and ever worked with."

His first positive experience on the set was the key moment for me to ask about how he liked working on the show in general and if there were there any particular moments he was not so happy with.

"I enjoyed it a lot, certainly for the first year or two," he summed it up.

However, the director left no doubt that there were some difficult moments:

"There were some ups and downs. At some point, I was up to direct the upcoming season, and I was going to actually direct alternate episodes — six out of the first twelve," the director referred to the Wine Country episodes of season 7. "We would go to Napa on location. Jeff got some crazy idea about — I don't know — that I wasn't behaving or some damn thing and he put me through a rather unpleasant experience, but ultimately giving me the assignment in the end anyway. So I was upset by that. But, generally speaking, I enjoyed the work."

What Michael liked most was when his work was challenging. So another great moment of the series was the surprise party to celebrate Richard and Maggie's engagement in *Twist and Shout* (episode 167 <7.12>): "I remember we did a big event where we had a major party at *Falcon Crest*. I thought: 'Boy, I am going to be loaded up on this one!' Because they [the producing staff] would ask you to shoot a show in seven days — not ask you, they would expect you to... You could generally do it, it wasn't that hard a show. This particular episode had, you know, like... 30 extras, and every character in the piece was there, and some things were going on inside the house, and some things were going on outside the house." However, that episode was finished in time and was received very well by the audience.

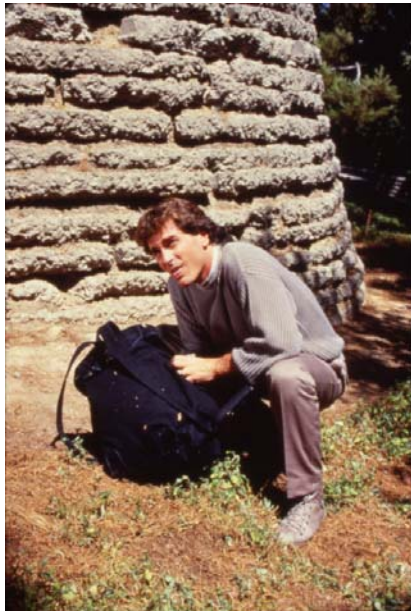


Another episode was sort of problematic. It was *Hornet's Nest* (episode 169 <7.14>). "I thought it was fun when I started working with Ursula Andress," he began, but pointed out that it was very difficult and exhausting to shoot at the particular estate. "I was shooting at a location where Dana [Sparks] had been kidnapped and being held prisoner in this castle-like structure," he referred to what posed as Dimitrov's house in Yugoslavia, a big mansion in Los Feliz, which is now a



retreat owned by the *L.A. Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*. "It was one hell of a place to shoot! It had all kinds of problems. It was very complicated shooting inside. I had to shoot the big explosion — and I never got around to be able to do that." Michael explained that the director of photography eventually shot some flares off outside the window. "That was the one time that I ran into overtime, I think. I think we had to get out of there and couldn't come back. But, you know, that does happen occasionally. It was horrible. I remember there was a circular staircase, and that was murder... I had to shoot several scenes there."

A difficult location: The spiral stairway in Dimitrov's house. The building is a retreat center nowadays.



A scene with John Callahan at Dimitrov's property; he tries to rescue his wife, Vickie.

Ursula Andress in a scene in episode 169.



Michael underlined the monotony that came along with his work on *Falcon Crest*: "After you've done maybe half a dozen or so of the same show, *Falcon Crest* sort of fell into a pattern after a while. By that point, I was saying to myself I'm just repeating everything I've already done over and over and over again, and I was really getting bored with the show. The only exception I ever had was with *Fame* — *Fame* always had the music, and that made it interesting, and there was always a different challenge."

Coming back to *Falcon Crest*, he added: "I really thought that the show was not really going anywhere dramatically or thematically and it would get to be a challenge... You know, they would bring in some exciting guest stars. I loved working with Leslie Caron, for example. But at the same time, I thought what they did with her was sort of beneath her stature. Like that opening shot with her that I had to do with her in a bubble bath! I thought that was just ridiculous."



David Selby and Leslie Caron in episode 157 in a scene taking place at the *Del Oro Spa & Country Club*.

Fond Memories of the Cast

Leslie Caron was one of his favorites among the special guests: "People like that, I enjoyed, and certainly some members of the cast. I had great fun and particularly liked David Selby. I think David was a wonderful, wonderful actor. Lorenzo [Lamas] — I got a big kick out of, I thought he was always very sweet. His challenge was... they [Lorimar] always wanted to show him with his shirt off because he was such a good-looking guy, and he had this enormous tattoo on his back, and we always had to watch how we staged it so we wouldn't see this giant — as I recall, it was a — dragon across the back and over towards the right part of his shoulder," he described what actually was a Pegasus.



Michael A. Hoey on the set at the raceway with Lorenzo Lamas and Robin Greer (episode 159).

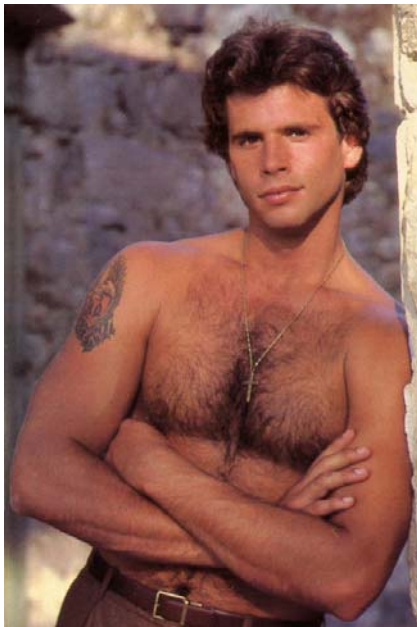
Then he continued about the other main cast members: "All of these people, you know, they were all professionals. Susan [Sullivan] and I didn't get along at first. She used to always challenge me, and I remember I went to Bob Foxworth, who was leaving the show at that point — I think

this was probably sometime in the middle of the second year that I was on the series — and I said: 'Bob, could you give me suggestions of how to get along with Susan?' He said: 'That's just her, my friend. You're just going to have to deal with it.' That was his helpful advice, and I went to Susan, and I said: 'Can we work out some sort of an arrangement where maybe we are not so confrontational?' She said: 'Why? I love it! That's the best way to work!' And I went... 'Oh, that's okay...' So from that point on, we got along very well now that I understood where she was coming from — that it wasn't necessarily personal."

We both had a good laugh about that. Having known Susan personally for quite a few years, I knew exactly what Michael meant. She is a very special character with a great sense of humor and a very particular attitude towards her work — and you only realize how very cordial and down to earth she is if you know her better.



Susan Sullivan has her own head — but has always been perfect at doing her work.



A photo from season 2: Lorenzo's tattoo is visible on his shoulder, something that always got him into trouble with the crew as they had to make sure the audience would not see it. Only a few episodes before the series ended, Lance got the tattoos officially on the show.



Robert Foxworth and Susan Sullivan during a party scene at the *Gioberti Estate* (episode 130).

Anyway, Michael confirmed her professionalism: "She gave it all she had, and the scenes between her and David were always excellent, you know, because their relationship was good."



Ana - Alicia as Veronique.



What Michael also remembered was Veronique, the Slumming / Seductive Socialite: "There was a scene when Ana - Alicia, whom I loved dearly, became a singing sensation," he started. "She was supposedly appearing in San Francisco — and we shot it at *The Roxy* on Sunset Boulevard," he explained about the famous theater in West Hollywood. "It was this great big black hole... Just tables, and the walls are painted black. So we filled it with extras, and I hired a friend of mine, Lonnie Burr, who was an ex - *Mouseketeer*, whom I had met when I was working at *Disney* back in the '50's when I was first starting off. I used him to play the manager of the club. He ended up, I think, getting three episodes out of it so it was a good deal for him. But her [Ana - Alicia's] singing was so dreadful that I thought: 'How could we make this sound really as good as she supposedly is?' You know... the crowd was supposed to go wild. Then I thought if I could make it look like they kind of are in on the joke a little bit, and that they don't really think she is that great, but they are sort of giggling, and I think that's how I eventually shot it. I don't know if that came across because I had to be very subtle about what I was doing. I didn't want to upset Ana - Alicia, who had a fiery temper, but never ever, as I recall, gave me any problems at all. I thought she was quite lovely. I adored her. She kind of got into her rôle at times, she was sort of believing that she was that character," the director emphasized how deeply the actress dived into her work. "And she and Jane were always kind of hotheads to one another."



Then he went through some other names of the regular cast members: "Margaret, Ladd, I thought, was kind of fun. I never quite understood why her character stayed as long as it did because it seemed like they were really working hard to keep her active within the show. Cesar Romero, I loved, I thought he was great, you know. He was such a pro, and he and Jane got along so well. They had known each other for years," Michael referred to the great chemistry Jane Wyman and Cesar Romero had.

Angela and Peter's wedding (episode 122).

"And then, the other one was when Eddie Albert came on board," Michael remembered about the movie star's character being introduced, creating the illusion that Carl Brock (a.k.a. Carlton Travis) was a nice guy, whereas he was later unmasked as a very



revengeful person. "It turned out that his and Jane's characters apparently had some sort of a love affair many years ago, and they came up with a photograph of one of their old *Warner Bros.* pictures," he referred to the 1938 movie *Brother Rat*. "Jane was showing it to all of us because it was going to be used as an insert in one of the episodes," he added about *New Faces* (episode 161 <7.06>).



"As you mention that photo of Angela and Carl, I remember another scene about their past," I said. "It was a flashback segment filmed in black and white where young Angie discovers Carl's brother dying in front of the fraternity house near the location where Angie and Carl celebrated their engagement party. A younger actress played Jane Wyman's character in that scene."



"Yes, I tried very hard to find somebody that looked something like Jane, but we ended up... As I recall, you hardly see her face, it was like an extra that came in to

just do that one moment. We fitted her with one of Jane's wigs actually," Michael explained about Jonni Paris, the actress portraying young Angie. "We shot it at CBS Studio Center at one of their kind of small basic standing sets, an alley set, as I recall." He thought about the flashback scene for a moment. "As I recall, it was an element in the mystery... She [Angela] thought something had happened and it turned out that it wasn't truly the case. Was that it?" the director asked me.

He remembered the mystery, but it was basically the other way round — Carl thought he had killed his brother while Angie, in fact, knew that he did not.

"You had another guest star who was involved in that mystery storyline: Eve Arden," I added, explaining that her character, Lillian Nash, was the real murderess, as it transpired in that episode.

"Oh, that's who it was!" Michael remembered now.

"There was a very interesting character, Brian... something," Michael went on.

"Oh yes, Brian Thompson, who played Hopkins," I filled in.

"An interesting heavy because he looked like... you know...," Michael hinted about the actor's looks. "He sort of reminded me — in a very odd way — of an actor from the '40's, by the name of Rondo Hatton. He was rather famous for the fact that he suffered from acromegaly, which is an extension of the features, and he grew quite ugly. They sort of exploited him at *Universal* and made several movies. My dad was an actor; he was at *Universal*," Michael explained that they were in a movie together, but then came back to Brian Thompson: "Brian — although he didn't actually suffer from that, for some strange reason, his features reminded me of this man, and I remember I shot him with some lights down below to make him look really ugly," Michael laughed.



Scenes of a manhunt: In episode 163, Richard is hunted through the brush by Hopkins. The hunt climaxes in *Channing Nevada*.



"There was a sequence in a cellar, as I recall, giving me the opportunity to do that. And what he did was quite frightening."

"Oh yes, that was when he manipulated the gas main in the *Gioberti House*," I remembered the scene from *The Big Bang* (episode # 159 <7.04>).

He came back to Jane Wyman again:

"Jane, you know, would only work in the morning. She would say to everybody, and she said it to me when I first came on board: 'I will work until the lunch break. But that's it, and don't expect me back in the afternoon.' Well, as it turned out, at least twice, as I recall — it wasn't through anybody's fault, but the sequence was more

complicated than we had anticipated or whatever the case may be — we got to the point where we had to break for lunch, or we would get into some sort of an overtime situation. I would go to Jane, and I would say: 'Jane, I really am sorry, but would you come back for one shot directly after lunch, and I promise I'll let you go as soon as I get that shot.' And she would always do it, never turned me down." That illustrated how devoted she was to the series. "It was her show," Michael added and smiled: "I mean she became almost like the Mother Superior of the show, but not in a bad way in any sense, you know. I remember she would always be the first one on the set in the morning because she would always be in the first shot. And then, if you had... like Chao-Li or someone like that, who was working with her, you could jump right in and get the shot right away. It looked good on the production report that you got your first shot within 20 minutes after the crew came along. But when you had any of the [other] ladies, she [Jane] would say to me: 'Get those broads away from the make-up table and get them on the set!' They would hover around the make-up table till the last possible minute to make sure that they looked as gorgeous as they could. And she would always say: 'Get those broads away from the make-up table and let's get started!' " Michael quoted Jane again.

In a party mood:
Dana Sparks, Jane Wyman, Margaret Ladd,
Susan Sullivan und Ana - Alicia.



Working with the Staff

The director now made a transition to the staff and crew.

"The crew was great. I always enjoyed working with the crew and the one cameraman that I liked particularly. I can't remember his name right now."

We went through a bunch of directors of photography, and he said: "It wasn't David Calloway. I thought that was a disaster when he came on. It was the man who came back after Calloway left the series again." Suddenly, the name came back to his mind: "Kenny Peach. A wonderful guy, a great guy! He was very helpful, and we got along extremely well. I always got along well with cameramen because I was trying to be well prepared and I would basically tell them what I had in mind and then I'd sit with them to sketch it out. It was a good relationship, and his crew was terrific. They worked fast and they were fun. The set was always very relaxed."

He also had particularly good memories of Earl Hamner.

Before he mentioned how Earl's and his paths crossed, Michael explained how he got into the entertainment industry: "I've always considered myself very lucky that I got to do what I wanted to do. My dad was an actor," he referred to Dennis Hoey, who played Inspector Lestrade in the *Sherlock Holmes* movies, "and I thought I wanted to be one, but then realized that I wasn't really suited to be an actor." Therefore, he finally chose to get behind the camera. "I went into editing for several years in order to learn my craft. Then I was promoted from assistant film editor to producer by Jack Warner and that's how I met Earl Hamner, as a matter of fact. Earl had just sold the book to *Warner Bros.*, called *Spencer's Mountain*, and instead of giving him the screenplay to write, which of course would have made sense, they sent this guy — who had never been to California before; basically, you know, he was a young man from Virginia, who had spent a few years in New York City — to Palm Springs to write an original screenplay on Easter week in Palm Springs, which ultimately became *Palm Springs Weekend*. He and I met, became friends and worked together on that."

Michael pointed out that, technically, he did not really work with Earl on *Falcon Crest* because Earl no longer had executive producing duties when Michael joined the series. But they would see each other during that time, particularly at the annual Christmas party for *Falcon Crest*.

John F. Perry, the line producer, was another member of the producing staff Michael had fond memories of: "A very nice man."

Talking about the crew, we also came to speak about the prop guys.

"I actually shot the sequence where we blew up the house," Michael referred to *The Big Bang* (episode 159. <7.04>) when the *Gioberti House* exploded. It was shot on the backlot of CBS - *MTM Studios* (nowadays *CBS Studio Center*) by a second unit. "They asked me to go out because they had to have a director — a *DGA* member — on hand," Michael pointed out. "So I actually was there when we blew up that... rather silly looking model, but it was all right." Michael was not very content with the prop guys' replica of the house. "I remember we cut it so that you didn't get to see much of it before the explosion so hopefully there were enough flames and everything... It was certainly big," he added about the model and told me that the studio even had a fire truck out there as they were worried about a possible brush fire on the studio lot. "They didn't hire a special effects company. I think they had the prop department build the

damn thing. Then they brought in their own special effects people, which we used in the body of the show sometimes.”



The explosion of the Gioberti House in episode 159 (left photo); *Stags' Leap Manor* in 2010 (right photo).

Speaking of the prop department, the director suddenly remembered a very funny incident.

“Somewhere — I don’t know where it is now... They offered it to me when I left the show, and I declined,” Michael began to tell rather mysteriously about a really special prop.

This was getting my attention as secrets from the set are always the most welcome tidbits for fans.

“There was a scene that we shot,” he continued, “where Jane is rummaging through an attic and she discovers a painting of her late husband... You know what I am talking about?”

“Oh yeah,” I said, “it was a scene that was just shot for the second episode of season 7, as I know from old production records, but that was never aired.”

“Oh, it isn’t even in...,” Michael was surprised. “Well, okay, here’s the funny thing: I was directing that episode. The prop department came to me and said: ‘We need to do a painting for the scene... a painting of the guy who was her husband. Would you pose for it?’ And I thought: ‘Oh, that’ll be fun, sure!’ And they did that full scale pic, you know, an oil painting of me. And I said: ‘Don’t tell Jane. When we do the shot, put it in there, and she’ll get a kick out of it.’ But actually, she didn’t, as I recall, and that’s maybe why she had it removed from the show. She may have been the one who said: ‘Take it out!’” Michael speculated. “I guess it broke her dramatic train of thoughts because here she pulls this thing out, and there’s me — you know, standing there... Boy, I felt terrible because this joke fell flatter than a pancake. When I left the show, the prop man said: ‘Would you like to take this with you?’ And I said: ‘No, I’m not going to hang up a big oil painting of myself.’ So I guess in some prop house it still hangs around, or maybe they destroyed it. I don’t know.”

It was very interesting that Michael shared that particular incident with me as it seemed rather strange why that scene had been taken out of the final version of the episode. My guess was that it might have had to do with the fact that Stephen Elliott originally played Angie’s first husband, Douglas Channing, something the regime of the show at the time of filming season 7 was probably not aware about — and maybe Jane Wyman was not happy with recasting Douglas even if it was just for a painting.

But Michael did not think that this was the reason: “You know, I never shot it so that you saw the painting. I don’t really remember. It’s very odd. Now that you point that out, I

wonder why they ever painted me in that... Why didn't they go to Stephen Elliott? He was still around, and they could have gotten a photograph of him. Anyway, it wasn't my idea [about the oil painting], and it was not received well. But I had never intended to show the painting. I am not even sure why they thought they had to have this painting." Finally, he summarized: "It seems to me that it was a sort of an unnecessary scene." When I explained — based on the script — what the purpose of the scene was, Michael said: "Oh, okay, that's why she didn't like the fact that it was me. It was breaking the scene, breaking the fourth wall in effect."

An extract of the script of episode 157.

Unfortunately, this rather special scene was edited and not broadcast:

FALCON CREST - "Obsession, Possession" - 176202 - 3/25/87	5.
4 CLOSE UP - PORTRAIT	4*
	*
ANGELA (V.O.) I gave you my life and you destroyed me.	
	*
5 INT. FALCON CREST - ATTIC - DAY	5
As Angela stands before a portrait of a man, dimly seen.	*
ANGELA You stole my baby. My first- born. My son. And you made him my enemy. Is Hell so dull you needed to amuse yourself by torturing me?	*
She punches the portrait --	*
EMMA (o.s.) Mother!	
Angela turns to Emma, who makes her way around discarded furniture, dusty boxes.	*

The Wine Country Experience

As many others involved in the production, Michael also liked shooting in Northern California.



"I did enjoy going up to Napa and directing the episodes up there. It was kind of fun," Michael came back to another element he particularly liked in his assignment. "They treated us very nicely, and they put us up at the *Silverado*," he added about the resort that portrayed the *Del Oro Spa & Country Club* on the show.

"The only problem I had was I developed an allergy because there was some kind of a mold within the grapevines. I came down with a

dreadful allergy. It was the first time I ever had something like that, and I've had a problem ever since. I moved down to San Clemente, which is alongside the ocean, and I thought I'd get away from it, but it turned out that I picked different allergies that I can now be offended by. Anyway, I had a wonderful time up there [in the Napa Valley]."

The director now remembered a particular shooting for the storyline with Eddie Albert and David Selby: "Some of the location stuff was interesting — one where Selby escapes from Eddie Albert and goes running off through the bushes. For a big sequence, we actually went away from Napa; we were up in the hills."

"Somewhere near Lake Hennessy, right?" I asked.

"Yes, I think so," Michael confirmed. "And we had a sequence with a helicopter, and I got some interesting shots with him running with the helicopter," he added about David Selby.

"But the climax of it, I actually shot on the backlot at CBS," Michael described the scene when Hopkins pointed the gun at Richard and was finally shot by Carlton. "That's the magic of movies and editing," he added about the fact that you would never guess that the various segments of the manhunt were filmed in different locations.

Another Napa Valley location we talked about was the Australian *Kookaburra Station* where Cole lived — actually not Australia, of course, but a location in the Wine Country. Michael did not remember where it was located exactly. "It was some kind of arid location, and they actually brought in the sheep," he said about the property department. "It was funny because when I was an assistant film editor many years before, I had worked on a film called *The Sundowners* [1960] with Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr. They were a family that went from sheep station to sheep station around Australia." Shearing the wool from the sheep was one thing the director recalled from that earlier production. "So I remembered all of the details of that," Michael pointed out that this was the reason why he added it to a scene with Billy Moses in *New Faces* (episode 161 <7.06>). "That was kind of fun!"

Michael also mentioned that he liked the restaurants in the valley. One of them was used as a filming site for various scenes in early season 7.

"There was one scene where Lorenzo was posing as a parking attendant," the director described a scene in *Lovers and Friends* (episode 165 <7.10>), which was supposed to take place in front of an "in" restaurant in Hollywood called *Valentino's* — but not located in Hollywood at all in real life. "That was all shot in downtown Napa," Michael added, "and we did a series of sequences inside that restaurant, too."

"Oh yes, I remember," I said. "It was the old *Lisbon (Mathews) Winery* in Napa, which had been converted into a restaurant by that time." More scenes filmed at that location included Maggie and Richard sitting on the terrace of the *Tuscany Valley Inn*, reading and discussing Chase's ominous letter in *Obsession, Possession* (episode 157 <7.02>) and a dinner scene with Maggie, Richard, Liz and Garth inside the *Tuscany Valley Inn* in episode 165 <7.10>. Nowadays, by the way, the location is no longer a restaurant, but *Jarvis Conservatory*.

"Anyway, you are bringing back memories that I haven't had in a long, long time," Michael said.



What used to be *Lisbon Winery* in downtown Napa posed for various locations on the show: The front (left picture) as *Valentino's* in L.A., a side wing as the terrace of the *Tuscany Valley Inn*.



He went on talking about filming in San Francisco: "I remember I shot some sequences with David and... — what's her name? — the ex-model with the gap..."



"Lauren Hutton," I said.

"Lauren Hutton," he confirmed. "At the baseball stadium in San Francisco, and we did some sequences along several of the locations in San Francisco, so we did drive in every day to shoot that stuff."

While he thought about those segments, he came to speak of the improbable Ninja storyline: "Remember the scene where the masked character appears at the window? And then it turns out to be a dream..." Michael referred to the imaginary scene Liz (Lauren Hutton's character) talks about in *Lovers and Friends* (episode 165 <7.10>). "Of course, it had to be a dream — how the hell could that guy get up some 20 stories and look through the side of a glass window?!" Another incident like that was the imaginary sequence when Liz was driving on a street near the Golden Gate Bridge. "We shot up near Sausalito," the director explained. "These were such terrible cheats. I hated that."

How It All Fell Apart

He now summed up his time on the show — from being hired to his last assignment: "It was a challenge, and I did some interesting stuff with the camera. I think it's what got me assigned to go on," he started, pointing out that he was invited back for a few more episodes until he was finally hired to take turns with Reza Badiyi in the first twelve typical Wine Country location episodes of season 7, followed by one more episode filmed entirely in and around Los Angeles (episode # 169 <7.14>).

"I did one more after that when the new producer, Michael Filerman, came back," Michael referred to *Changing Times*, the premiere of season 8 (episode 184 <8.01>).

"But that was a total disaster!" the director exclaimed. "Not for me," he added, "I rather liked the episode, I was introducing some new characters that became continuing characters in the show. I can't remember her name, but she was a very attractive..."

"Kristian Alfonso?" I asked.

"Yeah!", Michael confirmed. "She came off a daytime soap opera. And the guy, who played her father — I think he was awfully good. He's done very well; that was very early in his career," he said about Cástulo Guerra. He also fondly remembered Danny Nucci, who has been having a great career since his early days on *Falcon Crest*.

"Anyway, it was fun to be working with new characters and developing characters — very rare on that show."

However, these good memories were overshadowed by the negative experience as far as the production process was concerned.

"They hired me because they were taking over the show," Michael said about Filerman and his team and also explained that in the years before, Filerman had not worked on the show although his name appeared on the credits — something I had already known from other sources close to the set. The director continued: "He was not the nicest of people apparently from what I've heard, and I had not a very good experience with him. I remember Filerman kept coming to me and saying before I even started shooting: 'I want lots of close-ups. You know, television is a close-up business, so be sure and give me a lot of close-ups.'" Michael put on an insistent voice when he quoted Filerman. "I don't like close-ups," Michael added, now back in his own voice. "My favorite was to shoot over shoulders and, when it was important enough, to go in for singles. And Filerman came back to me after a couple of days of shooting and he said: 'You're not giving me the close-ups; I want close-ups on Jane!' " Michael imitated the executive producer's demanding and insistent voice again. Then, he continued talking about his conversation with Filerman: "I said: 'Michael, you cannot shoot a full head close-up on Jane Wyman! That would be unfair to her,'" the director referred to the actress' age and his efforts to make her look good on film. "And he said: 'Well, I want it that way!'" Michael quoted Filerman again. "I didn't do it, and of course, he didn't ask me back! But I felt that it wasn't only wrong thematically, but it was wrong and it was



Michael A. Hoey with Jane Wyman and Cesar Romero on the golf course of the *North Ranch Country Club* during filming the season 8 premiere.

bad for Jane. I mean Jane looked terrific, but she was not a young woman. You know she had lines in her face at that point, and it would have been wrong to do that to her. So I didn't."

He pointed out that Jane did not view the dailies on a regular basis, but the whole episode once it was completed and that she would not have been happy to see herself in a close-up.

"I think that's one of the reasons why Filerman didn't last very long," Michael guessed. The fact that Ana - Alicia's Melissa was written off during early season 8, was commented by the director: "I don't think he [Filerman] had a lot of good ideas very honestly." He paused a second.

"Then, they brought in a guy that I've worked with for quite a while, Jerry Thorpe. By that point, I thought the show had just gone to hell in a wheel-barrow! I didn't watch the show [regularly], I watched like an opening episode of a season to see how it was going."

We both shared the same opinion on the downfall of the series, particularly in the final year.

Then, Michael added: "I would say that probably even before I came on, the show had already sort of dropped in its qualities to some extent, but it was fun!"

I knew what he meant as some of the season 7 storylines, despite a good overall quality of that year, were a little over the top. "I thought Jeff [Freilich] kind of dropped the ball himself. He became more interested in directing than in producing — and he was running the show," the director emphasized that it is rather difficult, if not impossible, to do both jobs very well at the same time. "He was a really good writer, and that's why Ernie [Wallengren] was still with the show, and Greg Strangis and Howard Lakin," Michael particularly referred to season 6 when Jeff took over. "They were really good writers, and they were writing interesting stuff. But Jeff wasn't really there to supervise, he was too busy looking at how he was going to direct," Michael pointed out how the situation began to change after a while. "I remember I got so annoyed because I would have loved to have a crane in several of the episodes that I did, and they [Lorimar] would tell me: 'No, we can't afford one.' Well, of course, Jeff directed an episode, and the first thing was he gave himself a crane."

From an insider working on the set, who wants to remain unnamed, I knew that Jeff was always trying to get more money from *Lorimar* than the original cost projection would allow. I was told about instances when a crane was the cheaper compromise for Jeff's request to shoot from a high angle after he had originally asked Mary Van Houten, the *Lorimar* Vice President – Production Control, for extra money to rent a helicopter.

Michael summarized about the Freilich era: "But I think the show still had some merit to it at that point. I certainly enjoyed it."

Michael Nowadays

"Do you have any memorabilia from the set?"



"I have a crystal decanter, which has the *Falcon Crest* emblem etched in it — which was a Christmas gift one year. That was just it. I didn't steal anything on the set," he laughed.

When we came closer to the end of our interview, I asked Michael what he is doing these days. He mentioned that he writes books now. His website, www.mhoey.com, gives a great overview of his projects.

At the end, he summed up his time on *Falcon Crest*: "It was a nice experience, and it was fun going down memory lane with you!"