

Questions for BARRY STEINBERG

November 10, 2019

Thomas J. Pucher asked writer and producer Barry Steinberg, who worked on *Falcon Crest* between episodes 13 <1.13> and 46 <3.06>, questions about his job.

Barry Steinberg's answers are in bold print.

[The parts in brackets were edited for publication purposes.]

How did you like working on *Falcon Crest*?

Except for a pilot I had worked on the previous year, it was my first job as a producer. I was pleased to be there. It was also a new challenge. In addition to supervising production, I now watched over post-production, participated in casting and was more involved with creative aspects of the show.

Right before joining *Falcon Crest* during the 1981-82 season, you worked as the unit production manager on *Lorimar's Flamingo Road*, which was canceled at the end of that season. Did that position have anything to do with how you got your producer's job on *Falcon Crest*?

I had worked steadily at Lorimar the previous four years on various projects as an assistant director and unit production manager and was well-known around the company. I got to know Earl Hamner when I supervised the filming of a special on location at his boyhood home in Virginia. Earl's growing up in this small, out-of-the-way town was his inspiration for *The Waltons*. We did interviews with his mother, who still lived in the same house, and with his brothers and sisters. Earl had wanted me to produce *The Vintage Years* pilot, but the Head of Production felt I did not have enough experience for that project. I was assigned another pilot as consolation, then went back to *Flamingo Road* as unit production manager. When Mack Harding left *Falcon Crest*, I believe Earl must have asked for me again.

You started to work as the producer in episode 13 <1.13>. We know CBS had originally ordered only thirteen episodes (including the unaired pilot, *The Vintage Years*) so when they requested additional episodes for the remainder of the season, some staff and crew members had already left. You took over producing duties from Mack Harding. During the whole first season, nothing had been carved in stone, and it felt as if the show was just on its way, finding its pace and way of storytelling. Was it difficult for you to take over in that process?

When I took over as producer, I inherited a staff and crew who remained for the balance of the first season. I think it often takes a full season for a series to find itself. The writers learn the strengths of the a cast and how to take advantage of them. In preparing the second season we made some changes. We wanted a brighter, more colorful and more interesting look. We brought in a new art director, set decorator, director of photography, and women's and men's wardrobe. We modified some of our permanent sets. One example: we lightened the interior of the Channing Mansion considerably.

How did you get the necessary background information about what had happened in episodes 1 <1.01> through 12 <1.12>? Did you watch the show before you came aboard, or did you primarily use the bible and other production documents?

I didn't have much time to prepare. I watched a few episodes and got a sense of who the characters were. Not much more study was needed since the show and plot lines were evolving.

For season 2 of *Falcon Crest*, many other *Flamingo Road* staff and crew members and even actor David Selby moved over. Did it make things easier for you when these familiar faces ended up on *Falcon Crest*?



It's usually easier when you already know the people you're working with. From *Flamingo Road* we brought over the camera and wardrobe departments. Michael Filerman, one of our executive producers, appreciated what they had done on *Flamingo Road*. We knew they could execute the look we were going for. I think everybody at *Lorimar* was impressed with David Selby's work on *Flamingo Road*. I'm guessing they were looking for a way to use him on *Falcon Crest*.

The *Falcon Crest* season 2 main cast with supervising producer Bob McCullough (back row, left), director Harry Harris (back row, center) and Barry Steinberg (back row, right), as well as cast addition David Selby as Richard Channing in front of *Stags' Leap Manor* on July 26, 1982.

Filming in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys at the beginning of each season was a hallmark of the show. I think you had the opportunity to go on distant location for seasons 2 and 3. How did you like filming there, and did you revisit the Wine Country after the show had run its course?

Filming in Napa was a logistical and scheduling challenge and hard work. We began with completed scripts for the first six episodes and would shoot the Los Angeles portions first; then we'd go to Napa to complete them. By that time, we'd have completed scripts for the second six episodes, and we'd shoot the Napa portions, then return to LA to complete the second six episodes. Two teams of director and 1st Assistant Director would have to coordinate their work. Accommodations in Napa were nice and there were many gourmet restaurants to try if we had any energy left after our one day off per week. I must confess that I haven't been back.

Are you still in contact with anyone from the cast and crew?

For quite a few years I was in touch with various cast and crew members — Bill Moses, Harry Harris, Victoria LaFortune and others — but it's been some time since I've seen or spoken to any of them.



Who were your favorite cast members to work with?

I can't say I had any favorites, but looking back, I did feel a connection with Bill Moses, Bob Foxworth, Susan Sullivan, David Selby and Cliff Robertson.

Robert Foxworth, Lana Turner, Susan Sullivan and Billy Moses rehearsing on the set of *Falcon Crest* (episode 30 <2.12>).

Who were your favorite director and crew members to work with?

Harry Harris was a director I knew when I was assistant director and unit production manager on *Eight is Enough*. He probably directed more episodes of *Falcon Crest* than anyone else. He was a mainstay for us. His energy and enthusiasm would win over the cast and crew. Besides being a wonderful director, he was a true friend to me.

What was your most memorable scene?

There was a scene in the winery in Season 3. I believe it was a fight. I can still see the wine spraying out of the vats, soaking everybody.



A scene from episode 45 <3.05>, in which a draining lid, sabotaged by Lance, breaks loose, spilling thousands of gallons of wine in the *Falcon Crest* Cooperage.

What was your favorite storyline (regardless of the season)?

It's been so long I don't remember specific plot lines. I thought some were a bit far-fetched but still good fun.

What was it like to work with Jane Wyman?

Jane made sure never to keep the company waiting. She was always ready and always knowing her lines. She had strong opinions and wouldn't stand for any foolishness.

Jane Wyman with Mel Ferrer studying the script on the set of *Falcon Crest* (episode # 57 <3.17>).

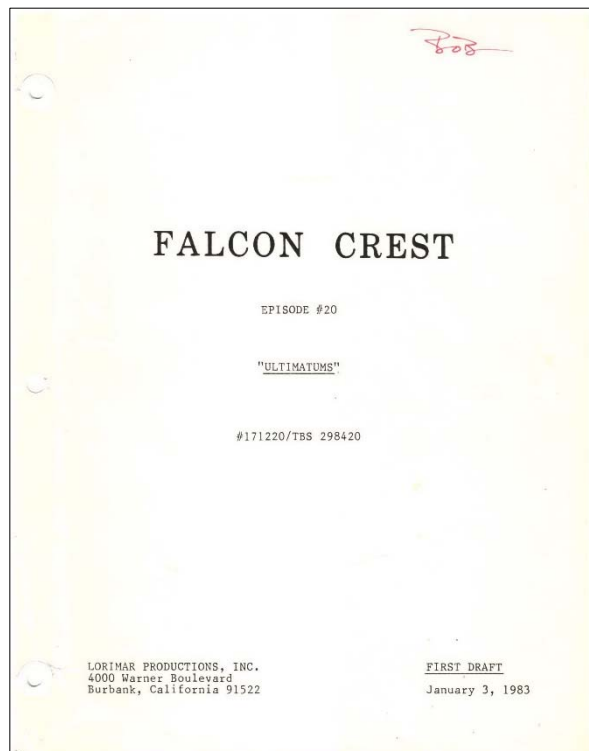


Jane Wyman with Lana Turner (Susan Sullivan and Billy Moses in the background) rehearsing on the set of *Falcon Crest* for the party scene in episode # 30 <2.12>.



Was there a lot of tension between Jane Wyman and Lana Turner on the set, as it was often rumored in the press?

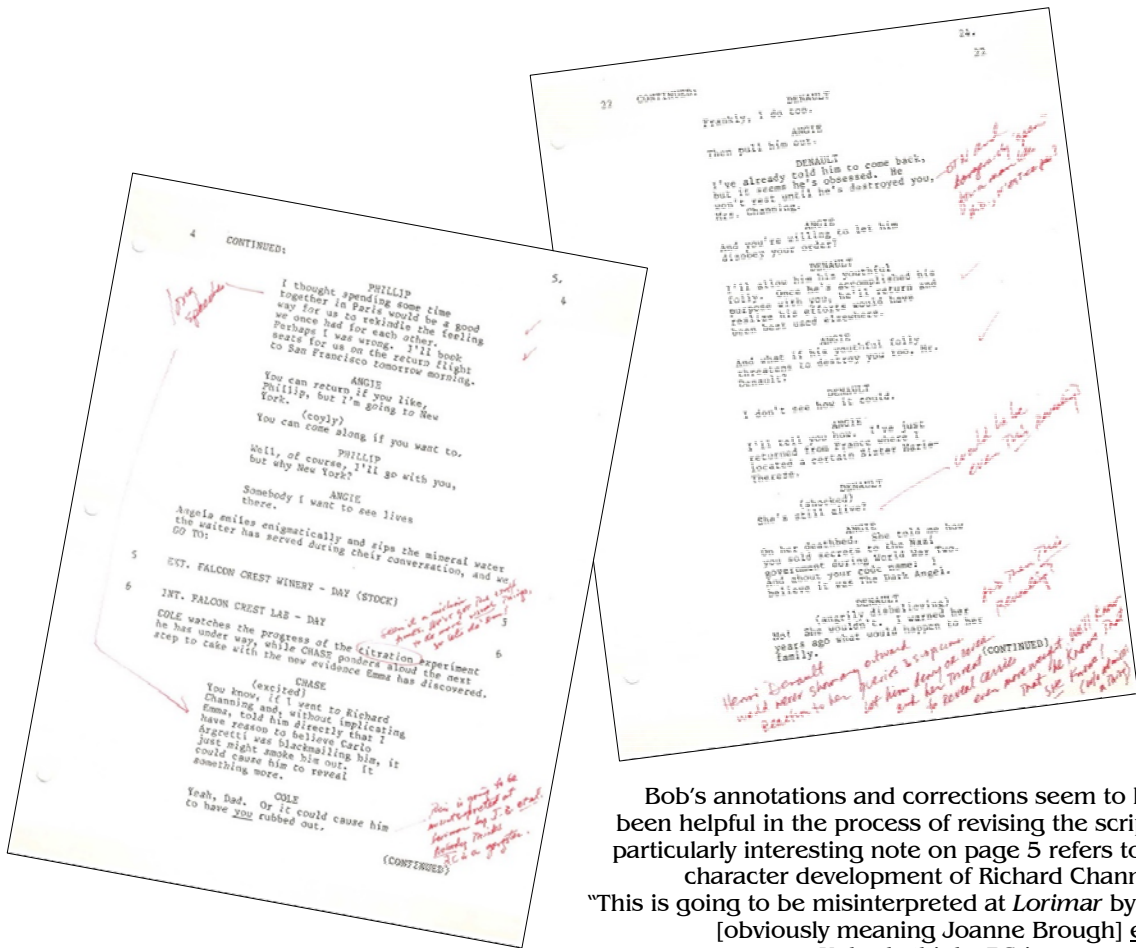
Jane had made clear to everyone how she felt about Lana, and that may have created some tension among the other cast and the crew. But everyone just did their jobs. From what I could tell, Lana was oblivious to it, but that may just have been her way of dealing with an uncomfortable situation. It was a fairly short period of time that Lana was with the show.



It is interesting that you wrote *Ultimatums* (episode 38 <2.20>). I assume it was probably your first script that made it to the screen. We have a huge archive of production documents, mostly donated by your colleagues, and your first draft of that episode is among it — with lots of notes and suggestions, all of them handwritten by Bob McCullough. It seems you've been collaborating quite well. How was your experience as a writer in contrast to your producing duties?

I think I bit off more than I could chew in taking on that script while also supervising the show. As I remember, my draft was terrible. Bob McCullough and the other writers really bailed me out.

The cover of script 38 <2.20> (Bob McCullough's copy), written by Barry Steinberg.



Bob's annotations and corrections seem to have been helpful in the process of revising the script. A particularly interesting note on page 5 refers to the character development of Richard Channing: "This is going to be misinterpreted at *Lorimar* by J.B. [obviously meaning Joanne Brough] et al. Nobody thinks RC is a gangster."

Why did you leave after episode 46 <3.06>, and what was your next project?

Earl Hamner asked me to move over to a new show he had begun, called *Boone*, about a young country singer in Tennessee in the 1950's about the time Rock and Roll was developing. There was great music and a terrific cast. I thought the show had good potential; but early ratings were low, and the network didn't stick with it.

Falcon Crest underwent several regime changes. If you continued to watch, what did you think of those regime changes and how they affected the show?

I did not watch the show enough after my time there to make any evaluation.

Among its many outstanding qualities, the show was famous for the celebrities who made special guest appearances. There were many rumors of other big names being taken into consideration for various rôles. Do you remember any celeb guests you discussed and characters they were intended to play?

I don't remember being involved in any discussions of potential guest celebs.

We have copies of the bibles, particularly of the first three seasons. Besides some ideas in those bibles that never made it to the screen, do you remember any other interesting storylines that were discussed, but never materialized?

I don't. It's been a long time.

Do you have any memorabilia from the set?

I may have some photos, but if so, they are packed away.

We have a couple of floor plans of the sets, but we are particularly looking for the upstairs hallway of the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion* and Emma's rooftop studio where she was locked up in season 1 as well as the *Gioberti House* master bedroom and guest bedroom. Those would be very helpful for our analysis of the set construction in contrast with the real Villa Miravalle at Spring Mountain Vineyards and Stags' Leap Manor respectively. Do you happen to have copies of those plans you might be able to scan for us?

Sorry. I don't have any set plans.

Do you have any other production documents you might want to share with us, such as shooting schedules, call sheets, production reports, production cost overviews, art department breakdowns or anything else? We'd be delighted about basically anything that helps us in our research about the history, development and production of the show.

Sorry again. I have not kept those kinds of materials.

After *Falcon Crest*, you continued to have an amazing career with — just to name a few — the *Perry Mason* movies, the *Father Dowling Mysteries* and *Diagnosis Murder* (all of which I enjoyed, too, by the way). Was working on these other shows a lot different from *Falcon Crest*?

The shows I've worked on since *Falcon Crest* have had much smaller regular casts. That makes for a different experience. Apart from that, every show feels different. I think the personalities of the people you're working with is the major thing that makes working on one show different from working on another.

We discovered that in *The Undercover Nun Mystery*, an episode of the *Father Dowling Mysteries*, establishing shots of wineries were used that were footage from *Falcon Crest*. Was it your idea to license those clips, or Victoria LaFortune's, who also worked on both shows?

Those winery shots must have been Victoria's idea. She had finished up *Falcon Crest* the year before.



Clips from *Falcon Crest* were recycled as establishing shots on *The Father Dowling Mysteries*: a shot filmed at *Inglennook's* former barrel building in Rutherford for episode 86 <4.18> (left screen capture) and a shot of the cave at *Spring Mountain's Winery Building* in St. Helena filmed for the predecessor, *The Vintage Years* (right screen grab).

What are your current project?

I haven't been doing too much lately, but I'm always available.