

Extra Time for an Extra:

DOUGLAS MAIDA

About Being a Different "Regular" on *Falcon Crest*

Interview by

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

Douglas Maida and I met on a social network, discussing what extras contribute to movies and television. An extra is a background player, who is usually hired on a day-by-day basis to help create the atmosphere the director and producing staff envision for a scene. Therefore, extras are sometimes also referred to as atmosphere or background actors/players. When you watch American television particularly from the 1970's through the 1990's very thoroughly, you will find the same extras all over in any kind of production because it was a comparatively small circle of professional extras back then. On www.falconcrest.org, we have researched extras for many years, trying to identify them in each episode and give them the credit they deserve at least in the cast and crew lists on our website since they usually remained uncredited on the shows themselves, but always contributed so much to the authenticity of the setting.

While many extras were hired only once or a couple of times over the lifespan of the show, Doug appeared in countless episodes of *Falcon Crest* between 1983 and 1990. Without



Douglas Maida first appeared as an extra in episode 34 <2.16> of *Falcon Crest* (on the right in the background in each screen capture).

claiming to be statistically exact, he was most likely the background player who outnumbered any other extra in the series. He is visible for the first time in *Deliberate Disclosure* (episode 34 <2.18>), followed by many more appearances all through the series, still hired on a day-by-day basis though.

When my wife and I traveled to Los Angeles in the fall, we met with Doug at *The Smoke House* in Burbank, which is just across from *Warner Bros. Studios*. You cannot only get some very good food at *The Smoke House*, but it is also a wonderful piece of Hollywood history; not just because many stars like to eat there, but also because of its use as a filming location for many productions since it opened in 1946. Although Doug and I had

only communicated through e-mail and a messenger service before, we felt immediately close when we met.

Becoming Dave on Falcon Crest

"You worked as an extra on *Falcon Crest*," I dove into the interview after we had already talked a while about our trip and what we had done since my wife and I came to California. "We all know that a background actor's duty is to help create the right atmosphere for a scene, make it realistic. You played Dave, a bellboy, who later became an attendant at the *Del Oro Spa & Country Club* in a number of episodes, but you were also seen previously as an orderly at the *Tuscany Valley Hospital* and a waiter at the *Tuscany Downs Turf Club*. Of course, *Falcon Crest* was not the only TV show you worked on, but how did you get your job on 'Falcon'?"



Clockwise: Doug in episode 49 <3.09> as an orderly (with Lorenzo Lamas), in episode 57 <3.17> as a patron at *Luccio's* (behind Laura Johnson) as well as in episodes 142 <6.15> (right behind Jane Wyman) and 156 <7.01> (as a *Del Oro* bellboy).

Doug smiled: "I got the job through *Rich-Mar Casting*. I started out as an extra approximately at age 19. I just tried it out. It turned out so well that, with various assignments as an extra, it became quite easy to make a living." He explained that he became a union member of the *Screen Extras Guild (SEG)* and worked on various other TV and film projects before, particularly *The Love Boat*, *Fantasy Island*, *Hart to Hart*, *Grease II*, *Who's the Boss*, *Married With Children* and *General Hospital*.

"Could you please describe for people who are not familiar with the business how your typical workday was like?" I asked.

Doug pointed out that extras were usually hired on a daily basis and assigned to certain projects through their respective agencies. "Us extras were usually paged by beeper at the time (it was way before cell phones were invented) and, before beepers, we had to call in and ask if there were any assignments available." Then the background players were told where to go for a shoot, whether it was on a studio lot or location, and how to dress appropriately for the scene, if they had to bring another set of wardrobe to change, or if they needed to bring along anything else, etc.



Right: In *Married with Children* and as a waiter on *The Love Boat*.



Doug as hairdresser behind Eva Gabor in *Burke's Law*.

Extras are usually uncredited because the billing standard in the entertainment industry is that a performer usually gets an on-screen credit only if he or she has lines in the final shooting script. Of course, there are some exceptions to that basic guideline, and this also depends on the union-related contract — which was *SAG* or *AFTRA* at the time (today the two unions have merged into one).

"In the season 9 premiere," I introduced my next question, "we finally learnt — after you've been on the show for six years already — that your character's name is Dave because you had some short interaction with Kristian Alfonso's character, Pilar Cumson, at the spa reception, and she mentioned your character name. Since your line was not in the script, was it your idea to say a few words and you got away with it, or did the director or someone else from the staff or crew ask you to speak a few words?"



Doug's answer revealed an interesting, but surprisingly odd fact: "We, as background never ad-lib anything unless told to do so by the director. It was not my voice in the final version of the episode; the segment was looped. It is actually a different person who re-recorded the line, and it was not documented who it was though." We were quite surprised since it remained unclear why the producing staff would loop the segment unless the audio was corrupted. Doug

had a theory though: "In this scene Kristian addresses me, and I think when they were editing the scene, they felt there was possibly some 'dead air' between her and me and it made more sense to hear something from me rather than just see a typical nod of the head or me mouthing something."

It was also interesting that the name Dave was actually the scriptwriter's choice, as I mentioned. "It was on my name tag," Doug said. It seems that the prop guys actually prepared the scene well because the name Dave was already part of Pilar's line in the script when she addressed the spa attendant although the script contained no line for him, but just a silent moment when he hands her the key to the spa's steam room. It was quite unusual that a silent bit would be addressed by first name in the script already though.

As a side note, Doug also referred to an interesting fun fact: "Something for the eye to



Douglas Maida right behind Jane Wyman as a waiter at the *Tuscany Downs Turf Club* in episode 81 <4.13>.

catch is, in many cases on TV series and movies, they discretely list name of the crew or producers or production staff like on a note board in the background. You can see their names at times in graffiti on a wall, something like 'Dave loves Mary'. It is very likely Dave and Mary are husband and wife in real life and part of production. You could see a book cover and below the made-up book title is what would be the author saying, "by Walter Smith", that Walter Smith could be a producer of the show. It's a way to pay homage to many who are not seen on camera."

Coming back to crediting extras, Doug confirmed that, in some productions, the more common way for an extra to get a character name is when actors ad lib a name while they are playing a scene. He explained that some actors sometimes deliberately mention a name when talking to an extra in a scene because that leads the silent bit to be upgraded — not to a speaking rôle, but to more or less something that is in between since the extra becomes a more prominent part of that segment. He referred to a different series as an example of a long running American soap opera that Kristian Alfonso came from and once represented by the *AFTRA* union only: "*Days of Our Lives*, the actors would get an extra upgraded to a 'five lines or less' *AFTRA* contract by giving the background player a name, thus creating a character when speaking to them. The background player wouldn't have to speak back or even could be off camera at that point and it would still justify and upgrade."

Working with the Cast and Crew

The scene with Kristian Alfonso brought us to the collaboration with the cast and crew in general.

"How did you like working on *Falcon Crest*?" I wanted to know.

"I enjoyed it although the extras stayed pretty much among themselves and didn't have much contact to the principals," Doug said. "We were there to work, do our job, be professional and not 'mingle' with the actors unless it was initiated by them. Do nothing to distract them from their acting duties."

"So how was working with Jane Wyman and the other regular cast members?" I asked. Doug answered: "I worked on the show with a respectful distance, not being starstruck. 'Professional' is the best word to describe us on the sets. We were in the union and that came with some responsibilities."



Douglas Maida (wearing shades) behind Margaret Ladd in episode 65 <3.25>.

One cast member Doug remembered fondly was Sarah Douglas, who played Pamela Lynch: "Sarah was friendly with myself and the other *Turf Club* waiter, Greg Drolette, and would often go out to clubs or dinner outside of working on the show with us. There isn't too much to expand on other than having fun 'after hours' from the show."

"Did you have a favorite director or other crew or staff member to work with?"



Greg Drolette as a waiter at the *Turf Club* (episode 80 <4.12>).

"Maybe Reza," Doug referred to Reza Badiyi, who — with directing 35 out of the 227 episodes of the series — outnumbered any other director who worked on *Falcon Crest*. "Reza, I recall, had a way of connecting to the background and not be condescending or mean-spirited," Doug pointed out. Also, he mentioned some of the assistant directors he loved to work with: "Richard Denault; Neal Ahern, who got me many assignments; Amy Rosenbaum and Carol Vitkay, who were a joy to work with; and later in the series Joe Moore, of course, who is married to extra Elaine Jimenez Moore now."



Douglas Maida again as the waiter in *Tuscany Downs* in a scene with Sarah Douglas in episode 91 <4.23>.

Doug also mentioned some other staff and crew members: "Also the wardrobe department was always very kind to us, Paul [Dafelmair], Mr. Ed [Edward Johnson] and Karen [Davis]. And 'Lady Lee' as we would call her as script supervisor was always welcoming. Some of the set guys were very nice as well though I don't recall their names. Other than the craft service guy being stingy with the snacks to us, I never felt any bad vibe from any of the actors or production staff overall."



A small private celebration in the wardrobe department on December 12, 1987: Carol L. Vitkay (second assistant director), Lee Walking and Karen Davis (set costumer).

Character Consistency for Extras

Our next topic was that a background player does not necessarily portray the same character in all the scenes he or she appears in a series, which can somehow become a consistency issue, particularly if the same extra appears quite frequently on the same show.



Doug as a *Turf Club* waiter (above; episode 83 <4.15>) and a *Del Oro* bellboy (below; episode 143 <6.16>).



I addressed Doug's rôle first: "You mentioned in our earlier communication that, when you were a more or less regular extra on *Falcon Crest*, you sometimes would be asked to pour tea for Jane Wyman and that you usually played a waiter in the show's standard bars. Those were apparently the *Tuscany Downs Turf Club* during seasons 4 through 6 and then the *Del Oro* for the remainder of the series. When and how did you get your first assignment for *Falcon Crest*, and do you remember for which part?" I wanted to know.

Doug explained that, in the beginning, the production people would try out extras in scenes: "After a while, they feel who is right for which purposes, and — in the case of *Falcon Crest* — they created some specific environments where they always put the same extras in," again referring to the aforementioned sets in which his character appeared on a regular basis. "For

me," he summarized, "it was the hospital in the beginning, and I later became a regular extra as a 'standard waiter', along with Greg Drolette as the blond equivalent at the *Tuscany Downs Turf Club* while I was the black-haired type with the mustache, and later as an employee at the spa."



From that perspective, Doug's appearances on the show followed a certain pattern, making his character's biography not an unrealistic one while, in many other cases, extras who were not working on the show as often as he did were pretty much randomly placed in scenes, playing one character in one scene and maybe a totally different one in the next scene. Therefore, I

Doug Maida as an orderly in episode 43 <3.03>.

wanted to know if character consistency for background players was an issue the producing staff put any focus on.

Doug answered: "When extras were called to do a job on a show like *Falcon Crest*, they were usually asked when the last time was that they were on the show, just to avoid too many contradictions. In those days, casting would just take your word to be honest about when you worked it last and what you played."

Coming from Doug's case to the other recurring extras, I wanted to know: "Did *Lorimar* usually try to get the same extras in the same rôles on one show, or was it more common to use an extra for one part in this episode and in a totally different part in the next episode of the same series?"



Douglas in his second regular set on *Falcon Crest*:
After being an orderly at the hospital, he was later utilized as a waiter at the *Tuscany Downs Turf Club*.

Basically, the latter was more usual, at least for the ones who did not work constantly on the show. Doug pointed out that all production companies, as a standard procedure in the industry, usually delegated or outsourced extras casting: "*Lorimar* did not do the casting of extras. At that time, it was an extra agency called *Rich - Mar Casting* that later became *Disc Casting* which later devoured and bought out its competitor *Central Casting*. The name *Central Casting* was more identified in the extras casting world and it was kept for that notoriety." Doug explained that casting people usually choose the same type of extras all the time. Their focus is not necessarily character consistency, but the visual impact: "They were usually looking for beautiful, good-looking people, trim and with an average height and size. The aim was always not to distract the viewing audience from the actors and the story. For guys at my age, they usually had an 'assortment' of the same guys, a few of them blond, a few others brunette and yet some others black-haired. A core group of men and women that were professional looking and acting for whatever the scene(s) may require." Looking beyond his *Falcon Crest* time, Doug added: "Later, when I became a senior casting director for *Central Casting*, I would often tell assistants and those just learning: 'When in doubt just send good looking people. Production can't complain about that.'" We all had a good laugh.

Some of the recurring extras on *Falcon Crest*, however, were lucky to have a rather consistent character backstory.

"One example is the case of Shirley Anthony as Dr. Lee Walkling," I said, "the doctor-turned senator from the Tuscany Valley, who was named after the show's script supervisor." Doug nodded: "That's one of the examples I mentioned, sneaking a crew member's name in!" Discussing Shirley Anthony's part, we came to the conclusion that, although her character's biography first might not have been created intentionally, the way it turned out, looked like attempts to make it plausible that someone of her position would socialize with the Giobertis and Channings and therefore be a guest at their parties or go to the same restaurants like them.



Shirley Anthony as Dr. Lee Walkling now serving as a senator in episode 182 <7.27> (far right in the left screen capture) during Richard's hearing about *The Thirteen*. The real Lee Walkling, script supervisor of *Falcon Crest*, in the same set on the right.

Of course, it was a lot less obvious for the audience during the original run of the series — in contrast to binge watching today — that basically the same background players were used over and over again because the episodes were presented on a weekly basis when originally aired.

SEG Colleagues and Other Shows

That brought us to our next topic, Doug's fellow extras.

"It seemed that there was some kind of a core circle of background performers who usually worked on *Falcon Crest*," I introduced this issue. "Besides you, I recall people like Larry Humburger, David Gust, Gary Moerke and George Sasaki as recurring extras, just to name a few. Also, Shirley Anthony (who we just discussed), Julie Salles, Suzanne Lodge, Robert Buckingham, David Pfeiffer, Lori Harris, Sharri Zak, Paul Van, Lennart Jakell, Roberta Storm, as well as real-life couple Kathryn Janssen and Walter Spear appeared very often, particularly on dress calls. Did the production company usually request the same extras, also in order to create a certain atmosphere to be true to the setting, such as having the same people from the community socializing all the time, for example?"



Just two of many examples:
On the left is Sharri Zak with Jane Wyman in episode 170 <7.15>; on the right is Julie Salles as a nurse in episode 41 <3.01>.
Both extras worked on *Falcon Crest* for many years.



Doug nodded: "In extras casting, at the time, a lot of the same people were used over and over again. The core working members of the union might have been approximately 500 extras, maybe a bit more. Some of them were oftentimes shifted around between certain shows from day to day, week to week, like in the case of *Lorimar* between *Dallas*, *Knots Landing* and *Falcon Crest* — which was also the case with me. I guess you would consider me upscale if you had to label to my look. So, pretty much a celebration, cocktail party, political event, nightclub or upscale vacations all over the world — I would fit in. Rarely, if ever, would I play homeless or a criminal type. Sometimes when calling in looking for a booking I would be told, 'no jobs for good-looking types today' — and we would both laugh."

"Since we just briefly talked about dress calls," I said, "*Falcon Crest* used a lot of *Screen Extras Guild* people particularly in restaurant and party scenes, and given the nature of the show, there were many dress calls for elegant receptions, balls and weddings, etc. Where did that special wardrobe come from?"

"The production companies usually did not provide wardrobe for extras," Doug pointed out. "So you had to bring your own tuxedo or gown. A key element for background work is your wardrobe. The more extensive, the more it would ensure your book-ability. From western wear to a tennis club to a disco and everything in between. Winter clothes for New York to swimwear for a beach in the South of France. Your car was important as well. It was cost effective to have background actors bring their own *Rolls - Royce* rather than production using a rental company to provide vehicles. Often the cars in a parking lot at a restaurant or nightclub belonged to the background. You would also be paid a 'car bump' for providing your car."

However, Doug confirmed that *Lorimar* did provide the uniforms he had to wear in the *Turf Club* and at the *Del Oro*: "Anything that was a specialty wardrobe was provided by production. Not many of us had a bunny outfit or soccer league costume at home in the closet. Sometimes you would get the job based on the fact you happened to fit the size of police uniforms wardrobe had pulled out first. Other times if you were an ongoing player, wardrobe would have you fitted specifically for a costume or uniform with your name tagged in it."



Doug Maida as a hair stylist in *Burke's Law* (with Eva Gabor).

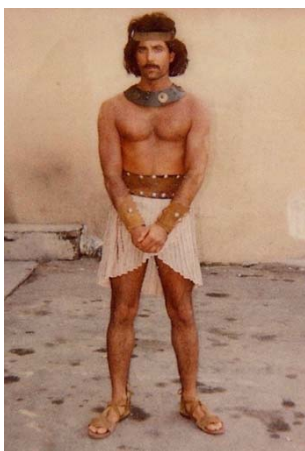


Douglas as a restaurant patron on *Dynasty*.

In *Fright Night*, a 1985 horror comedy, Douglas (right) got to work with Greg Drolette (third from right) again.



Doug (right) on *Murder, She Wrote*.



Doug in a *Transamerica Life* commercial.

From *Falcon Crest*, we came to other shows now.

"What was your collaboration as a group of extras like? I mean many people from the *Screen Extras Guild* show up all over 1980's television because the same people were hired as extras on almost every TV show. It's fun for the audience to realize that. Once you start paying attention, you will find the same background players everywhere. You also worked on the original *Dallas* as a regular waiter at the *Oil Barons Club*, but also on the original *Dynasty* in various parts and as the regular coffee barista on *Fame*, just to name a few shows from your incredible portfolio. How did these various shows differ as far as your work as an extra was concerned?"

Doug replied that he felt that there was a good companionship on *Falcon Crest* in general while working with the *Knots Landing* ladies and with Joan Collins *Dynasty* seemed to be a little more difficult. "*The Love Boat* was a great experience," Doug reminisced about the early days of his career.

Current Projects

"Please tell us a little bit about what you've done more recently," I said.

Doug explained that he became a senior casting director himself, which was a totally different experience. "At *Central Casting*, I was more often than not faced with basically impossible demands from producers or assistant directors, with regard to selecting certain types of people or certain numbers of extras within as little as 12 hour notice."

He also pointed out that, during his time as a casting director at *Central Casting*, working on one nighttime TV series was difficult "because, at one point, I was supposed to get 'hot women' as strippers who were to appear topless. They were to be filmed, but in the U.S. they can't show bare breast on TV. So the frame would be cut off at their breasts. Knowing this, I questioned why they needed to be full on topless. The assistant director's reply was, 'for crew morale while filming'. I despised that idea. You can bet that their 'morale' cost the show since I was the one to name the price of such indulgence." The situation became even more awkward later a few years: "I was shocked when an actress on that very show started the #MeToo movement as she was also an executive producer exactly at the time the incident with the topless extras occurred and did not prevent that from happening at all. Although it remained unclear if she knew, it would have been her responsibility as an executive producer to know what was going on — on her own set!"

Doug explained that working in the entertainment industry became quite different from what it used to be in the early days of his career. He decided to try something new and now has his own company, *Maida Designs* (www.maidadesigns.com), which produces colorful aprons, clutches, keychains and many other items. It allows him to use his creativeness in a different way.

"Other shows I continued being a stand-in on for the last 30 years or so include the *Oscars*, the *Emmys*, *Golden Globes*, *American Idol*, *The Voice* and *Dancing with the Stars*," Doug added. "Countless TV sitcoms as an actor and stand-in like *3rd Rock from The Sun*."



Thomas J. Pucher (right) with his wife, Dörthe, and Douglas Maida at *The Smoke House* in Burbank in November 2022.

It was a great pleasure to interview Doug, and time was really flying by. We were sitting so long in *The Smoke House* that we almost did not realize they were about to close. Our conversation gave us a lot of insight in the world of an extra's work, and we loved spending time with Doug during our stay in L.A. and are grateful for our friendship.