

An Extra's Voice:

RICHARD MORETTO

Talks about His Non-Speaking Rôle in Season 2

Interview by

OLIVER BAYAN (*German FALCON CREST Fan Club*)

Richard Moretto, a Napa Valley based Christian brother, was hired as an extra for the shooting of episode 19 <2.01>.

I got in touch with him through his cousin we met on a trip in the Napa Valley.

"You appeared as a priest in a cemetery scene. Can you share with us how you got the job and what kind of an experience it was," I asked.

"How did I get the rôle...?" Richard began to think. After a short pause, he said: "I was assigned at the time to the *Christian Brothers Retreat House* [in] St. Helena. The TV [series] *Falcon Crest* was very popular... 1981 [through] 1986. It was during one of those years that *Falcon Crest* made a request for a priest to play a walk-on rôle at the *Holy Cross Cemetery*."

Richard referred to the Roman - Catholic cemetery in St. Helena, CA. However, he slightly misremembered here since the actual filming location of the specific grave was in row 6 of the *St. Helena Public Cemetery*, which is directly adjacent to the *Holy Cross Cemetery* on Spring Street. Production documents also indicate that filming took place there on Thursday, July 15, 1982. That part of the cemetery, by the way, was used for several scenes for the program filmed between 1982 and 1986.



A 2007 view of the burial site:
Not much has changed at the *St. Helena Public Cemetery* since the filming of *Falcon Crest* took place.

"Do you remember the exact episode?" I wanted to know.

Richard had no memory of the title, but from how our conversation proceeded, I concluded that it must have been the premiere of season 2.

Richard continued: "The woman who was our cook at the retreat house told the TV people that she'd ask one of us brothers if we would be interested. I said yes. It was one day of shooting, but six takes. Kind of a long day! I stood there with my appropriate robes in my hands when this very flamboyant and dramatic director said: 'Well, where's the priest? Don't we have a priest?'"

Richard did not remember the name of the director, but I figured he spoke of Harry Harris, a renowned director, who had been working in the entertainment business for a long time when he eventually came to direct his first *Falcon Crest* episode, *The Challenge* (episode 19 <2.01>). Out of the first 10 episodes in season 2, Harry was assigned to direct the odd-numbered ones in the Wine Country. His job was so good that the producers hired him for a long list of *Falcon Crest* episodes later on.



This photo taken by Kathryn Bryan Hampton shows director Harry Harris with story editor and writer Ernie Wallengren while shooting episode 23 <2.05> in Calistoga, CA.

"Well, get over here! Do you have something to wear? Well, could you put it on?" Richard kept quoting Harry. "Jane Wyman was the principal actress in *Falcon Crest*... also a Catholic herself. She very kindly said to me: 'Don't let him bother you. Some directors tend to be like that.' Then she asked me if I were a real priest. I told her no, but was a brother, a Christian brother. She said: 'You'll do!' This took place sometime between 1981 and 1983, I believe."

Actually, Richard's estimation was quite accurate as the scene was filmed in the summer of 1982.

"The show did air the next September," he continued. He remembered pretty accurately. The actual original airdate was October 1, 1982.

"...and I became an 'instant star' " Richard joked. "No, actually, I 'rode off into the sunset' as a TV star... never to be seen again. Dramatic!"

"How much did they pay you as an extra?" I wanted to know.

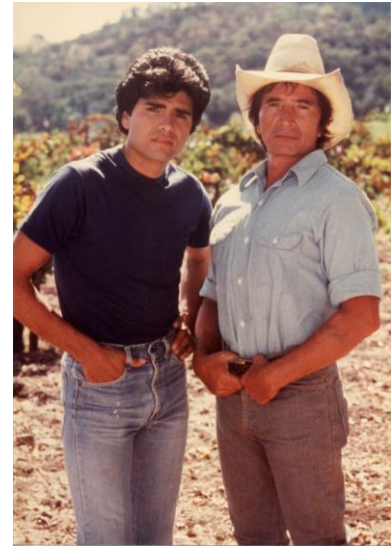
"The TV network (I wish I could remember which one it was) gave me a check... \$ 21 an hour; I was cheap labor! We did another couple of takes in the afternoon," Richard pointed out.

I explained to him that the check probably came from the production company, *Lorimar*, and that the network that originally aired *Falcon Crest* was *CBS*.

"Do you remember what you had to do in your scene, and was it shown in full when the episode aired or did they edit any parts?" I asked.

He nodded: "Some editing did take place if I remember correctly. My part was not a talking part. As the black limo arrived in the cemetery, I was to go over to the limo and greet and help out of the car... some of the women members of the 'family'. From there we went over to the grave site, and I began the prayers for the burial — just lips moving. After a few moments of quiet mourning, the family again returned to the limos and I helped them in. Now that I think about it, the funeral was for a favorite worker, a

Hispanic — long time at *Falcon Crest*."



The funeral scene from episode 19 <2.01> with Richard Moretto as the priest, escorting Mario and Alicia (Mario Marcelino and Silvana Gallardo) to the car.

Mario and Gus Nuñez (Mario Marcelino and Nick Ramus) in season 1.

The description left no doubt that he was talking about Gus Nuñez's funeral. The final version of the episode only contained parts of what had been filmed at the cemetery. Act 2 opened on the last few moments of the burial when the family members already started to move towards their cars, but Richard Moretto can easily be noticed in the scene.

"Are there any other specific memories or anecdotes you want to share with the fans?" I asked.

"I do remember another actor: Fernando Lamas, Jr.," as he affectionately called Lorenzo, Fernando's son. "He was, as they call it, the 'love interest'," Richard laughed about the character description that was attributed by the film crew to his hunky rôle, Lance Cumson.

"I watched him as he went off down one of the pathways of the cemetery going over his next lines for a shooting," the Christian brother added. "They all took their rôles very seriously and [...] they were probably being paid 'top bucks'! Not \$ 21 an hour."

However, Richard seemed to have enjoyed his work as an extra, as they were called in those days — the non-speaking rôles that have been euphemistically renamed “atmosphere people” over the last couple of decades as their purpose is to create the atmosphere of a real-life environment in the respective scenes.

“It was an education to participate in and observe how movies and TV sitcoms do it!” Richard summarized.

“The *Christian Brothers Winery* was never used... though one local winery was used, but I forget which one. They needed some interior wine scenes,” he added.



A 1997 photo of the old *Christian Brothers Winery*.

Of course, as far as filming locations in St. Helena are concerned, he obviously referred to *Spring Mountain*. The castle-like *Christian Brothers Winery* — also previously known as *Greystone Cellars* — could have made an impressive impact on the screen as well if it had been chosen as a *Falcon Crest*

location. After the huge brown limestone building outside St. Helena was sold by the *Christian Brothers* in 1991 and resold again a year later, it became the home to the *Culinary Institute of America at Greystone*. Actually, it has its own TV history since it was used as a filming site for the 1970 movie *Hunters are for Killing* with Burt Reynolds; that movie also shot a few scenes at *Stags' Leap Manor*, which became the *Gioberti House* on *Falcon Crest*.



Preparations for shooting at *Stags' Leap Manor* in the summer of 1982; Bo Foxworth, Robert's son, who worked as a stunt guy on the show, on the right.

It was an interesting chat with Brother Richard Moretto as it focused on a totally different perspective. While our fan club's other interviews are usually from a cast or crew member's view, this one gave an extra the opportunity to share his experiences with *Falcon Crest*.

“Hope this is helpful,” he said when we finished our interview.