

“Would You Like to Play Garth Again?”

Eight Years after the End of *Falcon Crest*,

CARL HELD

Talks about the Vintage Soap...

Interview by

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

“Yes, we can meet there. They have a very convenient lobby,” Carl said about the *Holiday Inn Hollywood* on the phone when I made an appointment for an interview with the actor, who played the rôle of Garth, Richard Channing’s (David Selby) mysterious right-hand man on the popular *Falcon Crest* television series from 1986 through 1989.

It was a sunny Wednesday in mid-April in Hollywood, California. In spite of the heavy rainfalls and storms caused by El Niño at the beginning of this year, everything was finally back to normal in Hollywood. It was a typical Californian spring time weather this morning.

I was waiting for Carl in the hotel lobby — with a warm and nice interior design dedicated to the glorious days of Hollywood, a place where you could feel the glamor and the myth of the old days in Hollywood, a glamor that had decreased or even ceased over the past few years since the major studios left the city and moved up north to the new media district in Burbank.

When Carl entered the lobby, I headed towards him to greet him. Before that, we had only talked via phone several times. He had not changed very much since the time he played on *Falcon Crest* although he later said about himself and his co-stars “We get older — as you’ll discover.” He will be 67 in September, as he said.

We talked for a few seconds and decided to go to the *Show Biz Café* in the hotel to have a pleasant conversation. Before I started the interview, we ordered — Carl wanted the coffee pot only. Anyway, we first talked about ourselves, and I provided the star with a brochure about the *German Falcon Crest Fan Club*. After he had looked through it and had taken the first sip of his coffee, we talked about how *Falcon Crest* came over to Europe and its first broadcast in Germany.

I explained that the episodes were dubbed, not subtitled in German language, and that we are sometimes not too content with the results of the translation, especially considering the fact Garth's interesting accent got lost when his voice was substituted by a German speaker. Carl himself assured that he also prefers subtitles to dubbing. He explained that he played Garth with a Northern European accent, maybe even a German accent.

Talking of syndicating TV series, something else crossed Carl's mind. "Is there a series over there, a very old series, *Perry Mason*?" he asked me. I confirmed that, and he told me: "I did ten of those,... originally in the 1960's. They wrote me in as a character. I was supposed to bring all the teenagers in to watch. But on Saturday night at 7:30, teenagers were not at home watching television," he explained why he just starred for one season on that show. I told him I unfortunately missed to see him on the series because the reruns were on the air at a time I could not watch TV. "I watched the new *Perry Mason* cases," I said. "Yeah, more movies, those two-hour-things," Carl added. "I tried to get on them, but they didn't want to have me back," he mentioned. "What a pity!" I said. But Carl took it easy: "I know, but that's how it goes." He was thinking for a moment, and I became aware of the fact that this is what the show business is like — you are always looking for a part in a movie, a series or a play, but you never know...

Now Carl was ready for my questions. "You don't mind me recording our conversation, do you?" I asked him. "No, no," he said, and I switched on the tape.

The first thing I wanted to know was who came up with the idea of the rôle of Garth. "It was the producer, Jeff Freilich. It was his idea. He wanted a new assistant for Richard, and he thought of it in the shower, he told me. He wanted a guy, he didn't want a woman because he had an assistant, who was a woman [Pamela Lynch (Sarah Douglas)]. He thought of this character, and maybe with an accent, he had that in mind. And he said: 'Yes, that's it, that's the kind of character I'm thinking of, and we'll try him out one or two episodes and see how he fits in.' So I got a call from my agent one day to hurry over to *Lorimar Studios* for an audition." Carl explained there were usually about twenty other people there for the audition, all types of persons, all different. "I read this scene," Carl continued, "and he [Freilich] had written this scene specifically. It wasn't going to be on the show, but it was just a test for the actors. And I looked it over, and I thought I got this, I know this, I can do the scene. And I chose a moment in there to say something funny, just to be amusing. He [Freilich] laughed. I mean I walked in the room, and later he said 'I thought if this guy can act, he's it.' And I can." Carl described the audition; he said his lines with an accent: "When I had finished, he [Freilich] said: 'That's very good.' I said: 'Thank you very much.' And he said: 'What happened?! You don't have an accent!' I said: 'No, I don't have an accent. I am American.' He said: 'Wow, that was great'. By the time I got home, the phone was ringing, and the next morning, I had to be on a plane going up to Napa Valley for a couple of days. That's the way I like to get jobs. So I did a couple of scenes for two different episodes up there, and they liked them, and the rest is... you know..."

"Yeah, you got a major rôle," I said, "especially during the seventh season." Carl replied: "Oh yes, they were writing for me. It was a lot of fun."

That led us to Carl's cooperation with David Selby. "David is very easy-going. We worked very well together," Carl said. "We improvised things, like once the writers made a reference, they used something from Shakespeare, just a little quote, something about the war, and I immediately said 'Othello,' when he [David] said it, at which point he [David] then said 'Act two, scene one,' and I said 'That's right.'" Carl explained the writers only had the quote from Shakespeare in there, but he and David completed that particular scene on their own.

"How did you like working on the set?" I asked. "Oh, it was wonderful, it was the best set I've ever been on," the actor said. "I think it was due... a lot due to my attitude. Once you start working regularly, you feel more relaxed, more comfortable. I've got the job, that's why, and then you get to know people, and I made sure I got to know everybody, including the lighting men, the electricians, the workers, everybody, even the gardeners, who bring the plants and all that stuff, and the painters working on the set as well as all the cast and the make-up people. I got to know everybody by first name, also all the people from the production office. I just thought why not. I was having such a good time..."

When I asked him about his work schedule, Carl said he did not have to work every day. He explained the production company usually shot all the exterior scenes in the Wine Country for approximately 15 episodes. "So they'd all have to be written," he added, alluding to the fact that this special *Falcon Crest* production manner was totally in contrast to the typical working schedule of producing any other television series. "Those exterior scenes were shot up there," he said. "And then they took extra footage which they could cut into other things. Then we'd come back here [to Los Angeles] and they shot all the interiors. And then some of the shows, we shot entirely interior, but they used footage from up there [in Napa] so that it looked like we were there." He continued talking about all the places they went to when *Lorimar* was filming on location in Northern California: "We also went to San Francisco, the San Francisco Bay,... then the big baseball stadium — we were there one day, *Candlestick Park*." "For the Lauren Hutton storyline, right?" I asked. "Right, with the ninjas and all of that," Carl confirmed and added that he is a baseball fan himself — of the *Los Angeles Dodgers*. "The *Giants* up there [in San Francisco] — we hate them, you know," he laughed and made a funny comparison to German soccer: "I mean that's like *Kaiserslautern* and somebody else!" The way he pronounced *Kaiserslautern* was amazing — I heard no difference from how a native German speaker would have said the word.



Carl came back to the location shootings: "They spent a lot of money on that show." We talked about the beautiful scenery of the Wine Country for a while, and Carl told he had rented a bicycle in the Napa Valley for the days he did not have to work: "I don't know how many miles, but it was pretty far from *Falcon Crest*." He said he went through the entire valley by bike. "It's a wonderful landscape, isn't it?" I said. "Absolutely," the actor confirmed. "Wonderful weather up there. We were there in May and June; that time of the year is just perfect."

Carl Held as Garth on the terrace of Richard's house.

Talking to Carl was really a pleasure. It was not the typical style of an interview with questions and answers, but it turned into a nice conversation, in which one topic led to another.

During our chat, Carl also talked about the years in his life he spent in Europe — in impeccable German: “When I lived in England, I had a lot of work. I also did TV commercials in Germany, France, Italy, everywhere. And I was always ready to fly away. Like one hour — and gone.”

“When did you live in England?” I wanted to know. “From ‘68 to 1980,” he replied. “But we had an apartment until ‘86. Then we sold it.” Carl explained that he spent the six years in the 1980’s partly in England and partly in Hollywood.

“Are you married?” I asked. “Oh yeah, almost forty years,” he said proudly. “Great,” I replied, and he confirmed: “Especially in my business, you know...” He smiled. After a second, he added: “Although I was married before...”

Carl now talked about his wife, Sarah Marshall, an actress from Beverly Hills: “We did a play on Broadway, we met on the stage,” he said. Then he told me about his wife’s television credits, including the *Star Trek* series: “She did one of those, she was a guest. I did one, too,” he added. Carl said that he had in fact married into the show business as his wife’s whole family was involved in the entertainment industry. Carl and Sarah and their black & white “tuxedo” cat, whose name is Shoes (“the best cat in the world,” as Carl says), now reside in Hollywood. Carl’s and Sarah’s children are grown-up and live all around the globe with their families.

We came back to Carl’s origin. He was born in New Jersey and educated bilingually for the first six years of his life — English and German. Carl’s father was German, and his mother had Austrian and German ancestors. “But my parents stopped speaking German... around 1936/37. My father was here [in the U.S.] without identity papers, he jumped off the ship... Then there was the war..., they wanted to become American, and so I didn’t continue to learn it properly. I had to study German when went to Germany, and also at an adult school in London. And I’ll never forget the teacher saying: ‘You speak German, but it’s so strange, you speak like a child.’ But that was the truth.”

He explained the particular childlike register in his German was caused by the fact his parents gave up talking to him in German when he was six years old. He again talked about his teacher: “She said ‘You have to take German classes 1, 2, 3 and 4, you have to study them altogether’. Grammatically, I am crazy, and I had to learn that, but my vocabulary was quite good... It was something natural for me, I heard it as a child...” It was amazing that there was hardly any American accent in Carl’s German, different from what I personally had experienced from many Americans who spoke German as a foreign language. We talked about bilingual education and language skills for a few moments.

I liked Carl’s attitude towards foreign languages; he said he thought many people were embarrassed when speaking a foreign language: “They don’t want to make mistakes, they are afraid of that ,” he supposed. He himself does not share this opinion. “It’s better to have a good sense of humor, then you can laugh about it...”

Carl said he never hesitated to speak a foreign language, he just tried. “That’s why I also speak a little French,... Italian... I was in Japan for over one year when I was a

soldier. I learnt Japanese there, and I still speak well enough to order everything at the restaurant in Japanese," he smiled.

Naturally there were also some hard times in Carl's life, for example the time he spent in Korea during the war there in 1952. As a young man, he just went through that experience as he said. He described honestly what his attitude towards life was like at that age: "You know, you are young, you fell happy, you think you live for ever. Death is something for somebody else..."

Talking about death, Carl told me his father had already passed away at the age of 61 and that he had smoked a lot. Carl himself also used to smoke for a while when he was younger, as he admitted, but he stopped it. Now Carl is very careful with his health and takes care of himself; he also goes to a fitness club regularly.

His mother, by the way, resides on Rhode Island. She is 88 and lives with Carl's younger brother.

"*Falcon Crest* was filmed at CBS - MTM Studios, which is now called CBS Studio Center, right? Up there on Radford?" I asked the artist. "Right," Carl answered. "It used to be Republic Studios years ago. And then in the '60's, it was *Four Star*. I did my first television job there," he continued.

That made me curious: "What show was that?" I asked. "A television series called *The Law and Mr. Jones*." He doubted if it ever came over to Europe. Then he explained it was a half hour TV show, of which there were plenty in the 1960's. "That was a lot of work for television actors because they had so many different shows," Carl compared these old series with the current TV shows, most of which are one hour series except some sitcoms. "Situation comedies — you have the same people all the time, not many guests," he said. In contrast to that type of shows, Carl said, there used to be so-called anthologies: "A different story and different people every week. That was a lot more work for actors."

Then, we came back to *Falcon Crest* and its production company, *Lorimar*. My question was why *Lorimar* filmed *Falcon Crest* at CBS - MTM in Studio City although they owned the old *MGM* Backlot in Culver City. Carl did not know, but he supposed: "Maybe they got a better deal,... cheaper or something else. It always comes down to money, you know..., not always, but usually..." The expression on his face showed how much he regretted exactly the fact that everything in this business depends on money. Carl is a real artist, an artist by heart. Talking of the former *MGM Studios*, which were owned by *Lorimar Television* in the '80's and sold to *Sony Pictures* in 1989, reminded Carl of the old *Metro - Goldwyn - Mayer* productions: "*Metro*,... *MGM*, was a wonderful studio. I liked that a lot." He explained that he had worked there during the 1960's when he mostly did television. "I almost became a big star of my own, you know, a television star with my own series — several times... But in the end, it didn't work out..." he regretted.

His favorite studio is *Warner Bros.* in Burbank, where also his favorite movie was filmed, *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman (1942). "I was under contract with *Warner Bros.* In 1963, I got a seven-year-contract. It was the old studio system where they had a lot of contract players. I was one of the last ones... I did all the television shows, I did a pilot..." he remembered. It was a pilot, in which he played a

lawyer. Somewhat sad, he said the network changed their plans with the pilot and canceled the series: "At the last minute — it was all scheduled to start..." But Carl left the past behind: "But that was the old days, you know, and then it all changed. I saw the last of Hollywood, really..." He mentioned he met all kinds of people in Hollywood, including big names, such as Paul Newman and Joan Collins, stars he is still in touch with.

Telling me about his working with big names, he also referred to Jane Wyman. So we were back at *Falcon Crest* again. "She is wonderful." When he joined *Falcon Crest*, he did not work with Jane for at least three, four or five months. But "finally, we had a scene together, and she said 'Young man, I want you to know I think you are a wonderful addition to the show', but she called me 'young man.'" Carl laughed. He had to admit from Jane Wyman's point of view he was a young man. "So age is all relative. As long as you find somebody around who's older than you are, you don't have to feel old," he added.

"Jane was very professional. Some of the young kids on the show, like Lorenzo Lamas, at first, when they would have scenes with her, they were casual, you know, they sort of learn their lines when they get there." He laughed: "That was Jane — you knew your lines! She wanted to rehearse." That is also the way Carl works: "I learn the stuff the day before, work it out. I'm ready to do it many different ways if the director wants to change stuff..."

He explained when he met Jane, she asked: "You want to run the lines?" Carl answered: "Sure, let's go." Now he remembered: "We run them several times,... so when we got out there, and they turned the camera on, we go through it — one take, you know." I asked him if he remembered his first scene with Jane Wyman. Carl was not sure, but he said one of his most memorable scenes with Jane was the one when he had to pin a microphone on her, which was a scene from the storyline about Richard's mysterious deals with the *Thirteen* in the 1987-88 season. "On her chest! Garth had to be embarrassed!" the actor explained. He told me he was amused to find a text passage in the *Soap Opera Digest* about that particular scene: "They singled that out as one of the moments of Garth's embarrassment. They said 'priceless'..." The magazine also contained an article about Garth being shy, "but not so with the old gun," Carl laughed. I confirmed I also liked exactly that habit very much about his character — you would never know what was going to happen next, you never know...

"How did you like the location filming at *Saddlerock Ranch*?" I asked the actor. He said it was a wonderful place he liked very much. His wife sometimes came out and spent the day there when he was on location. "It's a very nice part of the country, and very pleasant out there, nice house."



David Selby, Carl Held and Susan Sullivan in a scene at *Saddlerock Ranch*, Richard's and Maggie's home (1988).

"Why did you leave at the end of year 8?" I wanted to know. "It wasn't my doing!" Carl made it very clear it was not his decision to go. Some unpleasant things had happened around that time. It all started with a writers' strike in 1988. "That meant we were out of work until they settled it. And during that time, they changed producers. Before the strike, Jeff Freilich was one of the main producers, and he fell in love with Garth, I mean, he thought Garth was a great character. And that's why I was getting more stuff written... Also there was an episode where they said the episode was too short, you know, they needed another minute..., and they wrote a scene between Richard and me, in which he's kind of drowsing and I come in and wake him up, I say something, and then he gets me to talk about my past, and I talk about having had a child, having been married,... and that scene, we did five minutes after it was handed to us." I also remembered that scene, and I must admit it was excellent, especially considering it was done that quickly. Carl continued to tell that the crew went back to the editing room after that scene had been shot, and the editors suddenly realized they had enough film: "So they didn't need this, but they put it in anyway and took something else out because they liked it so much, and they couldn't believe that we did it, that Selby and I did it in five minutes and made it real touching." "Actually it's the only scene I can remember that Garth talked about his past," I said. "That added something to the person," I thought. Carl shared my opinion: "Yes, it started to put the pieces into the puzzle of who he is."

The actor continued: "Anyway, Jeff [Freilich] was ecstatic about my acting and all that stuff, and he felt like he had discovered me — but I've been discovered many times in this business — but he was another one who discovered me. He's the one who moved my billing up,... and my agent didn't have to call or anything. He did that. And the following year, he was going to put me in front of the titles, in the beginning with everybody else. And they were going to give me more money and make sure I was in every episode and all that stuff, and that was all Jeff's doing. My agent never had to say a word to him."

"I was always wondering why you were credited as a 'guest star'," I said. "Right. I was a 'guest star' for a long time," Carl replied. "I was becoming a regular. But I never had a contract. So all this was going to happen the following year [season 8]. When now the writers' strike comes along, what happened was... they decided for some reason that they wanted to get in some new blood while they had so much time to think... Anyway, the new producers were not that crazy about the character of Garth, but they kept me in during that season. But then thereafter, they just faded me out." I shared Carl's opinion that the new producers were not very careful with all of the cast. "They brought in new people," Carl added. "They should have done gradually rather than all in once," Carl thought. I told him how much we regretted the dramatic cast changes in the 8th season, especially Melissa (Ana - Alicia) being written off the show. "You see," Carl said, "that happens every time you change producers. The producer then has to justify his getting the job, and they come in with a broom and sweep everything out and put in all new stuff. And that's silly!" Carl's comparison exactly described what had happened to *Falcon Crest* in year 8. He was right. It was more than silly to make so many changes, to throw Ana - Alicia out, to bring in a bunch of new people no one really could identify with and to trim down the scenes of long-term regulars who were the core of the show. "That's what happened to Garth," Carl explained.

"That was it. And if we hadn't had the writers' strike, I'd be telling you a different story today — because the show probably would have gone on longer, and Garth would have been one of the top people in the show."

Carl is convinced of that, and so am I. *Falcon Crest* would not have gotten into that terrible crisis, which even caused the *Soap Opera Digest* to award the 1988-89 season with the title *Most Ruined Show*. It would certainly not have lost so many good actors — Carl Held, Ana - Alicia and last but not least Susan Sullivan.

We were talking about the extensive list of producers who were involved in the filming of the *Falcon Crest* series. Carl told me about their various duties on the set and mentioned: "There was a woman producer on the show. The guy who started *Falcon Crest* [Michael Filerman] brought her on. I guess they were friends or they had worked together in the past, and she was put on... just... because she was his friend. So she had a producer's job and she had a salary, and I'm sure she did things, but... And when he [Filerman] left, the people who took over,... they had to guarantee that she could stay. So she stayed. So a 'producer' sometimes can be... — you get your nephew a job. You know?! It can be that, it doesn't have to be," Carl added. No more explanation was necessary.

"Did you have any preference for a certain director to work with?" I asked. Carl was thinking for a while, but said he had gotten along very well with all of them. He had no favorites and no un-favorites. "Except in '89," he added, "I didn't know any of them, I hadn't worked for any of them." As his scenes were cut down in the course of year 8, he said: "Pretty boring, you know."

"Did you watch the 9th season of the show, the year after you'd left?" I wanted to know. "No, somehow I lost interest," Carl admitted. His loss of interest in year 9 is something no one can blame the artist for. With the many changes in cast and style, the series, which once began as a vineyard soap in Northern California's heralded Wine Country, ended up as a sex and crime story, which seemed to take place anywhere in the world but definitely not around the San Francisco Bay area. We talked a few minutes about what most fans found so awful about the 9th season, e.g. Maggie drowning in the swimming pool and Angela going into a coma.

That brought us to talking about Jane Wyman again. "She was an early riser," Carl said. "She got up early in the morning. She would come in, they would shoot all of her scenes first, get her out by noon or one o'clock, she could go home. We always did that... And why not?! She was elderly, and that was her schedule... So if you had a scene with Jane, you were there for the first thing in the morning."

We went on talking about the international success of *Falcon Crest* and other *Lorimar* productions, including *Dallas* and *Knots Landing*. In that context, Carl told a funny story from Cairo, Egypt, where *Falcon Crest* was running in daytime television; he said that he was there once and found out many taxi drivers parked their cabs and went into coffee houses to watch the show on TV in the afternoon. So it was hard to get a taxi there around that time.

So far, we had a really pleasant conversation. Carl had told so much about the show, about his co-stars. All in all, it was a wonderful chat. My last question was also

connected with *Falcon Crest*, but not with the show we all know — it concerned a new *Falcon Crest*. Since CBS recently had success with both *Dallas* and *Knots Landing* reunions, I personally think it's high time we popped the corks again, the corks of the *Falcon Crest* wine...

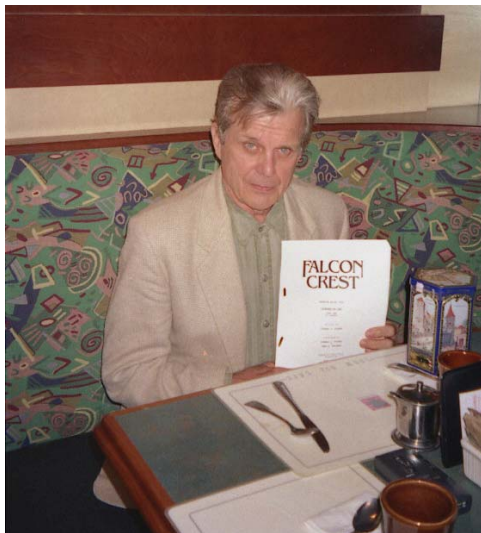
"If there were a *Falcon Crest* reunion in one or two years, would you like to participate in that show?" I asked Carl. "Sure, I see no reason why not," Carl spontaneously answered. "Ingo Küppers, my partner from the fan club, and I really thought about a reunion," I said. "If you can instigate it, if you can organize it, you know...," Carl said.

"We would like to try," I said and surprised him with several scripts of a few hundred pages altogether. I handed the scripts and a show description to him. "Wow, you have written a script!" Carl said. "This is just a preliminary draft," I said. "You may read it or you may put it in the trash...," I continued. Carl looked at the scripts for a moment while I was explaining we tried our best to keep the memory of that special series alive and would like to bring it back on the air. I told him we trimmed Jane Wyman's scenes down to make the filming easier for the now 84-year-old lady. I showed him our casting suggestions and everything else connected with the show. Carl was so kind to take the scripts and promised to read them. "If I can get this to somebody, who is in a position to do something about it, I will... I'll do everything I can... It's in my own self-interest, too."

We talked a few minutes about the work that was involved in our scripts, and I got the impression it would be also a challenge for Carl to be involved in a new *Falcon Crest* production. Hopefully, he will find someone from a production company or the network who is interested in the scripts.

Anyway, I thanked Carl for taking so much time for the interview. "I appreciate your interest, too," he said. "That's a two-way stream."

And vice versa, I appreciate his kindness and cooperation.



One question remains: Will we see Carl back on the screen, possibly as Garth on a *Falcon Crest* reunion? There's no answer — not yet. As the *Soap Opera Digest* wrote a few months ago, the wine has aged long enough — it is time to uncork a classic! So let's wait and see what happens. And let's hope...

"Who knows, who knows...," Carl said when we left the café...

Carl Held with one of the reunion scripts written by Ingo A. Küppers and Thomas J. Pucher.