

Lemuel, Lesbians and A Lot of Laughs:

JILL JACOBSON

Recalls Erin Jones' Humorous Tribute to *Falcon Crest*

Interview by

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

"Of course," was Jill's spontaneous reaction when I contacted her to request an interview, and we scheduled a phone conversation for Tuesday, December 9, 2008.

"It's totally my pleasure," she said when we started our interview. "*Falcon Crest* is one of those great, great times..." The actress regretted that the series was not on the air in the United States at the moment and was kind of envious of the current rerun on German pay-TV. She also wondered why it has not come out on DVD in the U.S. yet. "It didn't get the same attention that some of the others got," she stated sadly, alluding to *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. "It had some great actors, it was fun!"

Before we knew it, we jumped right into the middle of both our memories of *Falcon Crest* and talked about some wonderful moments we recalled.

Becoming Erin Jones

"How did you get your job on the show in the first place?" I asked.

"I auditioned several times," the actress explained. She remembered that one of the characters she originally auditioned for was an attorney. "They were written with no humor," she said about those characters. "Greg Strangis wrote the character of Erin Jones, and unanimously, Rod [Peterson], Claire [Whitaker] and Earl [Hamner] said: 'Give it to Jill!' That was after I had auditioned for the show at least three times."

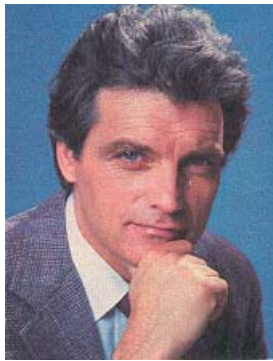
She remembered how she started on the show: "My first scene was with Jane Wyman." "In the study of the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion*," I added, remembering the scene in episode 109 when Angela hired Miss Jones to get Chase's vineyards quarantined. "You know, here I was with an *Academy Award* winner on television!" Jill said.

She explained her rôle was originally intended to be a guest appearance for one episode only — in the story about mealy moth. “I don’t know... Two or three months went by, and they found a way for Erin Jones to come back,” the actress referred to Rod and Claire. “They were lovely and amazing people, and they really fought for me to come back. It was because of Rod and Claire that I was asked back, and, of course, Earl wanted it.” So Jill’s rôle was expanded, and she finally participated in two seasons.

“They wrote me into the bible of my second season,” Jill proudly said because only regulars and recurring characters are usually mentioned explicitly in that reference document for the development of a season. She named Erin’s fake marriage to Richard as one of the things she remembered very well from the season 6 bible. If she stayed longer, this could have resulted in the most interesting position as a double agent, as she pointed out.

Remembering the Cast and Crew

Talking of Richard led us to David Selby: “Oh my goodness, he taught me so much!”



she exclaimed. “I was so fortunate to be able to work with him. What a dashing, gorgeous, talented, open, inventive, courageous and great guy to work with!” she expressed her respect for him as a genuine artist. She mentioned that she and her husband saw David and his wife, Chip, not too long ago when David was doing a stage performance. She also said that she and her ex-husband used to play bridge with the Selbys in the old days.

David Selby was one of Jill’s favorite *Falcon Crest* colleagues.

Jill now compared her working experiences with David Selby and Jane Wyman: “Ms. Wyman was a great actress with a strong sense of professionalism. I wish there were more Jane Wymans out there today. I was so fortunate to be able to have “on the job training” with Ms. Wyman and David Selby, very different and yet such powerful artists. That would sum up my amazing co-workers — two years of sheer bliss!”

Then she went on explaining about Jane Wyman’s approach: “She was a stickler for perfection. Line, line, line,... everything had to be on the mark,” Jill emphasized the total respect and admiration she had for her. “She was the consummate professional. I did everything to please her. But there was a tension on the set because she was such a stickler and everybody had to be on the mark. With Selby, we were doing improv. We rehearsed together. His style was moment to moment with an emphasis on a beginning, a middle and an end to a scene. We talked about our moment before the scene happened, which is rare in television... So that’s why I guess the chemistry worked on the show for two years.” She described him as a flowing improvisational artist: “Selby taught me that I could add things ad lib. I didn’t know that was allowed.”



Professionalism was one of the many great qualities of the late Jane Wyman.

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When we spoke about William R. Moses, she said: "Billy Moses was in my acting class 25 years ago."

Lorenzo Lamas is one of the people Jill sees quite often nowadays because they work out at the same gym.

She also had good memories of Cesar Romero.

"I went out with Morgan Fairchild," she said and remembered how well-known Morgan was in all the places where they went for lunch in those days.

Jill fondly remembered Marie Carter, the make-up artist, as a real lady, who taught her very much about how to hold her gown and how to look on camera, etc.

As far as the producing staff was concerned, Jill again referred to the regime of season 5. "Rod and Claire were the leaders while Earl was this wonderful Southern gentleman," Jill described the leadership of the series in her first season there and pointed out what a good time they all had in that environment. She emphasized how many of them on the set were in sync. "We were happy. And the people who weren't in sync, weren't."

The actress also mentioned a fairly peculiar attitude some people had towards her and her character: "Some of them believed I was my character." She thought it was rather strange that those people did not make a distinction between her character, Erin Jones, and herself as a person. "I never understood the reason for that."

What Miss Jones Brought to the Show

A lot happier topic was the great helping of humor on the show. "They had a lot of humor," Jill said about *Falcon Crest*.

Around the time when she came to the series, it became a lot more hilarious than it used to be in the previous seasons. With Rod Peterson and Claire Whitaker joining the producing and writing staff in season 4, the show had already lightened up compared to the darker and more gothic first three seasons, but around mid-season 5, the writers began to add a lot more humor to the series. "I think they needed it," Jill said about the humor that particularly her character brought to the show.

"You know, Jane Wyman had humor, too; truthfully, even though she was a stickler on the set. She had kind of this aristocracy humor. She liked it. There were other people that just couldn't get into it, they just couldn't look behind it. But I was fortunate to work with people who did."

Speaking of humor, Jill mentioned that, as a rarity in those days, she had a second series at the same time when she was working on *Falcon Crest*, which was also funny. It was a sitcom called *The New Gidget* where she portrayed a totally different character by the name of Larue Wilson. The series ran for two seasons and was originally aired between September 15, 1986 and May 12, 1988. She got that part after changing her agency. Jill explained that it was only possible because she was not under a regular contract at *Lorimar*, but hired on a weekly basis for her portrayal of Erin Jones. The unit production managers of both series coordinated the shooting schedules very well so it was not a problem for her to work on both sets on different days.

She described her working experiences on both *Falcon Crest* and *The New Gidget* as fantastic because “they were completely different characters”. Jill referred to Larue on *The New Gidget* as “a goofy Literalist always looking for the fun in every situation, open accessible and very colorful whereas Erin Jones on *Falcon Crest* wore a lot of black, a more controlled and manipulative and sexual woman that would double-cross anyone to succeed, a fierce private investigator.” But she also emphasized that both shows had a lot of humor — each in its very own way.



As an example for that particular humor Miss Jones brought to *Falcon Crest*, Jill most fondly remembered the courtroom scene at the *Tuscany County Courthouse* when Angela was charged with hijacking Chase’s wine shipment. We both vividly remembered the mockery Erin Jones made of the court when she suddenly claimed to be psychic and referred to Lemuel, her cat, as her business advisor.

Jill uploaded a clip of the famous courthouse scene to her website, www.jilljacobson.net.

“I remember that morning in make-up,” she began to tell a funny story about what happened on the day they shot that courtroom scene. “There was Lorenzo [Lamas], and I said ‘hello’, and he said: ‘Who are you...?’”

The scene in the courtroom was one of Jill’s favorite moments on the show. She expressed how glad she was that Rod and Claire, Ernie Wallengren, Greg Strangis and Earl were on the show to let that happen. “They took a chance, they threw the dice!” she described that the kind of humor they added in season 5 was something unexpected and new they just decided to try out. She described the core of the writing staff of that year — Rod, Claire, Ernie and Greg as well as Bill Schmidt — as “inventive people”; and the courtroom scene we had discussed was the perfect example for it.

Another memorable moment was when “they let me do a striptease,” she referred to the scene in Richard’s bedroom at the beginning of season 6.

The third scene she loved recalling was a sex scene in bed with David in early season 6.

Exquisite Wardrobe

Another wonderful memory Jill had was her wardrobe.

“They used to make my clothes for me,” Jill fondly remembered *Lorimar’s* wardrobe department providing her with some exquisite, very “Miss Jones - like” fashion.

She still has the outfit she wore in her striptease scene and she still has the bathing suit and the turban from the scene at the outdoor swimming pool in Acapulco, which was actually filmed at what used to be the *Holiday Inn* in Napa where the cast and crew stayed during the location filming in the Wine Country.



"Do you know who did the phone call with me?" she rhetorically asked about Erin's phone conversation with Richard. "Selby wasn't available. So it was Edward Albert," she explained. David's close-up was filmed separately and later intercut with Jill's phone scene.

1980's Hair

From the wardrobe, we now came to the women's hair in the 1980's.

"The hair in the '80's was not so good," Jill said. "I don't know how people could have done that every day," she alluded to the extreme styling and the use of tons of hairspray to fix the hairdo in that era and explained that many people wore wigs because they either had destroyed their real hair or wanted to prevent it from being destroyed. "I didn't, but most anybody wore wigs," Jill explained.

The "Secret" Lesbian Storyline

Talking about such delicate things, we also came to a "revolutionary" storyline for television in those days.

"The woman who played my sister," she began to talk about actress Jane Badler. "She was a very sweet woman. You know, they [the producers] brought her on with a contract and all these great ideas..." Jill hesitated for a moment. "I guess I can say it now... It's been a million years... They [the writing and producing staff] wanted to write me into a lesbian love affair!"



Jane Badler's character, Meredith Braxton, was originally intended to be Erin's lesbian girlfriend.

I confirmed that I knew that fact, but I wanted to know more about the background.

"Not on my show — you don't!" Jill quoted Jane Wyman's reaction to the provocative idea that was unheard of network television in the 1980's, particularly considering CBS' rigid and conservative program standards.

Jill, however, had a totally different attitude towards the storyline: "I was ready to go! It was perfect for my character."

She now shared the details about that storyline with me: "It was a funny day. The day of the shoot [of the first lesbian scene], I got to the set, [...] and I had already known that Jane Wyman nixed it. So I was already apprised of the fact that we [Meredith and I] were no longer going to be lesbians." When Jill arrived on the set, Jane Badler wanted to talk about the scene with her. "And I just said: 'We'll make it.' She said: 'We'll make the scene work.' Several times... Then I realized that she was referring to the original scene," Jill explained that their first scene originally was intended to be a shower scene.

Obviously, nobody on the set except Jill was informed about the last-minute change of the scene, but she finally told them that they were not shooting it, which saved *Lorimar* quite some money, although Jill was tempted not to tell them and shoot the scene anyway. Later, she sometimes thought how much fun it would have been to just shoot it. "I could have shot it!" the actress said, but emphasized with a smile that she was a good girl and had the crew call the production office. — What a gimmick as an outtake it would make today if the original scene had been shot. "I regret that!" Jill admitted. "I was always dedicated to my craft and experimenting on the set. I thought it would be fun to introduce the first openly gay character on prime time. I was the perfect character to come out. There wasn't a real love thing going on with me — might have changed the course of my career, how great would that have been!"

Coming back to Jane Badler, Jill regretfully said: "We had not had time to become friends as Laura Johnson and I had."

Mentioning Laura's name caused Jill to remember her as a wonderful colleague. The actress speculated that, from the perspective of storyline opportunities, Laura's character, Terry, could have been a more suitable same-sex love interest for Erin Jones than Jane Badler's rôle.

Leaving the Series

"It was a question mark as to when I left on the boat and sent to Bora Bora [actually Borneo in the final version of the show], I was indeed dead..." The actress explained that she knew from fan mail people wanted her to come back. "Because I was this crazy kind of unusual character for the show. And they did want me to come back, but that was when a different regime came in and Earl left." We talked about the changes in the show beginning in season 6 when Jeff Freilich and Joanne Brough became executive producers. Jill left no doubt how she regretted her character being shot to death according to the plans of the new regime: "I didn't want that to happen!" Then, she referred to Earl Hamner again, who left the door open for her return when Erin was sent off to Borneo: "That's what Earl did. Earl created a way for me to come back." She explained that the new execs got rid of many people, which was totally different from Earl's style. That was the reason why her character was written off mid-season 6. "I never wanted to come back and do the last scene," Jill admitted because it was difficult for her to leave the series she had grown to love so much.

Jill in 2008 — looking as stunning as ever.



We went on reminiscing a bit about the good old times we both cherished so much. I was very appreciative of Jill taking such a long time to talk to me, and we both decided to keep in touch and meet in person during my next stay in Los Angeles — maybe even with a group of *Falcon Cresters* if we can arrange it.

Jill in 2009.

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