

Questions for DAVID SHEINKOPF

August 28, 2005

Thomas J. Pucher asked actor David Sheinkopf, who played Danny Sharpe on *Falcon Crest* in season 9, questions about his job.

David Sheinkopf's answers are in bold print.

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

David Sheinkopf nowadays.

David, we are really happy that you would like to be interviewed. That is very kind of you.

No problem.

Did you know *Falcon Crest* before you joined the cast?

Yes, I did.



Did you watch it regularly?

No, I actually watched *Dallas* when I was younger.

Oh, I see... same production company...

Exactly.

When you were hired for *Falcon Crest*, did you go through an audition, or how did it work?

Well, the story of how I got *Falcon Crest* is kind of interesting. I just went to California in 1989, and I was in a showcase — that was in a class, an acting class. My scene partner's brother had an emergency, and they had to leave. So I stepped in place for this kid, and I was seen by the late Barbara Miller [the casting director,] from *Lorimar*. They brought me into that audition for Danny Sharpe, and I got the job.

Wow, that must have been exciting.

It was quite exciting. I had been acting in New York, and I was coming out to California with the intention of sort of taking it easy for a little while and then try to figure out what I wanted to do, and I got the job. So all of a sudden, I was on television again.

Do you know if there were a lot of other people auditioning for that part?

Oh yes, a few hundred people.

Was it difficult for you to join the cast of an established show? I mean *Falcon Crest* had been on the air for eight years, and many cast members had worked together for so long.

The show was going through a lot of changes when I came. So there was definitely some hesitation on some people's part,... but everything turned out really great. It was a great experience.

With the show undergoing all those changes the final year, was the general mood on the set sort of sad? Was there any feeling of resignation among the cast members?

I think there was like a little bit of odium just because there were so many different changes and so many different storylines going on. They [the producers] were trying to bring a new face to the show, trying to bring in a new audience, trying to make it a little bit younger.

How did you personally experience those changes? Were there any special reactions from fans, like in the mail, or was there any other kind of feedback you received?

I got a lot of fan mail. Most of it was pretty positive. People liked my character, and they liked the addition to the show. They liked the relationship between me and Carla Gugino. It seemed to be taken quite well by most of the fans.



David Sheinkopf and Carla Gugino as Danny Sharpe and Sydney St. James on *Falcon Crest*.

Well, that's great, especially because there were some characters in season 9 people did not like at all, like Andrea Thompson's character, Genele Ericson, for example. She was, as we know from fan mail, a character that did not really fit into the show, and people were quite hesitant specifically to that rôle. Is that also what you experienced while you were there?

Not really. I got a lot of positive fan mail. I did a lot of interviews and stuff when I was on the show that year. People really seemed to like the character.

Are you still in contact with any of your fellow cast members or anyone from the crew?

Not really. I actually just recently worked on a TV show now, and somebody had gotten a fan letter through to me through one of the grips that I used to work with — one of the lighting department guys. So I've called him and had a chat with him after a very long time. That was interesting.



You mentioned you are on another TV show right now. Is it still *Design on a Dime*?

Yes, I work on *Design on a Dime*. I am co-hosting the show.

David on his current show, *Design on a Dime*, for *Home & Garden Television*.

Well, that seems to be a little bit different from what you used to do before because it is no longer an acting job, but you are the host.

Yes, it's different. For the past ten years of my life, I have always been a carpenter and furniture designer. I did Danish modern... I had basically become an art director in the past years. So this kind of fits in with that job — it is somewhat acting, it is somewhat building. It collaborated a lot of my talents into one job. I've been doing that for about the past two and a half years.

Well, that sounds perfect for you.

Well, it's not bad. I miss acting — just regular acting. But it's a job, and it's a chance to do some good work and it's fun.

...and it is something very creative.

Definitely, I can definitely be creative.

That must be very satisfying.

Well, let's come back to *Falcon Crest*... Did you have a chance to work with Jane Wyman? She was absent for most of the time during the final year, but she came back for the last three episodes.

Just for the last episode, I worked with her and David Selby. That was an honor!

I can imagine. She was such a professional actress.

Yes, she was wonderful. She is always very present. She never really left the set.

They had a little room for her off to the side where she waited during her takes. She is a very special woman, a really nice lady. I got to talk to her a little bit and got to know her a little bit. She is a really lovely lady.

Do you know if she is in good health nowadays?

No, I don't actually, I'm sorry.

Who were your favorite cast members to work with?

I probably have to say I really enjoyed work with David Selby.

I can imagine. David is great. I met him a couple of times when I was in Los Angeles.

He is really terrific.

Yes, and I liked Andrea Thompson to work with; and Carla Gugino — she was great.

I liked your storyline with her. It was sort of the typical I-like-you / I-don't-like-you thing, maybe — in that context — a little bit similar to one aspect in the difficult Lance and Melissa relationship in the early years of the show. I wished there had been more allusions to the past in the last year.

Yes, things got a little diluted.



Is there a special scene you liked very much and you have nice memories of?

I had an episode where I had to work on top of a roof for about half the show. I enjoyed a lot of that because it gave me an opportunity to do things I had not done before. I mean it was interesting working 35 stories off the ground. We actually did that whole show 35 stories off the ground.

Yes, I know it was shot on top of the *Hyatt* in Long Beach.

That was a lot of fun.

Falcon Crest was famous for the use of real filming locations and cutting down the scenes shot at the studios. That also changed a lot during the last two seasons when more and more was filmed at the studios. However, there were a few scenes filmed on location during season 9. Do you remember Michael Sharpe's house, for example — a modern white building?

Sure. It was off of Mulholland Drive [in Los Angeles].

There was another house used quite frequently during the last season — the custom log home of Lauren and Walker.

Yes, I remember. I worked at that home once. I believe that was over in Topanga Canyon.

Talking of filming locations... In the early years of the show, *Spring Mountain Vineyards*, a real winery in the Napa Valley, was used for shooting. Their *Villa Miravalle* portrayed the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion*. In the last two seasons, only stock footage of that house was used. But there was a new exterior set built for a few scenes for the final season. Do you remember where the replica was built?

That was on the Radford lot of CBS.

One of the exciting things I got to do... The apartment for Danny Sharpe on one or two episodes was actually at the *Ambassador Hotel* in Los Angeles,... the hotel where Robert F. Kennedy was shot — over on Wilshire Boulevard. It was an incredible place to work at because it was such a piece of Hollywood history. They are now tearing that place down.

That is really interesting. I did not know they used a real hotel room for that purpose. I always thought Danny's apartment was a nicely built and well-furnished set.

The situation at the *Ambassador*... — they had these live-in long-term residence places. They were just basically rooms. It [Danny's apartment] was a pretty big room — it was not just a room, it was an apartment, and it was on one of the top floors of the *Ambassador*. I found it lucky to work there. It was great.

Do you have a favorite storyline?

That involved me or any other character?

Both...

I loved the storyline between Wendy Phillips and her [Lauren's] ex-husband. The one with the blow-up. Robert Ginty was a great guy, too, a wonderful actor. So I really liked the storyline between those two. I thought that was great. For me — I liked the whole thing about getting the winery and then losing the winery. I mean that was pretty intense. I was the youngest person to ever run *Falcon Crest*.

That was exciting, indeed.

My neighbor was also on *Falcon Crest* for a long time: Sheriff North — John Aprea.

Oh yes, he was great on the show, and he was later on *Knots Landing* for some time, too.

Yes, he was, and now he is my neighbor.

Please say hello to him for me.

I will.

John Aprea did a good job on *Falcon Crest*. It was a terrific time when he was on the series. Seasons 6 and 7 were two of the best years the show ever had.

Yeah, these were definitely strong seasons. They had to because they had to go up against *Dallas*, and both years of *Dallas* were pretty serious.

Was there a storyline on *Falcon Crest* you absolutely don't like?

Err... I thought the whole thing with Carla Gugino and her ex-husband and all that stuff was pretty cheesy — just because it went in that weird direction with the brothers and the murder and all that stuff.

You are absolutely right — and that storyline was terminated very abruptly. Was it because the viewers didn't like it, or was it the original concept as stated in the seasonal bible?

I think it was a little bit abrupt, but I think that everything was kind of planned within the bible of the television show.

There was a hiatus after episode 223. Do you know why CBS and Lorimar took the show off and brought it back a little over a month later with the four final episodes?

I am not sure. I know that they always had planned on bringing it back, but I am not sure why they actually took it off the air. Maybe they were trying to decide whether they wanted to continue with more episodes afterwards.

Do you remember if the rest of the episodes had already been shot when the show was put on hiatus?

Do you know what month that was — the hiatus?

It was in March and April 1990.

We had already finished. We finished the beginning of January 1990.

The whole series?

The whole series.

So when did you personally start working on it?

I started working on it in September of 1989.

Wow, that was quite early — because you first appeared in episode 215, approximately half of the season.

Yes.

Was that the usual schedule as they produced it?

It was pretty typical of filming.

The show was really famous for its celebrity guests. Susan Blakely joined the cast in season 9 as one of those special guest stars.

Yes, she played my mother.

Do you know if there were any other special guest stars taken into consideration for more guest appearances as in the years before?

You know that season was a little bit light on guest stars. I am not sure why. I know that they had a lot of characters going on... There were a little bit less guest stars in the last few years.



What was it like to work with Susan Blakely?

It was really nice working with her. She is a great actress. I also liked to work with Philip Hall, who played Michael Sharpe's lawyer. He is quite a good actor in his older years.

David Sheinkopf has fond memories of working on *Falcon Crest* with David Selby and Philip Baker Hall in particular.

Yes, he was terrific in that rôle. Well, how about Gregory Harrison? You had a lot of scenes with him.

He is pretty good. He was generous on film. He taught me a lot about professionalism within the community. We had a good time to work together.

So all in all, you enjoyed your *Falcon Crest* time a lot, as I can hear.

Yeah, sure. It was a lot of fun. I got a nice taste of Los Angeles work. I had the nice experience to work with very talented actors. I enjoyed my time, and, unfortunately, it ended fairly quickly. But the time that I'd had on there was special on all terms whatsoever.

You mentioned it ended quickly. When did you — as the cast members — know that it would finally be over after that season.

Probably in March of 1990.

So when you had shot the last episode, it had not been carved in stone yet at that time that it was over?

Right. They left themselves open.

Is it true that Jane Wyman wrote the soliloquy for her final scene herself?

She did, yes.

That was a very smart thing to do because it was filled with a lot of history of the show that way...

Well, thank you so much for taking the time for this interview.

You are so welcome, Thomas.

It was really a pleasure talking to you.

I'll see if I can find some old *Falcon Crest* stuff for you guys.

Oh, that would be very kind of you.

I'll see what I can track down.

Well, once again, thank you so much for your help.

Please don't thank me. It was a pleasure talking to you, and it's great what you are doing.