

Questions for HOWARD LAKIN

August 31, 2004

Thomas J. Pucher asked supervising producer Howard Lakin, a driving force in the *Falcon Crest* crew during seasons 6 and 7, questions about his work on the set.

Howard Lakin's answers are in bold print.

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

I would be very happy if you could take the time to answer some questions about your work on the set of *Falcon Crest*.

I would be pleased to be interviewed.

First of all, I have some general questions...

How did you like working on *Falcon Crest*?

I enjoyed it very much... a very free and creative environment...

How did you like filming on location in the Napa Valley?

Essential for the program; much needed authentic setting.

Are you still in contact with anyone from the cast & crew?

No.

Who were your favorite cast members to work with?

David Selby, Jane Wyman, Ana - Alicia.



Some of Howard Lakin's favorite cast members:

David Selby (Richard Channing), Jane Wyman (Angela Channing) and Ana - Alicia (Melissa Agretti Cumson).

Who were your favorite crew members to work with?

My exec producer, Jeff Freilich. But all the crew was exceptional.



Stormy Weather was a very special episode — not only for the viewers, but also for Howard Lakin, who wrote it.

What was your most memorable scene?

In *Twist and Shout* [# 167], when Melissa's bedroom came alive thanks to Buck Henry. Very fun episode opening. And *Stormy Weather* [# 172] was one long memorable episode/scene with the cast trapped together for an entire hour.

What was your favorite storyline?

The Maggie - Richard romance.



Maggie & Richard are undoubtedly the ultimate "dream couple" of the series. The writing staff handled their romance beautifully — beginning with their literally "explosive" kiss and then developing their relationship step by step from friendship to love.



Is there a storyline you really do not like — regardless of the season or writer?

Any story that had Susan Sullivan playing Mother Teresa oh so perfect. Any story that didn't use Jane Wyman's exceptional talent. All storylines from years 8 and 9.

Is it true that Lorenzo Lamas' tattoos were covered with beige shoe polish before the make-up department was able to find a special waterproof camouflage?

I heard it was bat guano, but perhaps that was just a rumor...

Why did Cesar Romero leave at the end of season 6?

Not sure, he probably became contractually too expensive.

Where are the flashback scenes (episode # 163 <7.08>) of Angela and Adam Brock, Carlton Travis' brother, from? Angie was only seen from the back. Was it a newly filmed scene or taken from an old movie, as you did with the b & w scene from *The Blue Veil* for the season 6 finale?

Ask Jeff Freilich, he was the master at that kind of thing...

Do you think there is a chance *Falcon Crest* will be released on DVD one day?

Absolutely. *Dallas* just released its first two seasons.

Do you know if any props are available somewhere? I happened to come across some prop wine bottles from the first season in L.A., which I bought, but I always wondered what happened to many of the other characteristic props, such as *New Globe*

newspapers or Richard's toy soldiers, for example. I also asked David [Selby] about them, but he said he has no idea; in fact, he only has one little soldier that was later made by the guy for him who had made them for the show.

Thanks to eBay, I imagine all the props that weren't recycled, that ended up in someone's garage... will appear online for sale!

I hope so. Many fans would love to own a "piece" of their favorite show, and the web has become an enormous help to track things down in the last few years.

Anyway, let us talk about you and your job on the show...

How did you land your job on the show? I know you were working for *Lorimar* for quite a long time and also worked on other *Lorimar* shows, including *Dallas*. Were you asked to join *Falcon Crest*, or was it primarily your decision to move over?

I was asked by Jeff Freilich, and given a vote of confidence from Earl Hamner, as I had worked with both of them previously.

Besides your writing credits, you received credit as a story editor in season 6.

In season 7, you became a supervising producer. What was the exact difference between your various jobs on the series?

In season 6 I was merely a top gun writer hired to pick up the speed and dazzle of the writing; in season 7, I was essentially the head writer with a small degree of production duties.

You wrote some of the most thrilling episodes of seasons 6 and 7. *Dark Passion* (# 141 <6.14>), *Chain Reaction* (#154 <6.27>), *Desperation* (# 155 <6.28>), *Stormy Weather* (# 172 <7.17>) and *Last Dance* (# 183 <7.28>) are just a few examples of extraordinarily exciting episodes packed with suspense and emotion.

Was it difficult to write for a show that had been on the air for five years at the time you joined the team?

I was unusual for a Hollywood writer in that I rarely tried to mimic an established show... Instead my writing style tended to challenge the existing structure and energy of every established show I worked on. Jeff [Freilich] and I kept alive much of *Falcon Crest's* history and all that what was great about *Falcon Crest*... but tried also to really give it more depth, passion, and a faster trajectory. To answer your question more succinctly, given I spent ten years free lance writing for many, many shows earlier in my career, I became very adept at picking up the rules and the characters of soap opera very quickly, and then getting rid of the banal.

How did you get the necessary background information about what happened in the previous seasons? Did you watch the show before you came aboard, or did you use a lot of consultants who had been on the crew for a long time?

I read many scripts, I talked to continuing writers Wallengren and Schmidt, also creator Hamner. Then I just hit the gas and burned rubber in all four gears (to quote the Beach Boys).

When was the decision for the Angela - Richard - mother - son storyline made? It was a brilliant idea, by the way. This and the Richard - Maggie romance are actually my personal favorites.

As David Selby mentions in his interview, it seemed to be in the collective subconscious of everyone on the show.

The show having been on the air for so long, it seemed inevitable that some inconsistencies in the history of the characters happened. This is absolutely no criticism, but did anyone from the crew or cast realize the dilemma with Julia's age? The problem is as follows: Whereas she seemed to be the oldest of Douglas & Angela's children in the early years of the series, it was mentioned in Peter Stavros' farewell letter, which revealed Richard to be Angie's son, that Richard was Douglas & Angela's first child — thus making Julia younger than Richard. Knowing from episodes # 156 <7.01> and # 157 <7.02> that Richard was born in 1942, the earliest possible year of birth for Julia could be 1943. Considering Lance was born in 1960, as we know from other seasons, Julia would have been only 17 when he was born. Now, to make the confusion perfect — Lance's half-brother Father Christopher was supposed to be even older than Lance, making Julia even younger when she gave birth to him. Is this really the way it was supposed to be?

In our efforts to design a complete Gioberti/Channing family tree including dates of birth and death, this age dilemma seemed to be difficult to understand.

***Falcon Crest* had creative regime changes, three or four of them. It also didn't get enough respect from many of its creative entities who found their pay stubs more compelling than logic. There is always a certain amount of time chaos and insanity in doing these shows. Without a single strong hand at the helm, things will fall through the cracks, alas. That is how your problem undoubtedly came into being.**

You left after the end of season 7. What was the reason? Was it your decision, and was it in any way connected with the fact that Jeff [Freilich] and many other people from the crew did not return for season 8?

When Jeff was fired, I of course left with him. We had the same vision.

If you kept on watching *Falcon Crest* after you had left, you certainly noticed that, in the last two years, the show was drifting away from the original concept, which was apparently caused by a completely new crew taking over the series. How did you feel about these dramatic changes?

I watched, then I cried in my beer. All our hard work thrown out the window. Welcome to show biz! (I'm second generation TV writer by the way, trained by my mother "the queen of TV movies" in the art of accepting the inevitable... Judging from Bob McCullough's interview, I let go with many fewer regrets than most.)

Now I have a completely hypothetical question: One of my partners and I wrote scripts and tried to instigate a reunion in 1998, but CBS and Warner Bros. unfortunately were not receptive to the idea as they thought the age of the classic prime time soap opera was over. But would you like to resume your producing duties if there ever were a *Falcon Crest* reunion?

No, but I wish I could have been at Jane's 90th birthday party! — Hey, if they continue to make movies out of Aaron Spelling crap like *Charlie's Angels* and *Mod Squad*, they can certainly be assured of a good audience for *Falcon Crest* and *Knots Landing* reunions... although the actors are aging faster than Captain Kirk.

I read about your company on the Internet. Are you completely out of the movie & TV business nowadays?

I always hated the TV and movie businesses, having been raised in them. It was terrible to discover as a young man that I was good at writing for them. It was lucky that I made enough money to retire at the age of 37. Now I write novels that are pop-literary, not genre. I also deal in rare books, manuscripts, and rock 'n' roll memorabilia. Check me out at www.lovestreetgallery.com, Europeans can get a rare piece of real rock music history for fair prices (That's my official advert!).

There are a lot of rumors about "secret" *Falcon Crest* storyline plans that did not materialize in the end. Many fans would like to get some more information about that aspect.

In the most memorable *Stormy Weather* episode (# 172 <7.17>), you wrote a dialog between Eric Stavros and Curtis Estabrook, which revealed that Eric fed Curtis with information so he could get together a full exposé about Richard. Curtis found out even hotter stuff. Eric's tip on overseas funds transfer (probably about the \$ 30 million to support Remick's enemies) led to an incredible story — according to Curtis, "it even includes Chase Gioberti". I always wondered what exactly you had in mind with the mention of Chase in that context and if that was the groundwork for something you planned for later episodes.

We have a saying in the states, "we just took a left turn at Albuquerque". Basically this means that you make a plan, and then something else always seems to come along and take you somewhere else. That surely happened here.

It is rumored that a number of celebrities were taken into consideration for special guest appearances during seasons 6 and 7 besides those who finally made it to the show.

Can you confirm that there were negotiations with Anthony Quinn?

Weren't you happy with Theo Bikel as a white slave trader? No, I don't remember any discussion of Anthony Quinn.

We certainly were happy with Theodore Bikel. I just heard Quinn was rumored to be cast as Peter Stavros' brother, but according to another source, it was towards the end of season 5. So this idea might have disappeared with the crew members who left before you came aboard.

But how about Angie Dickinson?

I think she was mentioned many times... maybe as a police woman. [smiling]

And Raquel Welch?

I think Lorenzo would have had a better time with her instead of daughter Tahnee. Yes.

Robert Mitchum?

Undoubtedly. He was first choice for Robert Stack's role. Yes.

And what about Tom Cruise? The *National Enquirer* once reported about that rumor...

This is surely a joke. But definitely would have been a better killer than Miss Jones!

Is there any truth in the rumor *Lorimar* planned a cross-over between *Falcon Crest* and *Dallas* for the 1988-89 season?

Good idea, but by then *Dallas* was getting better and *Falcon Crest* worse, so not much chance. — I'm biased as I produced *Dallas* for its last three years.

Were there any other interesting storylines that were discussed, but never materialized?

Chase Gioberti going to "anger management" classes, failing them miserably and becoming *Falcon Crest's* most bitter and obnoxious villain. I wanted that one! As Richard became nicer, Chase was to become more soulless. Bob Foxworth had what it took to carry this off big time. And I heard he was even willing to shave off his beard!!!

Finally, I would like to ask you for the official 1986-87 cast group photo — a picture that is extraordinarily difficult to obtain.

I have a bad habit of burning my bridges. I don't keep papers or tapes or other material.

Thank you very much for sharing your memories of *Falcon Crest* with us.

Please keep up the good work!