

The Good Soul on the Set:

MARTHA MANOR

The Longest Working Stand-in on *Falcon Crest*

Interview by

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

Martha Manor worked on the set of many Hollywood movies and TV series, including *Bonanza*, as a stand-in and also played a number of supporting rôles. Throughout her career, she stood in for many Hollywood stars, including Lauren Bacall, Joanne Woodward, Mitzi Gaynor, Marie Wilson and Jane Wyman.

On *Falcon Crest*, she was the longest working stand-in, being a part of the show for its entire life cycle.

I met Martha, who is in her 80's nowadays, for the first time when we both stood in line at the will call to pick up our crew tickets for the gala for Reza Badiyi's 80th birthday at *Royce Hall* at *UCLA* in April 2010. Later, I met her again at *Falcon Crest: A Look Back*, the show's first official reunion at the *Paley Center for Media* in Beverly Hills in October 2010 where we exchanged phone numbers and agreed on an interview.

It took me a while to set up a phone conversation with her, but we finally set it up for March 2, 2011. When I called her, we first talked a bit about our fan club and the continued interest in *Falcon Crest*.

Landing the Job on *Falcon Crest*

Martha began our conversation with one particular actress that really stood out in memories: Susan Sullivan.

"I like her so much. She is such a versatile actress," I said. "In her rôle on *Castle*, she is so much different from Maggie on *Falcon Crest*."

Martha confirmed that and added: "You know her name is Martha in there. She said: 'I kind of play you.'" With that quote, Martha explained that Susan named and sort of defined the character after her as they both go back a long way together. "I dress very wild, and she sort of dresses the way I do dress," Martha explained and alluded to the fact that even the costumes and jewelry Susan wears in her rôle as Martha Rodgers are

an homage to Martha's real-life clothing, something I can only confirm from what I have seen on Martha Manor when I met her at those celebrations mentioned above. "I thought that was hysterical when she told me!" Martha laughed. "Susan said: 'It kind of reminds me of you.'"



Susan Sullivan as Martha Rodgers on *Castle*.

It is no secret, of course, that Susan has been having a lot of creative influence on her character on ABC's *Castle*, also including the use of clips from Susan's old TV productions and still photos from her previous projects.

Anyway, the reason why Martha started with a conversation about Susan was that Martha got her job on *Falcon Crest* through Susan Sullivan.

"I didn't do the pilot," Martha began, "because Susan didn't do the pilot." She referred to the show's predecessor entitled *The Vintage Years* where Maggie was played by Samantha Eggar.

"I didn't start until Susan started. We talked and all... and she said she was going to be doing this series, and I happened to be available. Lots of times, I was doing other things so I couldn't always work with her. Most of the time I did!" Martha emphasized on how many of Susan's productions she stood in for her. "I did almost everything that she did. So that's how we got started, and later on in the series — actually, it wasn't too far, probably a couple of months after they've been making it... The stand-in that was [first] on the show was one of the family members. She was, I think, the wife of one of the electricians, and she just did it for kicks while we were on location. She continued doing it during that time. She had just done it so she could get to go on location with her husband. So anyway... they [*Lorimar*] asked me to take over for Jane Wyman, and so I also would stand in for Jane, too, because most of the time there was so much that Susan wasn't in. So I kind of doubled up there. So... that's how I started working with Susan [on *Falcon Crest*] because she had requested me."

It was interesting for me to hear that because I had not known before that Martha and Susan had worked together so often in the past. Martha explained that among the many projects she shared with Susan, she stood in for her in *Having Babies II* and *Rich Man, Poor Man — Book II* in particular.



Martha mentioned that Susan recently said to her: “Don’t tell anyone how long we’ve been together!” How typical of Susan! “When people ask her,” Martha smiled, “she’d say: ‘Well, we’ve been together since this and this show...’ and she would cough or something.” Not that Susan had to cover up for her age — because if you see her, you would never guess she is 68 as she looks so incredibly good, something that Martha confirmed. “I thought she was just outstanding at the reunion, too,” Martha added about Susan’s performance at the 2010 *Falcon Crest* panel at the *Paley Center*. Indeed, Susan was one of the really big highlights at the reunion — not only on the stage where she was extraordinarily charming, funny and straight to the point, but also behind the scenes as she played an integral part in making the first official reunion of the series possible.



Left: Susan Sullivan arriving at the *Paley Center* (above) and during the panel.

Enjoying Her Work

“So how did you like working on *Falcon Crest* in general?” I asked.

“It was a great show, and I had not done that kind of a series before,” Martha started. “I had done, you know, 14 years of *Bonanza*. Going from a western to something like that for that long was really fun because we never knew ourselves who was going to get killed or what was going to happen.”

What she particularly liked about the whole series was that it was so unpredictable in contrast to a movie where you usually have the whole script from the beginning. “We used to look as forward to the scripts as the fans did, and we just couldn’t wait to see what was going to happen to us, you know, in the next week or so. It was just very exciting, always wondering what they [the writers] were going to think up next. In soap operas, they come up with things that you never dreamt they would think of. You just never knew what the heck was going to happen the next week... who was going to be alive, who was going to be still [around], you know, not get killed or have something happened to them.”

"I guess you also liked going to the Wine Country, didn't you?" I asked.
"Oh yes, locations were always fun," Martha replied.

Good Memories of the Cast and Crew

Then she continued to tell about the cast and crew: "It was a wonderful family show because Jane [Wyman] herself was one of the few stars that was not conceited; was loveable and always on time, always knew her lines. She came down and she'd bring lunch. During lunch time, I used to play poker with the guys, and she started getting interested and she would come in, sit with us and play poker, too. She was just like one of the crew, and you could always believe whatever she said; she didn't exaggerate or anything, and she just loved her crew. Her crew was her family, you know, that was her life in that time. Being older and all that... Barbara Stanwyck was a lot like her, too. There's a few actresses... — Carole Lombard, another one — that really fit in with the crew." Martha explained that many crew members always got pictures of them and Jane together. "Always a real buddy," she added about the Oscar winner.



"There was no feeling of somebody, even with all the other women that we had come and go... — there was never any jealousy or somebody trying to overstep the other one, which is hard to do when you are working with that many actresses and actors."

Martha also mentioned some more of her favorites:

"Another one who was adorable to work with was Cesar Romero."

"Oh yes, I can imagine," I replied. "The chemistry between him and Jane Wyman was great."

"Oh yes!" Martha said. "They were really buddies — very, very close. Cesar always sent you a Christmas card and, no matter where he was, when he saw you, he would hold on and come over."



Discussions: Jane Wyman and Cesar Romero were good friends in real life, but they were oftentimes up in arms against each other in their relationship on *Falcon Crest*.

She also explained how much of a social life they all had together while working on the show: "The whole crew... There was always parties and such... You'd bring your families, and everybody joined in, and it was a wonderful family show, which is hard to find in our business. *Bonanza* was a family show, too, and I just feel very fortunate that I was lucky to be on a couple of shows like that."

Then, she came back to Susan Sullivan: "Of course, I loved working with Susan. She, you know, is down to earth and we are kind of buddies. We have known each other for so long and gone through things that happened on shows."

Susan Sullivan near the *Falcon Crest* Victorian Mansion in episode 42.

After that, she moved over to the staff members: "Another thing that was nice was we had some really good directors, too. That also made it nice, and they [*Lorimar*] would use them a lot. Everybody loved Reza!" she fondly said about Reza Badiyi, one of the most prolific directors in Hollywood with a history of more than 430 hours of TV.

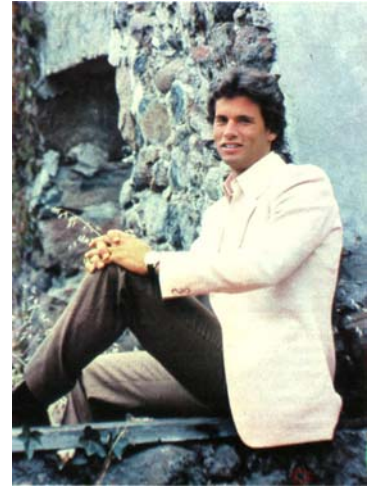


Reza Badiyi during his birthday gala in 2010.
Jill Jacobson and Margaret Ladd in the background.

Again, she came back to the cast members: "I think Susan was my favorite — and Jane [Wyman] became very friendly with me, too. That was nice." Martha guessed that the reason for her and Jane getting along so well was "maybe because I was a little older. And I'd love David [Selby]. David was just a lot of fun to be with — and very very down to earth. He's wonderful, too. Lorenzo was, you know, a young kid, whole the devil... and always getting into stuff... It was interesting when we had Lana Turner on the show." Martha explained that Lana had some difficulties adjusting to the hectic TV work: "She was so used to being the big glamor star, you know. Doing movies is so much different from doing television because, on television, you don't just do three shots a day; you do 20 or 30, you know. And she still was in those days where she was used to doing three shots. She'd just take so long to do everything. You had to give her like a two-hour extra notice for her time to be on the set... to get there on time and everything. But she was very nice and all. She just was used to the old school." Martha explained how scenes are shot for a television series: "You do a scene, and you do it a couple of times, and that's about it. You don't do it, you know, 30 or 40 times like she was used to having them [the crew] do. She and Jane got along okay, but Jane, you know, had her number from the beginning!" Martha laughed. "Everybody was aware of the fact, you know, that we had the famous movie star Lana Turner working with us. We tried to be, you know, real nice to her when she did stupid things — we just kind of overlooked it: 'She's an older lady now,'" Martha quoted what the crew would say or think in such a situation. "Not like Jane Wyman," Martha added and underlined how professional Jane's work was although she also came from old Hollywood school.



Martha has her own memories of the stars, particularly Lana Turner, Jane Wyman, David Selby und Lorenzo Lamas.



"There was another gal," Martha referred to another stand-in, "I brought her in because they [the producers] came to me and said: 'We need one other good stand-in.' And she was on vacation, and I got word to her to come home fast — that I had a job for her, and she did."



It was Melody McCord, who did not only become a stand-in, but also portrayed Melody, Angela's maid, in the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion*. "She had been in an automobile accident [after the show ended] and she just never really got over it. She ended up losing a leg. It was terrible. She was a great gal to work with, really terrific." Sadly enough, the actress passed away in 2004.

Melody McCord in a scene in her rôle as the maid on *Falcon Crest*.

"Kim Novak was another wonderful gal," Martha smiled. "Terrific to work with, and we became kind of friends, kind of buddies while she was on it. That was nice."

I mentioned that I had received a picture of Martha and Kim a few weeks ago from Lady Lee, the script supervisor of *Falcon Crest*. "I sent that to her for Christmas," Martha said. "For Christmas, I send out a picture of me with somebody that I worked with because all



my friends would kill me if I don't. All my friends, who aren't in the [entertainment] business, they wait for that... whatever picture I am going send for the year." "

Martha with Kim Novak during the shootings of episode 129.

The Writing Staff

When we made a transition from the cast and crew to the producers and writers, we came to speak about Earl Hamner, she spontaneously said: "Isn't he a marvelous person?! Believe me there are very few like him. He is a terrific guy!"

I confirmed that this was exactly my experience as Earl has been a close friend for many years.

"Earl had such a great group, you know," Martha moved over to the creative forces of the production and underlined the writers' qualities during Earl Hamner's reign. "Sometimes you would get some writers that are mediocre and are changing stuff constantly on their shows — and it's just terrible. You know, you learn your lines, and then you've got to learn them all over again, and that does happen on some shows. We were lucky we had a show where everything really went smooth. We didn't have a lot of problems."

"When Earl left," I introduced my next question, "the show underwent major changes — several times in the remaining four seasons. What did you think of them?"

"The writing would change when new writers would come in, and it changed the atmosphere," Martha said.

"I thought it started to slip a little bit," she added about season 8. "I thought that some of Michael's ideas were not the greatest," she came back to the 1988-89 season again, referring to Michael Filerman, who came back as an executive producer that year. "I thought that was [not] a [wise] move," she commented on Ana - Alicia's original character, Melissa, being written off, just as one example.



"Jerry Thorpe was always a very good writer, he did a lot of good things," she said about the executive producer who came in for season 9. However, he never wrote a single episode of *Falcon Crest* during his running the series; he only directed one episode: the premiere of the final season.

It was Michael Filerman's doing to kill off Melissa at the beginning of season 8 as he did not know what to do with her character. Due to the audience's negative response, he rehired Ana - Alicia as Melissa's look-alike, Samantha Ross, towards the end of the season (right picture).



Being a Stand-in and Photo Double

We left the show runners behind us now. "For people who are not so familiar with the production process, could you please describe your duties as a stand-in on the set of *Falcon Crest*?" I asked.

"I happened to be a stand-in that just doesn't stand in [only]," Martha began. "I'd also do a lot of the photo doubling, and I also did a lot of stunt work, which most stand-ins

don't do; a lot of men do, but not the women. But I did, starting, you know, way back, particularly on *Bonanza*. They didn't have a lot of stunt work actually on *Falcon Crest*." Then she explained her typical duties in detail: "The big part of being a stand-in is... you watch your actress do the final rehearsal." She pointed out that the stand-in is told by the director or the assistant director what to do during the scene, which is about to be filmed. "And when they [the actors] go in to get retouched up and all for the scene, then you go ahead and you go through every scene that they do with the cameraman, and then he is lighting you — and he lights you for all the angles. And sometimes, the director would want to change a scene, and he'd use you [as a stand-in] to change it, and you do the lines and such... And then when the actress comes in, you go over and you show her the little change, maybe instead of crossing to the table, you cross over to the chair," she described one of the typical stage directions that changed what was initially scripted. "The lighting takes approximately — it depends on how difficult the scene is — 20 minutes or so. If you are on a movie, it can take as much as an hour or two hours to light a scene. But on television, you don't have that time."

I also wanted to know more about her work as a photo double on the show. In contrast to the regular work of a stand-in (basically to prepare a scene), a photo double stands in for an actor or actress in various situations — actually on film — so the star does not have to waste time in the hectic shooting schedule with particular shots, such as close-ups, long-distance shots and establishing shots, etc. Depending on the exact production requirements, shots of that kind are sometimes filmed by a second unit working parallel with the associate producer or an assistant director while the director and the cast move on to shoot other scenes. Another particular field where photo doubles are used are close-ups of a dialog with two or more characters: The photo double might replace the actor or actress, who is only seen from behind in an over-the-shoulder shot. In such scenes involving a photo double, the regular cast member's dialog is dubbed over later during the ADR. It is evident that photo doubles must either have a rather similar physical build, style, and coloring of their hair or that the cameraman must use very specific angles during filming to cover up any discrepancy so the audience will not notice any difference. Of course, a photo double's performance is critical to maintain the momentum of the scene and to keep the other actors on cue. In order to flawlessly film a take involving a photo double, the photo double must learn the exact same blocking and dialog as the regular actor or actress.

With that in mind, I wanted to know how the crew made sure Martha would look like Jane or Susan when she was in a scene as a photo double.

"I have one of those faces — like *The Three Faces of Eve!*" Martha smiled, referring to the 1957 movie based on the true story of a woman who suffered from dissociative identity disorder (multiple personalities). "In fact I did a lot of stunts for Joanne Woodward," Martha added about the actress in the title rôle of that movie, but got back to *Falcon Crest* then and pointed out that she sometimes had to put on a wig and always had to be in the same clothes as the respective actress. She also said that it varied from actress to actress, of course, how close she got to creating the illusion of being the same person on film. "With Susan, you could get pretty close. Jane — she was..." Martha stopped for a second, then continued: "For distance, they could do it, but really, really up close, they couldn't." She also mentioned that, in her previous projects, it was no problem for her to get close to the performances of Joanne Woodward and Lauren

Bacall, for instance. "I watched them while I was on the set. I know how to walk like them, how they hold a spoon..."

It was obvious that not all stand-ins were able to work as a photo double. Martha's talent in that respect was one of the reasons why she worked all the time.

"You work very long hours on shows. We don't work just eight hours a day," she added. *Lorimar* made sure, however, that Jane Wyman usually did not exceed eight hours of working time per day, as Martha pointed out. "Sometimes she got stuck and had to," Martha added, but underlined that this was not the regular case with Jane — a privilege due to her age in contrast to the other cast and crew members. "You usually worked at least 12 hours a day. On some shows, I worked — particularly on 'shoot 'em up' shows, on *Rich Man, Poor Man* and some other shows I did [like] *The Night Stalker* — 14 – 15 hours a day... a lot!"

She also mentioned a situation when she continually worked for 26 hours once: "So people wonder why you don't have a social life when you are on a series. That's the reason: no time. You are gone in the morning from, you know, 5 o'clock to... you get home about 8 or 9 [in the evening]. You just have no time. The unions were trying to put a stop to working so many hours," she referenced to an accident of a young cameraman, who fell asleep while driving home after one of his usual 17-hour days at work, but also said that there are still productions with an incredible workload per day.

Playing Various Characters

Besides her work as a stand-in and photo double, Martha also portrayed several supporting characters throughout *Falcon Crest*.

"Oh Gosh!" Martha exclaimed when I asked her about her most memorable scene. After a second, she said: "I guess when we were supposed to have the earthquake! It was sort of fun. They had me all done up with bandages and bleeding," she referred to the scene in front of the *Tuscany Valley Parish Church*, which was converted into a first-aid station. In that scene in the season 6 premiere, Martha played a victim lying on a stretcher — Angela placed her jacket around her when the victim felt cold. It stood out in Martha's memories because it was so different from the other scenes.



In episode 128, the parking lot of the *Tuscany Valley Parish Church* was converted into a first-aid station.

The scene Martha Manor talked about was filmed here.





"In the jail, I played the matron that brought out the actress... I cannot think of her name right this second... the blonde lady that was with us for quite a while," Martha described another scene she fondly remembered.

I figured it must have been Morgan Fairchild. "That's who it was," Martha confirmed, "I did a little scene with her."

The segment was in *The Cataclysm* (episode 127 <5.29>) when schizophrenic Jordan was bailed out after her crazy drive as Monica, her alter-ego.

Among other characters Martha played in the series were a party guest at Richard and Maggie's engagement soirée in *Twist and Shout* (episode 167 <7.12>), the clerk at *The Toy Shoppe* in *Channing vs. Channing* (episode 175 <7.20>), the clerk selling Angela a new suit in a Washington dress shop in *As Tears Go by* (episode 182 <7.27>), a guest of honor on the podium at the opening of the *Channing Community Center* in *And Baby Makes Three* (episode 195 <8.12>) and the lady with the dogs near *Harris Rare Books* in *Grand Delusions* (episode 202 <8.19>).



Martha Manor and some of her rôles on *Falcon Crest* (from left): episodes 182, 195 and 202.

This interview was a really hilarious and very pleasant experience with the pretty fit lady. She is really funny and reminded me of Susan Sullivan's performance on *Castle*, indeed. Saying goodbye on the phone, her words were: „All right, sweetie, you take care...“