

The Man With The Lived-in Face

If you want to know the secret of Jack Lord's success, take a look at his failures. As Jack, himself, says: "I learned more from my flops than anything else..."

To a woman, there is something rugged and irresistible about a fighter. Perhaps it's the old cave man appeal, or a contemporary pastime known as separating the men from the boys. Whatever, one look at Jack Lord tells you he's a fighting man, and with enough nerve to take on the world for a cause—which might explain why he continues to bounce off the screen so sexy, in spite of the passing years.

Throughout his long career, the *Hawaii Five-O* star has learned that it's often easiest to get ahead by taking a step or two backwards—and he's been willing to fight to prove it. Always he's

been a man who keeps on trying in spite of failures—and he respects other men who do the same. They're the type he prefers to have around him when he's working. He's comfortable with them. It's the nearest thing to camaraderie this loner has ever known.

If success could be figured strictly on a financial basis, then Jack Lord had it made before he ever stepped foot on the professional stage. (Well, almost, that is: One scant week in stock after a full year of trying can hardly put one in the "pro" class.) It was the early 1950s; he was married, living in New York, and working on Broadway—selling Cadillacs! Interestingly enough, he was earning \$18,000 a year, an impressive figure for the post-war era.

But selling cars is hardly

creative enough for a young man who'd won an important art prize while in high school; who had two linoleum cuts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; who was a popular athlete voted most this and best that, and remembered as a boy who always accomplished what he set out to do.

His ever-loving wife Marie, sensitive to his every need, could feel his growing unrest as he made good as a salesman—first with Fords and later with Cadillacs in a progression "to the top" so typical of her man. Still, it was a form of retreat, selling cars to get ahead as an actor.

"I'll get a bankroll before I try acting again," he'd promised Marie before they were married in 1948.

"Don't worry, darling. You'll make it," she'd encouraged him. And three years later, she had a feeling the time to move ahead again had arrived. Jack had his bankroll, and he was ready to take that big step—backwards, perhaps; it all depends on how you look at it. He was ready to gamble on his talent and determination to make good in the theater. And his "May I?" was answered with an immediate and decisive "Yes!" from Marie.

Until he began studying at the Neighborhood Playhouse, his only acting had been in (Continued on page 14)

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JACK LORD

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maritime training films—which he proudly carried with him when making the rounds of theatrical agents in New York City. “This isn’t acting,” they told him, but the tenacity of the man was obvious even then.

“They kept throwing me out and I kept coming back,” Jack says matter-of-factly. “By that time I’d caught the bug.”

Beneath his light tone of today is just a trace of yesterday’s discouragement. He’d gone for broke, earned only \$50 in one full year, and was down to his last three bucks when he decided to shelve his career—temporarily. He married Marie, built up that bankroll, and strengthened himself for a fresh start. Jack Lord might have been down—but never for a count of ten.

Today, even Jack is amazed at the youthful cocksure enthusiasm he showed then, bulling his way into seeing Sanford Meisner, Neighborhood Playhouse coach.

“I had nothing but nerve,” he says now, with a shake of his head. “I told Meisner I wanted to be an actor and he said ‘You got twenty years, son? It’ll take that long.’ Now, all these years later, I realize he was right.”

It was a step forward when Jack landed a role in a Broadway show—*Traveling Lady*, with Kim Stanley. Or was it?

“It flopped—but it was a breakthrough,” he says philosophically.

Again he was right; it was a round-about way of going ahead, for it led to his replacing Ben Gazzarra in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*.

“A lot of important people saw me in that, and things began to happen,” he points out, his blue eyes flashing. “A Broadway opening is the crucible for an actor. If you survive that you can survive anything. . . . It’s frightening enough being thrown cold in front of a live TV camera. But Broadway is the supreme test. It can make you or destroy you.”

The challenge fascinated Jack and he did two other Broadway shows. “Both bombed out,” he confesses.

Disillusioned? Not Jack Lord.

Josh Logan tested him for the part of Bo in *Bus Stop*. “He was the young naive cowboy, remember?” Jack asks rhetorically. “And a virgin, at that. Logan saw the test and told me: ‘You’ll never make this one, kid. Your face looks too lived in!’”

As to be expected for a man with Jack’s temperament, that rebuff only served to make him more doggedly determined. And always there was that unflinching nerve to sustain him.

“Otto Preminger talked to me about a part in *The Court Martial Of Billy Mitchell*,” Jack recalls. “I asked how big it was and he said not too large. So I told him no, that I was a Broadway actor and only did important roles. Gawd! The nerve I had! Preminger looked at me with that Teutonic deep-freeze stare. ‘Young man,’ he said, ‘consider this a screen test with Gary Cooper. He

is the lead.’

“I’ll take it,” I told him.”

Jack’s relentless nerve gave him a jolt when he first met Cooper on the set. They’d met once before, when Jack was selling cars in New York.

“We talked about motors, then art, and he asked me to join him for lunch,” Jack recalls of that East Coast meeting. “Afterwards, we walked along 57th Street looking in galleries. Cooper was a marvelous man. Iron and gentleness—like Sandburg’s description of Lincoln: ‘Tough as steel and gentle as a fog.’”

“When I saw him again—two years later on the set—I asked the most foolish question of all: ‘Do you remember me?’ I could have killed myself. But Coop laughed and said, ‘Sure. You’re the guy who took a Duesenberg apart and put it together again. What are you doing now?’”

“I’m Zack Lansdowne in your picture,” I told him proudly.”

Jack still winces, retelling of this second meeting with his idol. And he vehemently denies the accusation by some that he mimics Cooper.

Jack Lord is his own man. Even though he longed to star in movies, for instance, it was *his* choice to call a halt to his career when it wasn’t going the way he wanted it to. He got into the movies playing a series of heavies—but after doing only six or seven films, he refused to be cast in any more villain roles. The result? He was out of work for eight months. Again philosophical, he put his time to good use by writing a television series, *Tramp Ship*, based on his world travels in the Merchant Marines.

Writing for TV was one thing, but acting on it—well, that was something else. So determined was he to play lead roles on the large screen that he turned down series after series for the small one. He had a chance at *Ben Casey* before Vince Edwards, and the scout on *Wagon Train* before Robert Horton. But he was undismayed when the roles spiraled these two men to fame.

“I was just determined to play lead roles in films, and made eight pictures before agreeing to do *Stoney Burke* with Leslie Stevens,” he explains. “By then I knew the value of such a series. I have no regret about Casey because I couldn’t work in an atmosphere of misery every day if you paid me all the money in the world.”

Where Hollywood overwhelmed and frightened many, it simply didn’t intimidate Lord. It was a place, a means to an end—nothing more.

“The frustrating thing about this place is the unwillingness of most to stick their necks out to take a chance,” he said in the early days. “When I refused any more villains in films, it was thought of as a phony trick, and no one would have me until Doran [E. A. Doran, who gave him his first movie lead in *Walk As A Dragon*] took a chance.”

As Jack likes to put it, he and Marie had been “in” Hollywood but were never “of” the place. They had lived in a luxurious apartment there but they didn’t have the usual things stars are

supposed to have, like swimming pools ("I don't want to be trapped by too many possessions; I want to feel free."). But they had a library of more than 6,000 books ("... and we actually read them").

After television gave Jack "name value," he notes that "studios I couldn't get into before called to find if I'd be available during my hiatus. Everyone wants to bet on a sure thing—that's the story of Hollywood."

Unlike many who go seeking their fortunes in the film capital, Jack Lord remembers those who did him favors on his way "up." In 1963, he told Hedda Hopper: "You're different. When nobody here knew me, you chose me for one of your 'New Faces of 1958,' and I appreciate it."

He remembers Ralph Bellamy as the man who gave him his first break, in Bellamy's popular TV series, *Man Against Crime*. He can talk easily of others, too. But, though he doesn't choose to talk about it much, it was his own persevering drive that got him where he is today.

And just where is he? Thanks to what Leonard Freeman (*Hawaii Five-O* creator and producer) calls "credibility casting," Jack's at the top of the heap. He's a television star with a piece of the action, which makes him financially secure. Also, he's one of the few Hollywood actors *not* represented by an agent.

"Having a star like Jack is like having money in the bank," says Freeman. "He's terrific. . . . He's always on time, no bags under his eyes, and he always knows his lines. . . . I'm a perfectionist, and so is he."

Lord learned his trade in a variety of roles, on television and in some 40 films. Then, as a partner in his first video series—*Stoney Burke*—he became a financial success. After that he could well afford to be choosy about what he wanted to do or *not* do—though money or lack of it *never* influenced him once he'd set his sights on an acting career.

There was never any doubt as to Jack's getting where he wanted to go, since he works best under adversity. Many times in his life it seemed as though success, not failure, would be his ruin. It might have been that the multi-talented man couldn't make up his mind which of his many interests to follow . . . or that a certain amount of sibling rivalry had him knocking himself out to match or outdo his older brother Bill. Both won the famed St. Gaudens Plaque (while at John Adams High School), which is awarded once each year to the outstanding artist in the New York City educational system. Both went to sea, with the Merchant Marine. Both played football and graduated from New York University. And both have a sustaining interest in art.

When *Stoney Burke* was cancelled after only one season, Jack was more than disappointed: he thought the show deserved better and still refers to it as "the most successful failure on television." Still, he made the most of audience reaction to a series character to which he felt completely committed.

After an intensive four-week vocal course which prepared him to sing Western songs, he made a nationwide tour of public appearances as Stoney Burke.

This actor takes everything seriously, especially himself. A man of insatiable curiosity as well as a perfectionist, he's followed each of his many interests—acting, writing, art, seamanship, photography, flying—with enthusiasm.

"At one time I was trying to be what is known as a 'Renaissance man'; that is, one who can do almost anything," Jack says earnestly. "Now I'm concentrating on being an actor."

For five years he limited himself to one guest star role per month—60 different performances: "Sometimes the antagonist, sometimes the lover. . . . I'd rather not work than play a non-challenging character," he says, and who's to doubt him when he's already proved he has the guts to go his own way.

His current schedule on *Hawaii Five-O* is a lulu. The series is shot entirely on location, with cast and crew working 14 to 16 hours each day to get what the star calls "seven acceptable minutes. . . . At the end of it, you're physically and mentally done in," he adds.

"Going in, committing yourself to a job like this, you know it will be a murderous schedule. You decide that nothing else matters. As President Truman said, 'If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.' There are tremendous pressures on all of us."

In his spare time Jack likes to cook, so it isn't too surprising that Julia Child, TV's *French Chef*, is his favorite performer.

"The woman is a wonder" he says. "Fascinating. I could watch her for hours. But she is real. . . . I've only met two actresses who were whole women," he adds, graciously declining to identify them. "There's usually something missing. They're like pies—with large or small pieces cut out, depending on the degrees of ambition. Ambition consumes in a woman. With the male actor, it's not quite the same. He is impelled by the desire to get outside himself, true. But he's also capable of more concern with the art of acting."

Will he give up his career after this series, since he's already earned, saved and invested more money than he and Marie will ever need?

"La Fontaine said, 'Never say to the fountain, I will not drink from thee,'" he answers this query.

"I don't think any good and successful actor—or any creative person—was driven by money or fame hunger to his goal. It's like anything else. Whether you work in words, stone, paint or compose, you are writing your love letter to the world. And you learn the most from your failures."

At this point, it is doubtful that there are any more failures ahead. Unless, of course, he should choose to turn about and go off in a different direction. And he well might do that, for Jack Lord is a man who still has the energy, enthusiasm and nerve to do whatever he wants to do—whatever the price.

—SARAH GILBERT