

# America

BY LIZ LLORENTE

AS A TEN-YEAR-OLD, SHE PLAYED AND REPLAYED HER TAPE OF *GYPSEY* — the version starring Bette Midler — and dreamed of stardom. At twenty-three, she *is* a star — of the most-watched new show of the recent TV season — and has won a Golden Globe Award, to boot.

For America Ferrera — as it did for Gypsy Rose Lee — everything's coming up roses.

"*Latin American. Chubby girl.* Those were reasons so many people doubted that I would ever make it," says the actress. "And those were the things that gave me my break."

She got that break at seventeen, making her film debut in HBO Films' *Real Women Have Curves*. For her role as Ana, an East L.A. teen who yearns for a life beyond the family's garment business, she earned a Sundance Award.

As the star of ABC's *Ugly Betty*, she again plays a young woman who has much to offer but is stereotyped by her appearance. With a wig of questionable style, geeky eyeglasses and conspicuous snap-on braces, Ferrera morphs into Betty Suarez, the nerdy secretary who manages to be happily — even confidently — out of place at the fashion magazine where she works. Both Betty and viewers seem to know that intellectually, at least, she can run circles around most of her self-absorbed coworkers, who almost unfailingly underestimate her.

But no one is underestimating the power of the series, least of all ABC executives, who gave the show an early renewal.

"It's a relief to finish the season without wondering whether you'll come back," Ferrera says, with characteristic understatement. "With the awards and the success with the public, we hoped they would have faith in us, but you never know."

She did know, Ferrera says, from early on that "when she grew up," she would be an actress.

She did her growing up in the suburban L.A. community of Woodland Hills, with her four sisters and one brother. At seven, she acted for the first time, landing a small part in *Romeo and Juliet* at the junior high her older sisters attended.

Then there was *Gypsy*. "I became obsessed with Bette Midler and the musical," she confesses. "I watched it fifty times in one summer. I thought, 'I want to be Bette Midler when I grow up.'"

That, of course, was not to be. But acting opportunities came early and often. Before *Betty*, she was seen in shows like *Touched by an Angel* and *CSI*. On the film side, she starred in the hit *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and appeared in several others, including *Lords of Dogtown* and *How the Garcia Girls Spent Their Summer*.

She has also worked on independent films like the bilingual *Towards Darkness*, which she executive produced. She also did a Spanish-speaking role in *Boy, Immigrant*. All the while, she's been working toward her bachelor's degree in international relations at USC.

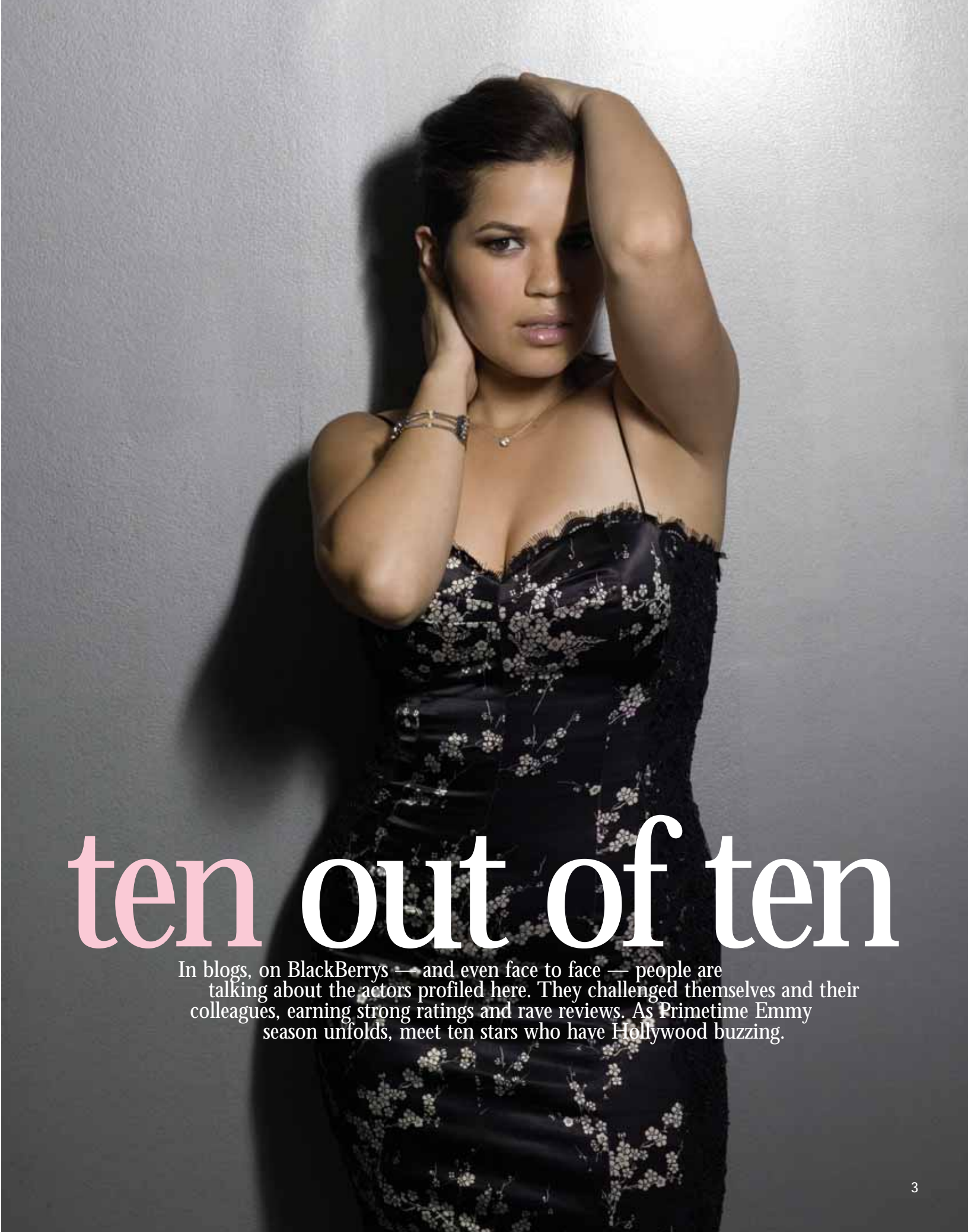
But the young woman who dreamed of starring in major films is, for now, taken with television.

"It's a very collaborative industry," Ferrera says. "The most fulfilling aspect is being behind the camera and developing the material and being part of what is done with it. Writers are extremely open to what I have to say. We take the character of Betty somewhere together."

Ferrera's costar, Tony Plana, says the collaboration she enjoys is no accident. "She has in-depth conversations about what is going on with Betty," says Plana, who plays her father, Ignacio. "She's very focused, very self-determined. She sets the tone on the set, and others follow her lead."

Where can she go from here? Anywhere she wants.

"I see television — if she wants to continue in it — in her future," Plana says. "I also see a great future in feature films. I see a Latina Meryl Streep — a talented actress who is so versatile she can play a myriad of characters well."



# ten out of ten

In blogs, on BlackBerrys — and even face to face — people are talking about the actors profiled here. They challenged themselves and their colleagues, earning strong ratings and rave reviews. As Primetime Emmy season unfolds, meet ten stars who have Hollywood buzzing.

ten out of ten



# Forest

BY JUAN MORALES

WHEN FOREST WHITAKER TAKES ON A NEW CHARACTER, intensive research is generally a given.

To play a pool-hall hustler in the 1986 film *The Color of Money*, Whitaker became a whiz with a cue. Two years later, to portray jazz legend Charlie Parker in the biopic *Bird*, he learned to play the sax. While prepping for the 1991 thriller *Diary of a Hit Man*, he got wardrobe tips from an actual hired killer.

Last year, Whitaker burrowed deeper into a role than ever before. He gained fifty pounds, studied Swahili, learned to play the accordion and spent months speaking with relatives, friends and colleagues of former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. His portrayal of the psychologically complex despot in *The Last King of Scotland* won him the Oscar for best actor in a leading role, but the immersion process was exhausting.

So much so that by the time Whitaker returned from Africa, where the film was shot, he was craving a different creative tack. He got his chance when the producers of the acclaimed FX cop drama *The Shield* approached him about the role of John Kavanagh.

A by-the-book internal affairs officer, Kavanagh is determined to bring down the show's rule-flouting antihero, Vic Mackey, played by Michael Chiklis. Embracing the opportunity as an acting exercise, Whitaker set out to work on a more instinctive level.

"I wanted to trust myself and see where my spirit would guide me," says Whitaker, whose disarming earnestness makes him the rare performer capable of speaking of his "spirit" and "artistic journey" without sounding insufferably pretentious.

"Instead of the meticulous work I did for *Last King*, *The Shield* was an opportunity to explore what would happen if I just gave myself a couple of thoughts to work with," he says. "I saw the character as a kind of archangel. If he bent from his belief structure, he would break. I also knew he was so resolved that every time he was pushed away, it would make him stronger, harder, tighter and more aggressive. That's why he becomes more and more intense as he battles with this bad cop."

Indeed, in the beginning Kavanagh holds the high moral ground. But the scenes pitting Whitaker's barely contained rage against the feral menace of Chiklis's Mackey give life to Nietzsche's admonition that those who fight monsters must take care not to become monsters themselves.

Whitaker's experience on *The Shield* was so invigorating that shortly afterward he agreed to a brief story arc on the NBC medical drama *ER* as Curtis Ames, a patient who suffers a stroke while under the care of Goran Visnjic's Dr. Luka Kovac. When chronic health problems lead to the loss of his family and home, Ames becomes obsessed with extracting an admission of responsibility from Kovac, with devastating consequences.

"I pride myself on trying to walk through whatever fears I have," says Whitaker. "With *ER*, the challenge was to go into a long-running show where people have strong bonds. Also, the character had an interesting plight: trying to get one guy to admit that he made a mistake. But once that's admitted, what is there to live for?"

For Whitaker, there's clearly plenty: his actress wife, Keisha, their two children and his booming career. Although movie offers are rolling in on the heels of his Oscar, he remains open to more television work.

"TV reminds me of acting school, where we'd do a different play every three weeks to work on something new," he says. "*The Shield* and *ER* were a perfect fit for what I was looking for, and what I needed to understand about myself to continue to grow. So if I find the right thing on TV, I'm sure I would do it."

# Ellen

BY JAMIE DIAMOND

A WAIF-LIKE YOUNG WOMAN IN JEANS AND WHITE BLOUSE ENTERS a Beverly Hills pastry shop. It's Ellen Pompeo, who plays Meredith Grey on *Grey's Anatomy*, ABC's hit series about actively sexual medical interns. But before Pompeo can reach her table, she's called over by another patron, Jake Gyllenhaal.

For some, this might be a surprise. But for Pompeo, it's déjà vu. The week she arrived in Los Angeles seven years ago, Gyllenhaal, noticing a pretty stranger, knocked on her car window to chat her up. Turned out she was a former bartender-cocktail waitress who'd made several commercials in New York and a few episodic shows and had moved to Hollywood looking for bigger roles.

He wished her luck. He was an actor, too, and who knew? Maybe they'd work together some day.

They did. Two weeks later. At an audition that resulted in their starring in the film *Moonlight Mile*.

"I don't call it coincidence — I call it fate," Pompeo says. "I don't think everybody's life is that way, but my life is."

Within the next two years she appeared in Steven Spielberg's *Catch Me If You Can*, opposite Leonardo DiCaprio; in *Daredevil*, an action-fantasy film with Ben Affleck; and *Old School*, a buddy comedy with Will Ferrell and Vince Vaughn. Then, shortly after learning that her scenes as Jim Carrey's ex-girlfriend in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* had been cut, she was offered the title role in an ensemble TV pilot called *Grey's Anatomy*.

"How often in movies does someone at my career stage get asked to play an intelligent woman who has life plans?" she says. "Meredith is a doctor, and she's smart."

But because this was a pilot, Pompeo says she didn't get that excited. By now, though, feeling a certain thrill might be safe. *Grey's Anatomy* is the number-one scripted show in the eighteen-to-thirty-four and twenty-five-to-fifty-four demos and is seen by about 19 million viewers a week.

Seen from up close, Pompeo has an impish quality. If she were selling Girl Scout cookies, she'd leave you with an empty wallet. "I'm petite and my features are delicate," she says, "but I'm not as dainty as my appearance may lead you to believe. As [costar] Justin Chambers says, I'm much more of a broad."

A native of Everett, Massachusetts, Pompeo is the youngest of six. Her mother died when she was four, after which she often went to visit her aunt and uncle in New York City. On one visit, they took her to see the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall.

"My aunt says I stood up in the middle of the show and declared that I wanted to be an actress." The idea was cemented a few years later when she saw *All About Eve*. "I'm sure I didn't understand much of what Bette Davis was saying. It was all about her eyes and her expression. I thought, 'I want to do what she's doing.'"

But there was a problem. Back home, "you wouldn't dare say something as grandiose as, 'I want to be an actress.'" And another problem. "I was very shy. I lost my mother at such a young age, I withdrew socially from life."

Pompeo didn't act in her high school plays. Nonetheless, she views her circumstances as an asset. "Nobody talked about my mother's death," she says. "We were supposed to behave as if it never happened. I think that resulted later on in my deep desire to express myself emotionally through acting."

So how does Pompeo feel now that she's committed to spending six years on a show that deals with death every week? "It's interesting and cathartic," she says. "I wasn't able to deal with it, and now I can. Everything comes full circle." She smiles and glances over at Jake Gyllenhaal. "As I said, I believe in fate."



ten out of ten

ten out of ten



# David

BY DAVE ITZKOFF

IF YOU'RE AMONG THE SQUEAMISH BUT DEDICATED VIEWERS OF FOX'S *BONES* who can watch the show only from behind the couch or with a hand over your face, you're not alone: David Boreanaz shares your pain. "I have seen bits and pieces of my show," confesses the star of the hit crime-investigation drama. "I have not seen the completed pilot, and have I not seen one episode beginning to end."

It's not that he flinches at the sight of *Bones*'s typically morbid milieu: trunks that pop open to reveal corpses missing their skeletons or graveyards whose occupants refuse to stay underground.

What really freaks out Boreanaz — who plays Seeley Booth, the rugged FBI agent and perfect foil to forensic anthropologist Temperance "Bones" Brennan (Emily Deschanel) — is the sight of himself on screen. "I drive myself crazy," he says. "I'm getting a little bit better at it, but I really don't like to look at what I do."

By now, you'd think he'd be used to glimpsing his image on a television set. After seven years as a repentant vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and his own spinoff series, *Angel*, Boreanaz proved he couldn't be pigeonholed. He traded his fangs for an FBI badge and leapt onto *Bones* just one year after *Angel* ended its run.

But that interim year was a restless one for Boreanaz, who prefers a state of perpetual motion: a new TV project, in which he would have played a hitman for hire, never made it past development, and a pilot he shot for J.J. Abrams, about con men and federal agents, didn't get picked up.

And when he was asked to meet with *Bones* executive producers Barry Josephson and Hart Hanson, the initial encounter probably could have gone better. ("I was not in a good mood," Boreanaz says. "Something weird happened.") But Josephson and Hanson persevered, as did then-Fox programming chief Gail Berman, and their phone calls to the actor struck a chord with him.

"I'm a very personable guy," Boreanaz says, "and if somebody puts their effort into being straight up with me — especially in Hollywood — that can outweigh a lot."

Two seasons later (with a third on the way), Boreanaz finds himself fully invested in the role of Agent Booth: after a typical eighty-hour workweek, he and Deschanel often spend weekends training with noted acting coach and "secret weapon" Ivana Chubbuck. And for extra credit, Boreanaz will log a few hours with Michael Grasso, a veteran LAPD officer and industry consultant. "We go target shooting, we test new guns," says Boreanaz. "For the beginning of the third season, we'll work on some fun interrogation stuff. It's cool."

What continues to draw Boreanaz — and viewers — back to *Bones* is the unconventional relationship Booth shares with Brennan, a Frank Capra-esque friendship that's always on the verge of blossoming into something bigger, but never quite crosses the line.

"We're not a soapy, *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy* kind of show," Boreanaz says. "She's a little bit country, I'm a little bit rock-and-rock. You flirt with that and maintain it as much as you can. But how many years do you want to drag the damn thing out?"

Next season, Boreanaz will have a greater say in these matters: he'll carry a producing credit in addition to his starring role. And though he has some ambitious ideas — he'd love to see James Garner guest-star as Booth's grandfather, for one — he'd rather see Booth and Brennan continue their gradual evolution as characters than make drastic changes just to shake things up.

"I'm all about the steady climb," Boreanaz says. "I'm not a fast sprinter. I'm a marathon guy."



# Mary McDonnell

BY ANN FARMER

MARY MCDONNELL GOT HANDED AN ASTRONOMICAL acting order on Sci-Fi Channel's popular series *Battlestar Galactica*, which focuses on a beleaguered colony of people in outer space who are fighting intelligent robots for survival. The executive producers asked McDonnell to portray Laura Roslin, the warm, empathetic and accessible colonial secretary of education. They also asked her to play Roslin as the ascending president who leads with an unapologetic, stoic and authoritative strength.

"I guess you could say that Mary McDonnell's achievement in the show is the most profound," says executive producer David Eick. "Because she had to sell you that she was one person. Then, in the course of the story, convince you that there was much more to her." Furthermore, McDonnell had to persuade viewers that her character wasn't turning loony when Roslin started experiencing prophetic visions. "Honestly, in any other actor's hands, I believe we might have made the character look silly," says Eick.

It certainly helps that McDonnell seems to harbor no doubts about the emotional and psychological life of her character. "Do I believe that she saw something very real?" she reiterates, when asked about Roslin's visioning. "I do. I do indeed." She adds, "One of the beautiful things about working in the realm of science fiction is that those ideas can be realized."

McDonnell's ability to wholeheartedly embrace her roles seems to have begun with her very first part. Years ago, in her college's production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, she played Mercy Lewis, the servant girl who cries out during a witch hunt trial that she is being attacked by a supernatural yellow bird. "And I did see the yellow bird," McDonnell says, laughing. "The experience of actualizing another human being through my own spirit was exhilarating."

Since then, her numerous stage and screen performances have routinely achieved critical acclaim. Twice she's received Oscar nominations — for portraying Stans with Fist, the white woman raised by Sioux Indians in *Dances with Wolves*, and for playing a paraplegic soap star in *Passion Fish*. She was also nominated for a Primetime Emmy for her guest appearance in NBC's *ER*.

*Battlestar* marks the first time in her career that she's played a television character for three seasons, with a fourth on the way. "I've truly fallen in love with that process of playing an ongoing character," McDonnell says.

Still, she admits to being a bit puzzled when the pilot script arrived four years ago in the middle of lunch. She hadn't before worked in the sci-fi genre. "But I read it that night. And I immediately understood," says the fifty-five-year-old, who came of age in the '60s when women were largely stymied from political leadership roles. "What hooked me was the relevancy of the piece and the opportunity to play a middle-aged woman who's forced by circumstances into discovering her potential power."

Last season, with Roslin's cancer in remission, McDonnell played her with more vitality than previously. "I made her a little more quick to the draw than I'd allowed her to be," explaining that while Roslin's cancer had returned by the final episode, McDonnell has no intention of relinquishing her character's newly found confidence. "Right or wrong, she did what she thought was right and she didn't ask for anyone's permission. And I like that."

McDonnell's teenage children have also noticed her burgeoning attitude, saluting her at times when she slips into character and gets a little too bossy with them. "They say, 'Yes, Madam President,' or 'Excuse me, Madam President,'" she chuckles. "I think Roslin was always in me. But I think she's just coming out more. It's like letting the cat out of the bag."

ten out of ten



ten out of ten



BY BRUCE FRETTS

# Kyle

KYLE CHANDLER IS BLOWING UP.

No, we're not talking about his Emmy-nominated role last year as an ill-fated bomb-squad specialist on *Grey's Anatomy*, although that did detonate quite a reaction ("I got so many phone calls from my friends saying, 'Oh my God, I can't believe you blew up!'" Chandler recalls).

What's really causing the forty-one-year-old actor's career to explode is his winning performance as high-school football coach Eric Taylor on NBC's *Friday Night Lights*.

When Chandler first read for the role, creator Peter Berg — who'd directed Billy Bob Thornton in the film that inspired the series — "didn't think I was quite right," Chandler says. "He thought I might have been too young for it." But Chandler's aw-shucks charm soon changed Berg's mind.

"It was one of those deals where you go in and you're just as honest and straightforward as you can be," Chandler says. "I was just being myself, and it all worked out."

Chandler's past makes him well equipped for the part. He played high-school football in Lawrenceville, Georgia, a town even tinier than *FNL*'s Dillon, Texas.

"I was the star tackling dummy," he jokes. "I walked on first year as a short, fat kid. The next year I grew tall and skinny, and I got the hell beat out of me again."

A few years later, at the University of Georgia, he discovered a more pleasurable pastime: acting. He landed a role in Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors*, and "once that applause struck up — I hadn't really heard that before, and I liked it."

Since then, his career has been virtually error-free. Signed by ABC while still in college, Chandler has worked steadily in prime-time dramas (*Homefront*, *Early Edition*) and big-screen blockbusters (*King Kong* and Berg's upcoming counter-terrorist thriller, *The Kingdom*). With *Grey's* and *FNL*, Chandler has tackled meatier, more mature roles with gusto.

"My wife [TV writer Katherine Kyl] told me ten years ago, 'Just wait until you get to be forty or forty-five — you're going to have so many different opportunities,'" Chandler recalls. "Those would be the times when I was not working. I'd be out in the yard trying to kill a gopher or something. But she was right."

As Coach Taylor, Chandler is a father figure not only to his players but also to his teen daughter, played by Aimee Teegarden. "I have two kids, and I've been married for eleven years, but I haven't had a chance to play a father or a husband like this," he says. "I've got a large source of information to draw on, so it's really quite fun."

Alongside Connie Britton (who also played the coach's wife in the *FNL* movie), Chandler has created one of TV's most believably loving marriages. "She's just really good people, and she's a good actress as well," he raves of Britton. "So it all blends together to form the perfect storm, if you will."

Chandler enjoyed an equally potent chemistry with Ellen Pompeo on *Grey's*, and Primetime Emmy voters recognized him with a nomination as outstanding guest actor in a drama series.

"I was completely shocked," he says. "Everything good that happens to me in life like that I just consider extra icing on the cake."

But since he'd already scored the lead in *FNL* when the nominees were announced, "I haven't been able to test exactly what an Emmy nomination might get you around this town," he says with a laugh. "I wish I had a little laminated card — I could show it off and see what people said."

Just imagine what they'll say if he wins one.

BY REBECCA DANA

# Anne

ANNE HECHÉ SPENT FOUR YEARS SEARCHING FOR THE PERFECT TELEVISION PROJECT before she heard about *Men in Trees*, a relationship drama eerily well-suited to her particular talents — including her special gift for pratfalling on ice.

The ABC show, created by Emmy-winning *Sex and the City* writer-producer Jenny Bicks, is about a writer of best-selling relationship guides who discovers, in the series premiere, that her picture-perfect fiancé is really a philandering cad. By the end of the first hour, Heché's reedy and resilient Marin Frist has dusted herself off and gone in search of a simpler life in — where else? — Alaska.

*Men in Trees* may sound familiar — *Ally McBeal* meets *Northern Exposure* — but this is no *Sex and the Frozen Tundra*. The uniqueness of the show, and the reason it's developed a following among critics and viewers, has a lot to do with Heché's nuanced portrayal of Marin, an essentially optimistic modern woman with bad luck and perfect hair.

The part is a natural fit for Heché, who has built her career playing tough but vulnerable (yet quirky) leading ladies: from her film roles — as Winifred Ames in 1997's *Wag the Dog* and in the classic role of Marion Crane in the 1998 remake of *Psycho* — to her theatrical work to her long list of TV parts — on *Everwood*, *Ellen*, *Nip/Tuck* and, of course, as the inimitable Melanie West on *Ally McBeal*. Indeed, Heché, who won a Daytime Emmy in 1991 for her work on *Another World*, seems to have spent much of her professional — and personal — life preparing for the role of Marin.

"All the things in my life I have done and tried provide me with the experience I use to play Marin," Heché says. She describes the character as one of ABC's lineup of "powerhouse women who are loving and conscious and funny and ridiculous — all of these things. They love fashion, they're complex. The fact that people are responding so well to it, it's great. We want to speak to women. We want to give them a reflection of who they are."

The role appealed to Heché for several reasons, not least because it meant an extended stay for the actress and her son Homer in Vancouver, which plays home to Elmo, the far-flung Alaskan village where much of the show is set. "I knew that I wanted to do a character that would be able to suit my personality," the actress says by telephone, on the first day of hiatus after filming twenty-two episodes without a break.

ABC had just told Heché and her fellow actors that the network was bringing *Men in Trees* back for a second season. Relieved by the knowledge that Marin's life, love and occasional heartbreak will go on, Heché and Homer were enjoying a sunny day in Canada. "I've always been a chameleon," she says. "I knew that if I did TV, I'd be with that character for a long time. I wanted to be able to do a role that really connected with my spirit."

"Anne brings such a great strength to the character," says Bicks, who executive produces the show with James Mangold and Cathy Konrad. "But she knows how to play this girl who has learning to do."

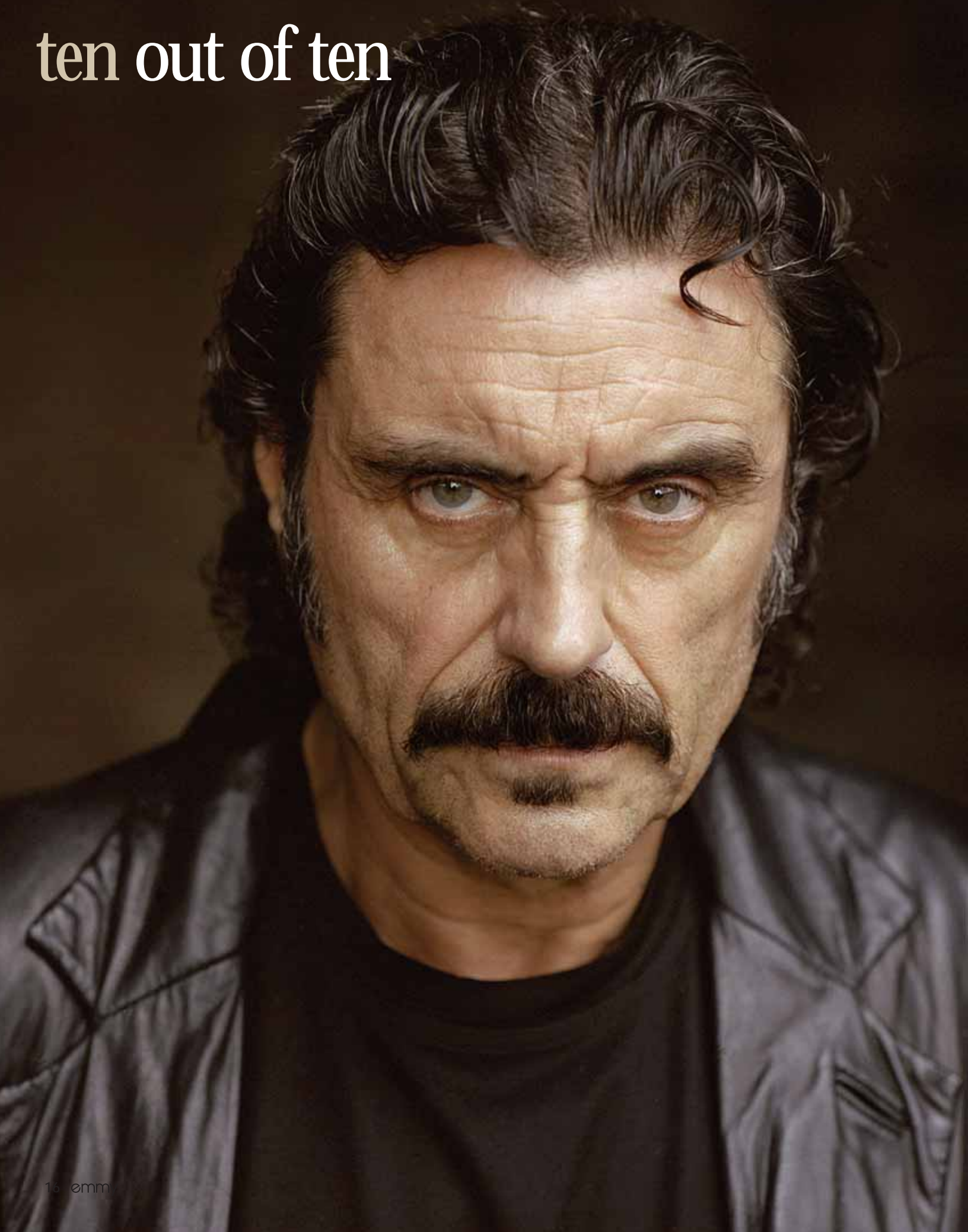
Bicks says she cast Heché for her facility with both comedy and drama. Her ethereal, beachcomber beauty was a plus, and the gift for pratfalling an unexpected bonus.

"I'm always impressed by what she can do physically," Bicks says. Still, she is trying to avoid writing in too much physical comedy, lest her star end up bruised after each day of filming. But, Bicks admits, the appeal is tough to deny: "What can I say? She falls very nice on the ice."

ten out of ten



ten out of ten



# Ian

BY KATHLEEN O'STEEN

WHEN IT WAS FIRST SUGGESTED TO DAVID MILCH, CREATOR OF HBO'S *DEADWOOD*, that he should cast the very British Ian McShane as the western's murderous Al Swearengen — a corrupt saloon owner whose *f*-word-infused volleys rip across the landscape like bullets from a Gatling gun — Milch recoiled.

"I think, physically, I was the last person David wanted," McShane says with a chuckle. "He was looking for a brute, not an Englishman. He said 'No, no, that's *not* the kind of actor I want.'"

Of course, Milch did cast McShane, and the actor took to the part with gun-slinging gusto. *New York* magazine called McShane the "dirty soul of *Deadwood*," while *Slant* declared: "It goes without saying that McShane continues to astound week to week."

The show wrapped its third and final season last summer, but after extended negotiations, plans are afoot to shoot two two-hour telefilms this summer to tie up the story. That means McShane will be back at the Gem Saloon, killing and pimping with aplomb.

"I had this instant rapport with the character," McShane says, "and with David. I like his dialogue."

He was also intrigued with the way Milch challenged his actors, with episodes like the ones in which Swearengen, dying from a urinary tract infection and kidney stones (this is South Dakota in the 1870s, after all), suffers a disabling stroke. He ultimately survives, but must hide his impairments for fear of being killed.

"This gave Swearengen a whole different, sympathetic passage," McShane says. "And, for once, I didn't have to sit up at night learning soliloquies."

It's not a complete surprise that Milch balked at casting McShane in his down-and-dirty western, given the actor's pedigree as an English hunk.

In the long-running BBC series *Lovejoy*, seen in the U.S. on A&E, he starred as the dashing antiques dealer. But many Americans got their first glimpse of the suave McShane in the 1966 feature *If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium*: he was the charming tour guide who wooed Suzanne Pleshette. Over the years his credits have run the gamut, from Judas in the British miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth* to Teddy Bass, a gangland boss in the 2000 feature *Sexy Beast*.

The son of a professional soccer player (Harry McShane was a forward for Manchester United) and TK mother, McShane says he was always destined to act. "A teacher put me up for [Britain's] National Youth Theatre at age fifteen, and my parents never said a word against it," he says. And they remain proud of their only son's accomplishments — with one disclaimer.

"My mother was horrified the first time she saw *Deadwood*," McShane admits. "She said, 'Ian, do you really have to say all those terrible things?' I said, 'Yes, Mom, that's what pays the rent.'"

These days the actor remains busy with stage commitments (he'll star on Broadway in a remake of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*) and voiceover work (he voiced Captain Hook in the upcoming *Shrek The Third* and the snow leopard, Tai Lung, in *Kung Fu Panda*, due out next year). He's also one of the stars of an upcoming Fox feature, *The Dark Is Rising*, a time-travel adventure about a boy who fights forces of evil.

And, if the fates allow, he'll soon be back as one of *Deadwood's* deadliest founding fathers. "David [Milch] creates an atmosphere for work that is quite extraordinary," McShane says. "He's a professor of literature, and what he writes is pretty profound."

And profane. Speaking of which, does McShane ever add an extra *f*-word, possibly in the heat of the moment? "Absolutely not," he says. "Every swear word is carefully calibrated for rhythm and effect. If you put one in the wrong place, David will know."



# Jeanne

BY KATHLEEN O'STEEN

HERE'S THE SCENE: BARB HENRICKSON'S HUSBAND, BILL, PASSIONATELY KISSES another woman right in front of her. What does she do? Well, she might smile sweetly, wish him a good day, then head off to work.

That kind of reaction is a challenge for actress Jeanne Tripplehorn, the gorgeous, brown-eyed Oklahoma native. On HBO's polygamy drama, *Big Love*, she plays the quietly nurturing, yet steely cored Utah wife and mother who has her hands full with three children — and two younger “sister wives.”

“I've had quite a journey with this character,” Tripplehorn says of Barb, wife number one in the household where the husband, played by Bill Paxton, calls the shots.

“In my heart and soul, there are these constant questions. How does one react in these situations without exploding from jealousy? Everything about Barb's relationship with her husband goes against what I feel. It's all been very frustrating.”

With the show heading into its second season, the exasperation continues. “Most roles have something that you can use from your past, but I've never shared a relationship,” she says. “Barb is not someone who comes naturally to me.”

Tripplehorn blazed into the public eye fifteen years ago in *Basic Instinct*. She played a psychologist whose scorching sex scene with Michael Douglas, a detective on the trail of killer Sharon Stone, is one of the film's many memorable moments. In retrospect, Tripplehorn says she regrets that *Instinct* is what put her on the map.

“That movie was such a phenomenal success — it was overwhelming. I wish my career would instead have had a slow, steady rise. I had just started acting when I got that role. After that, with the roles I was offered, it was like a minefield. Suddenly I felt directors weren't taking me seriously.”

It was a bit of a cruel conundrum for a young woman who had been taken quite seriously in Tulsa, her hometown. The daughter of guitarist Tom Tripplehorn, who played with Gary Lewis & The Playboys, the actress says she saw very little of the limelight as a youngster; she had a middle-class upbringing, raised by a single mom. “While I had this father who was a musician, he wasn't a guiding force in my life.”

Tripplehorn's mother and grandmother recognized her love of performing and encouraged it. But on the way to acting, she made a detour to radio. As a teen, she recalls, “I started calling the local radio station and requesting songs in different voices. The disc jockey eventually figured out that they all were the same person.” She studied for an FCC license so she could work as a deejay, but the license requirement was dropped as she prepared to take the test.

Just sixteen, she got her deejay gig at Tulsa's KMOD. That led to work at a local television station, cohosting comedic shorts during the Saturday night movie, and then to a local show of her own, a comedy-and-music half hour that ran on an ABC affiliate.

“At one point,” she says, “I would wake up at 4 a.m., do my morning radio show from 6 to 10 a.m., then I'd be writing comedy bits to use on the television show on the weekend. I was barely twenty years old.”

Eventually Tripplehorn, again encouraged by her mom, decided to pursue acting. “She was really hoping I wouldn't be a deejay all my life.” The budding thespian auditioned at Juilliard and, not surprisingly, was accepted.

Today she's married and the mother of August, age four. And things couldn't be better. “I'm finally getting to tackle a woman who is complex,” she says of *Big Love's* Barb. “I'm an actor in my forties, and I'm doing the best work I've ever done.”



ten out of ten

ten out of ten



BY ANN FARMER

# Skeet

WHEN SKEET ULRICH WAS SIX, HE EXPERIENCED A MAJOR TRAUMA. He says his father kidnapped him and his older brother while his mother was at work. He recalls being spirited away in a U-Haul and living with his dad for the next several years in various places on the East Coast until his father unexpectedly returned them one day to their mother.

Ulrich was too young to understand why he was separated from his mom. But he recalls the longing he felt for her. "I remember missing her every day," he says, adding that his father dropped out of his life afterwards. With the exception of a call Ulrich received from him on his twenty-seventh birthday, complimenting him on his career success, Ulrich remains estranged from him. "It's made me want to be a great dad," he says, referring to his devotion to his six-year-old twins.

Considering what he went through, it's not surprising that Ulrich came up with the Jake Green back story that he did. In the last few riveting episodes this past season of CBS's apocalyptic drama series, *Jericho*, viewers got to glimpse into the murky past that is haunting Ulrich's character, Jake. The prodigal son of the local sheriff and unlikely hero of the small Kansas town, Jake keeps rising above his personal demons to help others survive the aftermath of an unexplained nuclear explosion.

Viewers learned that Jake is tormented by memories of killing a girl while furtively embroiled in a war in the Middle East. There are hints of other shameful past events. It all firmly resides on Ulrich, who not only shoulders Jake's guilt; he took a decisive part in creating his character's history.

"It was like doing a crossword puzzle," says Ulrich, describing how he helped fill in the blanks with the pivotal details that the executive producers agreed could sustain a long story arc. "It's got to be the worst thing in the world to lose a child," he adds.

When it came time to perform the scene in which Jake reveals his gnawing secret to his dad, Ulrich experienced a catharsis. "When you connect, it sends chills up the spine. There is no faking it. You know when you're feeling the truth. This is why we actors do what we do. It's to let the stuff out."

"He brought a depth to the story," says executive producer Carol Barbee, describing Ulrich as a methodical and meticulous actor, determined to make his flawed character as real as possible. "Nothing gets by him," she says, describing how Ulrich has tweaked a lot of Jake's dialogue so that it better resonates with his gut instincts. "It's the little things that help carry emotions," Ulrich adds.

In fact, production got held up while shooting the final episode as Ulrich grappled with one scene. "It was the most agitated I'd ever seen him," says Barbee, who took him aside to work it out.

"He was feeling that these were not the thoughts that Jake would have," recalling the scene in which Jake has to respond to his "good" brother's anguished admission of an affair. Barbee was sufficiently swayed to rewrite it. "It turned into such a quiet, intimate and cool scene," she says.

Ulrich, who remains extremely close to his real brother, starred several years ago in the short-lived supernatural drama, *Miracles*. And he's had memorable performances in a number of TV movies and films including *Scream*, *As Good As It Gets* and *The Newton Boys*. But nothing has come close to the acclaim he's receiving for Jake Green.

"He's awesome," says Barbee, who believes that Ulrich has successfully imbued Jake with some of his own personality traits, including Ulrich's aura of vulnerability. "I think he's guarded," says Barbee. "That's very attractive about him. And I think he's definitely brought that to Jake."