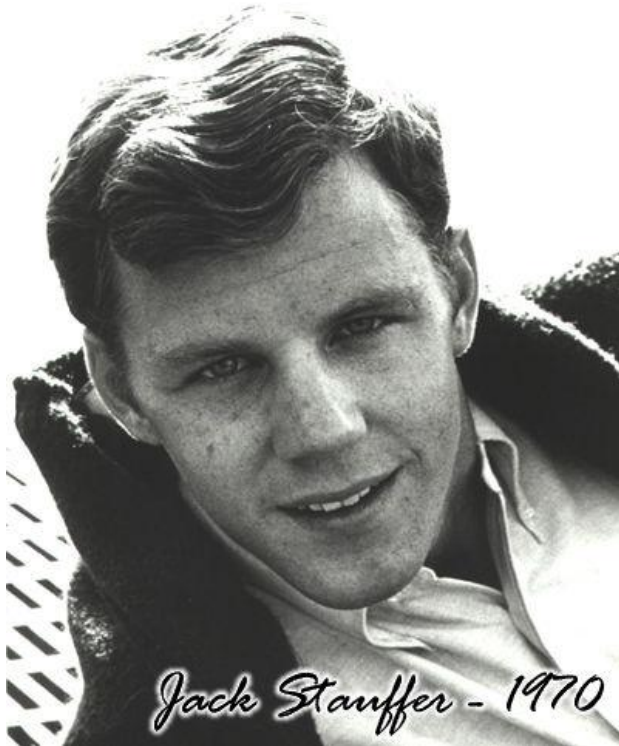


Looking Back

At the grand old age of 62 I find myself often looking back at my life and career and wondering "what if?" Was I successful, could I have done things differently? If I had the chance to do it all over, what would I change?



I have often been asked what prompted me to become an actor. The best way for me to answer that is to say I have always had the urge, need, instinct to perform, to be out front, show off, etc. I am not sure this was a good trait. I only know it was a driving passion for me. How do you justify a need to go through life pretending to be someone else? I think the term paranoid schizophrenia is often associated with this behavior. Regardless, I vividly remember having an elaborate fantasy life as a child, and I could "role play" for hours on end. I was not a particularly good student in school, because I was more comfortable outside the box so to speak than I was learning and reciting information. I was also associated with the "Biz" throughout my childhood as my father was a successful radio and early TV producer and our house was always full of TV and film personalities.

When I graduated from high school in 1964, I was accepted to Northwestern University and enrolled in their theatre department. It was during this period that my father and I became almost totally estranged. He refused to allow me to stay in the theatre department and insisted I get a more general liberal arts education so I would be more prepared to do something with my life if I fell flat on my face as an actor. I think my father's intentions were sound in that he knew the perils of a life in show business, but he never accepted my passion for the craft. In actuality, my father and I were never close. He was a stern, uncompromising, man. Most of my childhood memories of him consisted of me being punished for some infraction or another. I always had the feeling that whatever I did was wrong. Several years after his death my mother told me an enlightening story. It was between my junior and senior year at Northwestern. I spent the summer portraying Harold Hill (a role I did four more times over the years) in a youth production of Music Man. My parents attended a performance and after a big number in the first act my father leaned over and whispered "I'll be damned. He really is good." to my mother. I wish he had said it to me. Anyway, the schism between us never healed completely even after I was a successful actor.

When I graduated from Northwestern in 1968 I arrived home only to be told that I was now on my own and if I wanted to act I should find a place to live in New York and sink or swim. So I did. I lived with a college chum in a one room studio apartment and started pounding the pavement. What exciting times they were. I learned to make innumerable variations of spaghetti because that was all the food budget would allow. I made friends with several other starving actors and we christened ourselves the "2nd.actors" because we would sneak into Broadway shows with the crowd at intermission. We couldn't afford to buy tickets. To this day there are quite a few plays that I have never seen the first act of.

I have always believed that any success in life comes partly because of talent and mostly because of luck – or having a really big "in" with the right people. Shortly after I moved to the city I met and fell in love with a young actress named Renne Jarrett. Renne had been a very successful child actress and was doing well as an ingénue.

Renne's mother was an agent . She agreed to handle me, initially because I was dating her daughter. This allowed me to get auditions. Once I got in the door I started to get hired. I spent a season on tour with "Room Service" and did commercials. Let me say something about commercials and to anyone who thinks doing commercials is unworthy of a legitimate actor. They pay the bills baby!! There are many Emmy, Tony, and Oscar winners who not only began their careers doing commercials but after becoming stars, signed lucrative contracts as spokespersons for products. Between 1968 and 2000 when I left Los Angeles, I was in approximately 250 commercials. In fact most of the money I made in my career came from commercials.

My big break came in 1969 when I auditioned for a brand new soap opera and in January of 1970 I created the role of Chuck Tyler on the new ABC show "All My Children". With me in the original cast were Susan Lucci, who made a career of portraying Erika Cane and became the highest paying actress in the history of daytime television, Karen Gorney, who went on to appear opposite John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever", and Richard Hatch, who went on to "Streets of San Francisco" and "Battlestar Gallactica". Richard and I were complete opposites, yet we became close friends. Our paths crossed many times over the years. I did an episode of "Streets" with him and of course joined him when I became Bojay on Battlestar. When Richard embarked on his attempt to get Battlestar remade in the late 90's, I joined him, and we spent several years together in this quest.



I spent almost four years on All My Children. I loved every minute of it. I had a job. Not just a day job or a week job – but a full time gig. You can't imagine how important and reassuring this was. An actor's life is unlike any other because you never know where or when your next job is coming. There is no tenure for an actor, no climbing the corporate ladder, no job security. You are only as good as your last performance. Consequently, an actor's life revolves around incredible highs and lows. When you are out of work you are nothing, dirt, pond scum. Then you get an audition. The audition process in itself is completely degrading because in the initial stages you aren't even auditioning for the decision makers. Early auditions are invariably in front of an assistant casting director who is screening talent and deciding which ones move on. Your hopes and dreams are in the hands of somebody's nephew or niece who has the power to deny you access to the director or producer whose job is to hire you. Get thrown out at the first level a few times and see what it does to your disposition. Talk about shattered ego. No wonder actors are squirrely. It's because the rejection is so personal. If your profession is selling cars or real estate, if a client doesn't want to

buy your product it is a reflection of the product not you. As an actor, you are the product. You are selling yourself, your ability, and your dreams. When you are rejected you are being told that you personally are not worthy. I know you aren't supposed to think this way, and intellectually I knew most of the time I was rejected because I was not big enough, they wanted an ethnic look, they wanted someone older, a myriad of reasons. So why did it hurt so much? I always felt that I had been rejected personally. I felt that way in 1968. I feel that way today. Just recently, I auditioned for a big production of "Guys and Dolls". I had not auditioned in several years as I have been mostly directing since 2000. I knew the show would be cast young. I knew I was probably too old. Yet I still went in thinking "hey, I can play that role. They can play that role a little older." So I prepared. I walked in the door, got exactly five seconds into the audition and heard, "THANK YEW!" Thank you, fricken thank you, after five seconds? And I drove an hour and a half each way for this crap. I was PISSED!!! I was almost an hour back down the road before I could laugh because all I could think about was that it hurt just as bad in 2007 as it did in 1977. In anything you do you have to believe you are good enough. It's called ego. An actor has to have a big ego just to survive. The trick is to keep it in perspective, especially if you are lucky enough to get the job. Now you are worthy. You are hired. They give you a dressing room or a trailer. Everybody knows your name. You are part of the elite community of working performers. You are in heaven. You can't wait to jump out of bed in the morning and go to the studio, location, or theatre. You rehearse, you work hard, you perform, and the finished product whether on stage or on film is the

result of your effort. Also, the slob who three weeks previously said you weren't good enough is now fawning over you trying to do lunch. It takes an incredible stable individual to resist telling said person to go jump in the lake. AND – as we have previously mentioned – most actors aren't the most stable, reasonable, well-put-together individuals in the joint. But for that week, month, even two days - You are so HIGH - - Then the job is over, the show closes. You are right back to the bottom of the pile again.

Anyway, the best thing about "All My Children" was that it was a full time, fifty-two week a year job. Every day we learned, rehearsed, and performed thirty five page scripts. I was in heaven. I truly believe to this day the happiest time of my life was the four years I spent on that show. I was crazy and stupid to leave it. So why did I? It is a long story but I'll try to give you the condensed version. Renne and I had an on again off again romance because she was pretty ensconced on the west coast and I was in New York. She was a hot property of Columbia TV and considered one of the hot up and coming young actresses. In 1971 Renne came to New York to visit family and we ran into each other. Everything rekindled and we decided to get married. Renne relocated back to New York – much to the dismay of Columbia TV – and she immediately was cast and became one of the stars one of "Another World". We were married in late 1971. It was a big whoop-de-doo in New York and all the daytime magazines and the soap fans were all outside the church. Life was good – sort of – because Columbia was after Renne to come back to the west Coast. I knew Renne wanted to go back and when we got married I told her I would leave "All My Children" after my contract was up and we would relocate to the west coast. SO - -when the fateful day arrived, I told the producers that I would not be renewing my contract. This was all fine and dandy until the producers took Renne and me to dinner and not only offered to double my salary but to bring Renne onto "All My Children" and develop a whole story line around us. Not being stupid, I quickly did the math and realized that my new yearly salary would be in excess of \$55,000 and Renne would be getting the same. That was \$110,000 a year in 1974 dollars for a young couple guaranteed. What we would have made additionally in commercials, public appearances, whatever, was gravy. I also had a deep fear of losing my full time employment status. Renne and I talked, I cajoled, we argued. The image that still lives in my memory today is Renne curled into a corner, her knees drawn into her chest, sobbing and screaming, "YOU PROMISED!!!" So I turned it all down. Over the years I have been asked many times if I could undo one decision in my life, which one would it be. It would be that one.

Now lest you think I protest too much. Columbia TV who wanted Renne on the west coast and not yours truly, who was the player to be named later in the trade, was incredibly generous, and encouraging to me. In fact they actually put me to work before Renne. Over the years I did many shows for Columbia, including pilots for my own series twice. I am eternally grateful to them.

I won't go into my years on the west coast. Suffice to say that I enjoyed a reasonably successful career as a working actor. I worked with some incredible actors and directors. There were great locations and some pretty funny stories that I have told many times over the years. Some of my favorites are : The David Jansen stories, the Jack Lord Stories, the Horse story, The Doberman's Story, and others. They have been documented and you can find them on the site. Over the years I think I made sixty or so guest appearances on different prime time shows, mini-series, and movies of the week. I was never a big star. I enjoyed the highs when they came and endured the far more frequent lows. I had a few shots at the big time when I was hired to do pilots for my own show. None of the series were picked up. If you want to see a list of credits, you can go to the resume section on the site here or look my name up in IMDB.com. Renne and I were married for seven years and then divorced. You can bet I was even sorrier I left "All My Children" at that point in my life. I need to say I never begrudged Renne for anything, and we have remained good friends to this day. We had a son, Drew, who is now 32 is a big wig at Electronic Arts. I have always felt we need to be happy with ourselves in life. Renne was not happy with me. She did find happiness when she met and married a successful TV director. They have been together twenty six years. Interestingly, when Renne discovered she was financially stable, she never acted again. Kinda makes you wonder. I, being a complete whore worked for Renne's husband many times. And yes, I did find my true soul mate. I was in San Francisco visiting friends one weekend in 1980 and picked up this cute little Berkeley coed named Katy in a bar. One thing led to another. We have been together for twenty eight years and have two great kids.

Life went on and I inevitably got older. The BIZ also changed dramatically. I came along towards the end of the studio system. Most of the TV shows were produced by the studios – Columbia, Warner, Universal, Quinn Martin, etc.

Also, most shows in those days were star driven and each weekly episode had a certain amount of guest actors. Since I was known by the casting department of these studios, I knew the casting directors for many shows. When parts came up that I was right for I would be called in to audition. Usually I would be in competition with five or six other actors. I got some shows. I didn't get some shows. The important thing was that I was in the ball game. Then everything changed. The studios were no longer the producers. Many of the new shows had their own production companies and merely rented space at the studios. Universal or Columbia shows became David Kelly or Stephen Botchko, to name a couple, shows. These people formed their own companies and employed personal friends in many capacities – especially as actors. Look at some of these shows. You see the same actors over and over. Unfortunately I didn't know these people and I began to work less and less. The Universal and Columbia casting departments where I knew everyone became a thing of the past. I found it increasingly difficult to get in front of these new casting people who were half my age. These new shows also featured large ensemble casts. Shows like *Dynasty*, *Falcon's Crest*, *Hill Street Blues*, *L.A. Law*, *Ally McBeal*, *ER*, etc. became the staple of prime time television. There was very little work for guest actors because of these large casts and the story lines around them. There was also a lot of griping from the resident actors over not getting enough to do to ensure even less guest work. When I did "Lois and Clark" the show's producer called me in after I had finished filming to thank me for my work. The Lois and Clark offices were in the old Columbia TV building on the Burbank Studios lot. Right next door to the Lois and Clark offices were the ER offices. I thanked the producer and immediately asked him if he would walk me next door to the ER people and tell them how good I was because I could not get an audition with them. He told me he didn't know the people next door. It was unbelievable.

So what happened to people like me. Frankly it became a slow death spiral. There is a wonderful old axiom that goes like this: Who the hell is Jack Stauffer? Get me Jack Stauffer. Get me a younger Jack Stauffer. Whatever happened to Jack Stauffer. Who the hell is Jack Stauffer? Truer words were never spoken. An elderly very distinguished gentleman made an appointment one day with my commercial agents. He was interested in doing voice work. I was actually there when he walked in. He introduced himself to the receptionist who summoned a very young assistant agent in training. This young lady escorted the gentleman to a desk and proceeded to "ask him what he had done". He was charming and gracious and said he had had a few minor roles over the years. The young lady then told him she would keep his name on file and if an opportunity arose she might give him a call. She then dismissed him. He regally walked out of the office. I looked at this girl who had been in the business maybe six months and asked her if she had the remotest clue as to who she had been talking to. She did not. The elderly gentleman was Gregory Peck.

When I was reasonably successful, I had good representation who opened doors, got me auditions, etc. I also knew the casting people at the studios. As I previously mentioned many of these casting people were now gone. I had also been around forever and was increasingly considered as old hat. I had also done pilots for my own series on three occasions that were not picked up. In any business when a project fails somebody always takes the blame. Well, in TV when everybody passes the buck, the easiest person to blame is the actor. Hell, I didn't think it was my fault. All I did was do what the director told me. But, increasingly I lost out on many auditions because new young casting people wanted to see new young faces. Were these new people better than me, I don't think so. They were just fresher. So as I became less desirable as an actor I lost my good representation. Nothing personal, Jack. You know it's just business. Funny how that argument was never accepted when the shoe was on the other foot – but that's another story. Also because of the scarcity of jobs, many actors who were much higher on the "recognizability" list than I was, started auditioning for and accepting jobs that previously they never would have considered. Big name movie personalities and former stars of long running TV series were now doing episodic TV for a lot less money. On one of the last auditions I went on for a minor one day role that at one point in my life I would never have considered, I ran into an actor who had not only had his own TV series but had starred in several very successful motion pictures. I had known him for years so I asked him what the hell he was doing auditioning for a day part that was only paying scale. He told me he needed to do it to qualify for his SAG insurance. I knew then it was time to leave.



As I have been telling you, for many years I made my living in television. What I longed to do was return to my theatre roots. It is very difficult to be a TV or film actor and a theatre actor at the same time. It actually is more a question of priorities. Doing TV and film work is a lot more lucrative than stage work. Do a guest episode on a successful show and you might pick up \$3,500 for the week. Make a successful commercial and you can pick up several thousand dollars in residuals. The largest sum I ever earned from one job was from a commercial that took me about four hours to shoot. The product was Sure deodorant. I went to Riviera golf course in Santa Monica early in the morning. For three hours I whacked balls out of a sand trap and waved my arms over my head. When I was dismissed at 11:00 AM I spent the rest of the day playing golf on one of the most prestigious courses on the west coast. That little vignette of me in the sand trap was used in eight or ten Sure spots over a period of four years. I made over \$100,000 in residuals. Tough life I know.

In theatre, unless you are on Broadway the pay scale is much smaller. You are lucky to make \$750 a week and many times you don't get paid at all. A TV gig is also much more immediate. You get a call to audition for a show on a Tuesday, get called back on Thursday, and shoot the following week. A theatre commitment is much longer. Even a limited run in regional or local theatre requires anywhere from four to eight weeks of rehearsal and then a three week to three month run. There is also the question of commitment. I have always believed once you accept a role in a play you are obligated to fulfill that commitment. It is very risky to accept a TV or film role if you are in a theatrical production. Murphy's Law will undoubtedly rear its ugly head. You are on the set. The director assures you will be out by 5PM. Something will absolutely go wrong. Production will grind to a halt. Now its 8 o'clock and you are supposed to be on stage. Unfortunately many actors audition for and accept roles in plays only to bail on the production when a better TV or film offer comes along. I have never done this. To me it is a reflection of your integrity as an actor and a person. If you accept a job, you don't take another one till the first one is over.

I returned to the stage in 1992. What I discovered almost immediately was how much I missed and loved the theatre. Theatre is a completely different approach to acting and performing. I think the best way to describe it is that there is an emphasis on immediacy in film acting and an emphasis on longevity in stage acting. You get a script. It can be for a play or for a TV episode. Naturally, there is a beginning, middle, and end. The plot twists and turns. Your character has certain traits that are introduced and evolve as the plot goes along. Now production begins. In theatre you begin rehearsal and approach a role at the beginning and work towards the end. As each scene goes by your character can evolve logically. You see how other actors react to you. You work out sequences throughout the rehearsal process so that by the time the show opens you have a good grasp of not only your character but all the characters who are involved with you from beginning to end.

In film, most of the time you will not shoot in continuity. You will shoot according to location of the scenes. For instance, in the beginning of the story you are portrayed as a loving father and husband in the family living room. Much later in the plot in that same living room you are revealed as the sadistic killer. In film you will shoot both those scenes the same day because that is where the production crew is. It makes no sense to go on location to a home for a scene in the beginning of the show and then have to go back for the hair raising finale three weeks later. It is cost prohibitive. So every scene at that house is shot at the same time. I always found this more difficult as an actor, especially if you are doing these scenes early in the production schedule. From reading the script I know what has supposedly happened between the first and last scenes but I have no sense memory because I have not filmed the scenes in the middle. Additionally, there are many ways to interpret any given situation and sometimes, after you have filmed the end, when you and your fellow actors subsequently film middle scenes, you discover that the choices

you made for the finale back in week one aren't as good as the choices you might make now. Many times over the years I have wanted to go back and reshoot scenes because of something I discovered afterwards.

Acting for film is all about getting the performance right one time. That is why a good actor and director will shoot a scene over and over until both are satisfied. However, once the scene is finished, you never go back to it again. The performance is frozen for all time. Acting for theatre is all about being able to recreate the performance every night. I have always preferred the latter. It is probably selfish but it is great fun to go out on a stage and reel an audience in every night. It is thrilling, exhilarating, exhausting, and I love it. I have never gotten tired of it. Whether a powerful drama or a big musical every time the curtain goes up I embark on another great adventure. I get to act, sing or dance for a new audience every night. That's another big advantage to live theatre. Your audience is right in front of you. You get their feedback every night. There is nothing more gratifying than to watch an audience rise to its feet during a curtain call. Remember that ego we talked about earlier. Of course I have also watched audiences walk out at intermission.

The vast majority of shows I did after returning to stage work were musicals. In the beginning it was a risky venture because I had not sung on stage in almost thirty years. I remember being more terrified than I had ever been doing TV work. I was absolutely sure I was going to stink. The director was a wonderful friend who wanted me for Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls*. When she made me the offer I was flabbergasted. I told her maybe I could fake my way through *Luck Be A Lady* but no way could I croon *I've Never Been In Love Before*. That song is a genuine number 1 Frank Loesser ballad. Her reaction was that; a: she was more interested in the role as an acting part; b: she was sure I could sing it well enough and; c: I was stagnant and comfortable doing the same old TV character and it would be a good challenge to see if I could stretch myself in a new direction. So I agreed and for the entire rehearsal process I was worse than lousy. Everything I knew about acting – I forgot. I lacked confidence and instead of exploring my potential and taking chances, I became a turtle and just tried not to screw it up. Lin White, the director, kept after me in the most positive way. She would not let me quit. She kept telling me I was improving when it was painfully obvious to the rest of the cast – all seasoned musical theatre professionals – that I was going to be the iceberg that sunk this ship. Well I didn't – sink the ship that is – although I almost missed my opening night entrance because I was throwing up in my dressing room. As I stood in the wings to go on my knees were literally knocking so loud that the stage manager heard them. The show was a success. The reviews were great. Even my meager effort was praised. The best notice though was for director Lin White who was hailed not only for the general production but for casting an actor rather than a singer for Sky. Guess she knew something I didn't.

After that show I never cared if I did a TV show again. I loved being on stage. I did *Music Man* four times, *Oliver*, *My Fair Lady*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and others. I also got to reprise my favorite role in my favorite play *Lt. JG Douglas Roberts* in *Mister Roberts* on two different occasions.

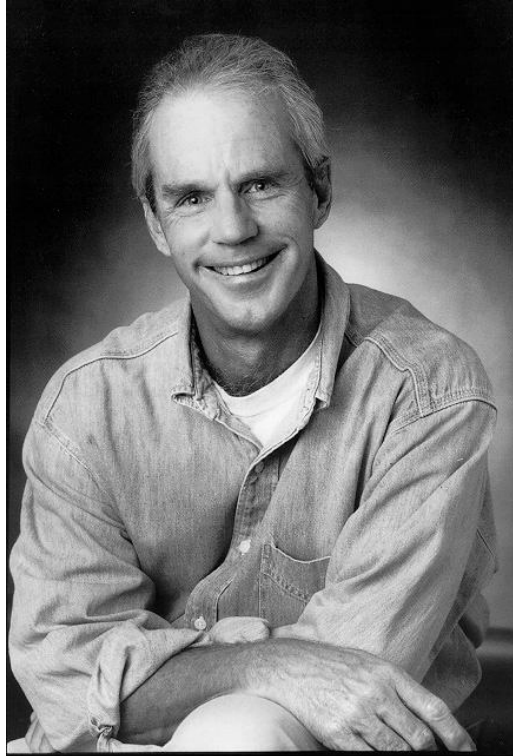
However it was my *Guys and Dolls* experience with director Lin White that changed my focus and started me directing. All my life I was at the mercy of directors. Most of the time their focus was more on getting the shot and staying on schedule rather than on the actors whose face was on the screen. Left to my own devices most of the time I was OK but on those rare occasions when I got to work with really good "actors directors" my work was better. Ralph Senensky was one of those directors who I worked with many times. A TV veteran of many decades his focus was always on the actor's performance. When I worked with him he would take the time to rehearse scenes with me and we never shot unless I was absolutely comfortable. I always remembered that.

As the ninety's moved on I became more and more focused on directing. As an actor I was always involved in my character and its relationships with other people. What I found I liked more was looking at the overall picture. I loved creating the whole thing. I loved the interaction of all the parts to make a good production. I loved having a vision of how a show should look and then watch it happen. I also found I loved working with actors. Having been on the other end so long I knew how fragile actor's egos are. I also knew the best way to bring out an actor's potential was to make him or her unafraid. Lin White made me unafraid and I never forgot it. So the one word I have never said to an actor in the dozens of shows I have directed is NO. NO is the great killer of creativity. You say NO to an actor and all that actor will do is wait for you to tell him what to do. Then it becomes your performance not his. If acting is about making choices than an actor must feel free to make those choices. And, most actors will eventually find the right choices if you guide them with patience and encouragement. It's like coming to a fork in the road and not knowing which way to go.

Take a chance. Pick a path. I guarantee you after a certain amount of time you will know if you are on the right path. If not, simply turn around and go the other way. The only thing I lecture actors on is not making a choice and wanting me to do it for them. If I can make one actor totally unafraid, to let it all hang out, to put his or her heart and soul out front, to be completely vulnerable and open to anything, then I think I have done a good job directing. I do not for one moment wish to imply that I let actors do what they want regardless of my wishes. What I like is getting actors to do what I want , and let them think it was their idea in the first place.

Katy and I left Los Angeles in 2000. I faced the fact that my TV career was over. It was OK. I was embarking on a new adventure. Now that we live in Monterey, I have directed for three different theatres. I have done comedies, dramas, and musicals. I have had great reviews and several of my shows have broken theatre records. I have adhered to the principal of surrounding myself with good people. I find the best choreographers, music directors, costumers, set designers, lighting designers, let them do their job and I get the credit. My favorite production so far is "The Full Monty" which I did for Pacific Repertory Theatre. It was SRO every night. My biggest thrill though is when an actor comes to me and tells me he or she wished they had met me earlier. AND – I just may not be through with acting. This past year I have travelled to San Francisco and auditioned for a couple of prestigious companies. I have had good reactions and I hope something comes out of it. You know what they say about old actors - - they don't just fade away because there might be one more gig around the corner.

Jack



Jack Stauffer