

THE FINEST CREW IN THE FLEET

The Next Generation Cast On Screen and Off



Adam Shrager

Introduction by

David Gerrold

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Originally written (in the masculine voice) as a eulogy for his son-in-law, June 1992.

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Acknowledgements

When I agreed to write this book, I knew that I would be seeking advice, assistance, and information from many disparate sources. Had I realised up front just how much reference material existed, and how wide a net *Star Trek* fandom cast, I may not have taken it on. Nonetheless, what you are holding in your hands could not have come into being without the generous assistance of many people.

The first thing I did upon deciding to write *The Finest Crew in the Fleet* was to log on to the World Wide Web and head toward Luca Sambucci's incredible *Star Trek* site (www.vol.it/luca/startrek/). Luca and I have never met, but we have corresponded via e-mail, and his "mother of all *Star Trek* sites" is a must-visit for fans of *any* aspect of *any* of the *Star Trek* incarnations. From Luca's site, I befriended much of fandom, learned about countless fan clubs, and realised that I had my work cut out for me. The Internet has provided me a steady stream of articles and information, some more reliable than others. For being of particular usefulness, I am indebted to Jim "The Big Dweeb" Griffith (moderator of rec.arts.startrek.info), Ruben Macias (compiler of the weekly *Warp 10* newsletter), and Mike "Vidiot" Brown (www.cdsnet.net/vidiot/).

Fan clubs, "officially sanctioned" and otherwise, have proved absolutely invaluable in my research. The single most remarkable among these clubs has to be the former International Audience Alliance for Patrick Stewart (IAAPS). Although the IAAPS is defunct, members (who now operate the fan club The Patrick Stewart Network) continue to operate the Patrick Stewart Research Library (PSRL) in West Islip, New York. The curators of the PSRL—Janet D'Airo, Joan Rumerman, Regina Hewston, and Cindy Thomas—opened their doors for me, answered my questions, and allowed me to garner an incredible trove of information about Mr. Stewart. The folks at the PSRL guard Mr. Stewart's privacy and possessions (many of which he has donated) very carefully, and have created a genuine reference centre for Stewart fans and *Star Trek* fans alike. I cannot thank them enough for their hospitality and generosity, and I sincerely hope that my efforts reflect the respect and deference the PSRL folks hold for this great actor. While *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was on the air, the IAAPS published *The Stargazer*, simply the finest fan club publication ever produced. One glance through the bibliography of *The Finest Crew in the Fleet* will attest to the level upon which I have relied upon this fine magazine. For anyone interested in creating a fan club publication, you can do no better than to emulate *The Stargazer*.

I am indebted to many other fans who have collected and shared their extensive stores of information about their favourite *Next Generation* actors: Judi Megna-George and Louise Jacobson run Imzadi International, a club (still going strong) dedicated to Jonathan Frakes and Marina Sirtis, and sanctioned by Sirtis. They currently publish,

out of their own small Pipedream Publishers operation, two magazines, *Red Alert* and *Imzadi International*. They have been more than generous with their time and resources, and have become both friends and colleagues to whom I will remain indebted. Raymond Ko maintains an excellent Gates McFadden Web page (www.sis.port.ac.uk/~dis12886/beverly.html), and we have been communicating now for many months. Melody and Jim Rondeau publish *DataEntries*, and have generously sent me copies for my research. I made many of these friends and discovered many of these sources with the assistance of the Star Trek Welcomittee, a group of fans dedicated solely to helping other fans find local or special-interest fan clubs appropriate to their *Trek* interest. Wow.

The filmographies at the end of each chapter, and throughout chapters 9 and 10, have been compiled from extensive research, “television encyclopaedias”, cross-referencing of articles and reviews, and fan publications. However, the foundation of each (except Patrick Stewart’s) was realised by building with permission on similar lists compiled by Ron Carman, who compiles “*Star Trek Actors’ Other Roles*” (www.cris.com/~Carman/reg.html). Much of this information is elusive, and Ron has spent years compiling it. He unselfishly has allowed me to build upon his work, and I in turn have allowed him to utilise mine. Visit his Web site for the most updated résumés of the stars of *The Next Generation*, as well as those of the other *Star Trek* series. The basis for the Patrick Stewart filmography was compiled by Joan Rumerman of the PSRL/IAAPS, a hefty and thankless job to which I can only say, thank you.

Three writers, none of whom I know personally, deserve special acknowledgement. Larry Nemecek is the author of *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion* (Revised 1995 Edition: Pocket Books \$14.00). He provides insight on the goings-on behind each individual *Next Generation* episode, and offers explanations as to the impact the individual episodes had on the actors, the characters they play, and the future of the franchise. His book was an invaluable reference tool, and I encourage all readers who do not yet own a copy of his tome to purchase one today. His volume truly must be on the bookshelf of every *Next Generation* fan. Dan Madsen is the editor and publisher of *Star Trek: The Official Fan Club* magazine (now known as *Star Trek Communicator*). Each issue includes in-depth interviews with the stars of *Star Trek*, many of them conducted by Madsen himself, interviews that not only detail the goings-on in the world of *Star Trek*, but also include intimate details of the actors’ lives. I have relied upon dozens of back issues of his quality publication in writing this book. Finally, Ian Spelling, a newspaper columnist, publishes a weekly syndicated “*Inside Trek*” column and contributes *Trek* articles to mainstream and science fiction publications alike. A peek at my bibliography offers a testament as to how much I relied on Spelling’s articles.

Part of the reason we watch *Star Trek* is to discuss it, debate it, argue over it, pick it apart, postulate over it, complain about it, and anxiously await the next one. To enjoy it fully, I have spent the last few years watching and discussing *Trek* with Sam Ramer, Rob Rudnitsky, Alan Dickar, Ezra Angrist, and Matt Webster, all of whom contributed on some level to this book. Amy Worlton gave up many lunch hours on

my behalf to seek out nooks and crannies of the World Wide Web I had not yet found. I am also indebted to a couple of sources at Paramount, who have requested anonymity. You know who you are. I think you'll see I have maintained respect and integrity for the program and for the actors involved, as promised. Like I said, who would want to read anything else?

The first thing that made this book possible was a gem of an idea by Bill Wolfsthal, publisher of Wolf Valley Books. With one phone call, he placed his trust in me, and I in him. I only hope that I have come through with my end of the deal. Bill (an incredible *Star Trek* fan in his own right, and someone with whom I have debated over the Vulcan's appearance in *First Contact*) has hired a group of fantastic people to run his operation—and I need to give a special acknowledgement to my hardworking editor, Amy Stout. Her ideas and persuasive honesty have made this book immeasurably stronger. For someone who is not a professed trekker, she's spent her share of time associated with *Star Trek*-related projects—having edited both Gene Roddenberry's authorised biography and a number of novels by David Gerrold.

Before my Brooklyn prose ever made it under my editor's pen, it suffered under the unrelenting critical eye of my wife, Lisa. She read every page, every word, backtracked, cross-referenced, questioned, fixed my grammar, and improved my writing tremendously. She was honest, critical, and judgmental, while bearing with me as I slaved through chapter after chapter, life story after life story. She did a lot of other things, too, for which I thank her from the bottom of my heart. The rest of my family, particularly my brother, Paul, and my father, Ed, although not the least bit interested in this subject matter, have unquestioningly supported me both in my efforts on this book and through the recent loss that we all suffered.

I took unblushing advantage of all of the above, as well as many others whom I've unintentionally neglected to mention. This book would be much less without all of their input. For all that is good about the following, I have them to thank. For the errors and mistakes that inevitably creep into such a project, I personally take full responsibility.

—Adam Shrager

Introduction

One of the things I have learned in the past thirty years is that just about everybody in the world wants to be a part of *Star Trek*—not simply because they want to be part of a successful television show, and not simply because they want to be part of a cultural phenomenon—but because they need to be part of the dream.

I remember when Bob Justman began lobbying for Patrick Stewart as Captain Picard. Meeting after meeting, he would talk about Stewart's compelling performance as the Machiavellian Sejanus in the astonishing BBC production of Robert Graves' epic novel of the first four Roman emperors, *I, Claudius*.

At first, Gene Roddenberry was reluctant to consider Stewart—even after he met him in person. But after interviewing several other candidates for the role of Picard, it became obvious that Patrick Stewart was the most qualified. His theatrical training came through as a strong sense of authority. Today it's hard to believe that there was ever any doubt about Patrick Stewart.

Another piece of casting, however, was probably inevitable. When the character of Wesley was first created—first Wesley, then Leslie (a fifteen-year-old girl), then Wesley again—it happened almost the same week that *St. Elsewhere* broadcast an episode starring Wil Wheaton as a child prodigy who had just completed medical school. The following day, I wrote a memo to Bob Justman and Gene Roddenberry suggesting Wil Wheaton as Wesley. But it was months before that part was cast—and by then, Wil Wheaton's name had been submitted by a number of individuals. One way or another, there was no way that Wil Wheaton was not going to be considered for the role, and there was no one else who was as right for the part as he was. Wil's youth and enthusiasm were considerable.

LeVar Burton was also an inevitable choice for the role of Geordi LaForge. What may not be as well known is that his character is based on a real individual. In 1974, a group of Detroit fans held a *Star Trek* convention and invited Gene Roddenberry, several cast members, and several writers (including myself). The emotional high point of the convention occurred when teenage muscular dystrophy patient George LaForge entered the convention masquerade as Captain Christopher Pike. He and his wheelchair had been made up to look like Pike in "The Menagerie".

George LaForge was one of the most enthusiastic of *Star Trek's* fans and this was one of the greatest moments in his life, meeting so many of *Star Trek's* people in person. Later, Gene Roddenberry made him an honorary admiral in Starfleet, the first and only time this honour has been granted. George LaForge died a few years later, but he was warmly remembered by everyone who was at that convention.

So, in 1986, when Gene Roddenberry decided to add a disabled person to *Star Trek's* crew, we considered various disabilities. Gene finally decided on blindness. (When this information was passed on to the studio executives, one of them sent

back a memo asking if we thought it was appropriate for LaForge to have this handicap in addition to being black. Say what—?) About this same time, I reminded Gene of George LaForge and suggested that we name this character after that young man. Gene thought it was a good idea, and that's how Geordi LaForge got his name. (Incidentally, that thing he wears across his eyes—? That's a hair beret.)

The one piece of casting that happened almost by accident was Jonathan Frakes as Will Riker. Another actor was originally on the inside track, and it was assumed his casting was a done deal. All that remained was for him to be seen (and approved) by the studio executives. Unfortunately, he choked in that final reading. Everyone involved was disappointed. But they were so sure he was right for the part that they brought him back—and he choked a second time. So they went with Jonathan Frakes instead—a brilliant decision stumbled into almost by accident.

What sets *Star Trek* apart from the rest of television is the way the audience has responded to it. To judge by the fans, *Star Trek* represents another way of being, one that suggests that the way the world is today is not necessarily the way it has to be—and the way we are is not the way we will always be. To see the show this way is to understand that it is not just a dream—it is also a responsibility.

Why? Because space is not the final frontier. The final frontier is the human soul. Space is where we will meet the challenge.

—David Gerrold

Preface

“They’re betting they can catch lightning in a bottle again.”
—Leonard Nimoy, quoted in a 1987 *TV Guide* article

Patrick Stewart is not Captain Jean-Luc Picard. He is English, *not* French, prefers tennis to fencing, and Darjeeling over Earl Grey tea. He loves roller coasters, his Nintendo Gameboy, *Beavis and Butt-head*, and valet parking. Picard flies one of the most technologically advanced pieces of machinery in our galaxy, but Stewart makes no pretences regarding his inability to program a VCR.

You can find Jonathan Frakes (Commander Riker) behind the camera these days or at home with his actress wife of ten years, Genie Francis, and their two young children. Brent Spiner (Data) is an avowed “television junkie” and veteran of the Broadway stage. LeVar Burton (Geordi LaForge) enjoys a legion of fans from his role on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, from his Emmy-nominated role on *Roots*, and (perhaps most significantly) from his hosting duties on the venerable PBS series *Reading Rainbow*. Marina Sirtis (Counsellor Troi) can often be found astride her Harley-Davidson or caring for her Yorkshire terrier and five cats. Gates McFadden (Dr. Crusher) has taught at the university level and worked extensively with Jim Henson’s muppets. Michael Dorn (Worf) now holds the record for being the actor to have appeared on the greatest number of episodes of *Star Trek* (including his time aboard *Deep Space Nine*), but off camera, you can find him piloting jets.

When we reminisce about the crew of the *Enterprise-D*, we remember the exploits of her French captain and swashbuckling Alaskan first officer. We revel in the adventures of the Klingon security officer, Betazoid counselor, android from parts unknown (eventually revealed to have been built at the Omicron Theta colony), blind chief engineer, and beautiful doctor. (Where were those latter two from? It was never revealed, though we do know that Dr. Crusher’s grandmother lived at the Arvada III colony, and that LaForge’s parents moved around quite often.) However, what we are really remembering are the exploits of seven talented actors: two Brits (Stewart and Sirtis), two native Texans (Dorn and Spiner), a Pennsylvanian (Frakes), an Ohioan (McFadden), and an American born in West Germany (LeVar Burton). Their lives and careers, triumphs and disappointments, are the subjects of this book.

Other actors in addition to the seven featured players made their marks on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Most notably Wil Wheaton (Wesley Crusher)—one of the four teenagers who starred in the hit film *Stand by Me*—saved the *Enterprise* nearly a dozen times, and ultimately left the show to pursue other offers. Denise Crosby (Tasha Yar) is best remembered by some as the granddaughter of Bing, but is also thought of as “the security chief *before* Worf.” Colm Meaney (O’Brien) has a successful movie career, as well as being a regular cast member on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Diana Muldaur (Dr. Pulaski) was the first female president of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. After her single season as the *Enterprise*’s chief

physician, she achieved great notoriety plummeting down an elevator shaft on *L.A. Law*. Whoopi Goldberg (Guinan), comedian and movie star, joined the crew of *The Next Generation* as a result of both her genuine love for the show and the impact Nichelle Nichols (Uhura) made on her as she was growing up. These twelve actors may be recognised for many divergent roles throughout their careers, but they will always be remembered for their roles in exploring deep space at warp speed.

It has been said by fans and critics alike that the only star of *The Next Generation* is the *Enterprise* herself. They are wrong. Without the actors portraying characters whom millions of viewers learned to love, depend upon, and root for, the program would be little more than a video game. It is a lot more than that, it is a cultural phenomenon that its stars are inexorably linked to.

All fans of *Star Trek*, from the most casual viewer of the show to the most avid, have their favourite actor or character. Fan clubs exist for each individual cast member, a claim that no other television program with as large a cast can boast. From the “Electronic Male Network” (for fans of Brent Spiner), to “Imzadi International” (for those who prefer Frakes and Sirtis), to “WilPower” (Wil Wheaton’s admirers), to “The Temporal Mechanic” (Colm Meaney’s fans), fan clubs have proved a way for avid devotees of particular actors to learn more about their favourite stars. Patrick Stewart has not only a number of fan clubs devoted to him, but also an American honour usually accorded only retiring presidents: a library detailing his life and illustrious career, located in West Islip, New York (the Patrick Stewart Research Library). Whomever your favourite *Star Trek: The Next Generation* actors (or if perhaps you like them all), this book endeavours to bring you closer to them: it delves behind the scenes of their lives growing up, their early careers, the set of *The Next Generation*, and the years since the program ceased production.

“Encounter at Farpoint”, the two-hour pilot episode, aired the week of September 28, 1987. The first casting call went out to talent agencies on December 10, 1986. It included calls for series “regulars” Captain Julien Picard, “Number One” William Ryker, Security Chief Lieutenant Macha Hernandez, and fifteen-year-old teenage girl Leslie Crusher. These four, along with Troi, Dr. Crusher, and LaForge, comprised the original core crew. Worf, originally conceived as something of a Klingon marine, was added very late, and was not even included in the first-season official cast portrait taken June 1, 1987.

Patrick Stewart was cast after being “discovered” by producer Robert Justman at a dramatic reading at UCLA. Stewart did not initially win over executive producer and series creator Gene Roddenberry as the man for the captain’s chair, and was actually cast on October 10, 1986, by Justman for the role of Data. Although Stewart did not fit Roddenberry’s image of what a captain should be (he really did want a Frenchman), Justman kept insisting that Stewart was the perfect captain, and finally Roddenberry gave in. Fans familiar with Stewart’s résumé probably think of him as “that British Shakespearean actor”, but recall that he was previously best known to American television audiences as Sejanus on the BBC-PBS miniseries *I, Claudius*.

Jonathan Frakes suffered through seven auditions in six weeks to win the role of Riker. LeVar Burton’s casting received the greatest amount of media attention, his

being the most “recognisable” face in the cast. Gates McFadden turned down the role of Dr. Crusher, having committed to appear in a play for \$400 a week. Brent Spiner was a Broadway stage veteran, and had replaced Rene Auberjonois—later of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*—in the musical *Big River*. Despite an extensive Broadway résumé, Spiner was most recognisable to television audiences from a recurring role on the comedy *Night Court*. Marina Sirtis was originally auditioning for the role of Security Chief Macha Hernandez, while Denise Crosby was after that of Counselor Troi. However, Gene Roddenberry stepped in and switched them, deciding that Sirtis’ European beauty was better suited for Troi’s empathic role, and Denise Crosby had the look of a security chief. The only avowed trekkers on the cast, Michael Dorn and Wil Wheaton, rounded out the main first-season cast. Wesley was named after Gene Wesley Roddenberry, and Roddenberry often thought of Wesley as “a seventeen-year-old version of myself.” Michael Dorn, in true Klingon fashion, walked into his Paramount audition in character: “No jokes. No laughing with the other actors. I sat by myself waiting for my interview. When my turn came, I walked in, didn’t smile, did the reading, thanked them, and walked right out.”

What the future holds for *Star Trek* is, of course, impossible to determine. Fans have probably seen the last movie to feature the original cast. Most devotees hope that the *Next Generation* cast will continue to appear on the big screen, and the overwhelming success of *Star Trek: First Contact* makes that appear likely. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek: Voyager* continue to impress, and to build upon the universe that Gene Roddenberry conceived—and of course, they offer opportunities for *The Next Generation* cast to appear and to direct. Rumours of a series or continuing projects featuring Captain Sulu persist. Novels and comic books will surely continue to be published into the next millennium.

Star Trek: The Next Generation is the single most successful hour-long syndicated drama in television history. It has spawned two feature films thus far, as well as two sequel series. It is a cultural phenomenon, enjoyed by college professors and nine-year-olds alike. It is a business, and fans understand that. But it is more than that. It is a weekly morality play, an escape from worldly problems, a dream of what might be to come. Some fans enjoy debating starship design, others warp theory. (Physicist Stephen Hawking likes to joke he’s “working on it”, or is he joking?) Other fans rant about how much they love the Wesley character; some vehemently disagree. For some, their admiration of Patrick Stewart has led them to Broadway and his one-man rendition of *A Christmas Carol*, or to New York City’s Central Park where he performed Shakespeare. When thousands of people at the sold-out Ziegfield theatre in the heart of Manhattan scream “DATA! DATA! DATA!” upon Brent Spiner’s appearance as Dr. Okun halfway through the 1996 blockbuster *Independence Day*, it is clear that the show has made an impact. “Engage” and “make it so” are as much a part of the popular lexicon as “beam me up” ever was.

What follows is a tribute, detailing the good—and occasionally the bad—the past, the present, and the foreseeable future, of the only cast that can truly be called “The Finest Crew in the Fleet”.

Patrick Stewart

Thespian on the Bridge

“There are those who would say sitting in the captain’s chair on the USS Enterprise is far more important than sitting on the throne of England.”

—Patrick Stewart, recalling one of the last roles he played with the Royal Shakespeare Company, *King Henry IV*

Patrick Stewart was born July 13, 1940, in Mirfield, Yorkshire, England, the third son of Alfred Stewart and Gladys Barraclough. His childhood could not be deemed happy, and his family was anything but prosperous. Yet from very humble beginnings grew an actor who would resurrect the role of *Star Trek*’s captain and imbue it with his own humanity and style, as well as introduce thousands to the joys of Shakespeare. He would come to be regarded as a sex symbol, leading man, and genuine Hollywood personality. He would accomplish all of this despite impoverished beginnings and the lack of an extensive formal education.

Not an Easy Childhood

Stewart’s household was poor and violent. He spent much of his childhood being afraid. His mother, a weaver, raised him and did all she could to shield him from an abusive father, but she was forced to work full time, “operating an enormous, terrifying machine in a huge, draughty weaving shed with two hundred other women.” His father, who had spent eight years in the army in India, returned home in 1933 only to re-enlist for World War II, where he was accorded the rank of regimental sergeant major.

“You don’t get that rank without being a disciplinarian so there were certain rules [in the home],” recalled Patrick’s brother Trevor, four years his senior. Eldest brother Geoffrey, sixteen years older than Patrick, stated, “Everything ran to a timetable. He ruled with a rod of iron and had a terrible temper. Patrick was very close to my mother and adored her but she had an extremely hard life because of my father. We always hoped he would die first so she could have a few years’ peace.”

Patrick himself told an interviewer in 1995, “My family home was run very much as a regimental mess—a lot of discipline, order, and organisation. I had the cleanest fingernails in school because my father inspected them every day.”

Initially, acting was an escape from a violent home. Every night, Stewart had a legitimate excuse to go out. He reported, “It cauterised the hurt and the pain. Being able to go somewhere else and say ‘What if?’ or ‘Once upon a time’ was comforting.” Mirfield supported twelve drama clubs, with a population of eleven thousand, so the opportunities for escape were ever present. He was also encouraged by the example of his grandparents. His grandfather made his living as a stage carpenter, and his grandmother cared for the children of stage workers, including a young Stan Laurel.

“One of the reasons I started acting when I was twelve or thirteen,” Stewart stated in 1995, “was that I found the stage, and putting on other personalities, much safer, much more comfortable than my own skin. My own problems always started when the curtain came down. Stage life had a beginning, a middle, and an end. I could feel in control there. In fact, I have always had difficulty with letting myself lose control onstage, with letting any strong emotion possess me. I had trouble making emotions seem authentic. Now, in my brand-new fifty-fifth year, I’m trying to achieve more of a balance. I’m getting more control over my life, and I can take more chances in my acting.”

Although Stewart’s father reportedly never struck his sons, “We were frightened to death of him,” brother Geoffrey stated. Yet this difficult family life brought Patrick closer to his brothers, inspired him to get out of the house and participate in local theatre; his father’s anger and disciplined style provided inspiration for later theatrical roles, including certain aspects of Captain Picard. Although Alfred frequently chastised Geoffrey for sitting up nights reading “that bloody rubbish” (Shakespeare) to his baby brother, Geoffrey still sat up and read the four-year-old Patrick bedtime stories—*MacBeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. “I barely understood a word of it . . . but I liked the sounds. The sounds did something to me viscerally,” Patrick recalls. Of course, decades later, when Patrick Stewart was relatively famous in England as an associate with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), father Alfred would find opportunities to quote *Henry V* and *MacBeth*.

Patrick agreed with his brother’s assessment of the fear they lived with growing up, but realises it may have been misplaced. “I’m the one son of his who never did any military service,” Stewart said in 1993, “and I know he always held this against me. But now I think I didn’t really have anything to be terrified of at all. He would have a good laugh at me being called ‘captain’ now!” Yet Stewart was always close to his brothers, whether they were reading Shakespeare or engaging in mischief. Referring to the British holiday Guy Fawkes Day (November 5), when children perform pranks similar to those in the United States on Halloween, Stewart admitted to Jay Leno, “It was the only time I crossed paths with the law. My brothers and I were arrested for chopping down trees in someone’s wood that was supposed to be protected. I’m ashamed and embarrassed about it now—but I do have a criminal record. . . . I also put a banger [a powerful firecracker] in the lock of my aunt’s door and blew it off. We were dumb in those days, we were young.”

Seduced by the Stage

Because Stewart did not own a television until he was twenty-three, the first time he heard a play in its entirety was on the radio. He listened to *The Tempest* when he was about ten. From his local Mirfield church he had got a copy of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. There were very few books in the Stewart household, but this volume is one that Patrick still remembers fondly. “I listened to the play on radio, and I followed along in the published text . . . which was very exciting for me—to have in my hands the same lines that the actors were speaking.”

Besides participating in theatre as a youngster, Patrick was an avid cinema goer. Every week, he would lose himself in the exploits of Doris Day, Debbie Reynolds, Tab Hunter, and Rock Hudson. However, one of the defining moments of his childhood, culturally, was the day he went to the theatre to see a film he knew nothing about, *On the Waterfront*. “I’d been utterly seduced by Technicolor, and I remember when the titles came up feeling irritably disappointed that the film was in black and white.” However, once the movie began, he was transfixed. “Everything changed from that moment on, partly because I saw that people made movies about me. I lived in an industrial town in northern England. It was a million miles from the Brooklyn waterfront, but nonetheless, all those values and conditions—the things that people were doing to one another—were recognisable, particularly, of course, in Brando’s character. I went back four times, I even took my poor mother, who didn’t understand what the hell was going on. It was overwhelming. Still is . . .”

Both as a child and as a grown man, and particularly after his twenty-five-year marriage ended, Stewart considered himself quite unhappy. He related personally to the character Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. Years later, he would formally rehearse the role for his one-man version of Dickens’ tale on Broadway, but he claimed, “In a way, I think I had been rehearsing it metaphorically for a very long time. I don’t think it’s accidental that of all the things which have obsessed me is a story about a close, narrow, unhappy, mean individual, not living in society at all, who in the last moments of his life is given a second chance to do better.

“I think there was, and probably still is, a substantial amount of Scrooge in my nature, and one of the things I’ve attempted to do is de-Scrooge myself.” It should be noted that now, living with his girlfriend, Wendy Neuss, a producer for *Star Trek: Voyager*, he has openly commented on how much happier and more fulfilled he is. In retrospect, much of Stewart’s past misery may have been linked to the crumbling of a long-term marriage and the requisite emotions that accompany such an event, particularly for a celebrity who, much to his dismay, finds his personal troubles splayed out in the weekly tabloids for all to share. Neuss and he are reportedly very happy together, and Stewart often notes that he knew they would be compatible once he learned that she could name all thirty-seven Shakespeare plays.

As a teenage student, Stewart attended Secondary Modern School, instead of enrolling in an academic school, before he dropped out at age fifteen. All eleven-

year-old children in England are required to take an exam, the results of which determine which school they will attend for the rest of their childhood education. “On the day of the exam I set off for school in the morning and got to the road that led to the building where the examination was to take place and walked past it. And I went up into the hills that are outside and a bit above my little town and I spent the day walking in the woods and, actually, it was spring, sitting about the bluebell patch. I remember looking at the view, enjoying the spring sunshine, and feeling extraordinarily happy. . . . And I went home and my mother asked me ‘how did it go?’ and I said it was great. Had a wonderful day.” It was at the Secondary Modern School that he encountered an English teacher who taught him the joys of reading Shakespeare aloud. This is the same teacher who asked him, at fifteen, if he had ever considered becoming a professional actor. “I thought the man was crazed,” Stewart recalls.

Yet just before leaving school, never to return, Stewart performed with two friends in a revue at the high school. In *The Great Mesmo*, a mind-reading act, Stewart played Mesmo’s sidekick who would go into the audience and ask someone to “hand me something—anything”. Patrick would then hold it up and say, “Great Mesmo, tell me, what I am holding in my hand?” The blindfolded Mesmo on stage, aided by a third member of the team behind a curtain, would then announce the item to everyone’s surprise and delight. Despite engaging in such joyous times as these, and being named head boy at Mirfield High School, Stewart left school at age fifteen to train as a journalist.

Stewart stated in 1994 that “the next closest thing in terms of distinction to winning an Academy Award would be to get an honorary degree.” This dream was fulfilled in 1995, when he was awarded a Doctorate of Humane Letters from California’s Pomona College.

Stewart’s first job after leaving school was as a beat reporter for a local newspaper. He credits one of his English teachers for helping him develop a flair for languages. This “flair” occasionally got him into trouble. Stewart told a columnist in 1990, was suspended from writing reviews for six months one time after I’d used a word that was considered inappropriate. I’d called a particularly small theatre ‘intimate.’”

His newspaper editor wanted him to abandon the theatre projects in which he was participating because they interfered with his journalistic commitments. “More than once I just made up the copy,” Stewart has stated. “I would try to cover events in advance or afterward by making phone calls.” “Abandon these amateur dramatics, or get out!” were the words yelled at him by the editor of the West Riding weekly newspaper. Although reasonable, this infuriated Stewart. “Reasonable or not, though, this was the kind of ultimatum of the kind I hate most. Out of sheer stubbornness, I got out! And so there I was—sixteen years old, qualified for nothing!” Stewart has been quoted as saying that he became an actor afterward out of spite, to get back at that newspaper editor.

A brief stint selling furniture at Hudson’s in the nearby town of Dewsbury followed. “I rather enjoyed it and it was good training in a way. Being an actor, reporter,

or salesman all involve fooling people on some level.” He won a drama scholarship to the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in 1957, which eventually led him to the Royal Shakespeare Company. During this time, he also participated in a drama camp at Calder, where he worked with the man who would eventually become “The Dynamite Kid”, his good friend to this day, and *I, Claudius* co-star, Brian Blessed. At Calder, Stewart also met one of his most influential drama coaches and teachers, Ruth Wynn Owen. Stewart began acting full time in 1959. In the nearly forty years since, he has never been out of work for more than a few months at a time—a record he realises makes him very lucky among actors.

Ruth Wynn Owen was Patrick Stewart’s first real drama teacher. A former student at the Old Vic herself, she had never taught before and needed convincing to spend a week at Calder’s Whit Week Youth Drama Course. It was here, during her first teaching experience, that she met a young Patrick Stewart and his good friend Brian Blessed. “One could see at once what was there. He was a ‘natural,’ natural timing and natural movement. . . . Acting is a gift, and he had it,” Owen recounted in an interview. As for Stewart’s role on *Star Trek*, she noted: “His natural authority makes him perfect for the character, and his warmth hinges the authority. . . . He is ‘officer class.’”

Stewart is indebted to the local Mirfield authority and in particular Gerald Tyler for being instrumental in helping him receive the grant to study at the Old Vic. Without the scholarship, he simply “wouldn’t have become an actor”. With his limited educational background—academically the absolute minimum the state required in terms of schooling—he was “as unqualified as was possible to be for the kind of scholarship I was given. I was blessed in having people who felt, despite my lack of educational qualifications, there were other things that made the money well spent.”

Enrolling at the Old Vic school at the age of seventeen, Stewart spent the next two years studying acting and focusing on losing his Yorkshire accent. He has referred to leading a “double life” during this period; for while he assiduously studied Received Pronunciation during the day and used it professionally, he continued speaking with his native accent and dialect with family and friends. About halfway through his training, which was at the time only a two-year program (it is now four), Stewart received some advice he has referred to as the best he has ever been given. “The principal of my acting school, an extraordinary man named Duncan Ross, said to me, ‘Patrick, you will never achieve success by insuring against failure.’ It took me many, many years to understand what he meant. It is still hard to live up to that advice. We all have an inclination to play it safe, not to take that big risk that could see us fall and utterly fail. But if you don’t take risks, you will never succeed. I think, in one respect, as I’ve gotten older, I’ve also gotten braver. I believe that I have something to say and I have a talent to say it with and I wasn’t sure of that for many, many years.”

Indeed, an Actor

In August 1959, at the age of nineteen, Stewart made his professional debut at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln, in the role of Morgan in a stage adaptation of *Treasure Island*. After only a month, he left this company and joined the Sheffield Playhouse, where he stayed until 1961.

It was during these two years, before he was twenty-one years old, that Stewart lost nearly all of his hair. “It was absolutely traumatic. I did a number of things to try to prevent it and then, when I saw it was unpreventable, to hide it.” Although warned that he would have difficulty landing jobs in lead roles due to his baldness, Stewart claimed that “being hairless on top and quite young can have its advantages. When a director gathers a company for a season he is looking for a variety of types. With the aid of a toupee he regards me as two for the price of one. I often felt more like an economic asset than an artistic one.”

On *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, Stewart revealed that for his final audition for Captain Picard, he actually wore a hairpiece he was then using in a London production of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It was nicknamed the “George” and was, in Stewart’s words, “just a few strands of hair.”

During the 1962–63 theatre season, Stewart was a member of the company of the Library Theatre in Manchester under the direction of David Scase, playing Orsino in *Twelfth Night* with other future Royal Shakespeare Company artists. Also at the Library he performed in *The Caretaker*, his first experience—or, as he put it, “confrontation”—with the plays of Harold Pinter. “It’s a tremendous experience acting Pinter, like having a terrible secret.” Also at Manchester, Stewart played his first major Shakespeare role, that of Henry V in the play of the same name. “Only David Scase would have had the courage or madness to trust me with this. He had a tremendous effect on my acting at this stage.” This performance of *Henry V*, well over thirty-five years ago, is the performance that Patrick’s brothers, Trevor and Gregory, consider their favourite of all the performances their baby brother has staged. “His speech before Agincourt brought tears to my eyes. I was absolutely dumbfounded by it! He’s got better, and done better things since—he’s played more important roles in larger and more important companies—but I personally have never been so moved by anything he’s done,” recalls Trevor.

Stewart spent the following season in Liverpool and eventually was able to return to the Bristol Old Vic as a leading member of the company, performing there from 1964 to 1966. While fulfilling his dream of returning to his former school, he met Sheila Falconer, a choreographer with the company. They were married March 3, 1966, and in 1968, Daniel Freedom Stewart was born. Now an actor and living in California, Daniel is best known among *Star Trek* fans as Picard’s “son” in the episode “Inner Light”. Patrick and Sheila’s daughter, Sophie Alexandra, was born six years later, and now owns and manages a boutique in London.

Stewart's London debut came in February 1969 at the Aldwych with the internationally famous Royal Shakespeare Company. The RSC was created after World War II as the national theatre company of England, devoted to the productions of the country's (the Western world's?) greatest playwright, in order to preserve a culture that it was feared might be lost and forgotten. When Patrick Stewart joined the RSC, subsequently being named an associate artist in one year, it was not for him so much the fulfilment of a life's dream as it was just another, albeit a very important, stepping-stone. At the time, his thought was that he would pick up a few classical credits and move on to greater fame, perhaps following in the footsteps of Laurence Olivier or John Gielgud. However, his time at the RSC was fulfilment enough for many years, and the impact Trevor Nunn and his company would have on him (as both a friend and an inspiration) kept Stewart actively associated with the RSC through the early 1980s. He worked for the RSC exclusively from 1966 to 1975, and then through 1984 appeared occasionally while working on television, in films, or on other stages.

While with the RSC, Stewart not only worked with Trevor Nunn's company, but also spent time with Mary Ann "Buzz" Goodbody's *The Other Place*, RSC's small experimental "third" theatre. Also with the RSC and Buzz Goodbody's troupe was Ben Kingsley, with whom Stewart remains good friends to this day. Stewart, Kingsley, and Goodbody, among others, lived off and on for three years during the 1970s in a predominantly female, Marxist collective in London, primarily working on "experimental" theatre.

For Stewart, at this time in his life the great "revelation", however unfashionable, was Shakespeare. "I don't like to see him performed badly. It's become like a parent-child relationship—you have to open doors, to make possible all kinds of choice and widen the vision. Never say one of his plays isn't about this or that."

Stewart published an academic essay and treatise on Shylock (from *The Merchant of Venice*) in *Players of Shakespeare: Essays in Shakespearean Performance*. His explanation and interpretation of Shylock's meaning and role was as an embittered outsider who happens to be Jewish. When he performed the part with the RSC in the 1970s, he was aware of the "monstrous stereotype" and told himself the part wasn't about the last sixty years of Jewish history. Yet as Stewart worked on the play, he began to realise that "Shakespeare had anticipated the twentieth century. I discovered that Shylock is a revolutionary character, lining up with the IRA and PLO in that he will risk everything and take a life for what he believes in. He will take a life because of inequality and to oppose the status quo. Shakespeare is often accused of being a conservative, a conformist . . . but he continually howls against the disgrace of injustice, of ignorance, and of a lack of concern and responsibility . . . and that is a radical attitude."

All *Star Trek* actors are asked about their favourite episodes, but Stewart is the only one who is just as frequently asked about his favourite Shakespearean play. "*Henry IV, Part 2*. It shows more potently than any of his other plays the great, soaring range of his talent. It contains some of the finest poetic drama he ever wrote, as well as great scenes of conflict, wonderfully, grotesquely comic sequences, and in

some places writing of such detailed naturalism that you could lift it straight out of *The Complete Works* and put it in a film script. The one role I most hunger to play is Falstaff.”

An interesting feature was reported by the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* in 1971. Stewart had been performing in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. In the production is a walk-on part for a dog, which was played by a pooch from a local kennel, a Labrador named Crab. From August until the play closed in January, Crab lived happily at Stewart’s home in Barford. Afterward, Crab returned to the kennel and Stewart went on one of his first tours of America, performing in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. While his family was in America, son Daniel pined for the pup so much that upon returning to Britain, Stewart went and rescued Crab from the National Canine Defence League kennels at Wickhamford, adopting him permanently.

Stewart’s love for animals has not subsided. After the Los Angeles earthquake in 1994, he adopted a homeless cat found wandering the *Star Trek* sets on the Paramount lot. Bella, his feline companion, is a close friend, and he dotes on her like a father.

Engaging His Career

On the personal front, Stewart was married to Sheila Falconer for twenty-five years; their separate lives on two continents during the years he worked on *Star Trek* as well as their growing professional and personal differences ultimately led to their break-up in 1991. Much was written in the tabloid press about the negative impact his weekly hour-long television program had on their marriage, but Stewart set the record straight. “My marriage broke up, which caused me great, great sadness—but I can’t hold the show responsible for that. It was a factor, but the responsibility was mine.”

However, for many years, Stewart and Falconer’s marriage had been viewed as a model, and at one point was featured in a 1982 London daily under the headline “Making Theatre Marriage Work”. Although they did not collaborate on a production together for the first sixteen years of marriage—except of course for the “production” of children and a family—they felt that being in theatre together, but not working in the same branch, was truly the best of both worlds. There was no competition, Falconer explained, “[but] what is nice is that, because we both understand the theatre, we can start talking immediately about salient points. . . . There are whole areas we don’t have to fill in.” Stewart concurred: “The pair of us have eaten together between rehearsals and talked over the production in bed. But then Sheila has always been a trusted counselor and adviser.”

Although Stewart’s focus during the 1960s was on the Shakespearean stage, and he was never really a science fiction fan, he was not unaware of the significance of

the space race or of happenings in the scientific world in the 1960s. As he stated to *Astronomy* magazine in December 1995, “I can remember more clearly where I was when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon than I can where I was when John F. Kennedy was shot. I remember that having an enormous impact on me. My son was then four months old, and I remember holding him up in front of the television and saying, ‘Look, pay attention to this. This is important.’”

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Stewart kept very busy. Established at the RSC, he also played Dr. Roebuck in *Maybury*, a BBC series about mental hospitals. To research his role as a psychologist, he mixed with staff and patients at a mental hospital. “At first I was so apprehensive I found an excuse not to go. But when I got to know the people on the wards, my visits became very enjoyable. I learned a lot from the patients as well as the doctors and social workers. They were all very glad the series was being made.”

Additionally, these middle years saw Stewart get showered with accolades for his stage work. In 1978, the Society of West End Theatres presented Patrick Stewart with its best supporting actor award for his portrayal of Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In 1979, he also won the Olivier Award for best supporting actor for *Antony and Cleopatra* and was nominated for best actor for *The Merchant of Venice*. In 1987 he won the London Fringe best actor award for his performance in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and had another Olivier nomination for *Hippolytus*.

Of course, during these years, American audiences would be hard pressed to recognise Stewart from his theatre roles, but would likely recognise him as Sejanus, the sinister lover of history’s most famous nymphomaniac, Messalina, in the miniseries *I, Claudius*, originally airing on PBS in 1976. “I found Sejanus to be one of the most delightful and charming characters that I have ever played, utterly irresistible, witty, sophisticated, gentle, caring, and loving,” Stewart exclaimed sarcastically in 1990. “Of course at the time when you are doing something like that, you are just doing a job. You never know that it’s going to become what *I, Claudius* finally became, this landmark series. . . . My favourite scene was actually the scene where Augustus died. You remember that scene when he died and the camera stayed a single uncut shot on his face. Brian persuaded the director that he would die with his eyes open. And that you would see him die and his eyes would never close. And if you watch very carefully there is an extraordinary moment when the light, the light seems to go out of those eyes and the face never moves. It’s quite magical!” The “Brian” Stewart refers to here is his lifelong friend Brian Blessed, whom he has recently said he would like to stand with arm in arm on the summit of Mount Everest.

Stewart draws analogies between Shylock (the Jewish moneylender from *Merchant of Venice*) and Sejanus, and to the way he found himself typecast before landing the role of Captain Picard. “I was sinister playing Sejanus. The point that I make in a lecture I do about Shylock: it is commonplace among actors that you must find some area of the character that you play that you can love, and the more you can love a character, the more chance you have of explaining him to an audience. Now I would be fascinated by trying to do that, particularly wicked people. I cannot remember