

BRODERICK CRAWFORD

A Special
Interview by
SYD
GILLINGHAM

Tough Guy With A Heart Of Gold

Oscar-winner, Broderick Crawford's forty years in show business have transformed him from an unknown actor to one of the biggest names in film-making. What hasn't changed, says Syd Gillingham, is the friendly, down-to-earth character of the man himself . . .

HE met me in the lounge of his hotel — Mr Broderick Crawford, Oscar-winning actor and, when times were harder, seaman, docker, and professional fighter. Soon he was talking about the advantage of having a pushed-in face and a funny voice.

"We last longer, you see," he said. "Often we sit around — all of us with the pushed-in faces and funny voices — and we say, 'Whatever happened to so-and-so?'"

"He's the guy we worked with on a couple of pictures when he had star billing. And suddenly he has disappeared."

One thing Broderick Crawford has not done is to disappear. But he was the first to admit that his appearance on the West End stage on this visit — in Jason Miller's "That Championship Season" — was decidedly happier than his London debut over 40 years ago.

"I had got out of university at the height of the Depression," he explained. "And I heard they were casting for the part of a football player for a play called 'She Loves Me,' which was to open in London.

"I auditioned, got the part, and we opened in London. You know what? We lasted ten days!"

The first sight of this man's tall, burly figure had taken me back to "Highway Patrol's" Captain Dan Mathews, the roughest, toughest television lawman ever. And now the impression became even stronger.

Gruff, grumpy, always-got-his-man, old 21-50 himself. I could imagine him grabbing the patrol car two-way radio microphone and barking "Ten-Four!" ("Okay, understood") into the mouthpiece.

And I felt I ought to apologise for harking back to "Highway Patrol."

"Don't," he said, in that familiar, cement-mixer of a voice. "It was very lucrative, and I liked doing it.

"I don't resent being remembered for 'Highway Patrol'. After all, it reached

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a great many people — more than you can reach on the stage or in the cinema. And you can reach them in one night.

"I had a lot of fun doing it," he went on. "We did 39 shows a year for five years. And they've been shown in quite a few languages. I'm very good in Japanese!"

"We were doing a show in two days and, in a six-day working week, that meant we were completing three shows a week.

"They may not have all been good. But they were fast. We had to finish after five years. We'd reached the stage of looking at scripts and getting the feeling we'd done it all before."

He smiled.

"Now, when I look at the cop shows on television, I realise they are doing the same things as we did," he ended. "The only difference is, they're doing them in colour!"

I wondered if there had been times in his career when Broderick Crawford had longed to get away from all those "heavy" roles and branch out into, say, comedy.

"Well, now that's a funny thing," he replied. "I've never really been type-cast. In films I've been the bad guy and on television I've been the hero — A rough hero, but the hero.

"Just before I came here I was talking to Peter Falk, who has the new 'Colombo' show," he continued. "He asked me if I lost my identity as a result of 'Highway Patrol'.

"I told him that, yes, I did, for a good many years, and he said: 'They don't know me any more, it's hello, Colombo, in the street.'

"I told him he'd have to go through this for a couple of years after the show had ended before it would simmer down.

"But it's true. People tend to forget the good things you have done. You wonder if they ever saw the picture when you won the Oscar."

That Oscar was in 1950 for his performance in "All The King's Men."

"Winning the Oscar was a great thrill," he said. "And so was the Drama Critics' Award in 1937. That was for my part in 'Of Mice And Men' in New York. That was my first real break.

"After that I went to Hollywood. That's where I started as the fifth gangster. Then I

worked my way up to the fourth gangster. By the time I was the first gangster, I'd really made it.

"Then came the war, and after four years I went back to Hollywood because they had promised to give us our jobs back.

"They gave us our jobs back, put us in one picture — and then fired most of us. I think I was ninth gangster this time.

"But then along came 'All The King's Men' and things have been pretty smooth since then."

DURING the war Broderick Crawford, now 62, served in the U.S. Army. After being sent out on a bond-selling tour, he came to London to work with the B.B.C., and the Army authorities here, helping to organise entertainment for the troops and to set up Forces' radio stations.

"I've been to London many times now," he told me "You can't lose me here. But this is the first time in London for my wife, Mary Alice, and I'm seeing it through her eyes."

Home for Broderick Crawford and his wife is an apartment on a hill overlooking Los Angeles, between Beverley Hills and Hollywood.

He has two sons by his first marriage. Christopher, 25, and in the road haulage business, and Kelly, a 23-year-old commercial photographer. Robin, his step-daughter, who is 21, graduates from college this year, and is planning to work with retarded children.

I asked why his sons had not chosen to follow Father's footsteps into acting careers.

"I come from a theatrical family," he said. "I'm the third generation of actors, and I was practically born backstage. But they wanted something steady. And acting is anything but steady.

"In New York alone, out of 8000 Equity members, just 700 are working," he explained. "And less than ten per cent. of the 24,000 membership of the Screen Actors Guild are in work.

"I've been very lucky. But I've had my rough times.

"I didn't mind going to sea, or working in the docks. But when I was a professional fighter I didn't like canvas on my back so I gave it up."

I asked if he preferred to do his acting in the theatre, or in the film or television studio.

"I don't mind," he said. "I

just like to act. But the theatre is more satisfying because you get immediate audience reaction.

"You can be in a film studio making a comedy picture and, of course, there has to be absolute quiet on the set. So when the actors say something funny, they have to wait five months before they know whether the audience thinks it funny, too.

"But I've worked with some great people in the studios. Like Clark Gable. They used to call him 'The King'. He was a great guy. People didn't really know him.

"He couldn't go anywhere without being mobbed. The club, the race track, anywhere.

"So he kept to himself by going out into the woods, hunting. He resented the invasion of his privacy. He was no different to anyone else. He liked to go to restaurants, too. But it was impossible."

I wanted to know if he had had any regrets in life.

"Yes." He grinned. "My biggest regrets are the temptations I successfully resisted.

"No, seriously, I don't have any regrets," he went on. "I'm a happy man. I take life as it comes. You pass this way but once.

"Now I relax with the more gentle sports. I like golf and fishing. I used to be a pretty good golfer, but to stay that way you have to play every day. When you become a weekend golfer you turn into a great liar."

We walked out into the London streets. There were cheery waves and shouts from passing vans. And people stopped this familiar figure to shake his hand, or to ask for his autograph.

I had the feeling that they still thought of this man with the pushed-in face and funny voice as Captain Dan Mathews of "Highway Patrol" and that they would do so for a long time yet. I think Mr Broderick Crawford noticed it too — and liked the idea!

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