

Square Jaw *and Big Heart*

The life and times
of a Hollywood actor

By Charles Napier
with Dante W. Renzulli, Jr.

Dedication

Charles Napier:

To my sons Whit and Hunter, my daughter Meghan
and to my friend and co-author Dante,
for making this book happen.

Dante W. Renzulli Jr.:

To my wife Pat, and children,
Joanne, Michelle, Bill and Liz.

Square Jaw & Big Heart

© 2011 Charles Napier & Dante W. Renzulli, Jr. All Rights Reserved.

All illustrations are copyright of their respective owners, and are also reproduced here in the spirit of publicity. Whilst we have made every effort to acknowledge specific credits whenever possible, we apologize for any omissions, and will undertake every effort to make any appropriate changes in future editions of this book if necessary.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopying or recording, except for the inclusion in a review, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the USA by:
BearManor Media
P O Box 71426
Albany, Georgia 31708
www.bearmanormedia.com

ISBN 978-1-59393-624-2

Printed in the United States of America.

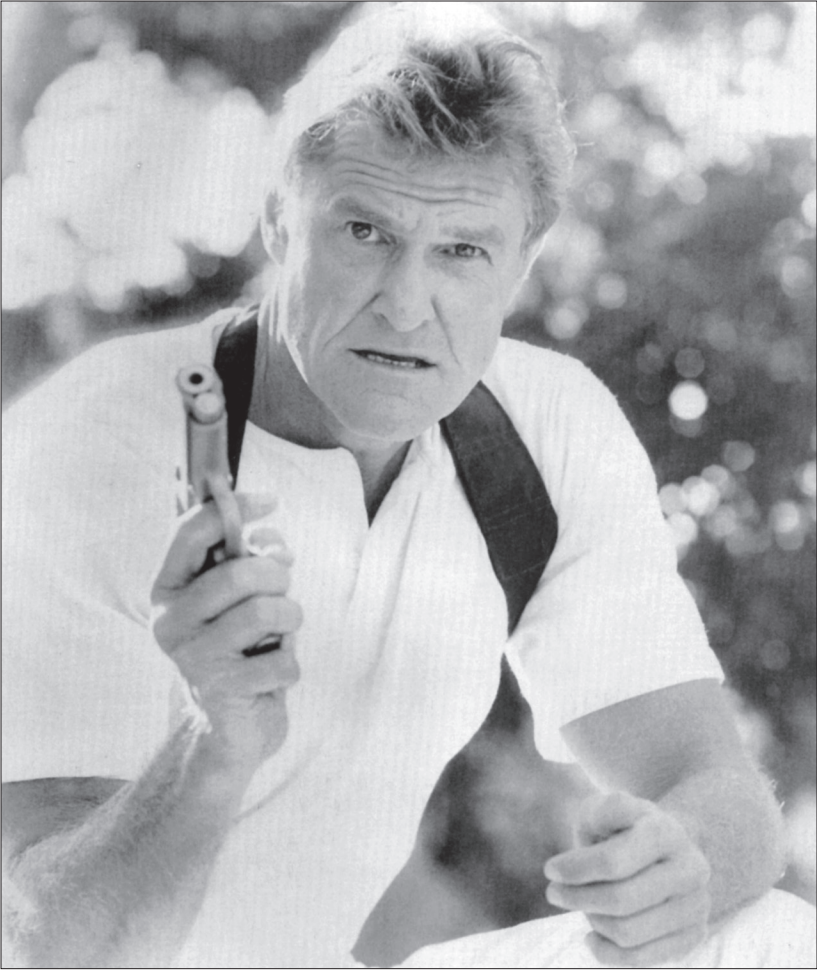
Book and cover design by Darlene Swanson of Van-garde Imagery, Inc.
Cover photo courtesy of The Russell A. Meyer Charitable Trust and Julio Dattavio, Photo Curator. See website: www.russmeyer.com

Contents

Preface	ix
Beginnings	1
World War II.	7
Scottsville, Kentucky.	13
Army Life.	21
My Acting Life Starts.	23
Star Trek	29
Moonfire	33
Overdrive Magazine	35
Alfred Hitchcock	37
Russ Meyer.	39
Rock Hudson	45
Streets of San Francisco	47
Baa Baa Black Sheep	49
Oregon Trail	53
Handle with Care	57

Big Bob Johnson	59
Thunder and Lightning	63
Budd Boetticher	67
Melvin and Howard	69
The Blue and The Grey	73
and Gregory Peck	73
The A-Team	77
Rambo: First Blood II	79
Filming Overseas	83
André The Giant	87
Instant Justice	89
The Outlaws	91
Radio Shack	95
Blues Brothers	97
Married to the Mob	101
War and Remembrance	103
Grifters	105
Red Necks in Love	107
Silence of the Lambs	109
Philadelphia	111
Tyson the Movie	113
The Cable Guy	117

Rod Steiger.	119
Annapolis.	123
Curb Your Enthusiasm.	129
The Goods, Live Hard, Sell Hard	133
The Slammer.	137
Buck McNeely.	143
The Charles Napiers	149
Dr. Phil	151
Agents.	155
Fame.	159
Some Thoughts on Acting	161
Appendix.	167
Index.	177



PR shot from the 1980's

Preface

Wherever I go, people will look at me as if they recognize me. They see that square jaw with the big smile. They may not know my name, but they know that face. That happens when you have been an actor for almost forty years, appearing in over 100 films and innumerable TV shows and commercials.

It has occurred to me that I have visited so many people in the privacy of their home via TV, that it's no wonder people (for the most part) treat me almost like family. I've been in their homes for so long that sometimes I feel like I am "the world's friend." I used to look at the TV antenna (remember them?) on top of a house and think, "I've been to your house."

Once while I was filming an obscure movie in the Northern Apennines region of Italy, I took a break and I wandered into some small remote village. Naturally I sought out the local bar for some nourishment. There was a black and white TV behind the bar, being watched by the local villagers. I took a seat at the bar. I look over at the TV. The *Dukes of Hazzard* was on, dubbed in Italian. Suddenly I appear on the screen, speaking perfect Italian. I had done a couple episodes of this show, but I did them in English.

The locals there started to do double takes, comparing the image on the TV with the American sitting at their village bar. I smiled at them, and they knowingly smiled back. Since I really didn't speak Italian, I offered a toast in English. I bought a round of drinks and we all became friends. Then I disappeared out the door, as if a ghost or phantom. I realized that my face is known all over, whether in some remote village of Italy or in the big cities of the United States. When you look at the sum of a man's life, there's something to be said for that.

I wrote this book to give you a perspective of what it is like to be an actor who makes his living in the movie and TV business. I may not be a major star, but I had enough talent to work for over forty years at it. I've known and worked with some of the great (and not so great) stars and talent of our times. I've loved it and I hope you enjoy my story.

— Charles Napier

Beginnings

Life began for me in Scottsville, Allen County, Kentucky on April 12, 1936. My father was a farmer and also a mail carrier. I had a younger brother and an older sister. Unfortunately we lost my brother, when I was very young.

I remember it was cold, very cold. The year was 1938 and I was two years old. How can anyone remember anything at that age? I did and still do. My dad broke the cold silence with these words, “Your brother is dead.” Then he left. My sister started screaming. She was five and understood. My dead brother had a name, Thomas Franklin Napier. I can’t recall the exact date but it is recorded somewhere.

This event took place in a rural area of Kentucky, Allen County. Scottsville was the county seat. I’m told we had 80 or so acres. Tobacco was our cash crop and was always sold just before Christmas time. The house was a one bedroom clapboard shack. An open fireplace and cook stove was our only heat. Light came from a coal oil (kerosene) lamp. I can still smell that acrid smell today. The road outside was gravel and if one looked left from the front porch, it led to the Methodist Church. This church was the hub and meeting place for several fanatical families, who gathered every boring Sunday AM

2 Square Jaw & Big Heart

to listen to some ignorant preacher rave and rant about sin, sin, sin. If being pure every day of the week wasn't enough, they held revivals every summer for two weeks. The point of this purgatory was the purification of the soul and "getting saved." "Getting saved" was never quite explained to me but I was filled to the max with guilt. It was a terrifying moment with the women sitting on one side, the men on the other side.

These women would leap straight up into the air shouting and babbling incoherently, speaking in tongues. They would advance toward the bad boys sitting in the back row. Most of them couldn't take the pressure and bolted for the door. Those unfortunate ones who were caught were literally dragged, kicking and screaming, to the altar, also called the "moaner's bench." There they were prayed over, prodded, and pounded into heaven's gate. One confession wasn't enough. Each year at revival, you were expected to fess up again and again. Once I learned to lie flat on the floor and pretend religious seizures, I realized it was a great position to look up the women's dresses. We had one preacher who had also discovered this little pleasure, and was usually the first one to hit the floor in a full frontal prone position.

My father was born in 1888; my mother in 1898. My Dad, Linus Pitts Napier, was 49 years old when I was born. LP (as he was called) was a small, no nonsense, serious man, who seldom smiled. He lived to be three months short of 104 years old. My father was born in Allen County, Kentucky. The Napiers can trace their heritage back to a Dr. Thomas Napier, who supposedly arrived from Scotland in the late 1800s. My mother was Sara Lena Loafman.

My mother was not from our community, and was naturally iso-

lated from her side of the family. My father served as a medic during WWI and was wounded in the Argon Forest sometime in 1918. Returning home, he somehow met my mother, who lived in another county. Courting in those days was quite a challenge, as the major mode of transportation was a horse or mule back. Henry Ford had just begun to make inroads into this forgotten part of the world, but somehow Dad had acquired one and thus he brought home his bride. Both parents were of middle age when we kids were born, thus we had a dose of early 19th century attitudes, superimposed on our young, impressionable minds at a very tender age.

We had a farm of about 80 or so acres. The chief money crop was tobacco, which was sold around Christmas time each year. Money, real cash money, was hard to come by. No credit cards were used in those days; it was all cash. Food was raised on the farm. Only coffee and sugar were purchased. We had two horses, Bob and Betty, and a mule (his name escapes me). My greatest fear was being attacked each and every day by a rooster. It was called flogging. My dad beat the shit out of this evil bird but to no avail. I could shoot a 22 cal. rifle at the age of four and, as soon as opportunity presented itself, I drilled this bastard between the eyes. No small feat I assure you when being stalked. My first victory. This farm was eerie. Mamma always said when you heard a whippoorwill call after dark, someone was going to die. My cousin, Dr. Willard Blankenship (very talented and famous), told me that the Napiers married Browns. The reason? They were slaves. Not a very desirable past I can assure you, but I remember the old slave quarters at Aunt Johnnie's place. Still there today, I guess.

This part of Kentucky suffered the evils of the Civil War. Kentucky

was a border state. Brother fought against brother. Father against son. Those hatreds exist even today. The mountain feuds were not necessarily about the Hatfields and McCoys, but about deep seated hatreds left over from that dark and evil conflict. Raiders on both sides struck deep into the heart of this state.

When I was about five, we moved. Gone were the cry of the whip-poorwills. Gone were the woods that kept me frightened. Gone was the red clay earth I even used to eat. I was about to enter a new world.

My mother's aunt was called Aunt Pearl. She was married to a cultured gentleman (a preacher) we called Uncle Potter. Aunt Pearl had class. Even then, not even knowing what class was, I could recall. All socializing was done at church. Everyone's life revolved around that church and the harsh rules and regulations governing our every move. Every thought was scrutinized by these bucolic people.

I recall being placed in Uncle Potter's car. For some reason I was fascinated by the hood ornament. As if in a dream, we rode for what seemed like an eternity, and finally came to a stop at a little house on what was called the Glasgow Pike. I was stunned! There were houses on both sides of our little place. Strange people lived across the road (not really a street but a two lane highway) and lots of cars passed, much to my amazement.

It was here that I was introduced to bullies, sex, and fights. It all started first at Scottsville Elementary School. It was some three or four miles away, in Scottsville. I remember the first day. My dad had gotten a job as a rural mail carrier. Boy he was pleased. A steady weekly check. He was a very frugal man. Believe it or not, in the 1930's, he had purchased a 100 acre farm for less than 5000 dollars. And he held

on to that farm. We also owned the little house on Glasgow Pike. I still have some memories of it. A family across the road had ten or twelve kids. No one supervised anyone in those days. You simply went out on your own and got the shit beat out of you for starters. When I inquired why this happened, I was told by the older brother to pick out one of his brothers who was younger, and smaller than me, and apply an ass whipping on him. I did so, but soon found myself feeling like a bully, so I stopped. In keeping with their simple and primitive ways, I was introduced to sex with the sisters of this family.