

## How Leonard Nimoy hurt his good friend's wife

By Penny Layne

What kind of man is Leonard Nimoy? Ask the people who grew up with him in Boston and they will say something like – “He was the most wonderful boy the world ever created ... A very capable boy – he always knew how to take care of himself ... He was a one-in-a-million boy.” Remarks like these are common. Leonard has always been a likeably and easy-going guy.

So how can we say he is hurting his best friend's wife?

The whole business began when Martin Landau demanded \$ 12,000 a week from his Paramount bosses to continue starring in *Mission: Impossible*. The studio turned down his demand, commenting that if they gave Landau that much, they would have to match it for Peter Graves, whose contract states no actor in the series can exceed his salary.

Landau kept his word, for when he didn't get his raise, he walked off the hit show. For him it was easy. He had been brought on as a week-to-week extra star in the show, but his mail far exceeded anyone else's in the early days. Such popularity did not go unnoticed. Martin became a weekly star. But he didn't want to be tied down to a long-term contract, and never signed one. So Martin could pretty much have things his own way.

Eventually, Steven Hill, the original star of the show, quit. The top-rated series' producers recognized the bind they could get in with just one star – especially one without a contract. So they landed Peter Graves for extra punch. The executives' thinking paid off when Landau made his demands.

If worse came to worst, Graves could carry the show. His popularity was almost as strong as Landau's. But the star with the most viewer appeal was neither of the strong male leads. It was the ex-fashion model, remote-eyes, blond Miss Barbara Bain that the fans really dug. As the only permanent female cast member, she stood out above the many male

leads. With Barbara and Peter still around, the M:I execs were not worried about Landau.

But Barbara proved very sympathetic to Martin's demands. She, too, threatened to leave, even though she was signed to a firm contract. But then, Martin and Barbara are man and wife in real life, and they are not the sort of couple you can divide and conquer. Where one goes, the other follows. Barbara quit, contract or no. As of now, she is being sued by Paramount, which claims she cannot work elsewhere until she clears up her contract with them.

*Mission: Impossible* was at its lowest ebb at that point. Many shows have survived the loss of one major star – *Bonanza* lost one of the original Cartwright brothers, Pernell Roberts, and many foretold doom for the show; but it survived quite nicely and still is a consistent top-10 winner. But rarely has a show lost its two top stars and lived long afterwards.

The studio, naturally, was in a tizzy. Then they had a great stroke of luck. Another Paramount teleseries, *Star Trek*, had just gone down for the third time. Although the show had been saved time and again by heavy fan mail, its Nielsen rating was much too low. The show was cancelled.

Suddenly Leonard Nimoy, one of *Star Trek*'s two stars, was set adrift in Hollywood once again. Leonard is a born actor. But no matter how good you are, luck plays an important part in any actor's career. Until *Star Trek*, Leonard's luck had been only fair. He admitted, “The show is the first steady job I've had in 17 years.” It was the chance of a lifetime.

To the small crowd of “in” people in Hollywood, Leonard was known to be a solid performer. He had “paid his dues” to the acting profession. For starters, he had been a soda jerk, pet shop toiler, cab driver and employed in sundry other jobs to partially

support his family while waiting for the right break. After constantly working at perfecting his craft, he was asked to teach acting to others.

Martin Landau has much the same background. It was inevitably that they meet and become friends. Besides sharing the same profession and being able to teach it, they share a common religion – Judaism. All this has drawn their families close together. It is only natural that the two families rejoice in each other's success since both got lucky at about the same time.

Just as suddenly, both actors were jobless, Nimoy because of the precarious aspects of the business, Landau because he wanted to be well compensated for continuing in the weekly series. And poor Barbara Bain, Martin's wife, seemed caught in the middle. But not for long, she too made good her threat and left *Mission: Impossible*.

Leonard Nimoy's fans then wasted no time in letting Paramount know they wanted Leonard back on the screen and fast! Nor did the studio want to let such a valuable talent go. A news release stated that Nimoy had been signed to do some movies for television.

But before he could make even one movie, the studio swooped down and chose him as a temporary replacement for Martin Landau on *M: I*. At that time, most people considered that Landau would finally return to the show. When Landau made no signs of reconsidering his position, Nimoy's new character Paris became a regular cast member.

For Leonard it was a chance to prove that he could be suave and sophisticated, totally opposite from his portrayal of Mr. Spock on *Star Trek*. Often when fans identify so strongly with an actor on a show, it is the character they are identifying with and not the actor. Leonard feared this was the case with the fans from his first series.

But his recent success on the second series has dispelled any doubts he had. The fans like the new Nimoy even better. He talks normally, shows emotion, dresses nod, spots a fashionable hair-do and shows off his own, unpointed ear lobes. In fact, he comes across so groovy he's getting the "swinger" crowd who see him as a matinee idol.

The change came just when Leonard needed it. He thoroughly digs his new, modern role. Leonard appreciates what television has done for him. As he explained to one reporter, "My income, in 18 months, went from \$ 16,000 a year to \$ 150,000. Wham! I'm a contract actor and I've sold my soul, but I'm not sorry for it."

He is anything but sorry. For too many years he and his wife Sandi struggled to make ends meet. The financial windfall means they can live in an expensive California home and offer the finest benefits to their two youngsters, Julie and Adam, who were born during their poverty period.

As for Martin Landau, he made no effort to hide the fact that he was bored by his weekly television series. There are some who believe he purposefully made his demands so high he knew Paramount would refuse to meet them and he could leave the show for just cause in the press. Landau has always preferred movies to television. He finds movies more stimulating, more challenging. Currently he is completing an important film role in Italy.

If the facts are carefully examined, the only one seemingly hurt by the whole affair is Barbara Bain. It is possible that if an actor of Nimoy's talent and television popularity had not been so readily available to replace Martin, the Landaus' requests might have been granted and they would still be the co-stars of *Mission: Impossible*.

Whereas Martin can continue his career even though he walked out on the television show, Barbara at the moment cannot. There is that lawsuit pending. Any American producer who tries to employ her could find himself involved in legal difficulties. She is being effectively blocked at present from pursuing her career. Had she finished out her contract to Paramount, she would have been free to make movies along with her husband. But she did not. She chose to follow him.

Barbara Bain is a two-time Emmy winner, probably the most popular actress on television. This latter statement is no idle dream. Even with the addition of Nimoy to the *M: I* cast, Peter Graves and the rest of the regulars and the consistent casting of such

lovely actresses as Lee Grant and Dina Merrill, many feel the show has lost that special something it had last season. One reason according to critics is the absence of Barbara Bain. She brought a special essence to the show; an essence no other actress, blond or otherwise, can replace.

But this may be of small consolation to Barbara. The public is fickle. Someone new eventually enters the scene to replace the lost face. If Barbara is kept from acting for too long a time, whatever backing she built up could be gone by the time she returns to the screen. Her career, which once looked so promising, is at an important crossroads. The stakes are high; the road back to the top can be

a long, hard climb. Luckily Barbara has her husband and family to fall back upon. She knew what she was doing when she broke her contract. She must think the price is worth the trouble.

Leonard in no way was influenced by the Landaus in their decision. And one actor's bad luck is another's good luck. What is happening to Barbara now could have befallen him. He could have been off the screen long enough to be forgotten. No one believes he started out to hurt his close friend's wife. It just happened. And it is no one's fault. Both Martin and Barbara wish their friend luck with their old show.