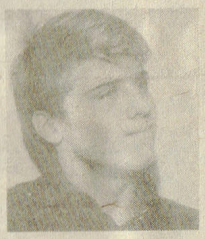
C209

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

The glamour and frenzy of Hollywood life have never been known to be excessively kind to the family unit. The endless weeks of work separate fathers, mothers and children only physically at first, but after a while, Hollywood nights lead to Hollywood fights, and doses of blind ambition, narcotics or inflated egos divide a group into a group of individuals.

By ANDY NULMAN



But there are exceptions to every rule or theory, and a prime example of a clan who have bucked the above system is the Van Pattens.

Although there are five living happily together in the Van Patten household, father Dick and middle son Vince are probably best known to the North American masses — the former for his roles in "When Things Were Rotten" and presently "Eight Is Enough", and the latter for his portrayal of "The Bionic Boy", countless Disney pictures, and his choice of tennis buddies, namely Farrah Fawcett-Majors.

And although "like father, like son" is an often-heard adage, nowhere does it better apply than in this instance.

"We have the same sense of humour," admits Vince, a 22-year-old "All-American boy" type. "We laugh at the same type of movies, like Mel Brooks for example. I also caught the gambling fever from my father."

Gambling is only one of the activities that Vince and his dad share in (you can catch the pair in "The World Series of Poker", on NBC later this season).

Togetherness

"We do a lot together," says cherubic Dick. "We have never done anything alone. If I go away on vacation, my wife and three sons all come along.

"It's not that I'm doing an honorable thing, it's just that they're wonderful company."

"It's really incredible," enthuses Rick Disensi, Vince's driver during his stay in Montreal while shooting the film "Yesterday". When Dick was in town a couple of weeks ago to visit Vince, I noticed quite a comparison. Their habits, their mannerisms, the way they talk and the rapidness of their words are one and the same."

But even when apart, the sum of the father-son team's parts is quite plentiful.

While most actors his age would be awed by the endless surrounding spectacle, Vince remains cool, professional, courteous and extremely polite.

"That's another trait I picked up from him," Vince smiles. "I don't tell people off. I just take all they dish out, even when sometimes I should tell them off.

"Actually, it has been my family that has kept me so together," he continues sincerely. "We've been in it so long that my father has taught me that this shouldn't change my life. If you're in 'the business', you separate your normal existence from your acting life. Either you can handle success, or you can't."

Saving attitude.

"I think he's always had that attitude," echoes Dick. "And that's what has saved him, because a lot of these kids grow up in the business, and they think they're something special. But all of a sudden, they get a little older, don't get any work, and then they become neurotic and resort to dope. They're very unhappy. But Vince isn't."

Just what is it that has kept Vince so polished in a world of rough jewels?

"He has strong feelings about religion," Dick notes, "but I think it has probably been tennis. It has kept him so busy that he really hasn't had much time to get into trouble."

Tennis plays a tremendous role in Vince's life. A second-ranked pro in Southern California, it looks like the sport will soon override Vince's acting career.

"After this movie, I'm really considering going on the pro circuit," he confesses. "I'll wait for these films (along with 'Yesterday', Vince has recently finished 'Rock and Roll High School', a Roger Corman film featuring punk rockers 'The Ramones') to come out and see how the reaction is. It's good to have something to fall back on."

Give it a shot

What does dear old dad think of sonny's decision?

"I definitely think he should give it a shot," he says. "You see, Vince is very modest and shy, so he probably hasn't told you, but he's one of the top 100 tennis players in the world, and has beat players like Roscoe Tanner. He's in the class of Jimmy Connors and Bjorn Borg. He has only been doing it part-time, in between jobs.

"These other players practice five hours a day, but Vincent will go away with a movie for seven weeks, then come back, enter these tournaments, and get to the finals or semis against some of the world's greatest. I think he should drop out of acting for about a year, and devote it to tennis. Even if he doesn't make it, at least we'll know he tried."

Although an established pro out west, the most widely heralded of Vince's on-court experiences has been his many matches with Farrah Fawcett-Majors, which has resulted in a long-running rumour of a romance between the blond pair.

"There's nothing to it, so it doesn't bother me at all," says Vince with a sigh. "If that's what people want to believe, let them. I feel a little bad though, because I wouldn't want anyone to say things like that about me when I get married."

"Actually, my older son Nels, also a tennis pro, is the one who taught Farrah to play," explains Dick, "but since he's not the actor, they made it like she and Vincent are having an affair. Farrah is my wife Pat's best friend, and we're with her and Lee all the time. I feel bad because, it makes Lee look sort of dopey, but he's not — he's a smart man."

The Van Pattens are just an ordinary family in an unordinary line of work. When away from home, Vince calls Dick every two to three days, just as in any other close father-son partnership. "He's a great person who really enjoys life," says Vince about his father. Dick counters by calling his son "an exceptional kid"

"But I hope I don't come off sounding like the 'proud father' sounding off," cautions Dick.

Don't worry. You both have an awful lot to be proud of.

Photo by Lawrence Kirsch / Sparrow Photos

Vince takes a breather on the set of "Yesterday", filmed in Montreal. Because of the strenuous skating involved, he muses "It was my hardest role."

Dick (second from right, bottom row) demonstrates how to properly build a family with the cast of his popular "Eight Is Enough" show. "Tom Bradford is not too far away from myself," Dick admits.

Dick on son:

"He's an exceptional kid"

Vince on Dad:

"A great person who really enjoys life"