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15¢ Local Programs July 12-18



Peggy Lipton,
Clarence Williams III,
Michael Cole
of 'The Mod Squad'

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Well, you can imagine the heartfelt gratitude and relief that surged through friends and relations when Michael Cole got a steady job.

There he was, a high school dropout, a participant in an early one-child marriage and divorce, former bartender, bookstore clerk and part-time pizza maker and, at 25, enough to worry a mother sick.

There is a happy twist to this familiar tale of a young man who couldn't seem to find himself. Michael Cole did find work—not down at the corner A&P but as Pete Cochran of ABC's *The Mod Squad*.

All those years of hoping, of everyone saying, "If only Mike would settle down and make something of himself," are over. The Madison, Wis., lad has a new and glowing image:

"When you look at Michael Cole, you forget *where* you are or even *who* you are, for Mike has a commanding presence not unlike that of a great and beautiful feline animal about to spring for the kill. . . . His shining brown hair curls against his face, making him look like a young Greek god. Though he turns and looks around occasionally, his beautiful, crystal blue eyes do not see. They are connected with some secret inner vision which, at the moment, you are not allowed to share. . . ."

That, in one writer's gurgly prose, is the whole true word. Many similar things have been written about him now that he is an honored figure in the gallery of teen-agers' gods.

Mike is besieged by interviewers—more than 70 so far—and his first

reaction, because he is a very uncertain, inexperienced and emotional young man, was that everyone was after his soul.

"I refuse to open up and share my life with some idiot who pre-interprets what I say and what I am," Mike declares in a sentence that is, for him, uniquely free of cuss words. "I want



to say, 'Don't lay it on me like that—with your little list of stupid questions.' "

"Mike overreacts to everything at first," says his brother, Maj. Ted Cole of Fort Ord, Cal., who does not overreact, even to Mike.

"Mike's got a definite hostility to anyone he doesn't know," says *Mod Squad* producer Aaron Spelling, "but it's more a defense mechanism than real hos-

tility. I don't think it lasts long. When we called him in and explained what the show was about—three young people working with the police—Mike exploded. 'I don't want anything to do with it,' he said. 'I'm not going to take the part of a guy who finks on his friends. It's a lousy idea and I hope you never make it.' 'Will you shut up and



read the script?' I said. He took the script and came back later and said, 'May I test for your series, please?' That's typical."

Estelle Harmon, whose acting workshop Mike attended, disagrees. "I don't think Mike's hostile. Of course, if he's drunk, he changes his image, and he's enough of an actor that he can play the image. The first year, his

drinking worried me. He never came to class drunk or even high, but I worried because I have seen students go down the drain from drink or drugs.

"He studied here three years, although he started working before he stopped studying. The last year, he was on a working scholarship. We called him stage manager but he even went

He has a hard time even saying 'Good Morning'

Michael Cole is beset by instant hostility to any new person or situation

By Robert de Roos

out to the house and washed my husband's car and polished brass. He never seemed too much concerned with material things. 'I've starved this long,' he said, 'I can starve a little longer.' People usually like Mike and like to help him, but he was never a guy with a bowl in his hands."

Paula Kelly Dickinson, Cole's steady girl friend, says, "I was working on →

a newspaper for \$40 a week and I was feeding Mike for a while. Then he got a job at a bar and then found Estelle Harmon. That started things."

Bob Kenny, who shared his apartment with Mike, says, "While he was studying he was low on funds and I helped out a bit. We helped each other. I was extremely introverted, and Mike brought me out of that."

Before he was employed regularly, Mike spent a lot of time alone, reading and mulling the long, simplistic thoughts of youth. Deborah Walley, a young actress who dated Mike for two years, remembers:

"Mike doesn't like to dance, but we did spend a lot of time listening to music. We spent more time in bars than anywhere else. Mike would drink, and when he gets drunk, he gets more hostile. He drinks because it's an act. Mike wants to appear tough and he loves the fact that he's Irish. That's part of the picture he paints of himself and it's not a good picture.

"We did a lot of talking and we drove a lot—out to the beach. The drives were the most fun. Each of us would bring a book and sit on the rocks and read. We talked about every subject there is."

Mike can remain silent for many hours, but he also can spring into a discussion day or night, sometimes tripping over his words or inserting curses into gaps in his vocabulary. Sometimes it comes out hip and almost unintelligible: "Like, man, I'm trying to do the understanding thing. A last attempt, man, to get it on, the whole number, to make it *love* for everyone.

"That's why I admire the hippies and the love movement. How can anyone have the audacity to knock it? And make them social outcasts? Isn't it interesting that a society would want to outcast somebody who wants to advocate love?

"The white kid today has got a ter-

rible problem," Mike continued, "and that's how to justify in his own mind what some Mississippi redneck did last night or 20 years ago or a hundred years ago. He thinks, 'I'm being blamed for acts that I have no idea about.' So he tries to overcome this and at times is overnice just because somebody's black. And that's bull. And it's bull for the black person, too. I think there's dignity about the races sticking together. We can do business. We can love one another that way.

"I'm not an angry young man," he said. "I am a concerned and conscientious young man." Adds Mike, "I've had an emotionally rich past—a lot of things have happened. I am really quite sensitive about what I have experienced. I'm fortunate to recall my feelings and it is a great help in my craft. A situation in the script will remind me of something I've been through and that helps me recreate the emotion. I concentrate on that situation and how I felt."

On the questionnaire submitted to Estelle Harmon's workshop, Mike wrote, "I am going through a religious upheaval—an identity thing. I want to find out how deep I can go and what I can do."

Today, four years later, Mike says, "Acting, like any other creative endeavor, is decided for you. A creative person doesn't *decide* what he wants to be—it *overtakes* him.

"Some people realize at one point in their lives that 'This is not just something I *want* to do—it's what I *am*. There's no way to keep me from being what I am. It's a blessing. I'm so fortunate to realize what I'm here for—I've recognized what I *am*."

Mike's attitude toward money is ambiguous. He stayed at Aaron Spelling's apartment for weeks because he did not want to spend what little money he had for rent. Mike had never had a car and was reluctant to buy one even after it was established that *Mod Squad*

had a certain degree of permanency. But when he finally sprang, he went big—and bought a Jaguar XK-E. "I don't know how much money I'm making on the show," Mike said recently. "I let people I trust take care of that. But I don't mind spending money—I've spent my share. I've just never had very much of it."

Deborah Walley recalls, "Mike doesn't believe in presents that you buy. He'd give me what he calls 'good stuff'—rocks or leaves or shells, things that turn him on." She picked up a tiny box full of red berries from a pepper tree. "Here's some 'good stuff' he gave me," she said. "Mike told me these are magic beans."

Mike is very close to his mother, who now lives in Canoga Park, in the San Fernando Valley. "We often go out to his mother's when we have dates," says Paula Dickinson. They also visit his brother Ted and his family at Fort Ord when Mike can get away from the show.

"I personally have this very happy thing for children," Mike says. "They've got all that *babyishness* going for them. I can really dig that."

Mike looks back on his short career: "There are so many creative people around here who could upstage me right off the lot—but they don't. One of the warmest moments I've had in the industry was when Howard Koch, head of the production at Paramount, one of the biggest producers there is, called me in," Mike says. "Me! I'd never even been on a sound stage. Boy, I sat in his outer office concentrating on how cool I was going to be, but my hands were perspiring so much they were almost dripping. And when I shook hands with Mr. Koch, he said, 'Relax, Michael. My hands perspire when I meet new people too! *That* from one of the giants of the industry. It was a kind thing to say."

And it is a statement which says a great deal about Michael Cole. END



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