



A Life of Make Believe: From Paralysis to Hollywood

John Mahon

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KIRKUS BOOK REVIEW A memoir from a physically disabled actor who navigated the rough-and-tumble world of showbiz. You may not recognize his name, but there's a good chance you've seen Mahon in a TV show or movie. Since the 1970s, this veteran character actor has appeared in numerous works—usually portraying a police officer or military man—such as *The Exorcist*, *The Rockford Files*, *The X-Files*, *L.A. Confidential* and *Armageddon*. But for Mahon, the path to Hollywood wasn't easy; as detailed in his memoir, he spent most of his life facing personal and professional obstacles. In 1950, at the age of 12, Mahon contracted polio, which caused him to lose the use of his left arm. The ongoing thread through this book is that, despite his physical disability and some professional setbacks, Mahon never gave up: "I didn't want to be an actor. I had to be one." Along the way, Mahon offers anecdotes about some of his acting roles; his friendship with Jason Miller, best known as Father Karras in *The Exorcist* and the playwright of the Pulitzer Prize-winning work *That Championship Season*; and his encounters with fellow actors such as Al Pacino, Warren Beatty, James Garner and James Coburn. Perhaps because Mahon isn't a recognizable famous star and he didn't live a tremendously glamorous lifestyle, the book's tone is quite unassuming and modest compared with other gossip-laden celebrity tell-alls. Managing a dash of humor, he's frank about some of the not-so-pleasant aspects of the profession—whether it's him dealing with a particular actor or director or working on projects that never got off the ground. Mahon's straightforward, honest perspective about his craft could benefit aspiring actors who take heed of his wisdom and experience. Thoughtful and entertaining, an engaging example of determination both on screen and in real life.

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John Davis:

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