

The Many Roles of Joe Mantegna

The actor and self-proclaimed cat person discusses his work on "Criminal Minds," "Joan of Arcadia" and as an animal advocate.

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Joe Mantegna at home with his Siamese cat Juliet. Photo by Chris Amerouso. "Criminal Minds" star and critically acclaimed actor Joe Mantegna talked with CAT FANCY for an exclusive interview in which he talked openly about his off-screen roles as husband, father and self-proclaimed cat person. Here he discusses his on-screen roles as an FBI agent on CBS' "Criminal Minds," a dad on "Joan of Arcadia," and an animal activist who offers his talents in public service announcements.

Q. Do you do any volunteer work or donate to help cats?

A. I am pretty active with the Humane Society of the United States. I have done public service announcements for them. I think they do great work. I have also presented at the Genesis Awards about three times. I am a big advocate for taking care of all animals.

Q. As one of TV Guide's 50 Greatest TV Dads of All Time for starring in "Joan of Arcadia," how do you compare to the father you played on that TV show?

A. I like to think that it is pretty similar. I loved doing that show, and I felt that in many ways I was portraying an extension of myself. I was very proud of that show, and it was ahead of its time in many ways; it was about real people. You could watch it and get something out of it. I like the way that the family and the kids were portrayed, and I wouldn't hesitate to say that I could only wish to be as good a dad as I was able to portray on that show.

Q. You received an honorary doctorate of psychology. Is psychology an interest of yours?

A. It is now! By my being an actor, my whole thing in life is to study people and behavior, to try to use it and understand it. I don't have an interest in the sense that I want to be a psychologist, but I definitely use it as part of my acting career.

Q. Do you ever wish that you had pursued a different career other than acting?

A. No, I am lucky. I wound up where I was supposed to be. I discovered it in high school and if at 16 years old something knocks you between the eyes and you say "I want to do this more than anything in the world" and at 61 years old you can still say that, then I have hit the jackpot.

Q. If you could incorporate cats into "Criminal Minds" what would the storyline be?

A. I could see my character having cats, so maybe later on down the road if we do an episode that deals with my home life we could show that he had a cat. He wouldn't have a dog; he is not that responsible. Dogs are too hands-on.

Q. Do you ever go above and beyond to pamper your cats?

A. My wife does. Things enter the house, and I'm like "what was that?" It's some cat structure that's going in the laundry room that is bigger than some apartments I have had in New York. We try to be aware of using natural products, and I think people are more aware of being green in their day-to-day life, and my wife is really good about that.