

AggieLife

An Aggie on the road to becoming a SUPERSTAR!

By Matt Patin
THE BATTALION

And... action!
In the early days of childhood, when many were out playing baseball in the park or exploring the uncharted boundaries of their neighborhoods, James Leary was inside watching *Star Wars* and beginning himself as Luke Skywalker.

Today, Leary has turned imagination into reality and has several acting jobs to his name, including spots on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and the short-lived Telemundo sitcom "Los Beltran." But Leary's ongoing road to stardom did not come easily.

Leary graduated from A&M in 1995 as an industrial distribution major, but knew since he was five that his passion was acting. Living out the lives of those he watched on television and in movies. When dressing-up as his favorite character no longer satisfied him, the budding actor tried out for his first school play in eighth grade. Leary made it a hobby and a goal to star in as many school productions as possible in high school.

The sporadic, unsure nature of a career in acting, however, did not go over well with Leary's parents. After putting his dreams on hold for several years in college, Leary had some outside influence in resurrecting his knack for acting.

My girlfriend at the time, now my wife, knew that I wasn't really Leary, she said. "(She) convinced me to try out for the first time of the year, 'Mindgames.'" It was the first audition I had in over two years, and I was very nervous, but I ended up getting the lead.

He did not stop there. The same year that he was quenching his thirst for acting with "Mindgames," Leary became a founding member of the A&M improvisation crew, Freudian Slip.

Between a job at a plumbing supply warehouse in Chicago and spending time with his wife, Stacie, Leary perfected his act at Second City and Improv Olympic, homes of sketch comedy and improvisation, and birthplaces of Saturday Night Live alumni Mike Myers, Bill Murray and Martin Short.

"I learned quite a bit from Improv Olympic, mostly about performance," Leary said. "I ended up on a team pretty quickly and started doing weekly shows, plus doing a show with some Freudian Slip members."

While in Chicago, Leary also performed in the play "Actors Who Lie to You." But after two years in Chicago and a lot of experience with acting crews under his belt, Leary decided it was time to travel to the summit of the entertainment industry — Los Angeles.

While in California, Leary trekked through several menial jobs to support himself and began his search for an agent.

Finding a good agent is horribly difficult," Leary admitted. "It's nerve-racking and gives you ulcers. And at the [early] level that in Hollywood, you are never happy with your agent for one reason or another."

With his agent's help and his own ambition, Leary landed several commercial auditions including some for Office Depot, Merck and Coors. Because of the nature of commercial auditions, Leary's experience with improvisation greatly helped.

Improvisation is an invaluable skill for any actor," Leary said, "especially here, where commercials are an actor's bread and butter. In most commercial auditions they want to do some sort of improv. You'd be amazed at how many people freak out and don't do it. Also, it helps free you up on stage. If you can handle being on stage in front of 300 people and just making stuff up on the spot, standing in a room of producers is a cakewalk."

Land auditions, however, is not always such an easy

endeavor, Leary said.

"You'll have those days where you feel like you'll never get a job. Once I was almost sure that I got a part for "Dharma and Greg," but I didn't. But trial-and-error is part of the game," Leary said. "No matter what, when you don't get a part, you can't take it personally."

Leary's optimism paid off. In 1999, he got a part in Telemundo's sitcom "Los Beltran," where he played Kevin Lynch, an American with atrocious Spanish-speaking skills. He was the only actor in the studio who could not speak Spanish, but cast and crew were intimately small, and Leary made several good acquaintances and heard the advice of experienced writers and directors.

After the show was canceled, Leary continued to pursue his career, armed with more experience and invaluable advice. By chance, he met the casting director for the UPN teen horror drama "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and has recently appeared in several episodes as Clem, a light-hearted demon.

"Clem is a demon, but with the personality of just a goofy guy," Leary said.

Since Clem requires prosthetics and make-up, many probably would not recognize Leary.

"The first time that I had to wear that head cast, it was really freaky," Leary said. "The first time I spent over four hours in make-up, and it took over half an hour to take everything off. Luckily, the next time it only took about two hours."

A lot of buzz is being made on fan Websites about Clem. Many fans enjoy Clem's light-hearted humor, which is ironic considering he is a demon. "Buffy" writers are often considerate of their demographic and its opinion, Leary said. If fans continue to enjoy Clem, he might have more frequent appearances on "Buffy."

Now, with a young child, a supportive wife and a blossoming acting career, Leary seems to have everything. But he has not forgotten the days when he would run around the house impersonating his idols and dream of studios, sets and



TOP: As demon Clem in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" BOTTOM: James C. Leary without make-up.

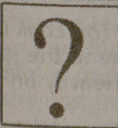
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stardom. Knowing that others share his dreams, Leary offered some advice.

"Of course you'll doubt yourself," Leary said. "But when you can't imagine doing anything else is when you know you were born to do it. Go out and act. Do anything you can find. The hardest part is the first step. Take it."

And that's a wrap.

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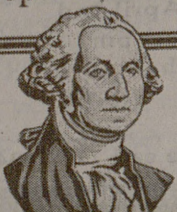
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