



female element, it looks like something *anyone* could really get excited about.

If he can put this one across, Tim will be set for the rest of his life as a real movie star. Maybe next year he'll be as unapproachable as Robert Redford and Al Pacino, but for the time being he's as unaffected as your kid brother. Things are starting to get a little ridiculous—he's becoming an in-demand item for the talk show circuit. He undertook a three-day publicity blitz to New York in August to hype the opening of *Almost Summer* for Universal; it was the first time he'd been to Manhattan since he did the Ed Sullivan show back in 1968 when he was a member of the Lucille Ball-Henry Fonda family in *Yours, Mine and Ours*. He's keeping his head about him, though—when the offer from Hollywood Squares came in, he said, "No way."

Meanwhile, he's available for golf dates with friends like Peter Riegert (Boon in *Animal House*), is still able to put time aside for important events like the World Series, strategic football games and buddy John "Bluto" Belushi's adventures on *Saturday Night Live*. He runs three miles on the beach below his house every morning and is occasionally capable of slipping out of town with his girlfriend for a weekend in Vancouver. Most important, he keeps in touch with his mother.

Tim told me he wanted to get into acting as a kid to help out his family because they were "real poor." This is not exactly true. According to Mrs. Sally Matheson, who should know: "Ninety-five per cent of that is true. We were not exactly poor. He probably didn't tell you that his father and I had a business, and his father worked for the airlines until Tim was 7 and his sister was 8, and then we separated . . ." (In fact, his father was one of the founders of PSA airlines.) "Tim did a lot of things to help us out," Mrs. Matheson explained. "But he loved acting from the time he was little. He loved everything to do with television, everything to do with any sort of acting. I had the television out when he was four, and it was being repaired—it was a console-type. I couldn't find him, and I looked and looked, and I went into the living room, and there was that face sticking out from behind the glass. He was on television. The only way I could punish him was to take his television away."

Ah-ha. A slightly different picture of the cagey Otter comes

into focus. Especially when you find out that his mother went to work as a secretary in the police department after her divorce, and that *Animal House* is the first R-rated movie she's ever seen. "I nearly lost my mind," she said, although she thought her son was "fantastic. There's no doubt about it."

Tim Matheson was a tiny little kid throughout high school, all the way into college, which he experienced for six months as a psych major at Cal State Northridge. For a long time he looked like he was about twelve, and when the offers began to pour in for him to appear as an eight-year-old here, a ten-year-old there, he totally lost interest in his education. His career moved over to the next logical stage, "professional juvenile," when he was a senior at Burbank's John Burroughs High School and grew five inches almost overnight. Before that he and Kurt Russell were the mainstays of Walt Disney Studios.

He grew from the time he finished at Burroughs until he was 21, when he attained the height to which he is presently adjusting himself (6'2"). He got away with roles as the perennial adolescent until he couldn't pull it off any longer and appeared in the TV version of his life, *What Ever Happened to the Class of '65?*

Tim Matheson is a seasoned professional actor. No matter how funny and charming and delightful he is, no matter how he likes to surprise you, no matter how much fun he can be, there's no avoiding that fact. Maybe Otter was the furthest extension of someone's wildest imagination, a fulfillment of everyone's fantasy of the supreme Male. Let's face it: no one could so epitomize both the sublime and the ridiculous as Eric Stratton. No one. Matheson's own mother summed it up: "I am looking forward to his being a star, but I will tell you one thing—outside of being a fine actor, he's a fine person. And, when his mother says that, that's something unusual. Most of them will tell you they're stinkers." Eric Stratton/Otter was a real stinker.

The point is this. Movies are movies. Tim Matheson will be setting off air raid sirens in *1941* which will reverberate in the minds and bodies of young women across America. "Eric Stratton"—Otter—turned into a gynecologist in Beverly Hills. It's only movies.

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