



# Truman's Very Own Dennis Farina

Feb. 29, 1944 – July 22, 2013

Dennis Farina had the sort of Chicago neighborhood face you'd find behind the tap at a corner tavern, standing at first base on a softball diamond or lugging your new icebox up the stairs. As he said to a Tribune reporter nearly 20 years ago while sitting high above the city of his birth, riding the Navy Pier Ferris Wheel: "I spend all day walking around this city. I always come back here. This is where I'm comfortable."

The actor — famous for his work in such films as "Get Shorty," "Saving Private Ryan" and "Midnight Run," and in television shows such as "Crime Story" and "Law & Order" — died suddenly Monday morning in Scottsdale, Ariz., after suffering a blood clot in his lung. He was 69.

Though he spent much of his time in warm climes, Farina still had a home here, the better to keep in close touch with family members and lifelong friends. They kept him grounded because they all knew what the TV-watching, movie-going public never could: Farina was self-effacing and shy at his core.

After a hitch in the Army he went to work in the South Water produce market for a time. At the suggestion of one of his brothers, he took and passed the entrance exam for the Chicago Police Department and started as a patrolman on the North Side; he became a detective four years later. His acting career began in 1981 when director Michael Mann — in Chicago scouting locations for his film "Thief" — met Farina and gave him a bit part in the movie. A friend suggested that Farina circulate his picture to various Chicago agents, which, in turn, led to his being cast in an episode on "Chicago Story," where he met John Mahoney, who convinced Farina to audition for a role in "A Prayer For My Daughter," at Steppenwolf. Farina subsequently appeared in "Streamers" at Columbia College; "The Time of Your Life" at the Goodman; "Class C Trial in Yokohama" at the Theater Building; in TV shows such as "Hunter," "Miami Vice" and "Remington Steele," and in such locally-filmed movies as "Code of Silence" and "The Naked Face."

"When I first got into acting, I never had any long-term goals, never had any plan," he said to the Tribune in 1988. "I just thought it would be a good way to make some extra money."

His work on Chicago stages remains the stuff of legend, and stories such as this:

His first stage appearance was in "A Prayer For My Daughter." Fellow cast member Mahoney sent a nervous Farina out on stage before the house lights had gone down. "I was scared to death," Farina said. "John took advantage of that."

In 1985, Farina was cast opposite William L. Petersen in "Manhunter" and set to start filming episodes of a new TV series titled "Crime Story."

He turned in his badge after nearly 20 years, and from that year forward his career was one of enviably steady employment, with parts large and small in such films as "Get Shorty," "Snatch" and "Midnight Run"; and dozens of TV appearances, including his role as host of "Unsolved Mysteries" and the high-profile part of natty Det. Joe Fontana on "Law & Order," from which he departed in 2006.

**By Rick Kogan Tribune reporter 8:27 p.m. CDT, July 22, 2013**