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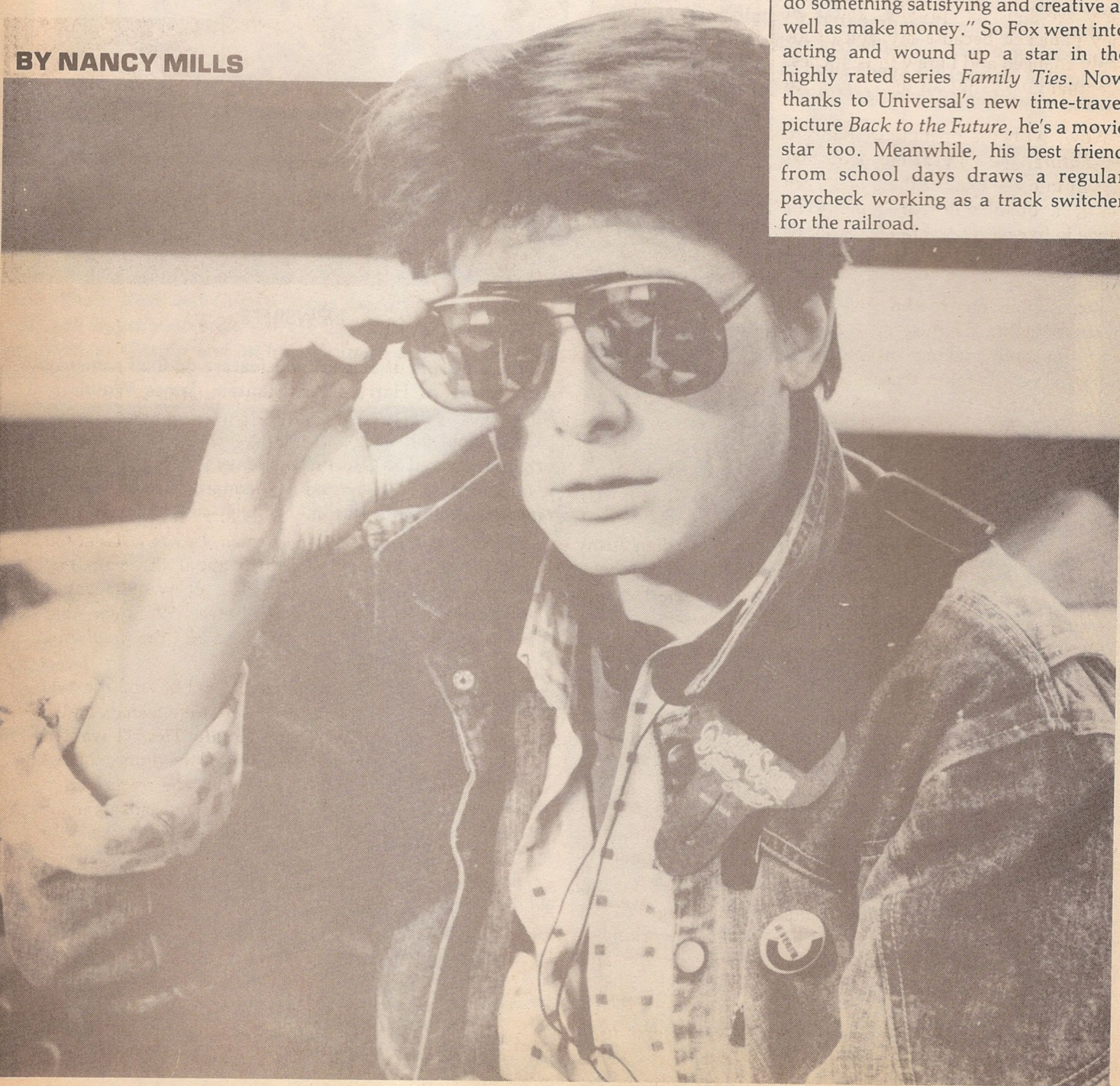
MICHAEL J. FOX

THIS TEEN IDOL'S FAMILY TIES BRING HIM BACK TO THE FUTURE!

BY NANCY MILLS

When Michael J. Fox was 15, he and his friends began planning their futures. "My buddies thought if they got up real early and got down to the loading docks by 5:30, they'd get jobs," Fox recalls. "Then when they graduated, they'd be one leg up toward being regulars.

"I was a little less practical. I wanted to do something satisfying and creative as well as make money." So Fox went into acting and wound up a star in the highly rated series *Family Ties*. Now thanks to Universal's new time-travel picture *Back to the Future*, he's a movie star too. Meanwhile, his best friend from school days draws a regular paycheck working as a track switcher for the railroad.



Back to the past. Fox is 15 and looks 10. The Canadian Broadcasting Company is casting a series. "I had heard they were looking for a bright 10-year-old who could play music," he says. "So I pretended I was 10 and went to the audition.

"At the time I was 3' 11" and weighed 85 pounds. I was a definite soprano. The CBC thought I was a prodigy and hired me. Later, when I told them I was 15, they didn't seem to care. We shot six episodes, and then they panicked because my voice suddenly changed and I grew three inches. Eventually Fox shot all the way up to 5'4".

Now, with the opening of *Back to the Future*, the 24-year-old actor has grown into the man of the hour. *Teen Wolf*, a quickie horror comedy he made in five weeks last fall for Atlantic Releasing was rushed into theaters Aug. 9.

Fox is oblivious to the Hollywood buzz about him because he is in Oxford, England, making an episode of *Family Ties*. He takes the news of his "super-hotness" in characteristic dry-wit style: "Right now I feel like the coldest person in the whole world," he jokes over the phone. "I just spent the day rowing a boat."

Not just any boat, however. Fox was rowing with the Oxford crew. It seems that his *Family Ties* character Alex wins a scholarship to Oxford for the summer, and he is trying to fit in between the oarlocks.

"Next March I'll be ready for another movie project," he says, "but my priority now is to have a successful fourth season on *Family Ties*. I do love the show. It's home. It's hard to think of not doing it if the others are doing it—although people say that's naive."

Fox is a curious mixture of 1985 lingo and old-fashioned responsibility. Interested in learning more about the disease Spinal Bifida because his nephew was born with it, Fox volunteered to be National Chairman of Public Awareness for the Spinal Bifida Association.

"I know this sounds corny, down-home and farmish," he explains about the way he was raised, "but my parents



take things one day at a time. They enjoy people as they are and don't judge them. When I grow up, I would like to be not grown-up yet."

Fox is the fourth of five children. His father, now retired, spent 25 years in the Canadian Army and 15 years as a police dispatcher. His mother is a secretary/payroll clerk.

"I never really considered college," says Fox, who dropped out of high school his senior year because homework was getting in the way of his acting. "I was a working adult. If I hadn't been, I wouldn't be as far along in my career."

Fox is inclined to get rabid about whatever he's doing. "I guess I'm pre-crazed. Maybe it's a fault, but if I'm into a good thing I don't like to stop and take my bearings. I might miss something."

After working steadily in Vancouver theater, radio and television for two years, Fox was cast in *Letters from Frank*, an American movie-of-the-week filmed locally. He remembers being in awe of his illustrious co-stars: "I sat with my jaw on the floor wat-

ching Art Carney, Maureen Stapleton and Margaret Hamilton work."

These notables encouraged him to come to Hollywood, and in 1980, he did. "One of my first projects was with Alex Haley and Norman Lear (the CBS series *Palmerstown, U.S.A.*). I learned a lot from them about the way they treated the work. It wasn't just a vehicle for themselves. What was that hack's name who said, 'the play's the thing?'"

A year later he was offered the role of the ultra-conservative teenager Alex P. Keaton on *Family Ties*. "I wanted Alex to be the star of the dinner table," Fox explains. "When you come from a big family like I do, you remember the time spent at the dinner table. My brother is the funniest damn guy, and I looked up to him so much. That's who I wanted Alex to be."

"Now I tend to get into that dry humor a little bit too. But just when I think I'm on a roll, I go home to visit my family, and my brother puts me under the table."