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Alumni Profile: Peter Facinelli

The "Twilight" and "Nurse Jackie" star describes his path from Queens to NYU to Hollywood

By Kristine Jannuzzi (CAS '98)

Peter Facinelli still remembers the first time he approached the doors of NYU when he was a student there over 15 years ago. "I was a kid from Queens who had the worst New York accent. The world felt so big."

The youngest of four children born to Italian immigrants, he grew up in a small community in Ozone Park, and says when he first told his parents he wanted to be an actor, "it was like telling them that I wanted to go to Mars." He ultimately managed to convince them to let him study theater at NYU on the grounds that acting skills would prove useful in becoming a lawyer.

He commuted daily from Queens to NYU on his motorcycle, holding his breath to avoid sucking in exhaust fumes while traveling through the Midtown Tunnel or fearing that he might be blown away when he opted to take the 59th Street Bridge into Manhattan. He jokes that he risked his life every day just to get to school.

It was a risk that has definitely paid off. Although Facinelli didn't end up pursuing the legal profession, those acting skills he honed at NYU helped set him on quite a successful career path as an actor. Facinelli recently starred as Dr. Carlisle Cullen in the blockbuster feature films, *Twilight* and *New Moon*, and reprises that role in *Eclipse*, the third film in that series, which will be released on June 30. He also stars opposite Edie Falco in Showtime's critically acclaimed comedy series, *Nurse Jackie*, and has appeared in a wide array of movies and television series since he first began studying acting at NYU.

Facinelli spent two years at Tisch and then transferred to Gallatin, so that he could have more flexibility in pursuing professional acting work while still a student. "If I hadn't done the two years at Tisch, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today," he says. But he appreciated the opportunity to build his own curriculum at Gallatin, where he studied topics ranging from transcendental meditation to Marlon Brando, in addition to his acting classes with the Atlantic Theater Company.



Facinelli as Dr. Fitch Cooper on "Nurse Jackie." Photo credit: Phil Caruso/SHOWTIME

He cites the teachers as one of the best aspects of NYU, and says it's thanks to his speech teacher, Susan Finch, that there's no trace left of that thick New York accent he had when he first arrived. "To be a good actor, you have to come from a neutral place. If you walk a certain way, or talk a certain way, it limits your ability to play certain characters, when you really should start from a clean slate and build a character from the ground up instead of building off yourself. And I've been able to do some very different roles because of that," he explains.

In addition to his acting credits, Facinelli has also written three screenplays, two of which will begin shooting in the coming months. And he recently served as a Narrative Short Film juror at the



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May 2010 Photo Gallery



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Facinelli recently came back to NYU to visit Gallatin's renovated space.

as a narrative short film juror at this year's Tribeca Film Festival, which he says is real honor for him as a native New Yorker. "New York will always be a part of me," he admits. Even though he

currently lives in LA with his wife, actress Jennie Garth, and three daughters, he comes back to New York often to shoot *Nurse Jackie* and to visit his parents, who now live on Long Island.

When asked what they think about their son's success, Facinelli replies, "I think they're really confused by it! I don't think they ever imagined that I would be able to have a career in this industry, just because my dad was a farmer in Italy and came over to the United States and worked as a waiter. It was such a far-removed profession – when I say that they are confused, I still don't think they get the full understanding of what I do." He adds, "It keeps me grounded, because I will call and I'll say 'Hey, I'm working with Drew Barrymore,' and my dad will say, 'Is he nice?' Or I'll tell my mom I'm working with Kevin Spacey and she's like, 'Oh, is that Sissy Spacek's brother?' So unless it's John Wayne, they don't get impressed easily!"

As for whether he would encourage his own daughters, who are ages 12, 7, and 3, to pursue acting, Facinelli says he simply wants them to do whatever their hearts desire, as long as it makes them happy. "But right now they are busy being kids, which is a good thing."

To NYU's newest alumni, the Class of 2010, he offers the following guidance: "When you graduate, you have to remember that your education doesn't stop; I think your education just begins. For me, acting has always been an art, and I think it takes more than a lifetime to really grasp or understand the art of acting. So never feel like you know exactly what you're doing and always leave room for growth." Sound advice for graduates in any field.

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