

East Palo Alto's first steps into the movies

By Tom Scanlon
Times Tribune staff

That guy walking down Hollywood Boulevard, talking to himself, gesturing theatrically, he might be crazy. Then again, he might be East Palo Alto's Allan Dean Moore, on his way to an audition.

The great price an unproven actor must pay — the waiting, anticipation, hopefulness and still more waiting that so often culminates in rejection — is slowly being justified for Moore. In two years, he has had small parts in three feature films.

In "Colors," his debut, Moore was the "Crips" gang member driving the van at the beginning of the movie. He appeared in several other scenes, and his only line was: "T Bone in county, cuz."

In "The Iron Triangle," a Vietnam War drama starring Beau Bridges and currently playing at San Francisco's St. Francis theaters, Moore has a dozen spicely lines as Sgt. Murphy. "You little pile of (useless thing)," Murphy scolds one of his soldiers. "You ever do that again, I'll shove this Thompson up your (place a Thompson isn't normally found)."

Sgt. Murphy appears only in the film's first 15 minutes, but it is a good showcase role for Moore's video resume.

In this summer's "Lethal Weapon 2" the

sequel of the Mel Gibson-Danny Glover hit, Moore plays the boyfriend of Danny Glover's daughter.

As "The Iron Triangle" continues to play at theaters across the country, Moore is at Lorimar Studios, besieged with mail. Perhaps years from now he will be sorting his own fan mail in a Hollywood office, but the mail he handles now is corporate. His "day job" will get him by until steady acting work, if not stardom, calls.

Speaking from the studio, the 27-year-old Moore is philosophical about his plight, and determined to make it in Hollywood, where he's been slugging it out for seven years.

"It's really tough when you start out — unless your family's in the business, you pretty much have to start from the basement," Moore says, his voice smooth and distinct above the inexorable hum of a mail sorter.

As Robert Townsend's recent "Hollywood Shuffle" comically — but accurately, says Moore — illustrated, it's not easy being an unproven black actor.

"A lot of roles don't specify what ethnic roles they want — that usually means they want a Caucasian male," Moore says, matter-of-factly, rather than bitterly. "Casting people have an idea of what they want,

and they're pretty stuck on it."

Rather than losing faith, Moore keeps pushing, waxing stoic: "You learn not to beat yourself up," he says of the countless rejections.

Moore looks out a Lorimar window and sees the lot where parts of "Lethal Weapon 2" are being reshot. He worries that this and script changes may cut down his part, but assures himself it's still a very good role; "Every scene I'm in is with the principals," he says.

Off camera, he also had the chance to rub shoulders with those principals, bouncing on a trampoline with Gibson (the Aussie star takes his tramp to sets to help reduce tension) and chatting with Glover. The latter, it turns out, was once a roommate of Don Smothers, Moore's wrestling coach at Ravenswood.

The son of Erma (a beautician) and Willie Moore (an engineer), Allan Moore was raised in East Palo Alto with three brothers — 29-year-old twins Dwight (an industrial consultant) and Dwayne (a business manager) and 25-year-old David (a technician) — and one sister, Dyann, an aspiring 22-year-old singer.

When East Palo Alto's Ravenswood High School closed in 1976, Moore ended up at Menlo-Atherton, separated from

offer double billings once in a while. been at university in Edinburgh," she said. "I was invited to her wed-

most of his buddies. "I really didn't fit in there," he reflects. Things got better when he started acting; his first play was, fittingly, "A Raisin in the Sun."

Ten years ago, Moore left the Peninsula for Howard University, intent on following his father's footsteps. After two tough years in engineering, Moore decided acting would be a good deal more fun.

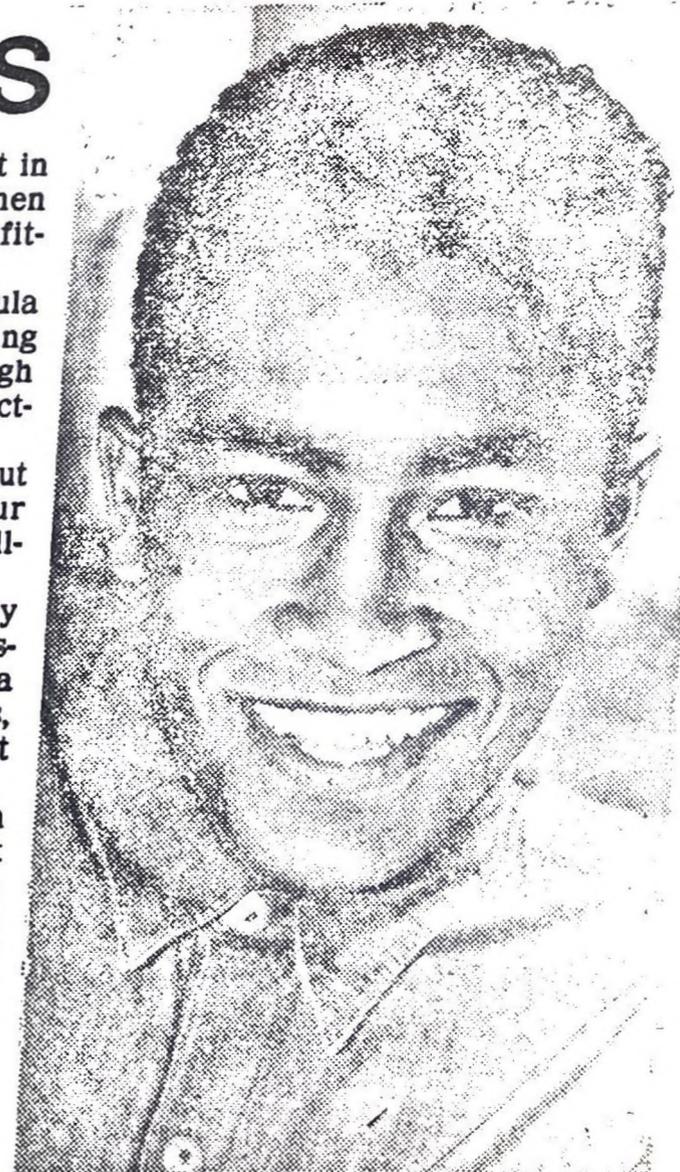
He moved to Los Angeles in 1981, but found no acting jobs waiting. After four trying years, Moore decided to take a full-time job and "get myself together."

The security of a steady job, he firmly believes, helped him land his first professional part, playing a gang member on a "Hill Street Blues" episode. Casting agents, he notes, "can just read in your face that you're kind of desperate."

Playing ruffians is nothing more than acting for Moore, who grew up in an East Palo Alto that was tame, compared to the present one. "Now I come home and see guys chasing cars down (to sell crack)," he says disgustedly.

East Palo Alto may someday have a movie star to point to, but first Allan Dean Moore must suffer the emotional roller coaster of auditions.

"It takes a while," Moore says. "Sometimes you have to be patient and let it happen."



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