

Actor Michael Tourek is a genuinely nice guy.

He's head-over-heels in love with wife Sara, a devoted dad to Grace and Isaac, an adjunct college professor who uplifts and inspires. He's the kind of guy who waits in the school car line to pick up his kids, mows his own lawn, and loves a good dad joke.

Which makes his demise from the mega-hit Netflix series "Ozark" a tough-to-watch, tough-to-grasp denouement. Michael played Ash, the right-hand man to local heroin producer Jacob Snell, portrayed by actor Peter Mullen. Michael describes Peter as "one of the nicest, sweetest, most generously giving actors I've ever had the pleasure of working with."

Peter must be quite the actor, too, because in season two, Jacob Snell bludgeons Ash with a giant piece of timber and then gores him to death with a fireplace poker.

It was brutal. The "Ozark" team created a prop dummy version of Michael to take the hit and stabs, devised a series of verbal cues, and relied on cinematic magic to pull off a gory death scene that had everyone on set wincing and groaning.

Michael took it all in stride, including a script line that would signal his departure from the hit show. Acting is acting, he explains. Egos, characters, and wished-for contract renewals take a back seat to the arc of the narrative.

No one likes to be knocked off, especially so soon in the run of a hit show, he admits, but it helped that the transition was handled with grace. "I appreciated that Chris Mundy, (a head writer and executive producer of "Ozark") thought enough of my work and enough of me as a person to call me in advance and go through their thought process and rationale."

Michael notes that the divide between television and film is narrowing as networks shift to create television shows that feel more like film. "They're approaching programming as a 10-hour movie rather than 10 separate episodic television shows, and that reveals itself in the

writing and storytelling and the way shows are shot to feel seamlessly connected and congruent.”

That is certainly the case with “Ozark,” the Emmy Award-winning Netflix crime thriller starring Jason Bateman, Laura Linney, Esai Morales and Julia Garner. The series is masterfully crafted and acted, with scenes and storyline suspense flowing effortlessly.

Michael and Jason Bateman had met while filming the movie “Office Christmas Party.” And while Michael had auditioned for a couple of other “Ozark” roles, it was the role of Ash that clicked and reunited him with fellow nice guy Bateman.

Here’s the backstory on how Michael landed the part: He was teaching an acting class at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G) when he got the call. He rarely answers his phone while teaching, but on this day, his students were working on group projects and so he picked up when he saw his agent calling. “He told me there was an “Ozark” role that I might be right for, and that they needed an audition tape in two hours,” he recalls. “So I dismissed class early, recorded my audition and crossed my fingers.”

Michael knew from early on that he wanted to perform and entertain. Growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, his family had a rule that if you sign up for something – sports or scouts or clubs – you see it through. “I tried lots of different activities, but the one thing I kept coming back to, again and again, was acting,” he says. “I loved being on stage and performing and playing pretend.”

After an unsuccessful first go at college, Michael returned home – and to his love of acting. He immersed himself in community theater and then loaded up his truck and headed to New York City.

It was make-or-break time, and he was ready. He got an agent. Even better, he got work. And best of all, he fell in love.

He met Sara, a dancer, while doing theater work in Indiana. He pined after her for a while, finally mustered the courage to ask her out and ultimately propose. She said yes and then oh-by-the-way mentioned that she was moving to North Carolina to attend graduate school at the UNC-G.

That meant another move, of course, which Michael expected to be short-lived. “I figured she’d finish grad school and then we’d head back to New York – at least that was my secret plan.” Sixteen years later and Tourek Party of Four remains happily entrenched in Greensboro. “We love it here. And while I worried that I might lose sight of my artistry moving from New York to North Carolina, that hasn’t been the case at all,” he says.

Michael found a creative outlet through Triad Stage, the region’s foremost professional theater company. He began collaborating with Triad Stage in 2006, has performed in three world premiere productions with the company, and finds that his on-stage work with the group provides an artistic outlet that film and television cannot match. He even met his current agent through the supportive Triad Stage community.

Michael also followed Sara’s lead and earned a bachelor’s degree in theatre from UNC-G, all while continuing to act, and returned two years later to pursue his master’s degree.

“I realized that if I was really going to start growing into the roles I was meant to play in my thirties, forties and fifties, then I needed – and wanted – to seriously train as an actor,” Michael explains. “I wanted to put the work in and learn everything I could.”

He did the work, which led to more on-camera work.

Michael’s IMDb (Internet Movie Database) profile is long and varied, including such movies as “Citizen Ruth,” “The Producers,” “Harriet,” “Office Christmas Party,” and “Lady and the Tramp,” and television roles on “Resurrection,” “Under the Dome,” “Swamp Thing,” “Doom Patrol,” and “Ozark.” “Boss Level,” a movie Michael filmed two and a half years ago, was finally released earlier this year, starring Mel Gibson, Frank Grillo, Naomi Watts.

During the pandemic shutdown, Michael wrote several short films and looks forward to trying his hand at producing next. "I'm creating my own content!"

"Doing the work" also led to a teaching career. How's this for a plot twist? From college dropout to adjunct professor, Michael now teaches acting at UNC-G, Guilford College, High Point University, Elon University and Greensboro College.

He enjoys motivating the next generation of actors and believes he gets as much out of being in the classroom as he gives. "It makes me a better actor because it allows me to articulate what I do professionally, and that constant reminder and reflection is a gift."

The gift he gives his students is the chance to study with an actor who *acts*, someone who has a working knowledge of the craft and is able to go beyond textbook rhetoric.

There are two pieces of advice he holds close and shares frequently. First, acting is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes focus and perseverance. There are no quick wins, he explains, and overnight success can be decades in the making.

His second bit of wisdom is "You are enough."

"I think that's important for us to hear and believe," he says. "All of us, and especially actors, spend so much time trying to figure out how to make other people happy, how to make them like us, accept us, give us a call-back. I want to change that mindset. You are enough as you are, with what you have right now and what you bring to the table. That will change over time, but in this moment, you are enough."

Told you he was a nice guy.

*For more information: <https://www.michaeltourek.com/>*