

'Little House On The Prairie' is dedicated to heart-warming stories of human triumph over adversity, but the scripts can't match the story of two of its stars.

Matthew, 14, and Patrick Labordeaux, 16, who play running roles in the series, are the adopted children of designer Ron and actress Frankie Labordeaux. The family saga rivals most TV shows for stark drama.

Fifteen years ago the Labordeaux, who had children of their own, wanted a larger family. Because they could no longer have children, they decided to adopt 'unwanted' or 'unadoptable' children.

They brought home Pat, labeled a psychotic baby. A year later they adopted the infant Matthew, who was autistic.

At one point Matthew was diagnosed as incurable and it was suggested he be institutionalized. He didn't walk until he was three. He didn't talk until he was five. One doctor thought the child was retarded.

Patience, love and constant attention overcame screaming tantrums, terrifying nightmares and destructive impulses in the family's San Fernando Valley home.

It was a long, slow process to instill in the boys a sense of security and worth. The Labordeaux give much credit for their success with the children to their belief in God. They are devout Roman Catholics.

Then, six years ago, tragedy struck the family. Ron suffered a serious heart problem which affected his kidneys, necessitating regular hospitalization for dialysis treatment.

He was given only months to live, but faith, optimism and love have seen him through.

Adversity has forged strong bonds among the boys and their parents, made stronger still by Matthew's and Patrick's involvement with acting, inspired by Frankie. Every day is special to the Labordeaux, a reason to celebrate.

'We are a very special family,' said Matthew, his brown eyes alive with enthusiasm. 'We aren't a normal family to begin with. The fact that Pat and I are actors make us even more different from other families.'

'But because of our backgrounds, we'd be set apart from other people no matter what. We realize that and it makes us all that much closer.'

'Pat and I grew up respecting our parents. We believe in good manners and respect for each other. It's not so much in the way we say things. It's how we feel about one another and how we treat each other that counts.'

'Sure, Pat and I love the cast and crew of 'Little House.' They're terrific people and we spend a lot of time together. But the center of our universe is our home and family.'

Both Matthew and Patrick attend a private school for performing children when 'Little House On The Prairie' is on hiatus. Both are outstanding 'A' students. Matthew received his first 'B' in six years last semester and was upset about it. He wants to enter Southern California's school of cinema when he leaves high school.

Because of their close family ties and work schedule, Matthew and Patrick do not have particularly active social lives among their peers. They are further isolated by the fact that neither boy is into drugs or alcohol.

'I've been acting since I was four,' Matthew said. 'So I'm used to being around adults on movie and TV sets. Acting isn't something I had to learn to like. It's something I've done since I can remember and I love to do it.'

'So does Pat. We're actors and we wouldn't want to be anything else right now.'

'Our careers keep us busy and have given direction to our lives. That makes us different from other kids who don't know what to do with themselves when they're not in school.

'Neither of us like to just hang around. I went to a party not long ago and the kids all seemed bored to death. I don't have to cope with figuring out how to escape boredom.

'These kids were either on dope or drinking liquor or beer, and some of them were only 12 years old. They turn to pot out of boredom. Pat and I don't need any of that. We're close to our parents and very open with them.

'I've tried to do some of the 'normal' things kids my age enjoy, like going to a roller rink or just hanging out. And it's no fun.

'To me acting is fun. During vacations and hiatus I begin to get impatient with all the free time. I'm anxious to get back to work right now, but if the directors go on strike it may be a long time.'

Matthew and Patrick look forward to regular family meetings where problems are ironed out, opinions expressed and decisions reached.

'Patrick is a lot bigger and stronger than I am,' Matthew said, 'and sometimes I challenge him. I always lose, but I'm going to keep on trying.

'Pat gets his driver's license next month and will be able to drive me to work and to school. Up to now my Mom and Dad, mostly Mom, did all the driving. We're both looking forward to relieving them of all that.

'But either Mom or Dad has to be on the set with us every day because we're minors. It's great to see the happiness on their faces when we do good work.'

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