



glee's mike o'malley:

emmy-nominated,
nashua-raised actor
stays connected



by **Beth Daigle**

main photography by **Adrien Bisson**

You might think that being a cast member in one of television's hottest shows would go to your head. But that's certainly not the case with Mike O'Malley, who was born in Boston and raised in Nashua, N.H. O'Malley's recurring role as Burt Hummel on FOX Television's "Glee" has earned him great praise and an Emmy nomination. His portrayal of the committed and compassionate father of a teenage son, who has struggled with his sexuality and peer acceptance, is poignant and highly effective.

A down-to-earth and all-around nice guy, O'Malley remains close to his Nashua roots. Talking to him is like talking to a friend of a friend, without even a hint of a Hollywood attitude.

Michael Edward O'Malley was born at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Boston on Oct. 31, 1966. He was raised in Nashua from the age of 2. His father, Tony, is a retired defense industry executive, and his mother, Marianne, is a career counselor. His parents still live in the home where O'Malley grew up.

Fond memories of Nashua linger for O'Malley. Little League baseball and Biddy Basketball were just two of the many activities that interested him. His upbringing was traditional, and reminiscent of simpler times. "It was sort of the last of the unsupervised summers where you could just be in the neighborhood," he says. "There were tons of kids there, and you would wake up in the morning and go outside and play."

O'Malley gets in the holiday spirit. Insets left and right: In his role as Burt Hummel, O'Malley plays the compassionate and dedicated father of Kurt, played by Chris Colfer.



“

That idea of walking a mile in someone else's shoes so you can understand what it is like to be them is hopefully one of the good things that happens through storytelling.

”



Opposite page: O'Malley gets tangled up at the Avery Bar at the Ritz Carlton Boston Common. This page, top: O'Malley, playing Burt Hummel in "Glee" with his on-screen son, Kurt, played by Chris Colfer. 2nd from top: O'Malley with the cast of "Yes Dear." From left: Jean Louisa Kelly, Anthony Clark, Liza Snyder and Mike O'Malley. 2nd from bottom: O'Malley was the host of Nickelodeon's "Guts" which aired from 1992-1995. Bottom: The Lowell Spinners minor league baseball team honored O'Malley with his own Bobblehead while at a LeLacheur Park.

He and his siblings, Liam, Marianne and Kerry, were raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools, something O'Malley says helped shape him into the adult he is today. The compassion and kindness instilled in him through his youth are qualities he carries with him, and they come through in his work as an actor.

At Nashua's Bishop Guertin High School, O'Malley dabbled in theater and took part in two productions. He also performed in plays at the Academy of Notre Dame, the all-girls school in nearby Tyngsboro, and admits that capturing the girls' attention was more his motivation for participating than the plays themselves.

O'Malley continued to act while attending the University of New Hampshire. After tagging along with his roommate to an audition, he was cast in his first college play. After that, he found himself auditioning more and more often on his own.

"At some point you have to decide whether or not you are good at it [acting] and if you want to work hard at it," O'Malley says. "It was not as if I was some acting prodigy — I am certainly not that, but I do have a certain aptitude for it, in part based upon my family."

O'Malley's aunt, Regina O'Malley, from Westchester County, N.Y. is a professional actress and acting teacher. He also has several cousins in the business. Though his desire to act was often secondary to his love of sports, it was something that he and his siblings had been exposed to since childhood.

"Of course, when it comes to sports, that was the thing I was most interested in growing up," he says. "But for most people, playing sports happened for them in high school. So you start to think what is it that I want to do, what is it that I can do?"

His sister Kerry also has a proclivity for acting and has taken her talent to Broadway. She has also landed roles on several television series, including "The Mentalist" and "Cold Case." "She's done about eight shows this year," O'Malley says.

Over time, O'Malley recognized his acting ability and began to pay closer attention to it. "When I got into college and really started to do plays, I realized how much of a challenge it would be to make it in the business. But then, by my senior year, I was taking it a lot more seriously."

O'Malley moved to New York City after graduating from college and remained on the East Coast until 1998. That year, he moved to California, where he lives today. His early career included a hosting gig on the Nickelodeon game show "Guts," the memorable role of Jimmy Hughes on the popular television series "Yes, Dear" and appearances on "My Name Is Earl" and "Parenthood." He had a role in Julia Roberts' film "Eat Pray Love," and today can be seen on "Glee."

O'Malley has also tried his hand as a writer and producer, including writing for the Showtime original series "Shameless." He has found

that it can be gratifying to write something thought-provoking or funny.

"As an actor, you are a foot soldier sometimes; as a writer, it is coming out of your head. It is much more difficult to do and do well," he says. "When I had my episode of "Shameless" done this year, I was very proud of it. It is much, much harder than acting."

O'Malley is incredibly busy, balancing not only his career, but his roles as a husband and father. He and his wife, Lisa, married in 2000, have three children: Fiona, 8, Seamus, 6, and Declan, 3. To say that he has his hands full is an understatement. "I am like any other mom or dad out there. I wake up and hit the ground running and to whatever degree I can," he says. "I help get the kids ready for school. I work, come home, coach two of my son's baseball teams, basketball and soccer as well, shuttle kids from here to there, and go to birthday parties."

O'Malley's "regular guy" persona makes him easy to relate to, whether you are talking to him on the phone or watching him play a character on television.

"There is a quality in the roles that I get which lends itself to people thinking that the character I play is somebody they know, are related to, or somebody that they went to college or high school with," he says.

In particular, his role as Burt Hummel on "Glee" has touched audiences in ways his other roles have not.

"More than any other role that I have done, [I am] emotionally connecting with a segment of the audience in a way that just doesn't happen when you are doing comedies," O'Malley says. "A lot of people saw the ["Glee"] storyline and expected my character to be one way, and when you then have a person exceeding expectations, and constantly trying to love his son, people can relate to that."

Watching issues on television that affect today's teens, such as bullying, teen pregnancy and struggles with sexuality and sexual orientation, can be disturbing to some parents. O'Malley thinks bringing these matters to the surface on "Glee" is a good thing. "You have to understand that on "Glee" they are obviously dramatizing certain aspects for the purpose of telling a story," O'Malley says. "You can't tell a story dramatically unless you have conflict, and that is part of what is going on."

Forcing the audience to face dilemmas they might not be exposed to otherwise is an important part of what the show is trying to accomplish.



Top: O'Malley is busy wearing many hats as an actor, writer, husband and father. Bottom left: O'Malley, a lifelong sports fan, dons a number twelve jersey. "A Brady fan before anyone else!" he says. Bottom right: O'Malley with his sister Marianne in their hometown of Nashua, NH.

"That idea of walking a mile in someone else's shoes so you can understand what it is like to be them is hopefully one of the good things that happens through storytelling," O'Malley says. "Anytime we can move the ball closer to the end zone of true equality, it is a good thing."

O'Malley's open-minded perspective even pertains to the often-ridiculed phenomenon of reality television. He feels there is room for all types of shows.

"I've always enjoyed documentaries, and that is what reality shows are, some manipulated more than others," he says. "The idea that it is happening to real people interests people for the same reasons that they watch the news or read news stories."

Living across the country from his family and friends presents a challenge for O'Malley, but "if you are doing work that you like and you have little kids, your life is so much about your kids that where you are living doesn't really matter. Would I live out here if show business was not out here? Probably not, because I miss my family and friends back home," he says.

Despite the distance, O'Malley is committed to staying connected with his family. He gets back to the Boston area often to visit, take a trip with his pals from Nashua or catch a baseball game with classmates from Bishop Guertin.

Sports, in fact, have helped preserve his relationships back home. "The success of Boston sports teams over the last 10 years makes family and friendship connections easier because you have even more excuses to get together," O'Malley says. "Some people knock professional sports for whatever reason, because they think it's too expensive or they don't like the behavior of some of the players, but it really is one of the few things that can unite an entire community. The success of the Red Sox, Celtics and Patriots has really brought people together."

These days, O'Malley has roles in

the upcoming films "So Undercover" with Miley Cyrus and "R.I.P.D." with Jeff Bridges and Ryan Reynolds. He will continue to be a part of the "Glee" cast and to write for "Shameless." On opening night of the Boston Film Festival this September, O'Malley premiered a movie he wrote called "Certainty."

The future holds many possibilities for this locally-grown personality, but at the end of the day he is a family man who is

fully involved in that phase of his life.

"I am in the thick of parenting and child-raising, and don't distinguish myself from anyone else my age who has three little kids," he says. "It is just the way it is, you know."

Editor's Note: Special thanks to the Avery Bar at The Ritz Carlton Boston Common for providing a location to shoot this feature, and to Laura DiBlasi of Laura DiBlasi Tailoring & Dressmaking for creating Mike's holiday baseball caps.

Use debit card.
Get rewards.
Cook up a storm.

With Enterprise Bank's MyEnterprise Rewards Checking Accounts, the more you bank and you use your debit card for purchases, the more points you get, and the more rewards you earn. That's right, you get rewards, not lots of fees. You can even donate your rewards to a local charity - whatever fits your personal enterprise.

Open an account today.
Start earning rewards.

myenterpriserewardschecking.com