

It's just funny money

...says a guy who once made \$1M an episode

By MICHAEL GILTZ

AS one of the first TV stars to join the exclusive million-dollar-an-episode club, Paul Reiser can't believe that all people talk about anymore is money.

"It's such an unseemly thing," says Reiser of the constant talk these days about "Friends" and David Letterman and who is making how much on TV.

"I never knew what my parents made. You never talked about money. You certainly would never ask somebody," says Reiser, who was one of the highest-paid comedians on TV when his show, "Mad About You" with Helen Hunt, ended in 1999.

"It's an ugly kind of thing frankly. I don't like when I hear people talking about it.

"Do you sometimes hear ridiculous numbers? Sure. Is it absurd that this person makes that and school teachers and doctors don't? Of course it's absurd.

"But nobody goes into this for the money. You always root for success and one of the lovely things about success is hopefully you'll get rewarded and put away a couple of drachmas."

Reiser himself turns 45 a week from Saturday, the day before his new movie "Strange Relations" debuts on Showtime.

A low-key drama, it stars Reiser as Jerry Lipman, a



Not mad about money: Reiser walked away from big bucks.

psychiatrist (the career of his real-life wife) who discovers he has leukemia. That prompts his mom, Olympia Dukakis, to let

Reiser know he's adopted and that his real mother might be able to provide a son who could give him a bone marrow transplant

and save his life.

Soon, the very uptight, very wealthy Lipman is picking his way a little distastefully through Liverpool where his mum (Julie Walters) tries to loosen the lad up and make amends.

"I always specifically wanted to do a movie in Liverpool," says Reiser, who is a huge Beatles fan.

He'd even worked on an idea about a guy who goes to Liverpool to track down some Beatles trivia and has a life-changing experience. Then he saw Liverpool.

"I had the knuckle-headed American attitude: it's the Beatles and 'A Hard Day's Night.'

"You get there and first of all the city's in color; it's not in black and white. You see four phone booths — it doesn't mean the Beatles are going to pop out. They're just empty phone booths. There's no

chasing; people aren't jumping in the air and freeze-framing."

Reiser is working on scripts (like a series that would be perfect for Showtime or HBO) and like his friend Billy Joel taking things a little easier and pursuing his passions.

"Life is short, and that's certainly something this movie taught me and 9/11 taught all of us. It can all go quickly," he says.

"Do the good things in life; don't put them off. Play your music, tell the people you love that you love them and don't waste time doing things you don't want.

"I often think about that. What would you do if someone told you you had six months to live? I don't know. I don't know that it would be that different.

"I would sit and watch my son. I would sit and try to write some things. Quicker."