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TV Sunday

Hot hunk has a hit in gay role

Mathew St. Patrick spent a year in a hospital bed watching soaps. Now he's kissing boyfriends in 'Six Feet Under'

By MICHAEL GILTZ

ON HBO's "Six Feet Under," Officer Keith Charles is one of the most memorable — and surprising — characters in prime time. An openly gay black policeman, Keith is the moral center of a show which turns to orgies and hit-and-run accidents for plot twists, but relies on his stern sense of right and wrong to keep things from tipping over.

Mathew St. Patrick — who plays Keith — has turned that strong moral code into an asset. Determined, sexy and rock solid, Keith can steal a scene just by tossing off one of those glowering, intimidating looks.

He's so commanding, viewers have been wondering how stupid boyfriend David must have been to let such a catch slip away. And casting agents are ruing the day they let St. Patrick slip by under their radar. No more.

"My life has gone through a dramatic change in the last two years," he says.

It's not the first time. When the thirtyish actor was about 18 — he won't divulge his age or discuss his private life — St. Patrick decided to move from his hometown of Philadelphia to Chicago. He arrived a new man.

"My drive from Philadelphia to Chicago changed me completely," says St. Patrick. "My life changed. I couldn't explain it, but I knew all the thoughts of running the streets were gone."

"I wanted to leave that alone and I wanted to challenge myself and live the kind of life I was put here to live. And clowning around on the streets wasn't it."

St. Patrick focused on his dream of a professional basketball career. Over the next few years, the young man who was raised Catholic lived a clean life and developed his skills, working towards the tryouts for the NBA.

Then, about a week before tryouts, another car ride changed St. Patrick's life again.

"Someone cut me off in the rain," says St. Patrick. "It was just one of those things. I wasn't driving too fast or any of those things. No one else



"My life has gone through a dramatic change," says Mathew St. Patrick's (above, with "Six Feet Under" co-star Michael C. Hall).

was driving carelessly."

The result? More than a year in hospitals and at home. Needless to say, any dreams of basketball were over.

"It took me a great number of years to get through depression and

A week before NBA tryouts, a car ride changed Mathew's life — once again

figure out what I was going to do with my life. Why did this happen to me? The whole 'why?' thing was really, really heavy. Why me? Why now?"

"I've gotten myself together. I had to be patient and that's what I learned from that."

"I believe there's a higher power and the Lord has brought me into existence and into this place for a reason. I have a really close relationship with God. I thank Him for not giving up on me when I was... oom man — I had my moments in life."

So St. Patrick sat in bed, watching

soaps for the first time in his life and never imagining that he would later appear on "General Hospital" and then "All My Children" for three years. St. Patrick can't even remember acting in a school play, but his first steps after recovery were as a model.

"When I first got involved with modeling in Chicago," remembers St. Patrick, "whenever I told my mom I'd gotten a job, she's always say, 'Honey? Are you keeping your clothes on? You're not taking your clothes off, are you?' That was pretty hilarious."

Now of course, he's playing one of the sexiest gay characters in TV history, a church-going police officer often seen kissing his boyfriend and initiating sex. As proud as he is of the work — and however supportive his family would prove — showing those first intimate scenes to them wasn't easy.

"I was in New York and my parents came up," says St. Patrick. "I took my niece to a park and my mother, father and sister were left in my apartment watching the pilot. When I came back from the park, they were sitting there with this look on their faces."

"Of course, they'd never seen anything like it and didn't know what to think. That look will always be remembered."

His character Keith has certainly had a lot of attention this season. "His plate is full," says St. Patrick, who pauses carefully when asked what he thought of the plot twist where Keith's sister turns out to be a crack addict, a perhaps banal stereotype.

"Uh, I looked at that and I wondered why," says St. Patrick. "I had to wonder where it's going to go."

"He says the show's creator Alan Ball has already given him a great character, one that increasingly reflects St. Patrick himself."

"I'm not a judgmental person. I am pretty much a shoulder for people to lean on. I have been and that's just part of who I am. I am a protector; I am a caretaker. I'm all of those things. "And I think all of those things have been allowed to shine through."

