

## Chapter 1

# On Top of the World

1987

I reached for the rubber knob on my cassette player and cranked Prince to the max. He was singing about purple rain, but the L.A. skies were a clear blue that sunny day. I was flyin' down the freeway in my new Honda 2.0 SI Prelude, the wind giving even more bounce to my already afro'd mullet.

I grinned, remembering the cruel pleasure of deceiving Tracey Gold yet again. Not that it was hard to do—Tracey was the most gullible person in the world. Just last week while carpooling to the studio I had started in on her.

“This car's got the sweetest technology, Trace,” I bragged. “It's so smart, all you have to do is set it on automatic pilot and it drives itself.”

“Shut up. Does not,” she furrowed her brow.

“Does so. This car has special radars. It can read the lanes and stay within the lines. It also slows down when it senses a car ahead.”

Tracey's eyes widened and her mouth gaped. “*Really?*”

I flipped a non-existent switch on the far side of the steering column just out of sight, put my hands behind my head and guided the wheel with my left knee. “See?”

She bought it. “Wow. That's amazing!”

It was classic Carol and Mike Seaver. If I had told that story to the writers, they probably would have written it into the show.

But enough reminiscing. Prince was singing and it seemed disrespectful not to focus on every last word. He was, hands down, my favorite rock star. My dressing room sported purple light bulbs alternating with the standard marquee bulbs around the mirror. Posters were tacked to

violet-painted walls of Prince straddling his 'cycle, a curvy Latina babe perched behind him, his cape billowing in the breeze.

The tape ran out and I fumbled around the cassette rack for my Boy George tape. I enjoyed crooning along with "I'll Tumble for Ya," even though Boy was a he-she who wore pastel eye shadow. Maybe it didn't seem strange to me because my day job also required wearing pancake make-up—or *man-cake*, as I preferred to call it.

It was the '80s, and it was the best time to be a kid: mastering the Rubik's Cube in speed contests, getting joystick-cramp in that spot between your thumb and index finger from hours of playing Donkey Kong and Berzerk, growing a Chia Pet (which kind of resembled my own hair) . . . I could go on.

Everything was big. Big colors, big belts, big glasses, big boom boxes.

Without realizing it, I was setting trends (well, my *stylists* were setting trends). I didn't know the first thing about fashion. If someone had given me a tank top with shoulder pads, I probably would have put it on. I couldn't possibly have understood the influence I had—or, to be honest, the influence my character, Mike Seaver, had. When I spun around sporting sunglasses and a brown leather coat during the *Growing Pains* theme, millions of teens were doing the same thing in front of their bathroom mirrors. I had no idea.

Boy George started a new tune as I exited the Pass Avenue ramp off the 101 and headed towards the Warner Bros. Ranch. This part of the drive was often the most entertaining. I took great pleasure in leaving my window down and maneuvering up to a red light next to a car filled with girls. I'd glance over, flashing my famously crooked smile.

"Morning, ladies."

I loved the double takes, the ear-piercing screams. Without fail, their spastic hands fluttered while their lips mouthed my name. The best part was taking off while the shock kept them stuck in the intersection.

The previous night during taping, I found another way to stroke my ego. A girl had won a chance to play a bit part on the show, though she had been told I wouldn't be around for the scene. An older man playing her father said his lines and all went normally. But when the second take rolled around, I snuck in and said the father's lines. The

girl grabbed her stomach, shaking all over. She stared, incredulous, while I soaked up every moment of her ecstatic squeals. When I hugged her, I thought she'd pass out in my arms.

With a wave to the security guard, I pulled my car into the parking space marked "For Kirk Cameron Only" next to Stage 30. I jumped out and headed to my 30-foot motor home. Another day, another 10 grand.

It cracked me up: *me*, a celebrity? I was told I was a "heartthrob," which sounded like a condition a person should have checked by a medical professional. Teen mags plastered my mug on their covers, with modest centerfold pictures inside. Q&As covered my fave color (purple), my fave shows (*Family Ties* and *Cosby*), my height (5' 7"), weight (130 pounds) and eye color (hazel). They also printed false information. One said my parents were a psychologist and a newspaper reporter. Sure, my *television* parents held those careers—my *real* parents were a math/P.E. teacher and a housewife/manager (of me).

I was supposed to be the coolest kid on the planet, but no one knew what a dork I was.

I received 10,000 letters per week, mostly from girls who wanted to meet me, touch me, marry me. I had a fan club that sent out a variety of keepsakes—photos, T-shirts, buttons, even a pillowcase with my picture just the right size for girls to kiss my fabric-y likeness as they drifted off to sleep. *Weird*.

Wherever I went people catered to me. Limousines carted me off to the next gig. Waiters comped my meals. Flight attendants whispered, "Mr. Cameron, why don't you come with me?" and escorted me to first class. Once off the plane, people laid down a red carpet and greeted me on the tarmac with military-like fanfare.

When I arrived at a party, everyone sat up and took notice. The room buzzed with not-so-quiet whispers: "Isn't that Kirk Cameron?" The adoration was obvious in the body language, facial expressions and eagerness of those around me. All of it baffled me beyond belief. I was in the midst of a phenomenon I felt I had no hand in creating.

I had everything the rest of the world craved—money, fame, fortune, any girl I wanted. I admit, I liked that part. What 16-year-old guy didn't want girls to melt when he walked in the room? And I certainly

wasn't complaining when Domino's Pizza offered me a million bucks to be their ad boy.

If I didn't have something, it was only because I didn't want it. I was a devout atheist, livin' large, hanging out with the beautiful people.

Years later when people asked about that time in my life, I defined it like this: Imagine a world where whatever you want is given to you as quickly as possible. When you walk into a room, all the adults smile at you, talk nicely and say, "What do you want? Okay, I'll give that to you."

Everything in your life is carefully placed with the intent to make you happy. If you aren't happy, no expense is too great in order to fix the situation. As far as you can tell, you are the center of the universe. Everything revolves around you, your schedule, your dreams and wishes. You are more important to adults than other kids are. "Why is that?" your little mind asks. And the only answer you can come up with is that you are *very, very* unique.

That was my childhood, my adolescence, my reality.

The smug 16-year-old climbing out of his white Honda Prelude had no time to muse about what was wrong with that picture. I was Kirk Cameron, and I was on top of the world.