

He slides into his blue-on-blue Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud and quickly sinks into the car's butter-soft leather seats. The engine purrs, as only a Rolls can. And Roger E. Mosley, who plays TC on CBS's Magnum, P.I., is off, winding past downtown Los Angeles.

His destination, he says, is Watts, in the south-central part of the city notorious for the race riots that erupted there in the '60s. Watts is where Mosley grew up. Even though he lives up-town now, he makes this trip frequently.

"I never considered myself as having left," he explains, gazing out the window. "I'm not coming back, I'm coming over. My mother lives right down the street."

The Rolls is sailing past housing projects, past Beulah Baptist Church, past the liquor store on 89th

Street that his buddy Sylvester Hardison owns. Hardison was, still is and probably always will be Mosley's best friend. As Mosley drives through, people recognize him. They give him the thumbs-up sign.

"Oh, that's Eva's house," Mosley says, driving by a boxy little house. "Eva was my first girl friend. Arthur Brown took Eva away from me because he had curly hair. I'll show you the vacant lot where I beat him up when he took Eva away. Arthur Brown was cute, but he couldn't fight."

The car slows down at a small house on Maie Avenue where Mosley once lived. Black kids went to one school and white kids to another, Mosley recalls; but after school, color lines broke down and all the kids played together. "There's always integration in the sand pile and in the bedroom," he says.

Even though Mosley is part of the Hollywood scene now, and has crossed over from the ghetto into a world of Rolls-Royces and network contracts, he maintains a close link with his past. Wherever he goes, he remembers where he came from. It's always with him. He never forgets.

Indeed, in one of Hollywood's most expensive restaurants, lunching on spinach-wrapped filet of sole and tiny vegetables, Mosley is reminded of the foods that were a treat for him as a child. "A butter-and-sugar sandwich was a delicacy," he says. "You never had a mayonnaise sandwich either? Well, you never lived."

After lunch, the valet delivers the car. "My biggest claim to fame," Mosley says with a chuckle, "is that I'm one of the few people who can drive from Watts to Beverly →

One foot in the ghetto, one in his Rolls-Royce

Success on Magnum, P.I. hasn't kept Roger E. Mosley out of his old neighborhood—especially since he finds Hawaii a little dull

By Betty Goodwin (TELE)

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Hills and back and know the same number of people in both directions."

Mosley isn't apologizing for the money he's made or for the success he currently enjoys. Besides the Rolls, he owns an '82 Cadillac, a classic Corvette, an original 1963 Stingray, a truck and a van. "No, I don't have any problems with that because nobody deserves them more than me," he says. "If I'd worked in that tire shop over there, I still would have had a Rolls. It's something I always wanted.

"My philosophy is the same as Rev. Ike's: the best way to help poor people is not to be one of them."

These days, Mosley spends most of his time in Honolulu, where *Magnum* is shot. The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii may not appreciate this, but its glorious beaches, palm trees and ukulele music send Mosley into a state of depression.

"I don't want to admit I have to live there," he grumbles. "I'm just not Hawaii-oriented. I can't go see 'Sophisticated Ladies.' I can't go listen to Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin. I can't go to the Hearn-Leonard fight. All I got is Don Ho and the Polynesian extravaganza." Mosley even prefers L.A.'s infamous traffic jams to the serenity of Hawaii. After all, the city, with all its turbulence, is part of what shaped him. "I like congestion and action," he says with civic pride. "I went to a movie in Hawaii just to stand in a line. You win little battles and you feel like you're a success when you get home."

Mosley had bigger battles to win as a child, although he says life there wasn't as tough as people unfamiliar with Watts imagine. "I had a lot growing up. I had a mother and a father. I had a car at 16, a good education, a good social life. I wasn't involved with drugs, never joined a gang, and I knew numerous kids just like me. Certain areas of Watts are affluent. That's why Watts stood out as a unique situation when they had a revolt in '65.

"In the '60s," he goes on, "I was a Watts revolt participant. I thought I knew everything. I could have gotten on a soap box and tried to lead masses of blacks down Sunset Boulevard.

Then, sometime in the '70s, Mosley realized he didn't know all there was; he wasn't a cure-all. "But I lend help wherever I can. If Alan King and Carl Reiner are helping the United Jewish Appeal, then Roger Mosley should be helping the United Negro Fund. I don't have a plan. I'm not like Ed Asner, trying to take charge or run for something, but I am there to help people if they have a program."

And he does. In 1974, Mosley founded the Watts Repertory Company and is also its artistic director. He helped form the Watts Swim Club, and has coached high-school basketball and little-league football. In Honolulu, he even found himself a position as coach of the Kaimuki Eagles, a peewee football team and, "All of a sudden I felt better being in Hawaii."

Performing on a highly visible show, Mosley's discovered that as TC, one of *Magnum's* Vietnam buddies who's now a helicopter pilot with his own island-hopping service, he has a certain responsibility to black viewers. "I read," he says, "that on a regular basis there are only about 30 black actors on TV—in any capacity. When I run into people on the street, they tell me they're so happy I'm not playing a butler or a chauffeur. It could be the biggest junkie on the street who looks at me and says, 'Hey, man, you're cool, brother.' TC is young, black, independent, vibrant and has no hangups about his station in life. Every other black character on TV is trying to arrest someone. If there are five or six million guys who want to be Tom Selleck, then 10 per cent, or whatever the black population is, would love to be me."

Nevertheless, Mosley says that "in the very next breath," people tell him they wish he said and did more on the show—"so they can be proud. They ask when TC is going to be shown with a woman or a wife. Almost every other letter I get asks what the initials TC stand for. I'm the only character people know nothing about. It almost sends me back to the studio with a Malcolm X attitude. But then when I get there I realize I've got to be Martin Luther King." What else can he do, he asks in jest, "Get three or four Samoans and →

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start a riot?"

Mosley says he's often raised the issue with the show's executive producer Don Bellisario. So far nothing's changed, and Mosley doubts if it ever will. But Bellisario admits that the role "isn't as dimensional as it could be," and claims that TC will be "fleshed out" as the show grows.

Just as Mosley's commitment to his character's integrity has been shaped by his background, so has his commitment to other, more personal, areas of his life.

He shares his life at home with a "roommate" by whom he has a 6-year-old daughter. "I tried being married once and I got an 'F' in being a husband, and nobody's teaching the course. If marriage was the stock market, nobody would invest in it. If it were a TV show, they'd cancel it, restructure it and put it in a new time slot." Mosley married young and produced two children, now aged 16 and 20. He also has two other children from separate relationships.

"I take care of all my kids. They all get a piece of the pie," he says. "It's my life. I'm not ashamed of it. And I'm not wearing it on a banner. It's just me."

It may not be a traditional family arrangement, but as his mother, Eloise Harris, explains, "He puts his kids on a pedestal. He's not going to let happen to his children what happened to him." Mosley's natural father "ceased to exist," as he puts it, when Mosley was 4. What became of his father? "I have no information there whatsoever. The only father I knew is my stepfather."

Mosley's mother explains something else about her 6-foot-2, 215-pound son: "When he looks at you, you get the impression that he's mean," adds his mother. "But he's not mean. He just doesn't show a lot of teeth."

"In a lot of ways, I'm alone in my thoughts," explains Mosley. "I don't need an entourage around me. I don't have any need for new friends. That may sound strange, but I'm very content with my life."

He also has a special bond with Selleck. In fact, originally, the TC role was designed as a white Texan, ex-crop-duster

type. When the idea of using a black actor came up ("Let's face it, there were a lot of blacks in Vietnam," says Bellisario), Selleck suggested Mosley. They had worked together in a movie that apparently was so terrible the two are pledged never to reveal its name.

"He brings great dignity to what he does," says Selleck. "I just didn't think we could get him. He's done so many lead roles."

Mosley's most important vehicle was the movie "Leadbelly," in which he played the title role of folk singer Huddie Ledbetter. One critic noted how he "erupts with an incandescent blend of sensitivity and barely controlled violence." "Leadbelly," says Mosley, "was the role that established me as not just another big guy."

In high school, as a big guy, Mosley had hopes of one day playing professional football; but because he did not get proper guidance, he says, he wound up turning down sports scholarships to several top Eastern colleges. During the Watts riots, he decided to become a TV newscaster "to tell the truth about things in the black community." He enrolled in a four-month course at a broadcasting academy where he was "ripped off," and accidentally ended up reading for a part in a play. He quickly became involved in theater, then movies ("Semi-Tough," "Stay Hungry") and television (*Roots: The Next Generations*, "Attica" and "The Jericho Mile").

With his role in *Magnum*, Mosley has tasted prime-time fame—and has also found out how relentless female fans can be. He had to put his house up for sale recently because of the endless trail of unwanted visitors who would leave notes on the front door and the cars, and drop off strange gifts besides.

Mosley may not be pleased about the infringement on his privacy, but at least he can laugh at it. "Ethnically," he says, "I'm in good shape. When my group [as opposed to Selleck's adoring fans] watches the show, they find me attractive, so I get my share. There's a slight trace of Reagan's trickle-down theory: my 10 per cent does trickle on down." **END**