

TEEN WOLF

*FROM MARTIAL ARTS
TO 'NEW MOON,' TAYLOR
LAUTNER'S WILD RIDE*

*BY NEIL STRAUSS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK SELIGER*

EASY RIDER
Lautner on the
beach in Malibu

'HAVE YOU EVER snorted a line of cocaine before?"

"A line of cocaine?!" Taylor Lautner, 17, replies. "No. I've never done any drug."

We are sitting on a gym mat in the North Hollywood headquarters of Xtreme Martial Arts. And we are trying as hard as we can to find some dirt on Lautner.

Two days earlier, Lautner wrapped filming in Vancouver on *Eclipse*, the third episode of the teen romance based on Stephenie Meyer's bestselling *Twilight* books about the love triangle between a girl from a broken home, an overprotective vampire who has intimacy issues and an amorous werewolf stuck in the friend zone.

Lautner, as every girl under 16 knows, is the latter manimal, Jacob. With the eight-pack abs. And the tan, chiseled face. And

No.
Have you ever been arrested?

No.
How about traffic tickets? What's the worst moving violation you've ever gotten?

I've never gotten one. Wow. This is interesting.

Um, how about urinating on public property? Have you ever done that?

On public property?
Like an alley or a park bench.

I guess, like, forests or in the woods if it's an emergency.

That doesn't count. What about drinking? Have you ever been drunk?

No.
Come on, I don't believe that.

I could just be answering no to everything.

OK, so you've probably been drunk before and maybe watched some porn.

OK, OK. Yeah, it is up to you for interpretation.

So if you've been drunk, what's the harm in saying it? There's nothing wrong with it.

to be the one that has that opportunity. I'm so grateful. It's *Twilight*. It's not me personally."

Lautner was not originally supposed to be in *New Moon*, because between the two books, the character transforms from a diminutive boy to a giant of a man. So as soon as filming on *Twilight* ended, before a new director was even assigned to *New Moon*, Lautner began preparing for the casting by drinking protein shakes, eating every two hours and working out until he gained 20 pounds of muscle. His co-stars put in strong words for Lautner, who promised *New Moon*'s director, Chris Weitz, he would gain 10 more pounds of muscle, which he accomplished, winning not only the role but the hearts of teenage girls everywhere.

"He gets a lot of attention because he's buff," says Kristen Stewart, who plays Bella in the *Twilight* films and who became Lautner's closest friend on set. "But I think as soon as the movie comes out, people are going to realize that's not why he got the job."

But even though fame has come to

"THIS COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ANYONE WHO PLAYED JACOB," says Lautner. "It's 'Twilight.' It's not me personally."

the pearly-white smile. And the squeaky-clean Disney-worthy reputation that we are attempting to ruin.

Although he's lived around L.A. for much of his life, Lautner, oddly, had no idea where to do this interview. So I suggested going to visit the person who is the key to his career, without whom it wouldn't have been possible: Mike Chat, also known as the blue Power Ranger and, more important for Lautner, the founder of Xtreme Martial Arts, a school of theatrical fighting that transformed Lautner from an 11-year-old world karate champion into a 17-year-old superstar heartthrob. Outside the studio, there are three life-size photos of Lautner at age 11 emblazoned on the glass windows. There are also three paparazzi waiting for him to emerge.

Lautner is wearing a black Xtreme Martial Arts T-shirt and matching sweatpants. And, as the line of questioning continues, he grows more and more uncomfortable.

You haven't even smoked pot once?

No.

How about cigarettes?

No.

Not even tried them without inhaling?

Contributing editor NEIL STRAUSS interviewed Stephen Colbert in RS 1087.

Can I ask you something?

Sure.
What did you do with Zac Efron when you interviewed him?

Taylor Lautner is not used to this type of interview. We will spend the day together doing martial arts, evading paparazzi and eating steak. And talking. A lot.

It will be, in a word, awkward.

This is because Lautner isn't really a star. Right now, he is a phenomenon. Outside the home where he lives with his parents and sister, there can be as many as 12 paparazzi vehicles lurking. There have been three books written about him, countless fan websites, and every week, the tabloids offer fresh speculation on his rumored relationship with Taylor Swift.

Yet all these fans and journalists hounding him, obsessed with him, haven't really seen him do anything yet. Aside from a few roles, his acting experience is limited to four unexceptional scenes in *Twilight*, the first film in the series.

Lautner is featured far more prominently in the sequel, *New Moon*, getting almost as much screen time as the brooding Robert Pattinson, who plays vampire Edward. "This could have happened to anybody who played Jacob," Lautner says modestly. "I was just lucky enough

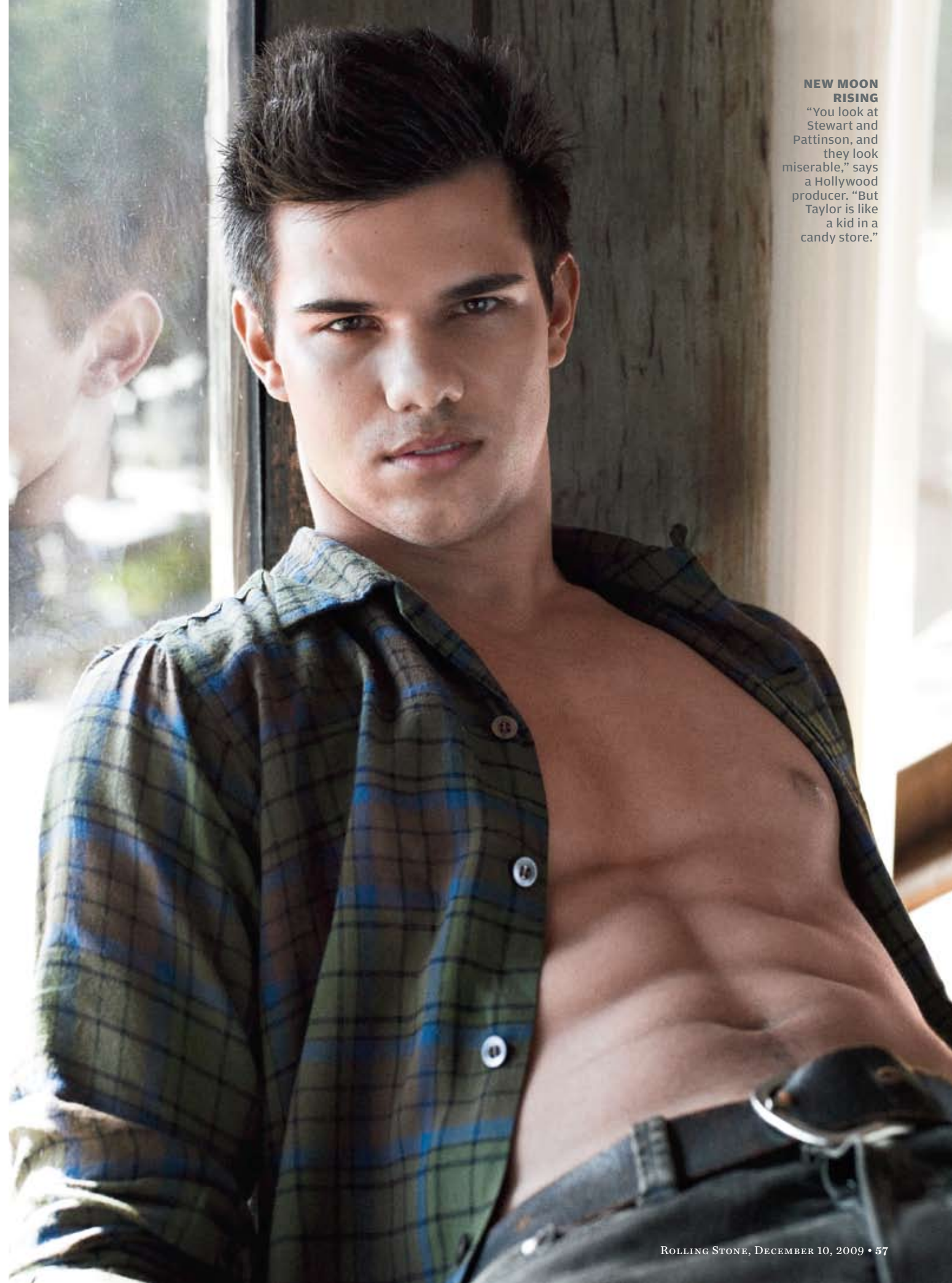
Lautner later than it has to Stewart and Pattinson, he appears to be handling it with much more ease. "You look at Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson, and they look miserable about their success," says a Hollywood producer. "Taylor is like a kid in a candy store. He's so happy and excited."

'YOU SAW 'NEW MOON'?" Lautner exclaims, grinning wildly. "I haven't even seen the movie yet. How was the CGI? How do the wolves look? How about the back flip at the end where I turn into a wolf?"

He stands on a gym mat in the corner of the Xtreme Martial Arts studio. The film is three weeks away from its release date, and final edits are still being made. "So I just jump and poof into a wolf?" he continues his barrage of questions as he executes a perfect double flip.

He walks over to Chat, a thin, wiry Chinese-Thai-American who looks younger than his 34 years. Chat is a former martial-arts champion and actor who has licensed his XMA techniques to 725 schools around the country. It is often difficult to tell whether Chat thinks of the discipline as a steppingstone to acting or

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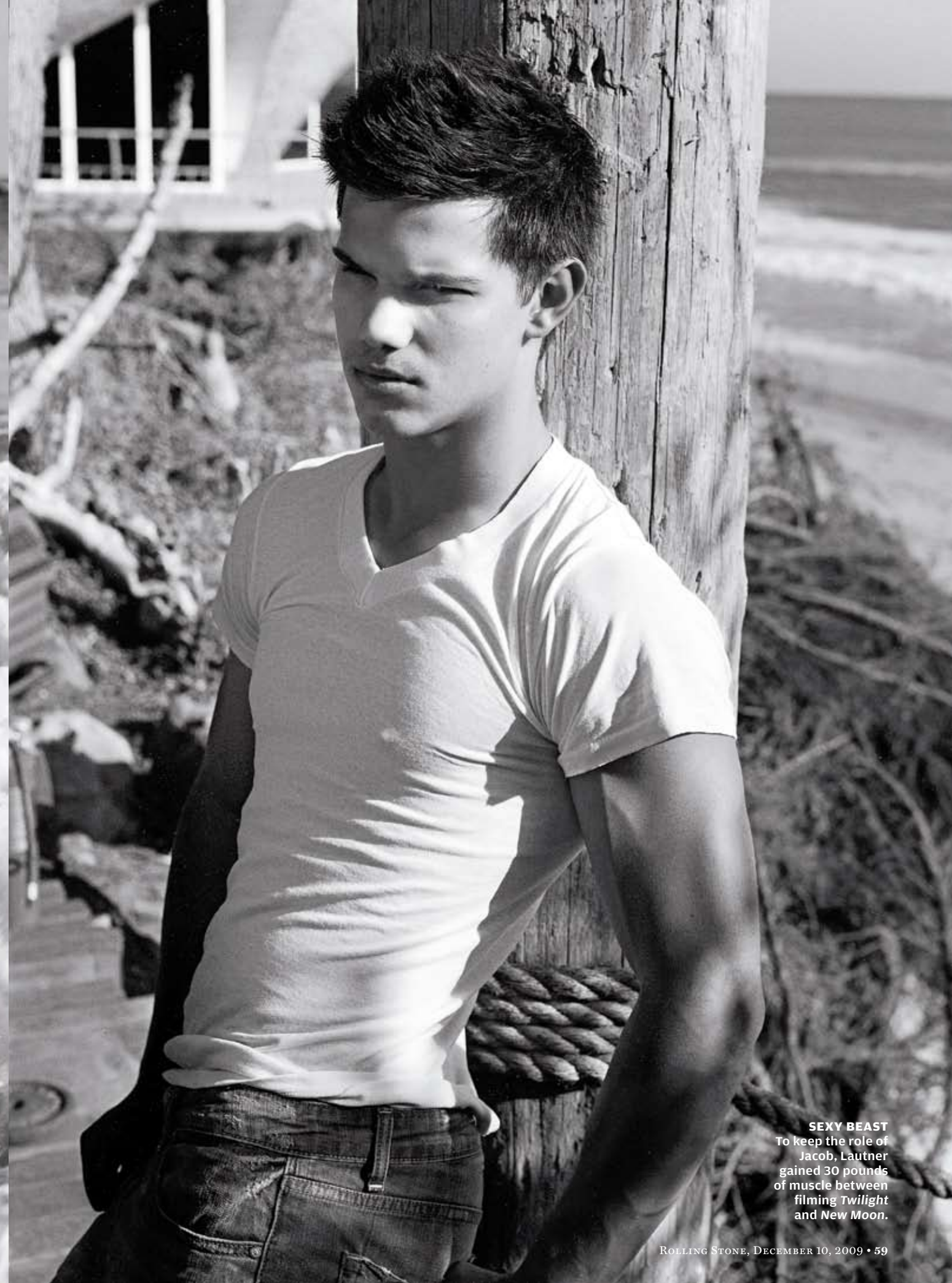
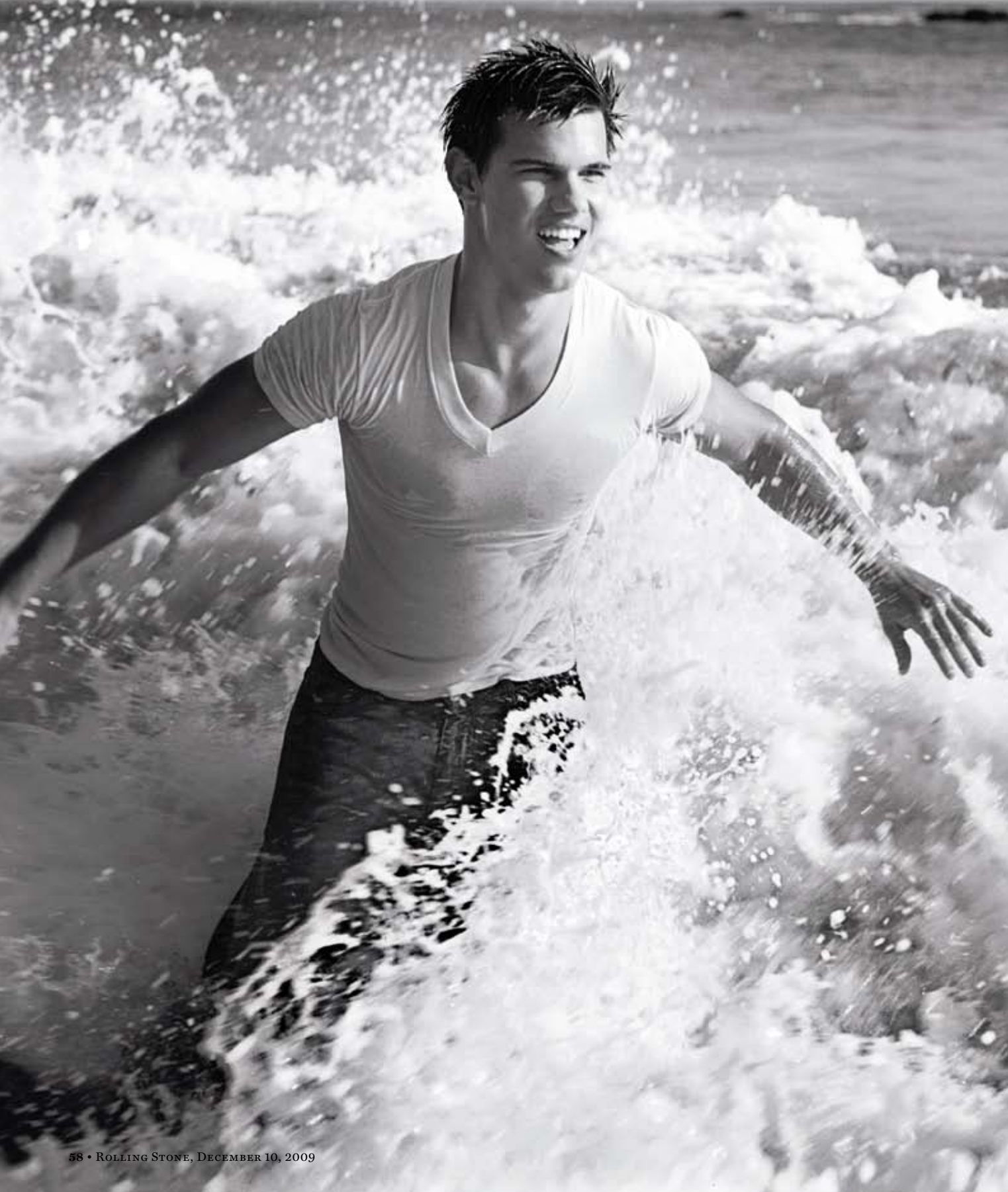


NEW MOON

RISING

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BECAUSE HE’S BUFF,”
says Kristen Stewart. “But that’s not why he got the job.”*



SEXY BEAST
To keep the role of Jacob, Lautner gained 30 pounds of muscle between filming *Twilight* and *New Moon*.

whether he hopes that placing his students on TV shows and films will help popularize his style of martial arts. Either way, if looking cool is more important than fighting well, Xtreme Martial Arts is the way to go.

"Show him the bo," Chat instructs. The relationship between mentor and student seems strange. Lautner is Chat's biggest success story by far, yet he has grown way beyond the world of Xtreme Martial Arts, which he hasn't competed in for years. At five feet nine, well-built but far from imposing, Lautner seems to be balancing on the precipice between subservient teenager and independent adult.

Lautner picks up a bo staff and frets that he can't do it anymore. Nonetheless, he begins spinning it in his hands, behind his back and over his head as if he'd never taken a break. This is something he does often: worrying that he'll fail at something, then succeeding effortlessly.

"People say Taylor got where he is because he has *it*," Chat says as the bo staff whirls in a helicopter blur. "But he worked hard for it. He practiced like a disciplined Navy SEAL."

"This brings back memories," Lautner says. "I remember working six days a week, four hours a day on the bo. After school, I would go to the basketball court and just practice, practice, practice."

There are two kinds of child stars: the Lindsay Lohans and the Zac Efrons. The Lohans are from broken homes, were abandoned in some way and witnessed or were victims of some form of abuse. The Efrons are raised by two parents who love and support them, and are brought up in some sort of religious faith. The Lohans end up in the tabloids for doing stupid, destructive things to themselves and others, usually fueled by drugs, alcohol and self-esteem issues; the Efrons tend to work hard, discourage any attention paid to their personal lives and stay away from clubs, drugs and the back seats of police cars. Lohans are interesting but unstable and depressed, while Efrons are boring but grounded and happy.

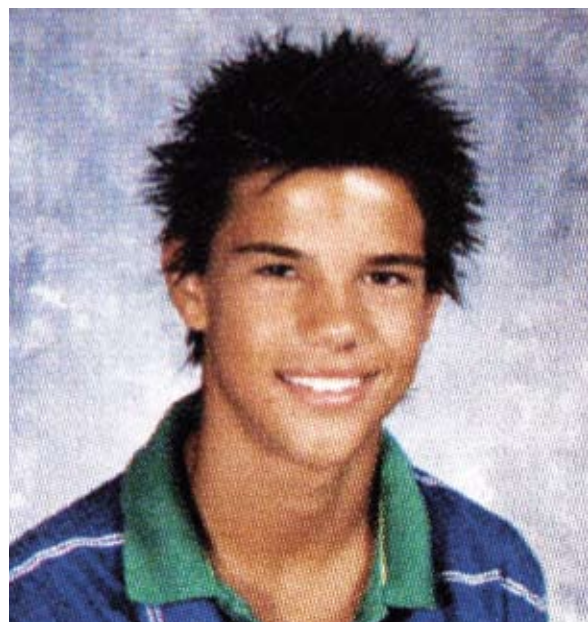
Lautner is most definitely an Efron. His father, Dan, is an airline pilot with a master's degree in clinical psychology. His mother, Deb, was a project manager at Herman Miller, the office-equipment manufacturer. They are still married, took Lautner regularly to their Catholic church, supported him from an early age and taught him a strong work ethic and a sense of morality.

"It's key as parents to talk to him about what is important in life, because it's not about being a movie star," Dan Lautner

says. "We tell Taylor, 'You've been given this opportunity. Be thankful for it, because it may disappear one day.'"

Most of the money Lautner has made he's put in the bank rather than splurging on anything extravagant. And, at the behest of his parents, he has continued his studies, taking the California High School Proficiency Examination to test out of high school and then immediately enrolling in community college to take courses online.

Stewart says that one of the qualities she envies in Lautner is his ability to focus in the moment, without ever getting too introspective about or dwelling on the bigger issues. He has an inner stillness and solidity that are surprising for his age,



STUDENT LIFE
Lautner during his sophomore year at Valencia High School. As a boy, he left his home in Michigan to pursue martial arts and acting.

and he tends to communicate more with his thick, low-slung eyebrows than with words. At times, his laconic nature is unsettling: Questions that require deeper thought are responded to with a smiling "I got you" (which he says 18 times as his only answer to a question) or a "There you go" (nine times). Sometimes even an "Oh, my" (three times). All of which translate as "I understand, but I'm either not going to reply or don't know how to reply."

With such polite, and seemingly oblivious, responses, it sometimes appears as if Lautner has taken a press-training course in evading answers. That is, until one speaks to his father – and notices that they have the same "Aw, shucks" speaking voice and answer queries with the same vagueness. Unless, of course, they both took the same media-training course.

LAUTNER NEVER PLANNED to become an actor, he explains as he sits in the upstairs lounge of Chat's studio. He has changed out of his workout clothes and into black boots, tight jeans and a black form-fitting crew-neck shirt with three buttons. His passion, he says, was sports: football, baseball and especially karate, which he started learning at age six at Fabiano's Karate in Holland, Michigan. The following year, at a tournament, Lautner walked away with three first-place trophies – and a life-changing experience.

Lautner and his father went to a seminar that Chat was leading on Xtreme Martial Arts, and Taylor ended up impressed: The idea of "jumping and flipping and doing all these cool tricks," as he puts it, far outshone the fun of karate. Afterward, the pair talked to Chat, who told them he was holding a six-day camp at UCLA in two weeks. So Lautner decided to attend. He was the youngest student there.

"We train the kids to find their breaking point," Chat says. "Everyone has a breaking point. But with Taylor we could push him beyond the breaking point. Sometimes it was one more routine when his legs were shaking and he was crying that he didn't want to do it. But he would make the decision to say, 'OK, this is what I need to do.'"

Lautner says now that the intense training "set me up for my life. It gave me the confidence, the discipline and the hard work. Chat used to tell me, 'If you don't give 110 percent, you are not going to get anywhere.'"

That hard work and discipline led Lautner to three championship titles in Xtreme Martial Arts. And because many of his students had gone on to work in film, Chat proposed the idea one day to Lautner and his parents.

"It scared us at first," Lautner recalls. "We were like, 'No, that's not for us.' I was like, 'I'm sticking to my sports.' But for some reason, this guy believed in me. He said he'd put us up at his house for a month. And he'd help get me on auditions."

At first, Lautner's father was apprehensive and turned down Chat's invitations for a year. But then he decided it wouldn't hurt to try it out for the month and see if there was any potential. Lautner's grandfather, however, a retired Shell Oil employee, was a little more gung-ho. Chat recalls, "He would always pull me to the side and say, 'He needs to get out there in L.A. You know, he needs to take a shot at this stuff.'"

So Lautner, his father, his mother and his sister came out to live with Chat and his family. Two days before he was supposed to return to Michigan, Lautner received his first callback – for a Fox TV pilot called *Oliver Beene*. And though he didn't get the job, that was all the encouragement he and his family needed that he could do this.

At age nine, Lautner started commuting between Michigan and L.A. for auditions and martial-arts training, eventually landing his first booking in a promotional spot for Nickelodeon's *Rugrats* movie.

When Herman Miller shut its Michigan plant, the Lautners decided to leave the Midwest so Lautner could pursue acting more seriously. His mother found a job as a manager at a software-development company, and the family moved to an L.A. suburb. Soon, Lautner was landing small guest appearances on TV series like *The Bernie Mac Show* and doing commercials for Frosted Flakes and voice-overs for Scooby-Doo and Charlie Brown cartoons. From early on, Lautner, with his gleaming

we were like, 'All right, whatever. We'll see.' But when the movie came out, I was just blown away. That's when I realized, 'Boy, what am I getting myself into?'"

SOON, LAUTNER BEGINS TO get antsy. Though he constantly talks about his respect and gratitude for Chat, he is sitting on a couch as far away as possible from where Chat is sitting. As we walk toward the exit, I ask if anything's wrong. He says he was slightly uncomfortable at the studio because "it's not me anymore."

When asked where he wants to eat, Lautner says he hasn't been back to L.A. in so long that he doesn't know where to go anymore. Sushi is suggested, to which Lautner lowers an eyebrow, which translates as "Disgusting, but if you insist." Then Chinese. He raises one eyebrow, meaning "That's a slightly better possibility." Then steak, to which he raises both eyebrows, signifying a resounding yes.

He is a creature of habit, he explains.

movie *Valentine's Day*, in which he stars in a vignette opposite Taylor Swift. Thus, the inevitable question arises.

I do have to ask, did you and Taylor Swift end up dating after that?

We got along great. We instantly clicked. And she's – she's an amazing girl. Aside from being beautiful, she's extremely funny, charismatic and fun to be around, so we definitely get along. We're close.

You have a good way of not directly answering questions.

Oh, my.

I'll ask a specific question, and then you will take it somewhere more general.

Got you.

Do you know what I'm talking about?
Like you'll ask something specific, and I'll take it to a different area? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

It's just a personal choice.

Got you.

I know what you're going to say, but are you going out with someone?

Possibly.

"WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL, THERE WAS A LITTLE BULLYING GOING ON," says Lautner. "People making fun of what I do."

white teeth, thick black hair, tan face and flattened nose, was typecast as the popular kid, the jock, the bully and the love interest in almost every show. Was this who he was in real life? "I don't think so," says Lautner. "I definitely hope I was never the bully. I was never extremely confident."

He shifts uneasily. "Because I was acting," he says, "when I was in school there was a little bullying going on. Not physical bullying but people making fun of what I do... I just had to tell myself I can't let this get to me. This is what I love to do. And I'm going to continue doing it."

In 2005, he landed the role of Sharkboy in *The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl in 3-D*. Lautner and his family thought it would be his big break. Especially when, afterward, he was cast in *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*. But instead of skyrocketing him to success, both films flopped.

And so, after the films, Lautner entered a slow period. But then, in 2008, his career began anew: He was cast as Christian Slater's son on the short-lived show *My Own Worst Enemy* and began shooting a movie based on a cult vampire romance called *Twilight*.

"Nobody knew what *Twilight* was going to be," Lautner says. "Nobody. We thought we were making it just for passionate fans of the book. People kept telling us, 'Oh, yeah, the movie is going to do so good.' And

"Everybody tries to get me to go outside my comfort zone with food, but I stick to what I like. I start with my Caesar salad, then get my steak, a side of garlic mashed potatoes and maybe some asparagus. And I'm fine with that every single night."

"He's so picky. I was the first person who got him to eat sushi," Stewart recalls. "He's very set in his ways. But that is very informative of his personality. He's very steady. He has a really solid sense of himself."

As we walk to Lautner's shiny BMW, three paparazzi start moving in, snapping photos. When he gets into his car, they jump into their cars. As we drive to Beverly Hills for steak, Lautner points out their techniques. One car stays on his right, another on his left, and one behind him, so that no matter what direction he chooses to go, someone can tail him.

"They probably get annoyed, because I don't do things," he says as he turns onto the freeway. "When I'm at home, I wake up, I go to the gym. I get in my car. I drive down to L.A., and I go to meetings all day. Then I come back, eat dinner, see my family, see friends, go to bed, and then do the same thing over again the next day."

We pull into the Grill and are inside before the photographers can get out of their cars. Lautner orders the usual – filet mignon, garlic mashed potatoes and salad – and begins talking about the upcoming

You've already given me the answer.
Really? I don't think I'm giving you any answer.

Like you said on "Valentine's Day," you and Taylor got along really well. My guess is there is something romantic going on, and you're seeing how it develops.

You're pretty good with the analysis. So I don't know. I guess I'm going to trust you.

Of course, there are other possibilities.
Yeah, what's another possibility?

Another possibility is that maybe you're just sort of discovering yourself...

OK.
... as a young person trying to figure out his sexual identity in the world.

OK. I see where you're going. Interesting choice.

It is a possibility.
There's a lot of rumors out there.

Lautner says that he's never been promiscuous: "Yeah, I would need to know the person. I'm really big about, like, commitment. Loyalty is a major thing for me."

He finishes his steak, and we exit the restaurant and return to his car as the paparazzi leap to attention. And I wonder if he's really told me anything. I ask him if he's ever played poker before.

"Yeah," he replies, raising both eyebrows. "I used to play poker a lot." **CS**