

Kirk Douglas stars as dyslexic grandfather

"The Secret" sheds light on important problem

By Steven Alan McGaw

Be it exploitative, violent escapist fare or lurid sensationalism masquerading as news, there's no shortage of inconsequential, dubious programming on contemporary TV. From shirtless, tropics-based private eyes to alleged news programs that focus on murder-for-hire in the nation's high schools, cheap thrills appear to run rampant.

It is, therefore, all the more laudable when a series, special or telefilm not only aims to entertain its audience without aid of leggy blondes or ample gunfire, but address an important issue or cause as well. Such is the case with "The Secret," premiering Sunday, April 19, on CBS. Anchored by the full-bodied performance of Kirk Douglas (in a rare TV appearance), the movie sheds sympathetic light on the problem of dyslexia and the ways in which misplaced pride and

lack of communication can augment its sufferers' woes.

Douglas stars as Mike Dunmore, the affable co-owner of a general store in a sleepy Cape Cod community. Bruce Boxleitner plays Dunmore's son, Patrick, who felt his father was inattentive while he was growing up and now resents his dad's warm relationship with his grandson Danny (Jesse Tendler.) Laura Harrington is Meredith, Patrick's mild-mannered wife, who tries to orchestrate peaceful relations between her sullen, complicated husband and her father-in-law.

In his third-grade class, Danny is known as a talented artist, a good athlete and a likeable playmate. His low grades, however, are a source of concern to all but his dad, who dismisses such worries, saying, "he's a jock." When a teacher suggests testing Danny for a

learning disability, Patrick is outraged and overrules his wife.

Mike, on the other hand, seems sadly sympathetic to Danny's problems and comes up with \$1,200 to have Danny tested in Boston. When Patrick learns of the plan, he retrieves his son just moments before the test begins.

Meanwhile, Mike has agreed to run for the town council, urged by friends who believe he can be an effective mediator between land-hungry developers and the Cape's downtrodden fruit growers. Showered with praise, he decides winning and serving in such an office would help to fill the void left by the death of his wife.

At a candidates' debate, however, it becomes painfully clear that Mike has his own secret handicap. The proud, gregarious man now faces a decision that can affect his relationship with virtually everyone he knows, especially his cherished grandson.

Douglas is endearing and effective as Dunmore. In the early part of the movie, he substitutes his trademark intensity for a winning, appropriately grandfatherly quality. When, however, Dunmore's long-hidden handicap threatens to become public knowledge, Douglas vividly captures the old man's terror. Boxleitner is similarly on target in the difficult role of Patrick, a man shackled by resentment and insecurity. Harrington gives Meredith an edgy anxiety and Brock Peters lends firm support as Thurgood, Mike's longtime business partner. Tendler is likeable as Danny, if a little too cute.

Admirable in its structure and character development, Cynthia A. Cherbak's script suffers, at times, from ease of corniness and a paucity of logic. Director Karen Arthur eases past most of these moments, however, and emerges with an enjoyable film that addresses its topic well. Additionally, Fred Karlin's music is nice and the scenery (the movie was filmed largely in Nova Scotia) is beautiful.



John Mahoney (left) plays a dedicated physician at a teaching hospital in *The Human Factor*, debuting Thursday on CBS. Kurt Dauterich portrays a student.