

ELLEN DEGENERES

b. 1/26/1958

“For me, it’s that I contributed ... that my hour of television is positive and upbeat and an antidote for all the negative stuff going on in life.”

In April 1997, Ellen DeGeneres, the star of her own popular sitcom, “Ellen,” took a step that became a turning point in her personal life and her career: she outed herself and her character on prime-time television. Her coming out led to a storm of media attention, including her photo on the cover of *Time Magazine* with the tag, “Yep, I’m gay.” Criticism followed that the show was now “too gay.” For a time after her public declaration, her career suffered from backlash.

DeGeneres returned to the national spotlight when she was chosen to host the Emmy Awards only a few weeks after the September 11 attacks in 2001. At the ceremony she quipped, “We’re told to go on living our lives as usual, because to do otherwise is to let the terrorists win, and really, what would upset the Taliban more than a gay woman wearing a suit in front of a room full of Jews?” She was praised for her poise and decorum as master of ceremonies.

Ellen DeGeneres attended the University of New Orleans and worked at a variety of jobs before she entered stand-up comedy. Her selection by cable channel Showtime as *The Funniest Person in America* led to opportunities to appear on television. During her first appearance on “The Tonight Show,” DeGeneres became the first female comedian ever invited to sit on the sofa and visit with Johnny Carson. She has been labeled a “female Seinfeld” for her quirky observational humor.

In 2003, she launched her daytime television talk show, “The Ellen DeGeneres Show.” It won 15 Emmy Awards and is the first talk show to win the Emmy for Outstanding Talk Show for its first three seasons.

In 2005, DeGeneres was again selected to host the Emmy Awards, this time just three weeks after Hurricane Katrina. She joked, “You know me, any excuse to put on a dress.”



Popular comedian Ellen DeGeneres was the first openly gay actor to portray a gay character on a leading prime-time television program.

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