

LESLIE JORDAN

ACTOR & COMEDIAN

b. April 29, 1955

d. October 24, 2022

He was an Emmy-winning actor and comedian and an LGBTQ advocate.

“Happiness is a habit. It’s a choice. It’s something that you have to work for.”

Leslie Jordan was an Emmy-winning actor and comedian and an LGBTQ advocate. Beloved for his puckish humor, small stature, and distinctive Southern drawl, he appeared in commercials, television shows, films, and theater productions.

Jordan was born and raised in Tennessee. His father died in a plane crash when Jordan was 11. His childhood travails were compounded by being a diminutive gay youth in the conservative South. Sent to a camp designed to toughen up young boys, Jordan returned with the award for best all-around camper—not because they succeeded, but because

he made everyone laugh. Humor became his best defense.

In 1982 Jordan moved to Los Angeles, arriving with money his mother had sewn into his jacket. He was soon appearing in television commercials. Standing just 4 feet, 11 inches, he found an asset in the physicality for which he had once been bullied. Feeling free and flush with cash for the first time, he fell into substance abuse and was arrested multiple times on DUI charges. Despite this, Jordan landed his first television role on the 1986 series “The Fall Guy,” and his career took off. He achieved sobriety in the late '90s.

Jordan earned an Emmy in 2005 for his performance as the snarky Beverley Leslie on the hit series “Will & Grace.” He appeared in three seasons of the award-winning anthology “American Horror Story” and became a regular guest on the sitcom “Hearts Afire,” among countless other TV performances. Jordan also appeared in more than a dozen films, including “The Help” in 2011.

Jordan sang and wrote several of his own stage productions. His first autobiographical play, a musical titled “Hysterical Blindness and Other Southern Tragedies That Have Plagued My Life Thus Far,” turned his childhood traumas into poignant comedy. It appeared off Broadway in 1993. He earned acclaim for his role as “Brother Boy” in Del Shores’s darkly funny 1996 play, “Sordid Lives,” and reprised the part in the film adaptation and TV-series spinoff.

Jordan brightened lives in multiple ways. During the height of the AIDS epidemic, he volunteered with AIDS Project Los Angeles, providing food and companionship to homebound patients. In the grim early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, his warmly hilarious videos went viral, earning him more than 5.8 million Instagram followers.

In 2021 Jordan published his autobiography, “How Y’All Doing? Misadventures and Mischief from a Life Well Lived,” and received the GALECA: The Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics’ Timeless Star Award. He died in his car the following year, after suffering a heart attack and crashing into a building.

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