

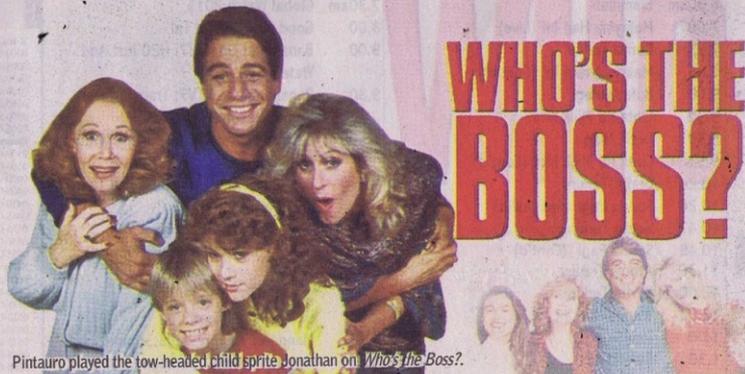
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Pintauro, 'Who's the Boss?' child star, reveals he got HIV while on crystal meth

IN 2003, Danny Pintauro realised he had a problem. Unlike countless other child stars who crash and burn before they can legally drink, the 27-year-old man who once played the tow-headed child sprite Jonathan on 'Who's the Boss?' was not dead or in jail. But after graduating from Stanford University and heading to New York, he was a bit adrift.

"So as soon as I got to New York all that stopped and I suddenly went, 'Who am I?'" he said in 2004. "I had no idea. I was so focused through school and college that I never tried to figure out the difference between Danny Pintauro and Dan Pintauro. We're very separate people."



Pintauro played the tow-headed child sprite Jonathan on 'Who's the Boss?.'

Work wasn't necessarily the problem — Pintauro has been performing on-and-off since he finished college, even if only in modest productions of 'Shear Madness'. Perhaps surprisingly, his sexuality wasn't an issue either. Pintauro came out "before everybody," he said, way back in 1997 after a tabloid threatened to do the job for him — and TV mom Judith Light advised him to come clean.

But, after the end of a two-year relationship, he felt he should see what else was out there. This is what led the young man, whose character used to confide in Light and Tony Danza on national television, to crystal meth — and, as Pintauro told Oprah Winfrey in a dramatic interview aired over the weekend, an HIV diagnosis.

"I'm HIV positive," a tearful Pintauro told Winfrey. "And I have been for 12 years."

Pintauro told Winfrey he was diagnosed in March of 2003.

"I went in for a regular checkup," he said. "You know, as a responsible gay man, you're getting an HIV test done every six months . . . And you sort of waited two weeks on pins and needles, or at least I did, because I was just terrified of the idea of getting HIV."

The diagnosis was, he told Winfrey, even a bit of a relief.

"It's backwards," Pintauro said. "You've spent so much time terrified that you're going to get it, and then you have it. You don't have to be terrified anymore."

Winfrey asked for more details.

"There was more that I wanted to explore sexually," Pintauro told Winfrey. "Crystal meth takes away your inhibitions. You have no limits. And if you want to explore that adventurous side, taking the drug is going to put you there."

"Does it make you more sexual?" Winfrey asked.

"Heightened," Pintauro said.

"Very, very heightened."

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Danny Pintauro

His readiness to experiment led to a drug-fueled sexual encounter, Pintauro said, with a man whose name he did not know.

"I truly thought I was being safe, and obviously, I wasn't," Pintauro said.

"Just paint a picture for me," Winfrey said. "You're doing crystal meth . . . swinging from the chandeliers, having sex for days?"

"Something like that, yeah," Pintauro said.

But after his diagnosis, Pintauro said he got more responsible. There was always a fear

"Who's gonna wanna love me?," Pintauro wondered — but he said he told the man who became his husband about his HIV status before they even kissed.

"What I vowed at time was that I wasn't going to be the guy who gave it me," he said. "And I never became that guy."

Pintauro said he is now looking forward to life as an HIV activist.

"I missed the opportunity to be a beacon of light for gay kids who were going through what I was going through," Pintauro said.

"I feel like one of the ways the community is going to listen is for me to be pretty harsh," he told People in a separate interview about his HIV status and past drug use. "It's not going to be, 'Hey guys, let's work on fixing this.' It's going to be, 'Get your f-ing s-together, pardon my language.'"

Indeed, even before his was HIV-positive, Pintauro had expressed frustration with closeted Hollywood stars.

"What really pisses me off these days is the number of actors who are gay — who are living that lifestyle — but who are not out in their public lives," he said in 1999. "My point is that somewhere out there is a 13- or 14-year-old kid who knows that he's gay and who is having a very hard time with it. And he or she sees this actor or actress on television and just knows in their hearts that they are also gay, but see them totally living the lie. That really bothers me."

interview, Pintauro also responded to the oft-discussed schoolyard speculation that he and/or Jonathan, the character he played on 'Who's the Boss?', was gay.

"I can't tell you how many people have said that to me," he said. "But at the time, I really wasn't at all aware of it. Now, when I look at old episodes of 'Who's the Boss?' I say, 'God, you are such a little (expletive).'"

But more than two decades after the show went off the air, Pintauro seemed ready to help make change.

"Last meal as a nobody," Pintauro wrote below a picture with his husband on Instagram posted over the weekend. "First meal as an activist." — WPBloomber



Pintauro revealed he was HIV positive in a dramatic interview with Oprah Winfrey aired over the weekend.