

Sammy Davis Jr

Samuel (Sammy) Davis, Jr. was born in Harlem, New York on December 8, 1925. His father, Sammy Davis, Sr, and mother, Elvera Sanchez, were both vaudeville dancers. Sammy was raised by his paternal grandmother. When he was three years old, his parents split up. Sammy Davis, Sr. took custody of his son and took him along on tour.

Sammy learned how to dance from his father and his uncle, Will Mastin. At the age of four, Sammy joined his father and uncle in an act, "Will Mastin's Gang, featuring Little Sammy." Later the three became known as the "Will Mastin Trio."

Racial Prejudice

Sammy served in the United States Army during World War II, but was confronted by strong racial prejudice. This racial prejudice continued throughout his career, but he learned that being in the spotlight removed some of the prejudice. He once said, "My talent was the weapon, the power, the way for me to fight. It was the one way I might hope to affect a man's thinking."

After his years in the army, Sammy started to achieve success with his career as an entertainer. In 1959, he became a member of the "Rat Pack" led by Frank Sinatra, and included performers such as Dean Martin and Shirley MacLaine.

Success

Sammy's career took off in the mid 1950s. He appeared on Broadway in 1956 in Mr. Wonderful, a big success. He also made appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show. He then starred in two dramas of Anna Lucasta (1958) and A Man Called Adam (1966). He appeared again on Broadway 1964 in Golden Boy. In 1972 Davis made a No. 1 hit on the Top 40 charts with "Candy Man." Sammy also enjoyed television and occasionally landed television roles, including appearances on the hit series, "All in the Family."

Car Accident

Sammy almost died in a car accident in 1954 in California. He was returning to Las Angeles from a trip to Las Vegas. He lost his left eye in the accident, forcing him to wear an eye patch for several months. He was later fitted for a glass eye, which he wore for the rest of his life.

While in the hospital after the accident, a friend shared with him the similarities between the Jewish and black cultures. Davis converted to Judaism after reading Paul Johnson's "A History of the Jews" while in the hospital.

Marriage

Sammy married his first wife, Loray White, in 1958, but the two divorced the following year. In 1960, he caused controversy when he married May Britt, a white actress. (He received hate mail while starring in Golden Boy.) The couple had one daughter and adopted two sons. The couple divorced in 1968, upon Sammy admitting to having had an affair with singer Lola Falana.

Soon after his second divorce, sammy started dating Altovise Gore, a dancer in "Golden Boy." They were married by Jesse Jackson. They adopted one child, and remained married until Sammy died in 1990.

Later Life and Death

Sammy performed well into the 1980s, but his health declined due to heavy drinking and drug use. He performed in two films with Dean Martin and also in the movie "Tap" with Gregory Hines. He then traveled on tour with Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin.

Sammy was diagnosed with throat cancer but refused to have surgery, which could have saved his life. Davis told doctors that he would rather keep his voice than have a part of his throat removed. He died in 1990.