



Pauly Shore

STILL



A photograph of a man sliding down a green water slide in a backyard. The man is shirtless and has a playful, slightly pained expression as water splashes over his face. The background shows a single-story house with a brown tiled roof, white walls, and brick pillars. There are green bushes and a lawn in front of the house. The sky is clear and blue.

Photographs by
KOURY ANGELO

CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

THE '90S COMEDY STAR SURVIVED A CAREER
IMPLOSION AND COPEd WITH PRIVATE GRIEF. NOW, AT 52,
HE'S READY TO BE HIS GOOFY SELF AGAIN

By **GILLIAN TELLING**

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aully Shore was a star at 17—and a Hollywood has-been at 29. In 1989, when the stand-up comedian was barely out of high school, he was hired as a veejay on MTV—a gig that turned him into an overnight sensation. His stoner, skater-bro brand of humor and his onstage persona “the Weasel” were so successful he landed his own MTV show, *Totally Pauly*. By the early '90s he was starring in popular movies like *Encino Man* and *Son in Law*. But by the 1996 release of his critically savaged film *Bio-Dome*, audiences had gotten tired of his shtick. “Unfortunately, I took it very personally,” he says of his fall from the heights of fame. “It was something I was used to—for 10 years my life was movies, touring, specials, albums. And then it just wasn’t there anymore.”

As the culture moved on, Shore was struggling with far more than a sputtering career. His mother, famed comedy club owner Mitzi Shore, was diagnosed with a neurological disorder, and Pauly was her main caregiver for years before she died at 87 in 2018. His sister Sandi died of undisclosed causes six months after his mom, and his best friend, TV executive Gary Garfinkel, died of brain cancer around the same time. Not long after that, his father, comedian and actor Sammy Shore, died at 92. At times it felt like he’d hit rock bottom, but instead of succumbing to the grief, Shore decided to make over his life completely—starting with leaving Los Angeles for good. He moved to Las Vegas, started a new podcast (*The Pauly Shore Podcast Show*),



Born into Comedy

Above: Shore with his dad, comedian Sammy Shore. Above right: At the Comedy Store in 1992 with, clockwise from top, Yakov Smirnoff, Jeff Altman, Tim Thomerson, Louie Anderson, Jim Carrey, Shore’s mom, Mitzi, and Bob Saget.

got back into acting (his new comedy *Guest House* is out now on demand) and embraced a new perspective on his past. “Instead of being hurt by Hollywood, I should have been patting myself on the back and going, ‘Wow, you had an awesome run. Now let’s take some time off,’” he says of how he wished he’d reacted. These days, at 52, all he cares about is being happy again. “I want to start over. I want to be the guy America fell in love with years ago, the loose and crazy guy. I want to be happy Pauly,” he says. He knows he’s already on the right path. “I feel like myself again for the first time in many years.”



Shore’s childhood in Beverly Hills was anything but conventional. His parents, Mitzi and Sammy, were the founders of the influential comedy club The Comedy Store on Hollywood’s Sunset Strip. When they divorced in the early '70s, Mitzi took over the club and became famous in her own right for promoting comedians of color and female comics. “The comedians were my family,” Shore says. “I’d be at Little League games with



From **STAND-UP** *to* **SUPERSTAR**



The Prodigy Shore, who was mentored by comic Sam Kinison, performed at his mother’s comedy club The Comedy Store in the early '90s.

The Veejay Shore (with Kari Wuhrer) hosted MTV’s Spring Break parties in the '90s. “MTV was it back then,” he says. “It was where everyone looked.”



The Weasel Shore (at San Francisco’s Warfield Theatre in 1992) developed an onstage alter ego fluent in California dudespeak.

The Actor His 1992 movie *Encino Man*, with Brendan Fraser and Sean Astin, was a hit with fans and at the box office. “My movies weren’t bad, actually,” he says, looking back. “I watched *Bio-Dome* recently and was like, ‘F---, this is funny!’”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: MICHAEL SCHWARTZ/WIREIMAGE; CHRIS HASTON/NBCU PHOTO BANK; GETTY IMAGES; CLAYTON CALL/REDFERNS; ACEY HARRER/THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES (2)



“The older I’ve gotten, the less I’ve been affected by the rejection. It’s just the business”

David Letterman and Howie Mandel, with my dad on the other side of the bleachers wearing just a Speedo and a hairpiece, Bob Dylan sitting next to my dad because his son Sam was on my team. The more time I’ve spent in Middle America with my fans, the more I realize that s--- wasn’t normal!” he says with a laugh. He enjoyed making the legends crack up. “My mom would be downstairs with Richard Pryor and Robin Williams, and it would be 2 a.m., and I’d open the door and be like, ‘Mom, can you please shut up? I have school!’ They thought that was so funny.”



Shore had no doubt he’d one day follow in the family business. “Stand-up comedy is one of those things that chooses you. You don’t choose it,” he says. When his MTV fame hit, he couldn’t believe his luck. “I loved making people laugh, and MTV gave me the keys to do that. It was pretty great.” The one downside? He had a hard time developing trust. Still single today, he says, “The relationships I’ve had with women have been very weird. People liked you because they saw you on TV, so you’d wonder ‘What is their motivation?’” It didn’t help that he was a mama’s boy. “She was



Back Onscreen

“I missed the camaraderie on-set,” Shore says of starring in the comedy *Guest House* (above), his first movie in a decade. “So many people are still behind me, especially the crews.”

always like, ‘Don’t get married. Take care of me!’ She got territorial when it came to other women,” he says. “But I loved my mom. I was her baby.”

After his fame waned, Shore was grateful he had stand-up to fall back on. “I didn’t really go into a deep depression because of it,” he says. “And that’s also when I actually became really good at it.” Meeting fans across the country helped too. “They gave me a lot of love.” He adds that his 2014 documentary *Pauly Shore Stands Alone*, about his life on the road, was cathartic. “That was my therapy for what I was going through,” he says. “I was living with my mom, and she was dying, everything around her was just dying. And I had to communicate with someone. If you talk about your problems, it helps you get through them. So for me, the camera was my therapist.” Returning to acting in *Guest House*, in which he plays a squatter who goes to war with a home’s new owners, was an equal thrill. “I missed it. Being back on-set felt like home again.”

While he hopes for more movie roles in his future, he says staying happy is his main goal now. “My journey made me realize you need to look at what you have, not what you *don’t* have. I have this nice big house, I’ve got a pool, a lot of friends, my podcast, and I’m getting so much love from fans again.” He also feels he has his parents’ blessing to move forward with the next chapter of his life. “When I walked into this house,” he says, “I felt both of my parents say to me, ‘You’re home now. Enough is enough. You’re home.’” ●