

Eric Gilliland



Eric Gilliland '84, New York City, Sept. 1, 2024, at age 62. Gilliland was a TV writer and producer who worked on hit sitcoms including *Roseanne*, *The Wonder Years* and *That '70s Show*. A radio/television/film major at Northwestern, he participated in both Waa-Mu and Mee-Ow shows. His Hollywood career began as a member of the production staff on *Amen* and as a writer and story editor on *Who's the Boss?*, and his four-year stint working on *Roseanne* earned him a Writers Guild of America Award nomination. After *Roseanne*, Gilliland worked as writer and consulting producer for *That '70s Show* and later as writer and producer for *My Boys*. In 2019 Gilliland served as consulting producer for *The Conners* — a spinoff of *Roseanne* — and he received a Daytime Emmy nomination for his writing on the Netflix sketch comedy series *The Who Was? Show*. His final project was the 2021 podcast *The Cinnamon Bear: A Holiday*

Adventure. Upon his death, celebrities including comedian Dave Hill and actor Ryan Reynolds took to social media to commemorate his kind spirit and writing talents. He is survived by his mother, Sonja Gilliland, and sister, Lisa.

In Memoriam: Eric Gilliland: 1962-2024

Our dear friend Eric Gilliland passed away on September 1, 2024 after a long illness. Eric was the director and cast member of the seminal 1984 Mee-Ow show at Northwestern University. In the fall of 2023, Eric was a key member of the committee organizing “Mee-Ow Show Fest,” a celebration of 50 years of the longest running college improv comedy show in America. He gave hours to the amazing reunion in April, hosted a panel of TV writers and was the last person to leave each party.

Eric went from NU to a legendary career in television, writing for such show as ‘Who’s The Boss?’, ‘The Wonder Years,’ and ‘Roseanne’ where enough people got fired that he eventually wound up as executive producer/ head writer. His many other credits include ‘That 70’s Show’, ‘My Boys’, and ‘Mr. Sunshine’.

But mostly, Eric will be remembered for being one of the world’s greatest friends. His affection for people was boundless, whether you were working alongside him or just a person sitting next to him at a coffee shop. When you were friends with Eric, you were friends for life. We all will miss him terribly but consider ourselves so lucky to have called him a friend.

Ryan Reynolds Tribute on Twitter to Eric Gilliland

Deadline: Eric Gilliland, Former Comedy Writer For ‘Roseanne’ & ‘My Boys,’ Has Died

The Mee-Ow Show Fest celebrates comedy group’s 50th year with laugh-out-loud reunion



A promo photo from the 1982 Dolphin Show production of Little Me. From left, Richard Samson (C83) as Bennie, Michelle Nicastro (C82) as Young Belle and Eric Gilliland (C84) as Bernie. Photo by Mike Heeger (WCAS82)/ Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives

THEN: A BIG SPLASH - The Dolphin Show

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[Entertainment Weekly - Ryan Reynolds, former colleagues tribute 'Roseanne' producer Eric Gilliland: 'It's a tragedy more people won't have the chance to know him.'](#) Gilliland, a longtime TV comedy writer and producer known for his work on 'Roseanne' and 'That '70s Show,' died Sunday. He was 62.

[The Snuggery - By Eric Gilliland](#)

<https://www.northwestern.edu/magazine/northwestern/spring2004/features/coverstory/index.htm>

"I don't like anything on TV now," says veteran comedy writer Eric Gilliland (C84), who ran ABC's *Roseanne* as executive producer for four years and shot a politically controversial pilot for Fox last year that didn't get ordered. Gilliland has given up on network TV and just wrote a dark comedy pilot about a foster family for HBO instead. "HBO doesn't need to go for the easy laugh or the easy story."

Because HBO and other premium cable networks like Showtime make their money from subscribers, they air no commercials and are not beholden to ratings, which determine ad rates. In broadcast television, ratings govern survival, and most networks chase the same demographics that advertisers pay the most money to reach: adults between 18 and 49, the younger the better. Scripts also are sculpted around artificial act breaks designed to lure viewers back after commercials.

This tension between art and commerce has always existed in television, to be sure. But as the networks were swallowed up by giant media conglomerates such as Viacom (UPN and CBS) and Disney (ABC) over the past decade, entertainment presidents increasingly became number crunchers with less autonomy and patience for shows that don't perform right out of the gate.

"*Cheers* in its first season was the lowest-rated show [for much] of the year," Gilliland recalls. "[NBC's then-chairman and CEO] Grant Tinker said, 'I like this,' and he let it stick around. One guy had a strong point of view. No one goes by their gut anymore. It's all testing, and they hit on the same formula. These guys all went to Harvard Business School."