

TV Close-Up: Johnny Galecki

by Eirik_Knutzen

Johnny Galecki dropped out of the eighth grade during the middle of the semester at his Chicago junior high school. He had wanted to be an actor from the age of 4, made his acting debut in a local community theater production at 11, and refused to let a little thing like a formal education get in his way.

JOHNNY GALECKI - Johnny Galecki plays a brilliant young physicist in the TV comedy 'The Big Bang Theory.' CNS Photo courtesy of Robert Voets. Galecki was born on a military base in Bree, near Antwerp, Belgium, while his father was based there as a member of the U.S. Air Force. His mother launched her career as a nun in a convent, then went to work on the Motown record label before a lengthy stint as a Detroit cop.

Unlike non-pro siblings Nick and Ally, Johnny chose a path forged by his grandmother, a former vaudeville dancer.

"Some of her wonderful stories definitely influenced and inspired me to become an actor," Galecki recalls. "The truth is that my parents had no clue what the hell to do with me, so they pushed me into the Boy Scouts and various athletic programs, even though there isn't a single athletic cell in my body. Then I read in the local paper about open auditions for 'Fiddler on the Roof' at a community theater about two blocks from home."

A couple of years, several plays and the movie "A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon" later - at the age of 15 and already a legally emancipated minor - he wound up alone in Hollywood.

Having learned the art of dirt-biking as a kid in Joliet, Ill., he got around to far-flung studio auditions in Los Angeles on a motorcycle.

Also credited as Rusty Griswold in the feature film "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," he had little

trouble finding work. His first experience as a regular in a TV series came on Robert Urich's short-lived "American Dreamers" (1990). A featured part in the Tom Arnold telefilm "Backfield in Motion" soon led to a five-year stint on "Roseanne" playing David Healy, daughter Darlene Conner's (Sara Gilbert) laid-back boyfriend (and later husband).

With multiple credentials as a regular or guest star on sitcoms (including "Hope & Faith," "My Boys" and "My Name is Earl"), it was hardly a surprise when Chuck Lorre - the executive producer and co-creator of "The Big Bang Theory" - rang Galecki to gauge his interest in the show nearly three years ago.

The program, from the man behind the old "Dharma & Greg" show, revolves around two brilliant young physicists who are square pegs in the Milky Way. Leonard (Galecki) and Sheldon (Jim Parsons) understand how the universe works but can't tell oxygen from kryptonite as far as women are concerned. Their confidence is further undermined when the gorgeous Penny (Kaley Cuoco) moves in next door.

It took 2 1/2 years, two pilots and myriad auditions before the 5-foot-5-inch 32-year-old thespian went into production this summer at Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank. Eight episodes were in the can at the time the Writers Guild strike began. "The Big Bang Theory" enjoyed a good start and was picked up for a full season (14 more episodes) when the strike is over.

Galecki took some time out to perform in the Broadway production of "The Little Dog Laughed" as Alex, a male prostitute, a role he originated off-Broadway the year before.

Also squeezed into his schedule before "Big Bang" was a small but pivotal part in "Hancock" (coming out in 2008), a big-budget motion picture starring Will Smith as a fallen superhero having an affair with his publicist's wife, Charlize Theron.

Galecki says he is "single, never married and with no children - not even a pet snake," so he is able to take on an eclectic range of roles on very short notice. Stage plays take him frequently to New York and Chicago.

In the slasher feature "I Know What You Did Last Summer," he appeared as a loser with a lusty eye toward Jennifer Love Hewitt. In a dark comedy titled "The Opposite of Sex," he portrayed a gay teenager adamantly denying having been sexually molested. Galecki played another gay man in "Bounce," a conniving assistant with plenty of free advice for the central character, Buddy Amaral (Ben Affleck). He also played an insecure rich kid in "Suicide Kings" and a bad-seed boyfriend biker in "Bean."

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