

'Happy Days' Actress Came to Christ Through 'Facts of Life' Friend

Erin Moran, the former child star who played Joanie Cunningham in the sitcom "Happy Days" and "Joanie Loves Chachi," died Saturday at age 56.

She died from Stage Four skin cancer. Her husband, Steve Fleischmann, says he held her hand as she passed away.

"She was there watching TV in bed. I laid down next to her, held her right hand in my left. I fell asleep and woke up about a hour later still holding her hand, and she was gone, she was just gone..." he said in a statement.

While many mourn her death, new information reveals that Moran was a strong believer who knew the Lord before she died.

Moran's limo driver, Barton T. Wade, told *Breaking Christian News* that years ago, Moran told him about how her friend and fellow actress, Lisa Whelchel, had led her to the Lord, and that she had accepted Christ.

Moran spent her years acting in TV and movies. She had several years of experience when she was cast in 1974 in *Happy Days* as Joanie Cunningham, the kid sister to high school student Richie Cunningham, played by Ron Howard. Other cast members included Tom Bosley and Marion Ross as Joanie's parents and Henry Winkler as the loveable tough guy Arthur "The Fonz" Fonzarelli.

"What happened with all of us was like we were this family," she told Xfinity in 2009. "It was so surreal with all the cast members. ... They were my family, get it?"

Debuting at a time of nostalgia for the seemingly innocent 1950s, the sitcom was set in Milwaukee and became a long-running hit. Howard and Winkler were the show's biggest stars, but the smiling, freckle-faced Moran also became popular. In 1982, she was paired off with fellow *Happy Days* performer Scott Baio in the short-lived *Joanie Loves Chachi*. Moran returned to *Happy Days* in 1984, the show's final season.

Her more recent credits included *The Love Boat* and *Murder, She Wrote*, but she never approached the success of *Happy Days* in any other role. {eoa}

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