

# Matthew Perry, Star of 'Friends,' Dies at 54

Mr. Perry, who died on Saturday, was best known for his role in "Friends," the NBC sitcom that followed a group of young professionals living in Manhattan.

By Orlando Mayorquin and Matt Stevens

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Matthew Perry, who portrayed Chandler Bing in the acclaimed sitcom "Friends," has died. He was 54.

The death was confirmed by Capt. Scot Williams of the Los Angeles Police Department's Robbery-Homicide division. He said the cause of death was not likely to be determined for some time, but there was no indication of foul play.

Mr. Perry was well known to American television audiences, featuring in over 200 episodes in all 10 seasons of "Friends," the hit NBC show that followed a group of young professionals living in Manhattan. Mr. Perry starred alongside prominent actors like Jennifer Aniston, David Schwimmer and Lisa Kudrow.

Mr. Perry's character, Chandler Bing, was notable for his sardonic wit.

"Friends" has endured decades after it first aired in 1994, gaining popularity among young audiences in recent years.

Though best known for "Friends," Mr. Perry had a career in television that spanned nearly four decades, with his earliest credit in 1979, when he was a young child in an episode of the cop show "240-Robert," according to IMDb. He landed the role of Chandler Bing at 24.

He had roles in various television shows in the 2010s, including "Mr. Sunshine," a 2011 ABC comedy in which he starred as Ben Donovan, the general manager of the Sunshine Center, a San Diego sports and entertainment arena. In that show, he portrayed a gloomy, self-absorbed loner who was turning 40. Mr. Perry also played Oscar Madison opposite the actor Thomas Lennon, who portrayed Felix Unger, in all three seasons of a remake of "The Odd Couple," which ran on CBS from 2015 to 2017.



The cast of "Friends" in the 1990s. Clockwise from bottom left, Courteney Cox Arquette as Monica Geller; Matt LeBlanc as Joey Tribbiani; Lisa Kudrow as Phoebe Buffay; David Schwimmer as Ross Geller; Matthew Perry as Chandler Bing; and Jennifer Aniston as Rachel Green. NBCUniversal via Getty Images

“I was a guy who wanted to become famous,” Mr. Perry told The New York Times in a 2002 interview. “There was steam coming out of my ears, I wanted to be famous so badly. You want the attention, you want the bucks, and you want the best seat in the restaurant. I didn’t think what the repercussions would be.”

#### The Guardian

Mr. Perry had a history of addiction and related medical problems that, by his accounting, led him to spend more than half his life in treatment centers or sober living facilities.

In a memoir released last year, “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing,” he described his decades of drinking and drug use.

Mr. Perry first went to rehab in 1997 for what was described in news reports as an addiction to pain medication. In 2000, he was hospitalized for pancreatitis, an inflammation that can be caused by alcohol and drug abuse.

His addiction led to a series of complications in 2018 that included pneumonia, an exploded colon, a brief stint on life support, two weeks in a coma, nine months with a colostomy bag and more than a dozen stomach surgeries.

Two years ago, Mr. Perry, by his own admission then newly sober, appeared in a televised reunion of the “Friends” cast, in which its stars revisited some of the show’s most famous sets like the Central Perk coffee shop to banter about old episodes and revel in the nostalgia.

News of Mr. Perry’s death prompted fans worldwide to post tributes on social media.

“Matthew Perry lived a complicated life, but his effortless capacity to make people laugh was a remarkable gift,” Brandon Lewis, a writer in New York, said in a post on X.

Dr. John Leeds, a British gastroenterologist, wrote in a post, “Listened to his book over the summer where he so eloquently describes his struggles with drugs and alcohol.”

And RM of the boy band BTS, who has said he watched “Friends” to learn English, posted without comment on his Instagram story an image of a youthful, smiling Mr. Perry.

Jin Yu Young contributed reporting.

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# The One Where Matthew Perry Writes an Addiction Memoir

In “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing,” the actor gets serious about sobriety, mortality, colostomy bags and pickleball.

By the time he was 49, Matthew Perry writes in his new book, he had spent more than half of his life in treatment centers or sober living facilities. Michelle Groskopf for The New York Times



By Elisabeth Egan

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BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — When I pictured Matthew Perry, the actor frequently known as Chandler Bing, I saw him on the tangerine couch at Central Perk or seated on one of the twin recliners in the apartment he shared with Joey Tribbiani.

In September, after arriving at his 6,300-square-foot rental house and being ushered through a driveway gate by his sober companion, I sat across from Perry, who perched on a white couch in a white living room, a world away from “Friends,” the NBC sitcom that aired for 10 seasons and catapulted all six of its stars into fame, fortune and infinite memes. Instead of the foosball table where Chandler, Joey, Monica, Phoebe, Rachel and Ross gathered, nudging each other through the first chapters of adulthood, Perry, 53, had a red felt pool table that looked untouched. There was plenty of light in the house, but not a lot of warmth.

I have watched every episode of “Friends” three times — in prime time, on VHS and on Netflix — but I’m not sure I would have recognized Perry if I’d seen him on the street. If he was an ebullient terrier in those 1990s-era Must See TV days — as memorable for his full-body comedy as he was for the inflection that made “Can you BE any more [insert adjective]” the new “Gag me with a

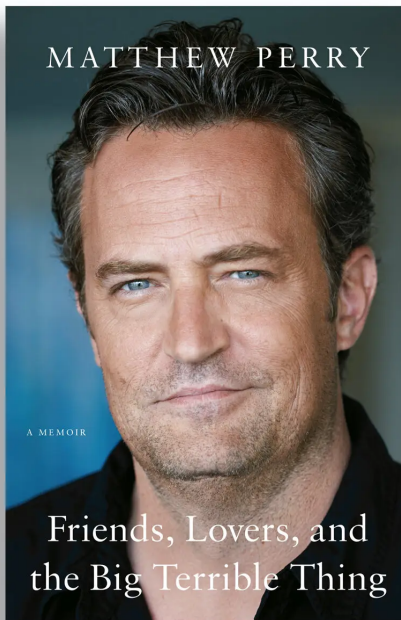
spoon” — he now seemed more like an apprehensive bulldog, with the forehead furrows to match.

As his former co-star Lisa Kudrow confesses in the foreword to his memoir, “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing,” the first question people ask about “Friends” is often “How’s Matthew Perry doing?”

Perry answers that question in the book, which Flatiron will publish on Nov. 1, by starkly chronicling his decades-long cage match with drinking and drug use. His addiction led to a medical odyssey in 2018 that included pneumonia, an exploded colon, a brief stint on life support, two weeks in a coma, nine months with a colostomy bag, more than a dozen stomach surgeries, and the realization that, by the time he was 49, he had spent more than half of his life in treatment centers or sober living facilities.

Most of this is covered in the prologue. At one point, he writes in a parenthetical, “Please note: for the next few paragraphs, this book will be a biography rather than a memoir because I was no longer there.”

The book is full of painful revelations, including one about short-lived, alcohol-induced erectile dysfunction, and another in which Perry describes carrying his top teeth to the dentist in a baggie in his jeans pocket. (He bit into a slice of peanut butter toast and they fell out, he writes: “Yes, all of them.”)



Perry said he had a moment after he recorded his audiobook when he thought, “Oh my God, what a terrible life this person has had!” Then he realized, “Wait a minute, it’s me! I’m talking about me.”

Quietly and then, as he relaxed, at a volume that allowed me to stop worrying about my recording device, Perry settled into the conversation about his substance abuse. It started with Budweiser and Andrès Baby Duck wine when he was 14, then ballooned to include vodka by the quart, Vicodin, Xanax and OxyContin. He drew the line at heroin, a choice he credits with saving his life.

“I would fake back injuries. I would fake migraine headaches. I had eight doctors going at the same time,” Perry said. “I would wake up and have to get 55 Vicodin that day, and figure out how to do it. When you’re a drug addict, it’s all math. I go to this place, and I need to take three. And then I go to this place, and I’m going to take five because I’m going to be there longer. It’s exhausting but you have to do it or you get very, very sick. I wasn’t doing it to feel high or to feel good. I certainly wasn’t a partyer; I just wanted to sit on my couch, take five Vicodin and watch a movie. That was heaven for me. It no longer is.”

Perry said he had been clean for 18 months, which means that he was newly drug- and alcohol-free when the “Friends” reunion aired in May 2021.

“I’ve probably spent \$9 million or something trying to get sober,” he estimated.

Most addicts don’t have Perry’s resources. But they have what he called “the gift of anonymity,” while his bleakest moments have been photographed, chronicled and occasionally mocked. For the record, Perry isn’t a huge fan of secrecy as it pertains to Alcoholics Anonymous, where he sponsors three members. He explained: “It suggests that there’s a stigma and that we have to hide. This is not a popular opinion, by the way.”

Perry’s demeanor brightened when we talked about pickleball, his latest obsession. He built a court at the house he’s moving into in the Palisades. He plays with friends and hired pros. He said, “I thought it would be a good idea, to pump myself up, to play pickleball before this interview, but basically I’m about to fall asleep in your lap.”

So what inspired him to write a book?

After his extended stay in a Los Angeles hospital, Perry started tapping out his life story on the Notes app on his phone. When he hit 110 pages, he showed them to his manager, who told him to keep going. He worked at his dining room table for about two hours a day, no more: “It was hard to face all this stuff.”

Perry has written for television (“The Odd Couple,” “Mr. Sunshine”) before but, “writing a book I had not really thought of before,” he said. “Whenever I bumped into something that I didn’t really want to share, I would think of the people that I would be helping, and it would keep me going.”

Over the course of the next hour, Perry returned to the idea of helping fellow addicts 15 times. The dedication at the front of the book reads: “For all of the sufferers out there. You know who you are.”

He said: “It’s still a day-to-day process of getting better. Every day. It doesn’t end because I did this.”



“I married Monica and got driven back to the treatment center,” Perry writes. Danny Feld/Warner Bros.

The memoir came together without a ghostwriter, which is rare for household-name authors. Megan Lynch, the senior vice president and publisher at Flatiron, said of the proposal she read last year: “There was a real voice to it. It was clear that he was going to share intimate details not just about his time on the show but about his entire life, and that felt revelatory. I’m not working on an assembly line of books by celebrities and it’s something as an editor I want to be very choosy about. For me, this really rose to a level that I do not ordinarily see.”

Lynch, who watched “Friends” when she was 14 and credits it with providing a vision for a future life in New York City, added, “Unlike any celebrity that I think anyone has ever worked with, Matthew turned in his manuscript ahead of the deadline.”

Although Perry hopes that “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing” will eventually be shelved in the self-help section of bookstores, “Friends” fans will find poignant nuggets in its pages. Perry writes gratefully and glowingly of the 10 seasons he and his co-stars worked together, earning \$1 million per episode at their peak.

He recalls the time Jennifer Aniston came to his trailer and said, “in a kind of weird but loving way,” that the group knew he was drinking again. ““We can smell it,”” she said — and, he writes, “the plural ‘we’ hits me like a sledgehammer.” Another time, the cast confronted him in his dressing room.

Perry also drops a sad bombshell about his onscreen wedding: “I married Monica and got driven back to the treatment center — at the height of my highest point in ‘Friends,’ the highest point in my career, the iconic moment on the iconic show — in a pickup truck helmed by a sober technician.”

In a phone interview, Kudrow said: “It’s a hideous disease, and he has a tough version of it. What’s not changing is his will to keep going, keep fighting and keep living.”

She added: “I love Matthew a lot. We’re part of a family. I’m basically ending this with ‘I’ll be there for you’ [the ‘Friends’ theme song], but it’s true. I’ll always be there for him.”

Perry’s childhood friends Christopher and Brian Murray echoed this sentiment. “He’s gone through more than any human being I know and he’s come out on the good side of it,” said Brian, the older of the two brothers who have known Perry since first grade. Riding bikes around their rural corner of Ottawa, the trio would belt out the theme song from “The Rockford Files” and rib one another in the cadence that Perry later immortalized on “Friends.”

“A lot of it was tough to understand,” Christopher said. “You wouldn’t wish that on anybody. Fundamentally, his personality and his heart are absolutely in the same place they were when he was a kid.”

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Benjamin Lee, Sian Cain,  
Alexandra Topping and  
Nina Lakhani

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# Tributes pour in for 'comedic genius' Matthew Perry, dead at 54

**Cause of death unknown as Justin Trudeau, Adele and others speak fondly of actor best known as Chandler Bing in Friends**



📷 'Thanks for all the laughs': Matthew Perry in 2016. Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images

Hollywood stars have hailed the “comedic genius” of [Friends](#) star [Matthew Perry](#) after the actor’s death at 54.

The American-Canadian star, best known for playing Chandler Bing in the sitcom [Friends](#), was found dead in a hot tub at his Los Angeles home on Saturday.

A Los Angeles fire department spokesperson confirmed that first responders were called to his address about a “water emergency”. He was discovered unresponsive about 4pm, according to unnamed law enforcement sources speaking to the [Los Angeles Times](#). No drugs were found at the scene, sources said, but prescription medications were recovered at the home and hence toxicology will be part of the investigation, the LA Times reported.

The cause of death, which will be determined by the Los Angeles county coroner’s office, may not be known for some time, but foul play is not suspected, according to Cap Scot Williams, who leads the city’s police robbery homicide division that is investigating Perry’s death.

Perry’s family said in a statement to [People](#): “We are heartbroken by the tragic loss of our beloved son and brother. Matthew brought so much joy to the world, both as an actor and a friend.

“You all meant so much to him and we appreciate the tremendous outpouring of love.”

Perry’s last post on Instagram, on 23 October, included a photograph of him sitting in a pool or hot tub at night, with the words: “Oh, so warm water swirling around makes you feel good? I’m Mattman.”

Former schoolfriend Justin Trudeau, actor Viola Davis and singer Adele were among those who paid tribute to the actor, who struggled with addiction and strived to help others who battled similar demons. Screen legend Kathleen Turner, who played Chandler’s transgender parent, told the Guardian: “I was proud to play his ‘Dad’”.

Trudeau, Canada’s prime minister, wrote on social media that Perry’s death was “shocking and saddening”. “I’ll never forget the schoolyard games we used to play, and I know people around the world are never going to forget the joy he brought them,” he wrote. “Thanks for all the laughs, Matthew. You were loved - and you will be missed.”

Adele, who announced earlier this month that she has quit drinking, paused her Las Vegas show to pay an emotional tribute to Perry.

“He’s probably the best comedic character of all time,” she said. “He was so open with his struggles with addiction and sobriety, which I think is incredibly, incredibly brave.”

Gwyneth Paltrow paid tribute to Perry and recalled their time spent together in the summer of 1993. In a [post to her Instagram page](#), the actor said: “I met Matthew Perry in 1993 at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. We were both there for most of the summer doing plays. He was so funny and so sweet and so much fun to be with.



📷 Perry with Julia Roberts in an episode of Friends from 1996. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

“We drove out to swim in creeks, had beers in the local college bar, kissed in a field of long grass. It was a magical summer. He had shot the pilot of Friends but it had not aired yet. He was nervous, hoping his big break was just around the corner. It was. We stayed friends for a while until we drifted apart, but I was always happy to see him when I did. I am super sad today, as so many of us are. I hope Matthew is at peace at long last. I really do.”

The Friends co-creators, Marta Kauffman and David Crane, along with the show’s executive producer, Kevin Bright, spoke of their shock at his death. In a joint statement, they said: “He was always the funniest person in the room. More than that, he was the sweetest, with a giving and selfless heart.” They added: “This truly is The One Where Our Hearts Are Broken.”

Perry had expressed the hope that he would be remembered for the work he had done to help fellow addicts - including his 2016 play *The End of Longing* and his 2022 bestselling memoir, *Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing*. The actor Hank Azaria said Perry, who was the first friend he made when he moved to Los Angeles, had helped him give up drinking. “I really loved him. A lot of us who were close to him felt like we lost him to drugs and alcohol a long time ago because, as he documented in his autobiography, there was so much suffering. I had to pick it up and put down the biography like 11 times it was so painful for me to read.”

Davis said the book had “shifted so many close to my heart. The people no one sees and most throw away. It was a gift.”

Warner Bros [Television](#) Group, which produced all 10 seasons of Friends from 1994 until 2004, paid tribute to “our dear friend” and “an incredibly gifted actor”.

“The impact of his comedic genius was felt around the world, and his legacy will live on in the hearts of so many. This is a heartbreaking day, and we send our love to his family, his loved ones, and all of his devoted fans,” it wrote.

Perry, who was a ranked youth tennis player in Canada, moved into acting



after relocating to LA when he was 15. After small roles in *Growing Pains*, *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Dream On*, Perry secured the role that would define his career: the sarcastic and neurotic Chandler Bing.

*Friends*, a comedy about six professionals living in New York City, quickly became a phenomenon, winning multiple Emmys and attaining record ratings; after 10 seasons, the 2004 finale reached more than 52 million viewers in the US, making it the most watched TV episode of the 2000s.

“People come up to me every day and say, ‘Hey, Chandler!’ I don’t respond to it,” he said in a 2014 interview. “If somebody says, ‘Hi, Matthew, I love your work,’ that’s one thing. But if somebody goes, ‘Yo, Chandler’, I don’t like that. I’m tired of it. I’m not Chandler.”

Maggie Wheeler, who played Chandler’s girlfriend Janice in *Friends*, said the joy Perry brought to “so many” in his “too short lifetime will live on”.

“I feel so very blessed by every creative moment we shared,” she wrote on Instagram.

Morgan Fairchild, who played Chandler’s mother Nora Bing, said: “I’m heartbroken about the untimely death of my ‘son’ ... The loss of such a brilliant young actor is a shock.”

Born in Massachusetts in 1969 to an American father and a Canadian mother, Perry grew up in Canada, where his mother worked as a press aide to the Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau. In his memoir, Perry recalled acting up after his father abandoned his family to chase his own dreams of becoming an actor - including bullying a young Justin Trudeau. “I decided to end my argument with him when he was put in charge of an entire army,” he wrote.



Matthew Perry's best moments on screen - video obituary

As a teenager, Perry moved to Hollywood with the hope of reconnecting with his father. It was there that he began to enjoy acting and was eventually spotted at a diner - “charming a bunch of young women” - by director William Richert, who left a note asking him to be in his next movie, *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*, alongside River Phoenix.

Perry was 24 when he started playing Chandler. He reflected that when he read the part, “it was as if someone had followed me around for a year, stealing my jokes, copying my mannerisms, photocopying my world-weary yet witty view of life”. In a 2019 interview, Crane said the role of sardonic joker was the most difficult to cast, with Craig Bierko, Jon Cryer and Jon Favreau also considered.

“Marta [Kauffman] and I were thinking, ‘Chandler is just poorly written’,” said Crane. “Then Matthew came in and you went, ‘Oh, well, there you go. Done. Done. That’s the guy.’”

Perry was nominated for an Emmy award five times, once for *Friends* and

twice for his role as lawyer Joe Quincy on *The West Wing*.

During his tenure on *Friends*, Perry starred in films including *Fools Rush In* with Salma Hayek, *Three to Tango* with Neve Campbell and *The Whole Nine Yards* with Bruce Willis. He also took small roles in *Ally McBeal* and *Scrubs*.

In a 2002 [interview](#) with the *New York Times*, he confessed: “I wanted to be famous so badly. You want the attention, you want the bucks, and you want the best seat in the restaurant. I didn’t think what the repercussions would be.”

Perry’s personal life was blighted by addiction, starting in 1997, when he became addicted to pain medication after a jetskiing accident. He later claimed to not remember three years of his time on *Friends* and to spending over \$9m on his fight to stay sober.

“I was taking 55 Vicodin a day, I weighed 128lb (58kg), I was on *Friends* getting watched by 30 million people - and that’s why I can’t watch the show, because I was brutally thin,” he said. Perry later admitted he had suffered severe anxiety “every night” while filming the show and said he felt nothing when the show ended.

When *Friends* ended in 2004, Perry’s next small-screen lead was in Aaron Sorkin’s *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, which was cancelled after one season. In 2009 he starred in hit comedy *17 Again* alongside Zac Efron and later guest-starred on both *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*.

Perry also led one-season sitcom *Go On* and a remake of *The Odd Couple*, which lasted for three seasons. In 2016 he wrote and starred in the play *The End of Longing*, which opened in the West End and later transferred to Broadway. “I had something important to say to people like me, and to people who love people like me,” he said.

Perry estimated he had relapsed “60 or 70 times” since first getting sober in 2001.

In 2019, he was put in a two-week coma when his colon exploded due to opiate abuse; he underwent 14 surgeries to repair the damage. “At this point in my life, the words of gratitude pour out of me because I should be dead, and yet somehow I am not,” he wrote in his memoir.

The book was a hit with readers and critics. [The Observer’s Barbara Ellen](#) called it “harrowing and revealing about the juncture where extreme compound addiction collides with mega-celebrity”.

Reflecting on his own desire for celebrity, Perry said: “You have to get famous to know that it’s not the answer. And nobody who is not famous will ever truly believe that.”