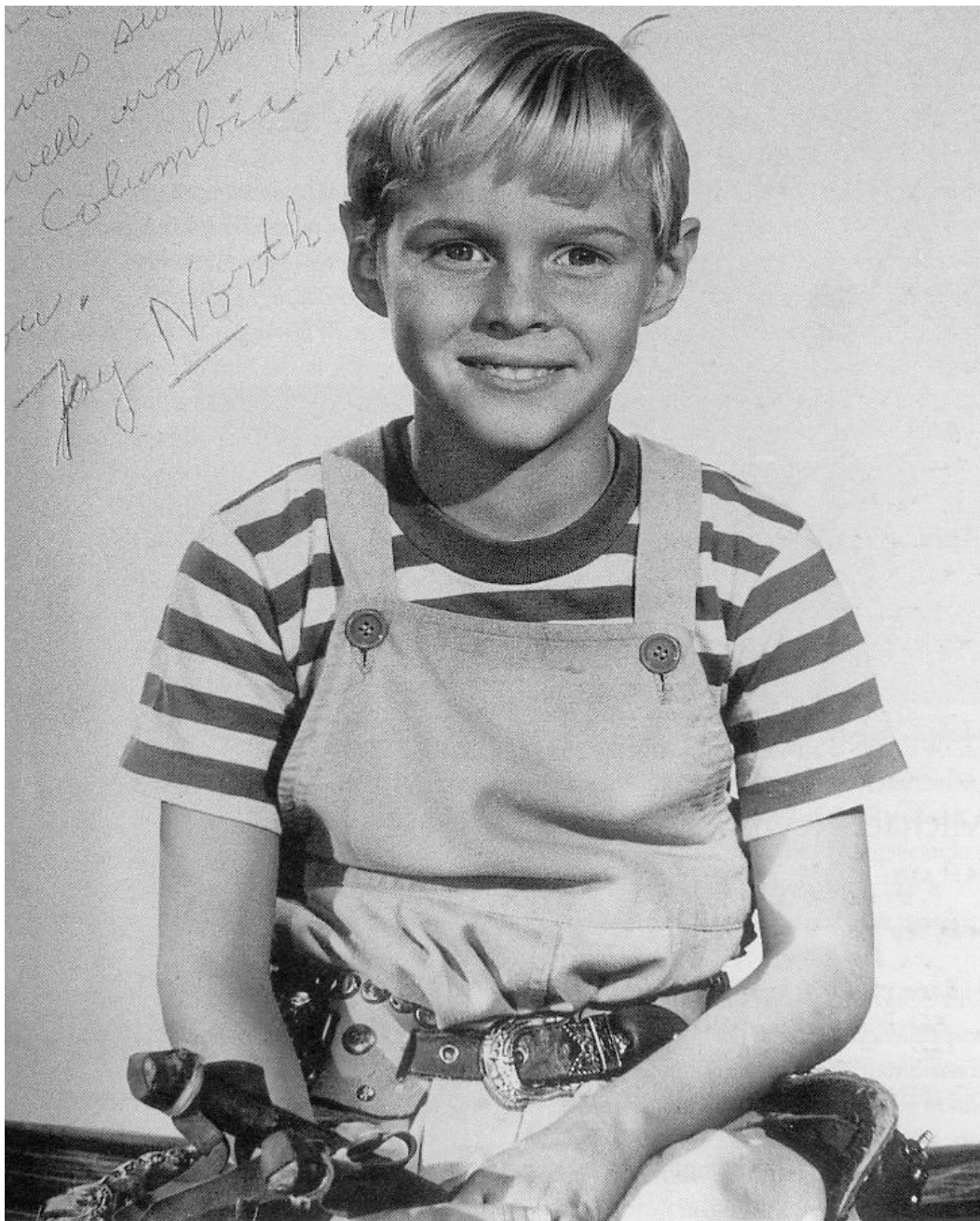


Jay North

Titles: 11 Sources: 4 Stills: 3
Home website:

Born: North Hollywood, August 3rd 1952



Pre-eminently spankable – Jay North as Dennis Mitchell

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

As familiar a face to US TV audiences in the early Sixties as Macaulay Culkin's was in the Nineties, North grew up in the part of "**Dennis the Menace**". The role was heavily sanitised for TV, (as it was for the 1993 Mason Gamble/Walter Matthau film) becoming a boy who always *meant* well but generated havoc about him merely as a by-product of his life processes. The series tailed off in popularity as he grew older and less plausibly "innocent", and Gale Gordon replaced Joseph Kearns (who died in 1962) as the curmudgeonly Good Ol' Mr Wilson. After a couple of "family films" with animals, and a short-lived boy-and-his-elephant series, he appeared in a sex initiation feature in the "**MY TUTOR**" vein, and played a part in the 1980 TV movie "**SCOUT'S HONOR**" with Gary Coleman, Meeno Peluce and erstwhile boy actor Paul Peterson. North's acting talent was only ever minimal at best (as Dennis he could deliver a winsome beam or an exaggerated earnest look - these alternating masks worn for all occasions) so it scarcely surprises that he failed to establish himself as an adult actor.

Kincaid's shaky thesis (below) is that North embodied the unspoken US archetype of the lovable little rogue - designed to be spanked and hugged at will, the child with the naughty, tantalising bottom. As Dennis, he was certainly never spanked (although threatened with it once or twice) and was rather too ingenuous a boy for the Penrod/Tom Sawyer type Kincaid pointedly overlooks. It is true however that "**MAYA**" conspired to squeeze Jay into improbably short shorts for the best part of the film, and while Kincaid overstates his case embarrassingly, the fireside scene with North and Sajid Khan is largely as he describes it. I would merely say that the scene evokes the "skinny-dipping" tradition which is part and parcel of the American myth of a "boyhood idyll", which also, it's true, embraced the hazard of periodic home and school tannings. See subject index under **AMERICAN BOYHOOD IDYLL** for further thoughts on that theme.

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"American juvenile actor, popular as a child on TV in "**Dennis the Menace**" (59-63) and later "**Maya**" (67)."

Halliwell's Television Companion review:

"American child actor who played "**Dennis the Menace**", grew up a little and appeared in "**Maya**"; then left the industry."

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"At the age of six a platinum blond child with unbelievably innocent blue eyes (it was unwise to believe them) became a national figure on CBS television when he incarnated Dennis the Menace, the beloved brat of Hank Ketcham's strip cartoon - chosen by Ketcham himself out of 500 auditionees. Jay North's insolently charming smile and air of butter-wouldn't-melt made him, almost overnight, the kid every American parent wanted to spank.¹ The series ran from 1959 to 1963.

He had already appeared on TV in shows like "**Queen for a Day**" or "**77 Sunset Strip**" before landing "**Dennis**". Between 1959 and 1963 the role was to take him through four series and 146 episodes, and earn him nearly \$90,000 not counting residuals, a tidy little fortune which, shrewdly invested in real estate, has saved him from further worries about cash. (It was as Dennis, incidentally, that he made a brief guest appearance in the Cantinflas vehicle "**PEPE**".)

The end of "**Dennis**", though, wasn't the end of Jay. In the grotesque "**ZEBRA IN THE KITCHEN**", he had the star part as a born-free animals'-libber, causing high-principled havoc when given a holiday job at a zoo - and releasing the animals. He was by now a handsome and earnest, not to say priggish, 12-year old, and a year later, in "**MAYA**", he shared an Indian adventure with a boy called Sajid Khan. (This duly got developed into a TV series.)

Hereafter, for all his fame and glamour, Jay North's career spluttered. He toured in stage plays, and made one or two ill-starred returns to filming: in "**JOYOUS SOUND**" (72) he was acted off the TV screen by Lassie, in "**THE TEACHER**" (74, aka "The Seduc-

¹ Why let parents have all the fun?

tress") was seduced and strangled, and in "**SCOUT'S HONOR**" (80) had little to do. In the meantime he had served briefly in the Navy before becoming a prison guard and then a "nutritional consultant".

Reacting against what was clearly a traumatic childhood, North developed into a personable but under-employed and disgruntled young man of right-wing views: pro decent dress and capital punishment, anti long hair and rock 'n' roll."

Comment from **Child Loving** by James R Kincaid:

" ... [Mark] Lester's progress almost exactly duplicates that of Jay North, who had, slightly earlier, moved from cute-but-clothed exhibiting toward twelve-year-old nudity. North had been for years (1959-1963) television's perfect Buster Brown clone, "**Dennis the Menace**", an image slightly more active than Lester's but physically identical. Like Lester, North progressed to spanking (by Lucille Ball in her "**The Lucy Show**" comedy series) and then, in a film called "**MAYA**" (1965), to full rearwards nudity. In an extended scene, explained (weakly) in the narrative by a dunk in a river, North stands naked before a fire, rubbing his buttocks and talking, while the camera holds still, breathlessly, unable to believe its luck. After a time, a good long time, he wraps some cloth around him but, so the happy joke goes, is so inexperienced at doing so that he leaves a part of himself exposed. Guess which part.²"

² To explain: Kincaid is producing evidence to support his contention that Western culture has always taken delight in images of the naked child – of the naughty child especially – and he cites many film scenes where the payoff shot entails a child getting spanked, or else revealing his naked bottom, or both. His argument is not without basis, but too laboriously made to take very seriously.

FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
--		Queen for a Day	US TV
--		77 Sunset Strip	US TV series
59	7	THE BIG OPERATOR <i>with Billy Daniels ?</i>	
59		THE MIRACLE OF THE HILLS	
59-63	7	Dennis the Menace	US TV sitcom, in title role, Dennis Mitchell
--		The Lucy Show 	US TV sitcom – guest appearance
60	8	PEPE	guest appearance, as Dennis Mitchell
65	13	ZEBRA IN THE KITCHEN	in central role
65		The Man From U.N.C.L.E. – “The Deadly Toys Affair”	US TV series – guest appearance
66	14	MAYA  <i>with Sajid Kahn</i>	in central role
67	15	Maya <i>with Sajid Kahn</i>	US TV series
72	20	JOYOUS SOUND	TV
74	22	THE TEACHER / THE SEDUCTRESS	
80	28	SCOUT'S HONOR <i>with Meeno Peluce, Gary Coleman</i>	