

# Finding redemption

From *The Goonies* to *Avengers*, with a number Box Office hits in between, acting runs in the family for \$35 million dollar man **Josh Brolin**, as *Harold von Kursk* reports

**F**ormer Hollywood bad boy Josh Brolin has delivered many great performances over the course of his career, but none have earned him as much attention, or money, as Thanos. After all, it's not every day that you get to play a supervillain who delights in annihilating half the universe and a whole swath of beloved superheroes. But when Brolin attended the world premiere of *Avengers: Infinity War* in April 2018, and saw the CGI-enhanced version of himself for the first time, he was momentarily stricken with panic. "I was literally sitting in the theater going, 'Oh my God. Oh my God. Spider-Man just disintegrated. That's not OK,'" Brolin recalled in mock horror.

"I looked at [Chris] Hemsworth and he looked at me. He smiled and was like, 'Your career is over.' But it turned out to be a fun ride."

Brolin has excelled at being bad on screen. His bravura performance in the Cohen Bros. 2007 epic *No Country for Old Men* helped revive an otherwise stuttering career. He was subsequently cast as the conservative politician Dan White who assassinated gay San Francisco Mayor Harvey Milk

in *Milk*, a role which earned him an Oscar nomination. Since then, Brolin has gone on to play a charismatically sinister CIA operative in two *Sicario* films, a shady hedge fund manager in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, and a brutal cop who torments Joaquin Phoenix in *Inherent Vice*.

Today, the 52-year-old Brolin is turning down more work than he was ever offered at any previous stage of his career.

This year audiences will see him star in the highly anticipated remake of *Dune*, directed by Denis Villeneuve, who previously hired Brolin for *Sicario*. After appearing in three of the top-grossing films of all time (*Avengers: Infinity War*, *Avengers: Endgame* and *Deadpool 2*), Brolin is now one of the most bankable stars in the business. It may have taken a long time, but he is finally beginning to enjoy his life journey.

Brolin is the son of actor James Brolin, who famously starred in TV's *Marcus Welby M.D.*, and Jane Cameron Agee, an actress and animal rights' activist. His parents had a stormy relationship and divorced when Josh was 16. It was shortly afterwards that he made his screen breakthrough in *The Goonies*, the classic hit teenage

caper film. Despite the success of that project, it was anything but a happy time in Brolin's life. In the years prior to his parents' divorce, his mother began to drink heavily and go off the rails. "My mom was going out with a truck driver at the time," Brolin Jr recalled.

"My dad was all over the place [working]. They never saw each other."

Lonely and feeling "neglected" after he moved in with his father at his home in Santa Barbera, Josh began hanging out with a gang of disaffected teenage surfers known as the "Cito Rats" who, apart from surfing and skateboarding, were indulging in a life of petty crime and serious drug abuse and trying to find some solidarity with each other while compensating for absent parents. "Our parents were off doing whatever," Brolin says.

"So we all took care of each other. Ultimately, we didn't do so well. It was a lot of shit, man."

**"I KNEW THAT I HAD TO CHANGE AND MATURE. IT WAS LIKE I STEPPED BACK AND SAW THE HAMSTER WHEEL"**

**JOSH BROLIN**

**Left: Brolin has found his way in the latest phase of his career and is now in greater demand than ever before – thanks to *No Country for Old Men***

We beat to our own drum... It seemed to actually come from this kind of anti-parental attitude – if you don't care, why should we care?... I felt like I had to physically be in the epicenter of whatever was earthshaking at the time, or causing the earthquake."

This period of rebelliousness would cast a shadow over the next three decades of his life. While his career progressed from TV series (*Private Eye*, *The Young Riders*) to supporting parts in feature films (*Hollow Man*, *Melinda and Melinda*, *Into the Blue*), he developed a reputation as a hard-drinking wild man who was arrested "nine times" by his estimate in his twenties and thirties for alcohol-related incidents. In the meantime, his mother died in a car crash while drunk at the wheel. He was only 26 when a radiologist who happened to be a family friend called him from the ICU to tell him that his mother was on life-support but was brain dead. Brolin, never one to wallow in "romantic bullshit," didn't ▶

hesitate to tell the doctors to turn off the machines.

His own path towards self-destruction came to an end nearly 20 years later in October 2013 following another night of heavy drinking that saw him wake up early one morning sleeping on the lawn in front of his house. That day he decided to visit his then 99-year-old grandmother who was on her death bed in the hospital. Reeking of booze, he stood over her and they both smiled at each other. That was the precise moment he decided to quit drinking as well as a three-pack-a-day smoking habit. "I realised that I was on a destructive path," Brolin said at the time.

"I knew that I had to change and mature. It was like I stepped

**Above: Brolin with Emily Blunt, Denis Villeneuve and Benicio Del Toro at the Cannes *Sicario* premiere in 2015** Below: **Brolin's photocall at the blockbuster premiere**



back and saw the hamster wheel. It made me think of a lot of things... my mom dying when I was in my 20s. All the impact that had on me that I hadn't moved past."

Despite his drinking, Brolin was a dedicated father to the two children he had with his first wife, actress Alice Adair, and the stepdaughter he inherited after marrying his second wife Diane Lane, in 2004. It was during this

time, when his acting career had slowed to a crawl, that Josh decided to become a professional day trader and soon found himself earning more money by playing the stock and commodities markets than working in movies. "I would rather be doing something else instead of working on garbage movies or play characters that you've seen 100 times before, I just can't hack doing what I think is crap," Brolin said.

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Though his marriage to Lane would ultimately collapse in 2013, mainly due to his drinking, Brolin did experience something of an epiphany from their time together. "I loved Diane," he said.

"I loved being a father figure to her daughter. It just wasn't attainable, and in that hero mentality, you get exhausted, and then when you get exhausted, you get resentful, and then all that stuff comes out. So I feel bad that I didn't have the presence of mind or the maturity or whatever to understand that early on."

Having given up booze and cigarettes, Brolin began to rehab his personal life, too. In early 2014, he entered into ►



a relationship with his personal assistant, Kathryn Boyd, whom he married two years later. She would give birth to their daughter, Westlyn, in 2019, and in July, 2020 Brolin took to Instagram to announce that his wife, now 32, was pregnant with their second child due in December.

"Love is just a continued processing of awe that one simply has to surrender to with wild laughter and runaway tears," Brolin captioned below a picture on Instagram of him putting his hand over Kathryn's baby bump.

It's only fitting, if not simply a logical consequence, that Brolin's screen renaissance parallels the wholesale change in his way of living. Anyone who saw his buff body and biceps in *Sicario* and later in *Deadpool 2* would see that the man takes his fitness seriously these days. "In a lot of ways it's been a huge gift that I've been given when I've been hired to work on films like *Sicario* and *Deadpool*," Brolin admitted.

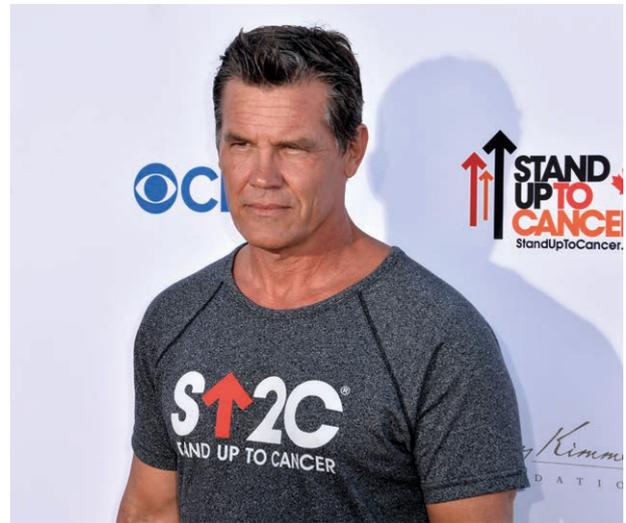
"THANK GOD. MAN. I LITERALLY WANT TO REDEEM MYSELF TO MYSELF. I WANT TO DO A BETTER VERSION OF WHAT I DO."

JOSH BROLIN

"I've never been in better shape in my life than I am now, especially now that I've stopped smoking."

"I trained incredibly hard for *Deadpool*. There was a strict diet plan. There was almost three months of no sugar. I weighed every food I ate. I had to exercise three hours a day because I only had eleven weeks to prepare. The first two weeks were really tough: I had the feeling of dying and destroying myself (laughs). When you have that phase behind you and your body starts to change, the whole thing starts to become really fun."

Another source of satisfaction for Brolin is that his new found



A-list stature gives him a chance at doing the kind of work he has always aspired to, notwithstanding his penchant for self-sabotage in his twenties and thirties.

"The reason I'm an actor is because I'm fascinated by people and why they do what they do. Whether it's George Bush or Dan White – the thing about my profession is, you can go anywhere and do anything... and you can use anything you've gained from your awareness of life and your understanding of people... and put that to use later."

"Acting is a constant process, and it's interesting, and it's like photography. You cannot master it – it's constantly changing. Its possibilities are limitless," he adds.

Perhaps the single most defining role of Brolin's career was his portrayal of Llewelyn Moss, the rancher who runs across a pick-up truck load of drug money in the Texas desert near only to find himself pursued by a Javier Bardem's relentless psycho-killer, Anton Chigurh, in *No Country for Old Men*.

The 2007 film won four Oscars, including one for Bardem

as well as one for Best Picture. But Josh more than held his own against Bardem and Tommy Lee Jones's laid-back sheriff Ed Tom Bell. "It was a miracle that I did the movie at all because I had just broken my collarbone in a motorcycle accident and I thought I wasn't going to be able to work on it. But then Ethan said that Llewelyn gets shot in the shoulder on page 19 of the script and so that worked out OK in the end!"

Today, Brolin is quite possibly the happiest he's ever been in his wild and rambunctious life. But whenever we seem him on the screen, there's always the glint of the former hellraiser in his eyes. "Those are the moments you live for in this business," Brolin admits.

Having rebuilt his life, he's now embarking on own his self-styled journey. "Thank God. Man. I literally want to redeem myself to myself. I want to do a better version of what I do." ■

**Above:** Josh Brolin at the 2018 Stand Up To Cancer fundraiser in Santa Monica Airport **Left:** Brolin and his wife Kathryn announced their second pregnancy together in July 2020

