

# David Van Camp Is Always Giving Listeners the Human Angle

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By Jim Cryns

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I told David Van Camp he has one of the coolest jobs in the world.

“On some days, you can have it,” Van Camp quipped.

Van Camp is the youngest member of *Markley, Van Camp & Robbins*, a daily news talk show that can be heard in 125 markets nationwide.

Van Camp is from Texas, and he supposedly loves *Star Wars*. “I play that up on the show. I liked the original trilogy of the franchise, but I’m not a complete *Star Wars* dork.”

His website says he’s a guitarist, a singer-songwriter, and a foodie. It also relates how a ‘real man’ rarely eats his steaks rare. He still technically owns but no longer plays a beautiful *Gibson SG*.

“Actually, it’s broken,” Van Camp said. “I’ve got a toddler, a one-year-old.

Some things don’t survive if you don’t put them away somewhere safe.”

He got the guitar when he was 16, saving up money from tree trimming and lawn maintenance to spend close to 1,000 bucks on the guitar.

“I guess I’ve always been a Gibson guy,” Van Camp said. “I thought the frets were a little larger than Fender necks. Have you ever seen Stanley Clark play the bass?” Van Camp asked. “I saw him at a jazz festival 15 years ago. His hands are huge, and he could palm a beach ball. He even does bar chords on the bass, so fast.”

He said Jamie Markley and Scott Robbins go back a lot of years together, with a show in Peoria, Illinois, on WMDB. Then, they got the chance to be live in Portland on a simulcast with KXL and WMDB.

That’s when the show took a terrifying turn. Scott Robbins had a heart attack. Van Camp was programming WMDB at the time and doing some producing for their show.

“After Scott’s heart attack, we started looking for replacements,” Van Camp said. “I had no desire to be on the air. But it was hard to find someone that would come to the studio in the middle of the day to work a few hours.”

After about a week of Robbins being in the hospital, Van Camp knew they had to get the show back on the air.

“Thankfully, Jamie came back,” Van Camp said. “I was a stopgap host, only to keep the seat warm until we could find a suitable host. Jamie and I clicked on the air, but Scott was in the hospital for a few months. His body was wrecked. He had a trachea tube in his throat. Not a good thing to have. His not returning to radio was the least of his problems.”

Van Camp explained Robbins’ kidneys were failing, and he was on dialysis. It didn’t look good. Van Camp was named as permanent co-host, and the station rolled with that. After a few months, Scott’s condition started to improve.

“He got to the point where he could come in and do one segment a week to see if he could still do it,” Van Camp said. “He had some memory loss issues and his body still looked like he’d been hit by a bus. We wanted to ease him back in, perhaps use him as a fill-in when one of us was out.”

Did Van Camp think Robbins would make it back to the show? Early on, Van Camp thought he would. But when 2016 rolled in and he was in a wheelchair, barely able to walk, Van Camp didn’t think it would be possible.

Then things took a turn for the better. It wasn’t long before Robbins started coming in for a daily segment. In 2019, they worked out where he could return full-time. It seemed like yesterday he had been hallucinating in the hospital. Alpha Media figured if Scott could come back, bring him back.

“Nobody knew what was going to happen,” Van Camp said. “I didn’t know if I wanted to do it, and we were weighing options. From what his doctors and family were telling us, he’d never be able to come back. But he references it now and makes jokes about it.”

“I think the three of us clicked early on because we knew each other as friends. Jamie and I did a good show together, but it was missing that spark Scott could bring. We needed that spark. When Scott gets mad and takes to pounding on the desk, nobody is funnier.”

Van Camp points out you don't want to go over the top with that kind of thing, but Robbins knows just how far to push it.

“He's that good. The perfect bit of spice. He's the Boomer. Jamie is the Gen X, and I'm the Millennial. Politically, we are fairly closely aligned. This is conservative talk, and we generally have conservative opinions. We disagree on some stories. But we're not super-heavy politically. I think that's the secret sauce of the show. You'll never feel awful when you listen to us. You can feel better after listening. You can think, 'Everything is going to be okay.' A lot of why we've been successful is the humor we can throw out there.”

Van Camp said the show's best segments come from the spontaneous, extemporaneous. They don't script or format their show where each one says a line at a particular point.

“We just pal around a lot of the time. Sometimes you can really lean into a topic. We're not trying to spark outrage. It's more like we're out to tickle their funny bone. We hear it all the time. A caller will say you were talking about You were talking about x, y, z, then Scott says something that doesn't make any sense. You just get the feeling that it's three guys who are friends giving each other a hard time.”

Off the air, they're probably not the guy you think they are. Van Camp said Scott Robbins is probably the most gentle of the three. Jamie Markley is the hardass. Van Camp puts himself in the middle.

“We started to get a rhythm down,” Van Camp said. “There was a moment when Scott said something that has become rather legendary in our show. Jamie sprung a top 10 bucket list. Jamie asked Scott, 'What's at the top of your bucket list.'”

Robbins said hugging a dolphin was on his bucket list.

“I was floored,” Van Camp said. “We played around with that. It became this bit. We save all our audio, and that was one of the clips we've played tons of times. 'Hug a dolphin.' Scott was serious. I think that's when we knew we were really going to work and brought Scott back full-time. He can say something, and we can make fun of him.”

Van Camp moved down to San Antonio in 2019. They keep eye contact on Skype during the show, something he says is critical.

“Scott and Jamie came down for a market visit with the dolphin thing at SeaWorld in San Antonio,” Van Camp said. “I took him to hug a dolphin.”

“We aren’t just co-workers who got matched up. We were friends. That’s what makes this whole thing unique.”

The trio is always looking for ways to make the show better, always on the lookout for things that might be relevant.

“We’ve got to try to transcend our own personal experiences,” Van Camp explained. “We take callers for two segments a week. Friday Five is a music-based countdown. We’ll take Labor Day and play songs with work or a job in the title. On a news talk, our phone lines are jammed. That’s a place where you can really see the generation gap. Where the three of us are really highlighted. One of us will always bite on the lure.”

The show doesn’t conduct interviews with guests. Van Camp said if you’re a solitary host, you’re having a conversation with someone who listens to your show when a listener calls.

“I understand you have to do that when you’re a one-man band. We don’t have to. We will work off someone else’s audio. We did a couple of interviews a few years ago, but they didn’t work. You’ve already got three guys with options, and we didn’t want a fourth. That can destroy any rhythm you’ve got working.”

MVR is not a morning zoo. Van Camp said they deal with serious topics like the Uvalde shooting.

“Sometimes the news isn’t fun and we’re not going to try to make it fun. It’s all about how we approach the subject. Give the facts. Here’s what we know. For me, you’re always looking for the human angle. Everybody is going to give the building blocks. For me, it’s asking about why some of the parents are handcuffed when all they want to do is rush in to save their child. I’ve had that conversation with friends. Jamie had that conversation with his wife. We’d ask what we would do in that situation. Once you get the news out, you can deal with the way people are processing, grieving. We’re all human.”

Van Camp said after a few days; you’ve got all the time in the world to talk about the police response and that stuff. He said radio is more intimate than television.

“We have real conversations that people have every day. They can listen to us talk and realize they’re not crazy. We don’t want to manufacture bits. Audiences aren’t dumb; they can smell that from a mile away.”

Van Camp estimates MVR can be heard in about 125 markets.

“I’m just really grateful that so many people like to listen to what we have to say. I never think of myself as anything special in that. We get to hear from people all over the country, and I love that connection.”

One of Van Camp's favorite comments came from a female listener in the Pacific Northwest. She is kind of a hate-listener.

"She'd email me once every other week telling me what idiots we are. Then she sent an email that made my day. She wrote, 'You know, I completely disagree with you, but you still make me laugh. You remind me of my idiot brother.'"

Technically, that would be three idiot brothers.

### Jim Cryns

Jim Cryns writes features for Barrett News Media. He has spent time in radio as a reporter for WTMJ, and has also served as an author and former writer for the Milwaukee Brewers. To touch base or pick up a copy of his book: *On Story Parkway: Remembering Milwaukee County Stadium*, available on Amazon, email [jimcryns3\\_zhd@indeedemail.com](mailto:jimcryns3_zhd@indeedemail.com).

