

For Jamie Markley, Hosting MVR Feels Like More Than a Job

 barrettsportsmedia.com/2022/09/14/for-jamie-markley-hosting-mvr-feels-like-more-than-a-job

By Jim Cryns

September 14, 2022



If you hang out with friends and talk about life, politics, and goofy stuff, you should get a radio show. Jamie Markley did.

“Our show is extremely natural, I think that’s one of the things we hear a lot,” Markley said.

He’s talking about *Markley, Van Camp and Robbins*, heard on more than 125 radio stations across the country. Three ostensibly different guys from different generations that just like to shoot the s***.

“It sounds like three friends who get on with each other like only friends can. To me, maybe it’s because I had a big brother growing up, it’s the jawwing back and forth. It’s endearing, never mean spirited.”

He was a jock in Peoria for 10 years, married for three, when a morning job in Rockford opened when his station in Peoria was sold. He spent two years there, then he heard a station was looking for a morning person in Peoria.

“My wife and I were just starting out with our kids and both of us had family in the Peoria area,” Markley said. We didn’t know what we were going to do. At the time I had an offer to do afternoons in Indianapolis. We were trying to take on *The Bob & Tom Show*. My wife wanted to get back home to Peoria. Nine months later we got back there.”

Before a career in radio, bands like KISS meant a lot. Markley wore a KISS shirt as a kid, and that can speak volumes about a person. I know because I wore one too.

If you didn’t listen to KISS, then you weren’t a kid in the 70s. Markley reminded me of a rock adage: ‘Rock and Roll is either going to hit you in the eyes or the heart, but it’s going to resonate with you somewhere.’

“Not only was KISS not your parent’s band,” Markley said, “they weren’t your uncle’s band either. It was something you hadn’t heard. When most people hear *Rock and Roll All Nite*, they still turn it up on the radio to this day. It’s music that keeps you young.”

Markley said one of the first albums he purchased was KISS *Destroyer*.

The band KISS indirectly got Markley in trouble in Sunday school.

“I grew up in the Methodist church. One time I had a KISS belt buckle and my Sunday school teacher went crazy. It was a Gene Simmons dragon belt buckle. I think I wore it on purpose.”

“*Alive* was already out. One of my first albums was *Aerosmith’s Toys in the Attic*. I don’t think there’s a bad track on the album with songs like *Uncle Salty*.”

According to Markley, *Aerosmith* was in bad shape in the mid-80s, doing lots of drugs. Joe Perry left the band after the album “*Night in the Ruts*.” Then *Aerosmith* came out with “*Done with Mirrors*” in 1985.

“It was an album only *Aerosmith* fans bought,” Markley said. “It had a horrible marketing campaign. I saw them on that tour and they were terrible and wasted. Then they did the duet with Run DMC in 1986, got clean and sober, and released “*Permanent Vacation*,” their big comeback record in 1987.

Once in the radio business, Markley had the perk of meeting a lot of touring rock acts. “Eddie Van Halen was very cool,” he said. Pushed to choose between David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar incarnations of the band, Markley said he had to go with Lee Roth.

“When I was on rock radio, I was just a ‘rock dog,’” Markley said. “All those guys were my heroes. I was at Alpine Valley for Van Halen. Scorpions, Metallica, I was turned on to rock by my older brother and sister. It was Boston, Eagles, a lot of different stuff.”

When Markley talks about MVR, you get the feeling he’s talking about a daily event he loves to be part of, more than a job.

“It’s smart to be informed, but I think it takes more work these days to figure it out,” Markley explained. “There are so many differing agendas being played out. When you look around, with just the people you know, there’s a lot of amazing people. A lot of the conflicts are things covered by nose. I’m not saying there aren’t awful things going on. The difference is how we approach it on the show. We’re just honest and tell people how we feel.”

Just because Markley is on the radio, people seem to feel his opinion on a matter might mean more than most. Markley said that’s way off base.

“If I’m going to a family gathering, or meeting old friends from high school, I don’t feel like I need to talk about my political perspectives or comment on everything in the news. I’m just there to have a good time. Sometimes people say they’ve got to get my opinion on something. I’ll tell you if you want my opinion, but I don’t feel any need to talk about it. There are some people who hear my opinions who never want to talk about that topic with me ever again. But I promise you’ll know how I feel on the air about every single issue.”

Markley was in no shape or form pushed our conversation to a higher plane, it just went there.

“When I was younger and said I was a Christian, I’m not sure what that meant,” Markley said. “I recall talking to my mom when I was 20 years-old. Some girl I knew had gotten pregnant. The conversation was rolling and my mom said you shouldn’t have sex before marriage. I told her that wasn’t realistic.”

Markley questioned how someone could go to Sunday school and not know the basic tenets of Christianity.

“There were a lot of things that happened to me in a 36-hour period when I was 31 years old,” he said. “My mother was dying, my wife became pregnant, and the radio station I was at closed. A few weeks later my mom died and I started to spiral. I was in a different town, away from support.”

Then came the booze, and Markley said things got pretty bad.

“I knew if my family was going to make it, we had to go back to Peoria,” he said. “I thought that would fit all our issues. I wasn’t ready for all that came my way.”

His path to spirituality was realized through all things, an MMA fighter. The man is Ryan Blackorby, who is also from the Peoria area.

“He truly had faith,” Markley explained. “My wife had been babysitting their first child. At the time he was doing some work for a children’s home.”

Markley said Blackorby had come to discover his faith a year or two earlier. The two friends started talking and Markley told him he'd never really read the Bible, and he'd never really been involved in Bible study in his life.

"I think that turned out to be a good thing because we could talk. I saw him as a guy I liked," Markley said. "When you think of people who have faith, you sort of envision a stereotype. But here was a real Christian guy and I wanted to know what that believing was really like. I can remember us getting together for lunch and I'd ask some basic questions."

Blackorby told Markley to start with the gospels. Then they could discuss his interpretations.

"I remember reading Matthew one day," Markley said. "It was a Saturday in January of 2001. Suddenly, I realized all of what I was reading made sense. I realized I couldn't fix things on my own as I was still drinking way too much."

My wife and I talked and decided we should start reading the Bible. She jokingly called me a 'Bible-thumper.' I was trying not to be too pushy about my new realizations. She said that was good as I'd gotten drunk a few nights before."

Markley knew his drinking had to stop, one way or another. He kept establishing drinking limits, like getting in a few quick ones. You're not an alcoholic if you can stop, right?

"I might have a couple, and sometimes I'd just go 'all in.' Finally I realized, 'Okay. I can't do this anymore. As far as my career has gone, I think audiences perceive you a certain way. The subject of drinking pops up occasionally. You have to know my co-host Scott Robbins and I used to party a lot."

Markley said when he shares something about his drinking problems on the air, listeners would thank him for sharing. They'd say, 'I had a drinking problem and when you said you had the same thing I felt God was coming through.'

"It's so hard to seek sobriety when you've been doing it for such a long time," Markley said. "Scott Robbins and I come from music radio. Especially when you're doing a morning show, you're trying to develop an on-air relationship with a friend. Alcohol was a buffer."

When Markley talks about something personal on the air with Scott Robbins or David Van Camp, he is talking to a friend.

"In the end, that's what it is," he explained. "That's what makes our show special. When you admit to your friends you have a problem."

Markley said the Bible is complex. For instance, when you're reading about the Garden of Eden, is that supposed to be taken in a literal sense? Or is it a metaphor? There's got to be some wiggle room in there.

“There are all types of writing styles in the Bible,” Markley said. “One disciple tells a story about the history of man. Another talks about the creator. When I hear different people get their take on the Bible, it’s fascinating. Having someone like Blackorby get me through has been very fortunate for me.”

He never went to AA. When he quit, he went to a counselor who urged him to go to AA.

“I understand it works for a lot of people,” Markley said. “If I fall off the wagon, I’ll probably go. There’s a Christian version of AA.”

Even though he’d never attended an AA meeting, he said it was an eerie experience. An alignment of powers that sure looked like they wanted him to go to a meeting.

“I was going to try to quit smoking. It was the last vice I needed to quit,” Markley explained. “I wanted to take a drive, and it was okay because I was sober. I remember it was New Year’s morning. I drove by the river just to sit. I was thinking about the coming year. I thought maybe I’d map out some goals for the year.”

Markley said a car pulled up and out popped a guy who was wearing a veteran’s jacket.

“I figured I’d have just one more cigarette before I quit. I went up to him and told him I’d give him five bucks for a cigarette. He told me to just take one.”

Markley did. In mid-smoke, another person with a veteran’s sticker on his bumper pulled up and Markley figured it was some kind of veteran’s meeting.

“I thought that was cool. Then I saw a woman pulling up who didn’t really look like she’d served in the military.”

Soon, other people started showing up at the same time. A light went on for Markley.

“I’m like, “Oh, this is an AA meeting.” I’m like, okay, I give. I understand why I was in this place. That’s the only one I ever attended. People went around and introduced themselves. I had actually commented to friends “I saw more love in that room than in a lot of churches I’ve been to.”

Jim Cryns

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