

Scott Robbins Couldn't Foresee MVR Camaraderie

BSM barrettsportsmedia.com/2022/09/15/scott-robbins-couldnt-foresee-mvr-camaraderie

By Jim Cryns

September 15, 2022



There are only three people I'm aware of who's died and come back to life again. The first two are Jesus and Lazarus. The third is Scott Robbins, one-third co-host on *Markley Van Camp & Robbins*, airing on a ton of radio stations across the country.

Robbins was basically given up for dead after his heart attack, triple bypass surgery, kidney dialysis, coma, and six months in the hospital.

"It's funny because I don't remember much about the heart attack," Robbins said. "I was married at the time. My now ex-wife said I was flopping around in the bed, but I didn't wake up. I apparently wasn't breathing too well."

He said the paramedics arrived and started doing CPR. They actually performed so much CPR, that some of Robbins' ribs collapsed.

Robbins gives much of the credit for his heart attack to excessive drinking and smoking through the years. He was in a coma for a month and there wasn't much optimism about anything. If optimism was a stock, it would have been delisted.

“They had to crack me open,” Robbins said. “They broke bones in my chest and pulverized the liver. I was bleeding internally. I was in the hospital for six months and I was discharged without a job. My marriage blew up. My life blew up.”

That’s a Dresden kind of blow-up.

Robbins, 61, said he was lucky enough to move in with his daughter, who is a nurse practitioner. Robbins said she cared for him for a year until he could get back out on his own.

“Most of us think we have good insurance,” he explained. “You’ll find out how good it really is when you find out how much they pay for your stay. I’m still climbing out of debt with that.”

Robbins applied for disability. He couldn’t walk and had to learn how to talk again. Robbins went to physical rehab three times a week.

“I guess I wanted to hang it up a few times. I wanted to stay alive to see my granddaughters grow up. It was a fight each day. I was thrown a few curveballs but I fought.”

His co-hosts, who are also good friends, were great to him.

“Jamie visited me nearly every day in the hospital, and I was there for six months,” Robbins said. “He’d sit with me and we’d watch *Jeopardy* to try to get my thinking back on track. He was incredible.”

I’ll take, ‘He’s Like a Brother,’ for \$400.’

Back at full strength, MVR is currently under contract with a three-year deal.

“The syndication hasn’t changed our lives dramatically,” Robbins explained, “but it has helped me. It’s a good living,” Robbins said. “Alpha Media pays half, other guys pay for half. I’m lucky because I can pay those bills. A lot of people who face the kind of medical problems I did are forced into bankruptcy.”

During his glory days as a rock and roll jock, Robbins once picked up Alice Cooper from the golf course.

“He was totally cool,” Robbins said. “We were listening to Lynyrd Skynyrd on the radio in the car. Alice told me how much he liked their music. His father was a preacher and he went to church while he was in town. He put his hair up in his baseball hat.”

Robbins said he and co-host Jamie Markley used to party together a lot. They originally met Robbins at a Van Halen concert in 1986.

“How hard we partied depended on what band was in town,” Robbins explained. “When you were a jock in the radio business in the 80s, record companies took care of you. In those days, you got just about anything you wanted. I was never a drug guy, but I was a booze guy.”

You can listen to a single track from a band’s album, and sometimes you realize you’ve heard something special.

“The first time I listened to Queen II, it blew my mind,” Robbins said. “I knew they were going to be huge. I heard a song and just knew it. When I heard Killer Queen on *Sheer Heart*, I thought, ‘holy s***.’”

Rush was his first concert, the *2112* tour.

“I paid five dollars for general admission,” Robbins said. “All night long I’m thinking, ‘Holy s***, this is *Rush*.’”

Robbins had known Jamie Markley and his career. Robbins was a top 40 jock at a competing station. He liked what Markley was doing on the air too and bonded.

They’d hang out every so often. Robbins said Markley was at WMBD in sales and he hated the job. Both wondered if it was plausible they could form a show together as a team. Robbins asked Markley if he’d have a problem with that and he said he didn’t.

“I told him management might have a problem paying two salaries for one show, but they went for it.”

With Van Camp now part of the team, MVR was doing very well. David Hall, a radio consultant, told the trio the show was good, and they should be doing it somewhere else. A city with more exposure.

“That’s when we got a deal in Portland with Alpha Media,” Robbins said. “We went to Portland and signed the contract. Two weeks later I had a massive heart attack.”

Robbins said there was no way he could have foreseen the camaraderie MVR enjoys on the air. He couldn’t have visualized it.

“I’m a former programmer and if someone asked me about three guys doing a show, I would have pooh-poohed it. I would have wondered if the audience would be able to tell who was talking. It’s not a problem now, but initially, it may have been.”

Robbins said growing up, WRIL was a great station in Peoria. He’d listen while he was a senior in high school.

“I admired so many great jocks. John Landecker was kind of a hero. I met him once at Comiskey Park. I loved him. I knew it was him so I went up to him. I was probably 19 years old. I told him he was the reason I got into radio. He told me not to blame him for that. He spent some time with me. He was bigger than life.”

When he was sick, someone contacted the band Rush’s management. They told them about Robbins’ condition in the hospital and said he was a huge fan of the band.

“Amazingly, the band signed a baseball and sent it back,” Robbins said. “I take my baseballs with me everywhere and if I meet someone cool, I ask them to sign one. I met Geddy Lee and we talked for a long time about baseball. Not rock, not music, baseball.”

Robbins said Geddy Lee has an amazing collection of baseball stuff.

“It’s like the Hall of Fame of baseball memorabilia,” Robbins said. “He told me he wasn’t much of an athlete, but while on tour he would get up and watch WGN and the Cubs. That’s the only station he could watch baseball on. There were early games in the afternoon before they played a show.”

To a man like Robbins, you get the feeling that age is just a number. He collects Funko Pops. Apparently they’re little dolls of rock stars, athletes, and other famous people.

“I’ve got the Seinfeld cast. I have all the members of Rush. I have an Alice Cooper doll and an Elton John doll.”

To relax, Robbins and friends go to Kansas City to see Royals games.

“It’s a six-hour drive, but we stay for four games each time,” Robbins said. “Two of my buddies and I have done it since 1986.”

Robbins didn’t hit Comiskey Park until much later in life.

“My dad worked for Caterpillar and every year he’d take a day off work and we’d go to see the Sox,” Robbins said. “My father loved the Cubs. Fergie Jenkins came to the radio station when he was promoting a business venture. We were talking and he asked me if I knew a place where he could get liver and onions. I told him I knew a place and took him there. My father was a huge fan and I asked Fergie if he would say hello to my father. He said he would. My father was on the phone and I asked him if he’d like to talk to Fergie, and he did. He later told me it was the biggest thrill of his life.”

Robbins’ father said that, not Jenkins.

Jim Thome comes to Peoria each year for a banquet. Robbins said Thome is a big dude. A farmland country boy.

“He is smart, savvy. Nobody is going to fool him,” Robbins said. “He’s like Paul Bunyan. Dan Fogelberg is from here too. There’s a monument to him on the riverfront.”

Can the show get bigger?

“I hope so,” Robbins said. “I think we’re all confident in the show. Once people put us on, we form a bond. We’ve had people tell us we’re such a big part of their lives. When I’m out, people stop me. I’m a radio guy, I don’t even know how they know who I look like. They’ll stop me and tell me how much they love the show. They say we say things they think.”

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