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# Jon Robbins: a complex personality

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## Jon Robbins: a complex personality

Photo Courtesy of the Ludlow Family Jon Robbins' mother, Sandy Ludlow, describes her son as having "the male Grant grin," a mischievous smile he shared with the other men in his family.



Posted: Sunday, July 23, 2006 12:00 am | Updated: 4:07 pm, Thu Sep 27, 2012.

Melissa Flores | 0 comments

The shooting victim could be jovial, fun-loving and at times, emotionally sensitive

Editor's note: "Debra," Jon Robbins' girlfriend at the time of his death, continues to live and work in Gilroy. The Pinnacle elected not to identify her, and to use a pseudonym for her protection.

In September 2002, Jon Robbins had a multitude of reasons to look toward the future rather than dwell on the past.

At 33, he'd finally made his way from working as a mechanic and a trucker to making a slot on a drag racing team. He was looking forward to October when he would serve as crew chief for a race team at a national event in Las Vegas, according to a friend. After the race, he and his longtime live-in girlfriend would take a cruise for the first time. The tickets had been booked and paid for months in advance.

Friends popped in frequently to watch a ball game or catch a drag race with the racing enthusiast. Thursdays became known as "Thirsty Thursdays" as coworkers, friends and family stopped by for a beer and a laugh.

"He had the male Grant grin," said Sandy Ludlow, his mother, of the mischievous smile he shared in common with other men in his family. "It seems to say they know something you would love to know, but they won't tell you."

Robbins had a way with words when telling a story – sometimes laughing so hard he got everyone around him rolling on the floor before he'd even finished the story.

"He was an attention getter," said Lisa Bradner, his stepsister. "He was the kind of guy who could tell a great story and he was really funny ... if he caught a two-pound fish, it was 10 pounds by the time he told the story."

Humor wasn't the only thing that drew attention to Robbins. He was handsome in a boyish way, with brown eyes and dark hair that curled as it grew longer. He stood 6-foot-7, towering over most family members and friends. But those he knew him, knew he wasn't as tough as he looked.

Beneath the exterior of his foreboding presence was a sensitive man.

As a child, Robbins begged his mother to take an injured bird to a veterinarian for treatment. Both mother and son had a penchant for taking in stray animals and would take in various waifs throughout their lives. As he grew older, his empathy for

others never left him. When race car driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. died, Robbins hid away in a hotel room while on vacation, shedding a tear over the loss of his idol.

Robbins had his share of personal losses in life as well. Born in New Jersey, Robbins grew up in a small community with his mother's family

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nearby. His alcoholic father abandoned the two when Robbins was a baby and never resurfaced in his life. Robbins grew close to his grandfather who took on a father role. The youngster, always tall for his age, enjoyed taking rides with his grandfather after dinner every night.

"We would always go to my parents for dinner and mom would cook or I would cook," Ludlow said. "Dad and Jonny would go for a ride after dinner around the bay, into the forest, to look for bunnies. It was a small town so everyone knew 'Oh, it's a quarter to seven, that must be Jonny and his grandpa."

At 9, his mother's marriage to Al Ludlow uprooted the pair. His mother had met Ludlow a dozen years earlier, when the two were pen pals. They connected through Sandy's best friend whose fiance was in the military and stationed with Ludlow. After he left the military, he met Sandy once, but they were both involved with other people at the time.

Years later Sandy and a friend went out to California and planned a visit to Ludlow. He and Sandy hit it off. A single father raising two girls, Ludlow asked Sandy to marry him several months later.

"Jon was thrilled at the idea of having a father, but it didn't hit him we were leaving for good until we all piled into the car," Sandy said.

The couple drove from New Jersey to Morgan Hill with three quarreling kids in the back seat.

"When we drove back, we had three kids in the back and she was probably wondering what she got into," said Al Ludlow, Robbins' stepfather. "I was used to that kind of thing."

Despite leaving behind his grandparents and all his friends, his parents felt he adjusted well in Morgan Hill.

"It was summertime and he went off and explored," Sandy said. "People gravitated to him. He was a big kid so he was hard not to notice."

Lisa Bradner, Robbins's younger stepsister, remembers him as being sociable from the start.

"He made friends at the drop of a hat," she said. "He always made friends way easier than I ever did. That was never an issue for him."

But under Robbins' happy demeanor, he continued to harbor anger and resentment toward his father and sadness over leaving his beloved grandparents.

"He had a lot of childhood hurts from [leaving] his grandparents and leaving New Jersey," said Robbins' girlfriend, who met him on Christmas in 1995. "He said he hated Christmas because his grandfather had passed away around then and it made him miss people."

The two were an unlikely pair when they first met that holiday season. Robbins had used drugs in the past. He and a fiancee broke off their engagement around Thanksgiving of 1994. He spent nearly a year living with his parents, spending most of his time at home. He had just moved out and rented a room from someone in Gilroy when he met "Debra" at the former Jack's Steakhouse where they played a few games of pool.

Three months before, Debra finalized a divorce and had a four-year-old son at home. The volatile relationship with her ex-husband, a heavy drug user, which had been going downhill since before her son was born, left her guarded and cautious. She kept busy running a trucking company. She helped her family financially.

But that first night the two hit it off, talking about cars and trucking. Debra told him to give her a call.

"The first time I called him he said he didn't think I would call," she said. "He had no self-esteem. But he was so intelligent and very caring for animals and people."

The pair went to car shows and car races together. After a few months of hanging out together without seeing other people, she said they could start dating if they took it slow.

"I had put up a lot of walls," she said. "He accepted this, me with all my baggage and all my friends."

Though the two never got engaged and only once talked about marriage, joking that if they were still together at 40 they would tie the knot, the relationship continued to deepen.

"I never thought I would be with anyone else," she said. "I didn't have to be married to be with him. There would have been no one who put up with me like him."

Though Debra said Robbins had a tendency to view things with a negative eye, she always knew how he felt about things that were going on in his life.

"I would blow things off, but if we got into an argument, he wouldn't go to bed until we talked it out," she said. "He would sit on me and make me talk."

Through the half-dozen years the couple worked and lived together, she saw Robbins's confidence grow. When she first met him, he talked about how deeply depressed he had been when his engagement fell apart.

"He had no sense of foundation, no job he enjoyed and one friend he really relied on," Debra said.

His sister, Bradner, saw a change in him as well.

"The fact that he grew up when he was with her and got more responsible made me think he was more serious about her than any other girl he was with," Bradner said.

Robbins moved in with Debra's grandfather when her grandfather became ill.

"Thank God he was there," She said. "My mother could not be there when my grandfather was dying. We cared for him for eight weeks."

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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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After her grandfather died, the couple remained in the house with Debra's son, who Robbins treated as his own.

Through the years he took on more responsibility – personally and with his girlfriend's company. Before he met her, he didn't have a checking account and didn't have anything he could call his own.

"His friends would come over and he would puff up," she said, when he showed off his '69 Camaro. "He loved them to see that car. He worked hard and had a checking account. He paid his bills every month."

When he wasn't hauling for the company, he worked on his Camaro or golfed.

"He'd get up at 4:30 in the morning to go to work and then be off at 1:30 p.m. to go play golf," She said.

Things seemed at their best for Robbins that September.

"There's no way he would have missed the cruise and the drag. He was so happy," Debra said, recalling the last time she talked to him on the phone while out of town with a friend. "We left saying we loved each other."

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Melissa Flores City Editor



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