



The Giant Among Us



A Conversation With KOAA Anchor, Rob Quirk

by Joy Blackburn,
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Everyone across Southern Colorado knows Rob Quirk; the Emmy award-winning anchor and reporter at KOAA News5. After all, we relied on him to map the progress of the fires as they burned across Waldo Canyon and Black Forest. We hung transfixed as he reported on the horrors at Columbine High School and at the Century Theater in Aurora. We marveled at his objectivity during his backstage reporting at the local Trump Rally, and his one-on-one interview with President Obama at the White House. From 9/11 to Covid-19, we've invited Rob into our homes to distill the day's events and tailor them to our concerns as citizens of the Front Range. And we all agree: Rob is solid, unimpeachable, and the most trustworthy person in television news.

But how many of us really know him?

Rob Quirk has a surprisingly compassionate side to him. For decades, he's been quietly supporting a selection of local causes close to his heart. One of those causes is the Multiple Sclerosis Alliance of Southern Colorado. I recently had the opportunity to talk with Rob about his charitable work.

"If I'm going to speak to the community every night, it's important that I know the community," Rob told me in



Rob Quirk reporting from the Columbine memorial in Clement Park during the tragedy's 10th anniversary service. Rob had also been on the scene on April 20th, 1999, interviewing survivors who had fled the school to the safety of Clement Park.

his famously resonant voice. "I want to be out here interacting, talking, and touching the community." He chose a number of causes early in his career to help him both plug in and give back. Then, in the early 1990s, the Multiple Sclerosis cause chose *him*. "My sister Kathleen was diagnosed with MS. It was such a shock." He recalled the phone conversations with his eight siblings who were spread out all over the country. "Kathleen was only 30 and was otherwise strong and healthy. But none of us knew much about the dis-

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ease or how it was likely to progress. This was pre-internet,” he reminded me. Of course, archaic search tools were no obstacle for an investigative reporter, but neither Rob nor his family were able to find much. “Treatments were relatively limited back then,” he admitted.



Nikki Pfeiffer, Executive Director of the MSA, spoke about how the act of volunteering can affect family members. “They’re always surprised by how much they learn, because that’s not really what drove them here. It’s more emotional,” she told me. “It’s a desire to *do* something. A disease attacked their family and they want to do something in response. The knowledge they pick up is just this amazing bonus.”

In the wake of January 6th, Rob hosted one of his signature “One on One with Rob Quirk” reports where he discussed how to heal the nation with General Wesley Clark and Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

Rob Quirk picked up knowledge and then some. Ten years after his sister’s diagnosis, when Kathleen’s health took a sudden turn for the worse, Rob was ready. “I had all kinds of resources by then. There were things Kathleen hadn’t considered or hadn’t thought she’d ever need. I already knew how to get them.” He also knew who to talk to, which is critical for planning ahead. He helped the family build an extension on another sibling’s home where Kathleen could live once daily assistance became necessary. “It was good to be in the loop and to know what was working for her.”

Rob has long been an enthusiastic participant at fundraising events for Multiple Sclerosis across the Front Range. It was at one such event that Rob and Nikki first met.

Despite the family’s efforts,

Below:
Nikki Pfeiffer welcomes attendees to an MSA event..



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Kathleen's condition worsened, and then deteriorated sharply. In 2018, at the age of 52, she lost her battle with MS. Eerily, in 2014, Rob's younger sister, Joanne, was diagnosed with the disease.

"Joanne is strong and disciplined, and there are treatments available today that weren't available for Kathleen." He added in a nod to Nikki Pfeiffer's high energy and optimism, "In fact, Joanne is a lot like Nikki."

But the question, "Why," hung in the air. After a pause, Rob addressed it. "Two sisters in the same family. That's no longer chance," he told me. With no MS history in prior generations of Quirks, Rob wonders if something in the environment near their childhood home could have triggered the disease. Lockport New York is located along the historic Erie Canal route. "There were a lot of chemicals and steel in the neighborhood. Could that have impacted my sisters?"

Nikki notes that other families have posed similar questions. "All across the world you'll find these small regions with high numbers of MS cases. It must mean something, but at this point we just don't know what it is." Much about multiple sclerosis remains a mystery.

Today, Rob has two daughters in their late 20s; closing in on the age Kathleen was when she was diagnosed. "Of course, we're concerned," Rob admitted. "We know what to look for. It's good to be aware, but we try not to dwell on it." Rob and his wife continue to participate in MS-related events. Their

Rob's hometown of Lockport, NY, while beautiful and historic, is tainted by the debris of its industrial-age birth. He wonders if these aging metals and chemicals could have affected his sisters' immune systems?



Within hours of the July 20th massacre at the Century 16 Theater in Aurora, Rob Quirk was on the scene providing much-needed facts and reassurance to Front Range viewers.

presence always ensures a terrific turnout. Perhaps more important are their efforts, which truly come from the heart. We have no doubt that this sincerity is the secret to Rob's long-running success.

"The reason local news has stood strong against the onslaught of cable news and social media," he told me, "is its unique ability to bring stories right into the neighborhoods where we live. And I don't just read the news, I write it and produce it. I have a significant thumbprint in what we deliver."

And quite a thumbprint it is. At the MSA, we are proud to say we know you, Rob Quirk. We see you clearly, and we thank you for everything you're doing for our community, both on camera and off. 🌟

