

LAWYERS JOURNAL

Discovered 'Big Show' video connects member Ryan Very with late grandfather

By Brian Knavish

Ryan Very never met his grandfather, yet, in many ways, he knows him well.

The proprietor of Very Law PPLC, Ryan is an active ACBA member. He is Chair of the Lawyer Referral Committee and a member of the Civil Litigation Section and Young Lawyers Division.

His late grandfather, Don Very, also was an attorney who was very involved in the ACBA. So much so, in fact, that he served a term as ACBA President in 1978.

Don passed away in 1979, some nine years before Ryan was born. While the two never met, Ryan's heard stories about his grandfather through the years from relatives and other members of the bar. As Ryan explained, many have told him about the similarities that exist between the two.

For one thing, much like his grandfather, Ryan is regarded as a fierce litigator who is passionate about advocating for clients and the legal profession overall. But the similarities don't stop there, as both are/were known for their abilities to perform not only in the courtroom, but also on stage.

Still, Ryan only had stories and photographs with which to get to know his grandfather until recently when video surfaced, depicting Don Very performing as part of a comedy act at the 1977 Bench-Bar Conference. This allowed Ryan to see his grandfather in "live action" and hear his voice for the very first time.

"It was amazing," said Ryan. "I've heard stories about my grandfather, but to actually see footage of him and hear his voice, that was emotional. I never thought I would get that chance."

The video, available at ACBABenchBar.com/Very depicts Don performing in "The Big Show," a Bench-Bar musical comedy show that featured ACBA members as its cast and crew. The Big Show was a staple of the conference from 1974 to 2002. In this particular video, Don is signing a parody of "Give Me That Old Time Religion."

How did Ryan become aware of the video? It was through fellow ACBA member Michael Louik, who was one of the driving forces behind The Big Show and directed the production each year.

"I have known Michael Louik since 2007 when I became involved with the ACLU of Pennsylvania and he was on the legal committee," Ryan said. "One day, more recently, I mentioned my name, and Michael put two and two together and said, 'Oh my God.'"



Ryan Very



Don Very

Louik had photos, programs and other information on Don from past performances of The Big Show, and got that information to Ryan, who shared it on his blog, available at ACBA.org/Very. (Louik's other films, relics and memorabilia from past performances of The Big Show are now stored in the Heinz History Center Archives).

Louik reached out to Marty Barron of ACBA Video, who did some digging and found the 1977 footage. The footage made its way to Ryan and allowed him to hear his grandfather's voice for the first time.

"It really is an amazing story," said Louik. "I'm so glad we could do that for Ryan. I know it meant a lot to him and his family."

Louik remembers Don Very well.

"He was, of course, very active in the bar association, and he joined our show," said Louik. "He was a very pleasant and wonderful guy who loved to sing."

The discovery of the lost footage also made Ryan dig further still and learn more about the extent of the similarities between him and his grandfather. When he was in law school at Boston University – completely unaware of his grandfather's showbiz pursuits – Ryan directed the Legal Follies, a sketch comedy group started by Emmy Award Winner David E. Kelly. This meant Ryan was carrying on his family's lawyer-comedy-performance tradition started by his grandfather ... without even knowing it.

Beyond that, as chair of the ACBA Lawyer Referral Committee, Ryan strives to make legal services more readily available to Allegheny County residents. And – as he learned from his research – Don championed the ACBA Lawyer Referral Service decades ago as well, greatly expanding its reach. (This is detailed in another of Ryan's blog posts, accessible at ACBA.org/VeryLRS).

“Basically, thanks to the ACBA, I keep learning how much I am like my grandfather, without ever having met him,” said Very. ■

Socialization on Tap at 2022 Bench-Bar

While “The Big Show” is a thing of the past, the 2022 Bench-Bar Conference – which returns in-person June 16-18 at Seven Springs Mountain Resort for the first time since 2019 – will feature plenty of social events and entertainment.

A beer and wine tasting, barbecue, poolside reception, axe throwing, trivia, karaoke and a Friday night “after party” are among the highlights. For more information or to view the complete schedule, visit ACBABenchBar.com. ■