

## **Episode 61: Robin drove the Wienermobile**

Welcome to What Was That Like. I'm your host, Scott Johnson. This is a show where we talk to regular people - people just like you and just like me - who have found themselves in an extremely unusual situation. We'll hear their stories and get inside their head because we all want to know what was that like. More information about each episode at [whatwasthatlike.com](http://whatwasthatlike.com). Here we go.

Today, we have a really fun episode that's gonna make you smile.

My guest today is Robin, and Robin likes to have fun. She's different. And she's on today's show to tell us about an experience she had – she was hired by the Oscar Meyer hot dog company to drive the Wienermobile.

And I realize some people might not be familiar with the Wienermobile, especially those outside the US. What we're talking about here is a large vehicle that is designed to look like a giant hot dog. Yes, this is an actual street-legal vehicle, 27 feet long (about 9 meters). If you're in the US, you might be surprised some day and see one traveling on a street, right there in your city.

And while this kind of vehicle seems like it would be unique, there are actually SIX of them traveling the country at any given time. They show up at grocery store grand openings, theme parks, pickle festivals, all kinds of events. And the drivers give out merch such as Wienie Beanies, Wienermobile Hot Wheels cars, and the ever popular Wiener Whistles.

Well, my friend Robin decided that she wanted to be a Wienermobile driver. So today she's going to talk about how she made herself stand out from the other ONE THOUSAND applicants and got the job, and what the job is actually like.

And a couple of other things – Robin lives in New York City. You've heard of The Moth, right? Really popular podcast. In New York, they regularly do storytelling competitions, and Robin has competed in these. They're called Story Slams. And she has actually won!

And at the end of this episode, I asked her to tell me about the time she was able to meet the comedy legend, Jerry Stiller. Great story.

So I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. If you'd like to support the show, and get access to all the bonus exclusive content, you can do that at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/support).

And now, here's Robin.

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### **Scott**

How long is the Wienermobile?

### **Robin**

The Wienermobile is 27 feet long. However, the one that I drove back in the day was 23 feet long. I wish I could tell you how many hotdogs-long that is because that used to be a fun fact that we knew - a fun Frankfurter fact.

**Scott**

Do you know why they changed the length?

**Robin**

Probably because they changed the type of car that it's based on. The one that I drove was based on a Chevy van chassis and the newer ones are GMC - I think they're based on GMC trucks.

**Scott**

How did you end up getting a job like this? I mean, nobody ever thought, when I grow up, I want to drive the Wienermobile - or maybe you did.

**Robin**

I had never seen it before. I grew up outside of Hartford. I later found out that the Wienermobile rarely went to New England. A lot of people who grew up in Chicago know about the Wienermobile because they had a plant there. In Philly, they had a factory there as well. So those were some of the more concentrated areas where the Wienermobile would travel back, like, a really long time ago. I'll tell you about how I got it in a second. The Wienermobile program started in 1936 and they were the very first company to ever create a mobile marketing program. What they did initially was they had these little people chefs, who were essentially the spokespeople or mascots, if you will. They had drivers taking them around and they would hand out little wiener whistles. They call those people "Little Oscars". You might know one of them because he is in the Wizard of Oz - His name is Meinhardt Raabe and he played the coroner. So do you remember that part where he sang "As coroner, I must aver, I thoroughly examined her."

**Scott**

I... confession time.

**Robin**

Don't tell me you've never seen the Wizard of Oz. You're gonna kill me.

**Scott**

It's a weird fact, but I have never seen the Wizard of Oz.

**Robin**

Why haven't you seen it? I'm sorry to hijack this. You've asked me how I got the job and I'm already, like, "What?!"

**Scott**

Whenever we're at a group party and you play that game - like, write down three things about yourself, and people have to find out or decide which one's not true. That's the one that always fools them because, I guess, everybody's seen it.

**Robin**

You know what's crazy about the fact that you're telling me this right now? Last week, I hosted a few storytelling shows for a client and we did two truths and a lie because I want us to do a lot of engagement with the audience. One of the things that crossed my mind is, because I'm actually

a horrible moviegoer and I haven't seen The Matrix, I thought of telling the audience that I've never seen the Wizard of Oz because they're gonna be like, "That's insane! That's a lie!"

**Scott**

Of course, not everybody has seen that.

**Robin**

Yeah. Oh, my gosh. Your listeners are going to appreciate the song I was singing because they're gonna be like, "I know exactly who you're talking about." Anyway, I'm just teasing you because people will say to me, "You've never seen The Matrix?!" I'm like, "No. Don't make any references to it because I'm not going to know."

**Scott**

Well, I've never seen Star Wars either.

**Robin**

Oh my God, where did you grow up?!

**Scott**

I've seen other movies. I like different types of movies.

**Robin**

Okay, that's fair.

**Scott**

Anyway, we're five minutes in. We've gone off the rails completely already.

**Robin**

I know. I'm sorry. I mean, I love puns and we've already gone on a detour if you want to do, like, a "whole travel driving". Anyway, I had never seen the Wienermobile before. I was a senior at Syracuse University and I was studying writing for television, radio and film, and marketing. I saw a poster for the Wienermobile and it was this bright turquoise or, like, royal blue background with this Wienermobile image - it was all illustrated - with this party hat on it. I was like, "What is this thing?" By the way, the economy was in the toilet at this time, but it didn't matter because this is a much longer story. I'll try to give you a very abridged version of it. Essentially, I had a really horrible experience in college freshman year because I was bullied by about 60 guys who called me this name— they thought of a guy from a movie. Let's see if you know this movie Fast Times at Ridgemont High.

**Scott**

Uh-huh. Spicoli?

**Robin**

No, not Spicoli. It was the science teacher, Mr. Vargas. Anyway, they thought I looked like this guy and they called me Vargas in the morning, noon and night. They would call and wake me up in the middle of the night, whisper behind me in class, corner me in the elevator, and they just made my life hell. Anyway, all I wanted to do was on-air work. I was terrified throughout most of college. In my senior year, I was in a really, really low state, I was incredibly depressed, which I never was before. Then, I saw this poster for the Wienermobile and I was like, "Oh my God, this thing looks so fun." What I found out - because I went to an information session - was

that they were looking for people to not only drive the Wienermobile, but serve as their spokespeople, and they wanted people who would travel in a region and do PR for them. That meant that you'd be on TV, on the radio, in the paper, and make people's days, essentially, everywhere you went. The best part was like, "Oh, I get to sell hot dog puns every day like this. They're basically gonna pay me to be myself." So everything about it just screamed my name because it was endlessly creative. You were meeting new people all the time. Because I felt like I had missed out on a lot of opportunities in college to really express myself, my voice, be on TV, and be on the radio, I didn't join campus TV or radio because of what had happened during freshman year. It was almost like I was getting a chance to make up for lost time. Then, I found out how hard it is to have his job and I set out to knock their gold toads socks off with my creativity.

**Scott**

Yeah, a lot of people want this job.

**Robin**

Yeah, I had no idea because I had never seen it, like I said. They were choosing 10 people out of 1,000 applicants. What I like to say is it was "dog eat dog".

**Scott**

So you had to figure out a way to set yourself apart.

**Robin**

Yeah.

**Scott**

As did all the other people. I'm sure they were thinking, "Okay, how can I stand out?" But you actually did it...

**Robin**

I did. Thank you. It's funny. I'll share what I did because I really was in such a low place that - I know it's gonna sound silly - if I don't get this job, I'm gonna kill myself. That was truly how low I was at the time. It makes me so sad now to think about 21-year-old me— actually, I was 20 when I applied. I was being that desperate, but it really fueled me. Anyway, I was like, "Everybody's gonna put puns in their cover letter - like, that's obvious - but I still did it."

I said like, "Howdy hotdog, hello to you! I recently traveled to Europe where you've got to have a real friendship with franks. What a lucky dog I was!" The whole thing was, like, completely riddled with puns. Then, I catered my resume to the job. I was, like, bragging about my excellent driving record and my impending "BSS degree" in Bologna Sandwich Skills, which I thought was so hilarious. I was like, "But everybody's going to do this." To me, that was, like, so basic and so—

**Scott**

That's, like, the standard. That's the baseline.

**Robin**

Exactly, yeah. I was like, "I know I'm better than that." So I put a cassette together of me singing self-promotional songs - it was around the holidays - and I called it Rockin Robins Hotdog Holiday Favorites. I didn't know how to do anything. I didn't know how to do graphic design. I

didn't know how to do any kind of audio production. I just would, like, book the studios, put myself in those rooms, throw in Winter Wonderland, and sing over that. So what I did was I did parodies of holiday songs because it was around the holidays. Now, I going to sing a second song for you, Scott, provided you include the first part of me teasing you. I'm hoping you recognize this song or, at least, the song on which it's based. So I sang like, "Oscar Meyer, do you hear me? Want to be in that weenie? Drive it around a little over the town, want to be a hotdog—" and I just kept going. Then, I did another one because I'm Jewish - I gotta represent my peeps, so I did. "Robin, Galson by Robin, by left in, my name all the time. This job will be mine. My shoe size's 9. I'm Jewish, but I do go on." So they got to see my personality and my sense of humor. Then, on the cassette itself, I drew a Christmas tree with little hotdog ornaments and a menorah with little hotdog candles which is, like, silver - so sacrilegious.

### **Scott**

It's like you were channeling "Weird Al" Yankovic - parodies and stuff.

### **Robin**

As you can imagine, I was a huge "Weird Al" fan as a kid. He still is quite talented. So I sent it off, but I was still, like, in such a bad place that I was like, "They're not gonna hire me." Then, I got a letter - because that's how we rolled back then - and I have my first meeting with the Syracuse district manager for Oscar Meyer. I was so happy that he had listened to my cassette. I was like, "Oh, sweet. He knows my work." Then, I kind of wiggled my ears because I didn't want to lie about my special skills on my resume - I was, like, so eager beaver - and I felt like it went well. Well, I don't know. Then, I waited and waited and waited for, like, another letter from Oscar Meyer saying that I cut the mustard. Then, they flew me to Madison, Wisconsin.

What they did in terms of winnowing down the field of applicants was they started out with 1,000 and broke it down to 40. Then, the second interviews were done with 10 people each. I got flown out to Madison the night before they had a hotdog social with, like, the senior execs and the other applicants. They wanted to see, like, how you get along with people, if you were personable, friendly, and could carry on conversations because it's such a huge part of the job. Also, they want to see if you eat hotdogs because, the year before, a vegetarian has slipped through the cracks. That's when I met Ross. I'm smiling - your listeners can't tell that I'm smiling - because I just texted him yesterday. He's like a sweetheart of a man. At that time, I had heard about how absolutely intimidating he was because he was a former Army sergeant. They had a former Army Sergeant running the Wienermobile program - like what?! He gave me one-word answers. I was just so excited about this opportunity. Anyway, the next morning, we were up at 7 AM right in the conference room and have 9 back-to-back meetings - everything's super intense. I was sitting in the conference room with all of my competitors. I mean, basically, it's like a reality show and people, like, pull all the stops. I mean, in the past, I had heard about a guy who had made, like, a miniature version of the Wienermobile and he did not get the job. Apparently, he did too much and one of the other people— basically, they have you meet with PR, HR, marketing, sales, and all different people within the organization.

### **Scott**

And they all have, like, a vote on who gets it?

### **Robin**

Yeah. Then, they also have you do an on-camera interview, which is huge because media was such a huge part of our job. They wanted to see how you did on camera. One guy did a debate between Ross Perot and Bill Clinton as to which condiment is best for a hot dog, and that was,

like, part of his on-camera interview. I was just like, "Oh, man." Of course, I had prepared something. Because I didn't know, I was given a hot tip. I was very excited because one of the people recruiting at Syracuse was a Syracuse grad and he said, "I'm gonna give you a little insider information. After they asked you all your questions during the on-camera interview, he's going to ask you if you have anything to add, and that's your opportunity to shine." I was like, "Awesome" because I wouldn't have known that and prepared this. I prepared, of course, another song, but this time, I brought my tap shoes, not factoring in that I'd be tap dancing on carpet. So when I got to this conference room, I was devastated. I was like, "No..." I thought about everything out. I was, like, tap dancing in the bathroom trying to do it quietly so that my competitors wouldn't hear me as I was practicing in between interviews.

**Scott**

Did you carry the shoes in with you or were you wearing them?

**Robin**

I had a backpack. You would have thought, like, "You're walking down the carpet throughout, like, hotdog HQ. Did you think you're gonna have, like, hardwood floors?" I used to think about it. So, once I got there, I was really upset.

**Scott**

And you couldn't exactly bring a big piece of plywood or something to work around.

**Robin**

No. And there wasn't even a conference table. I could consider getting on if I wanted to. Let me tell you, I was desperate. I wanted that job badly. So, I just launched into my routine and I sang. I asked the guy behind the camcorder to pan down to my shoes to show that I had gone the extra mile. I mean, I looked ridiculous. I can show you, but I'm trying to describe, like, what wings are for your audience. It's basically, like, a tap dancer's premiere move - the way I described it - where I look like a snow angel on crack. It was bananas. When I was done, the guy gave me nothing, no response, and I was so embarrassed. I thought they hate me and I just made such an ass out of myself.

**Scott**

Worst interview ever on camera?

**Robin**

W-U-R-S-T. So I figured out how to redeem myself and that's when I was going to meet with Ross, the Wienermobile manager, aka "Top Dog". I already mentioned the fact that he was a former Army sergeant but he was, like, really stoic. He had this weird habit of breathing like Darth Vader, which was disconcerting and so intimidating. So I went in and sat in his office. He got this small table. He asked me a bunch of questions. I responded and then asked him a bunch of questions.

I asked him if he had a chance to listen to my Wienermobile demo. He opened his top desk drawer and sitting there was Rockin Robins Hot Dogs Holiday Favorites and I was so excited like, "Oh my God! He knows my work! This is awesome!" Then, he went "Oh, you're this Robin..." That was, like, a dagger in the heart. I was like, "What does that even mean?" Was I too much? Something tells me that he hasn't listened to it, so I was like, "Well, if you want, you can listen to it on my Walkman." He was like, "That won't be necessary." I was like, "How about this... Why don't I sing a few songs that didn't make it on the album?" I didn't even want the

answer and I sang— on the plane, I had written two more parodies and I sang the first one. Then, when I was done, I had zero responses. I was just like, “Oh, God, this is horrifying. But I still have to try. I did my homework. I want to show you how badly I want this.”

I sang the second song and the last thing I sang was, “I’m gonna have this job before I’m dead.” Those were the lyrics and he went like, “Hmm...” I was like, “What does that mean? I don’t know how to read this room. I’m so confused.” I got on the plane and cried the whole flight home. I made the biggest ass out of myself. Ross hates me. Everybody over there thinks I’m such a clown. My self-esteem was already shattered and that just felt like it pushed me further down.

Then, I went back to school. There were so few jobs at that time and I was interviewing for, like, Bugle Boy jeans. I don’t have any passion for fashion. All I wanted to do is drive a Weinermobile. Then, a month or six weeks pass and I got a phone call and I heard, “Robin!” This was before Caller ID. I listened to the breathing and he said, “This is Ross calling from Oscar Mayer. We’d like to offer you a position as one of our hotdoggers”. I was so excited and just jumping up and down and screaming and crying. I’m so happy. I still love that job to this day. I’m very lucky. It is a really cool thing. That was hands down the best job in the world. I loved it. This is me tooting my own horn. I’m not trying to sound boastful. Given what I shared about how I was, I doubted myself throughout the entire process. I found out later that I was their top choice.

**Scott**

Wow, right from the start?

**Robin**

I didn’t honestly find that out until probably about 10 years ago. He said something to me when I was working on my solo show about it, and I was like, “Are you kidding me?!” I mean, just to know how absolutely depressed and how hopeless I was - I thought I was worthless. When I know that I was their first choice out of a thousand people, I was like, “You should have told me that.” But I got the job so that didn’t matter.

**Scott**

I guess they wouldn’t want to respond or applaud or anything like that to give you false hope if you didn’t get chosen.

**Robin**

That’s true because it was by the committees. They were really trying to find the right mix of people to represent the brand because - we were their foot soldiers - they really want to find people who are trustworthy because we’re driving around in his million-dollar vehicle.

**Scott**

Yeah, and it’s their brand.

**Robin**

Yeah, exactly. So they wanted to make sure we were representing them really well. That’s part of the reason why it’s such a hard job to get. The other piece was, like, we were pitching media all the time - it’s different from the mobile marketing programs now. If you see, like, a Red Bull or Hershey Kiss mobile sorts of things, quite often, they’re just handing out coupons or they’re handing out little premium items or trinkets, but the majority of our job was getting media attention - from all the markets we visited - being fun and kind to people, and entertaining and

engaging them. That's why it's so hard to get. They trained us on that but they really wanted people who had those skills and that creativity to really be entrepreneurial in a sense.

**Scott**

So what kind of training did you have to go through? What do they do?

**Robin**

I went to Hot Dog High and it was a week-long program that took place at Ostermeier. It was really detailed and really thorough. I was always a good student, so I was like, "eating it up" - no pun intended. What they walked us through was we learned a lot about the product, we went on a tour of the facility, we learned about media relations, how to work with meat managers, sales reps, and all the different markets. We learned how to drive the vehicle, how to maintain it, and all the things about - sort of boring - expenses because everything we did was not digital. We did a lot of training for, like, on-camera stuff. We had to learn a lot about which sound bites they wanted us to use. Certainly, they gave us a ton of, like, leeway in terms of things that we could say on our own - funny puns and that kind of stuff. They did a lot teaching us how to pitch media because we would have these things, oddly enough, called "Bacon guides". These are big directories of different media outlets across the country - they were huge. They were much larger than, like, a phone book. Inside there, you'd have, like, assignment editors, producers, and all these people to pitch

**Scott**

So did you have to book yourself for these appearances?

**Robin**

Well, they gave us a schedule three months in advance for where we would be - visiting grocery stores or-

**Scott**

So all that stuff was planned out. You had a schedule to travel here, to appear at this address, and all that. You didn't have to come up with all that on your own. That's good.

**Robin**

No, we didn't. But let's say we were going to be in Pittsburgh for, like, a radio promo or visiting - they call them store calls - we would also plan our own events around that. So we might do like, "Take a wiener to work" and we would do a radio morning show where we would ask people like, "Why is your boss a winner? Why does he or she deserve a ride to work in the Wienermobile?" Or we would, like - this is one of my favorite things to do - take kids to the prom. So, we did a radio contest for that, so we'd be bantering with the hosts. I would, like, pitch those ideas to producers or we would visit children's hospitals and deliver meals on wheels. So, once all of those events we are supplementing for, sort of, the "anchor events" - that corporate had set up for us - then I would be pitching media around those events as well.

**Scott**

Was it always just you driving? Do you have, like, a co-pilot or is it just you traveling around?

**Robin**

I had a co-pilot. His name is Jason. He was my complete opposite, which is why I'm working on a screenplay about this experience. I did a solo show about it many years ago. It's like a fun buddy movie based on my life experience of like, "He listens to hip hop. I listen to Show Jones."

He was, like, a complete horndog. I was a virgin. He broke the rules. I was a total rule follower. So everything about it was, like, made for movies - like, these two opposites trapped together in a 23-foot long fabulous hot dog crisscrossing the country in the Wienermobile. Actually, that made things incredibly challenging because he didn't want to do any work and I was like, "This job means everything to me. I don't want to lose it." I mean, there are so many funny things that we know. He would, like, do donuts or drag race in the Wienermobile and I would be, like, screaming and freaking out because I didn't want people to see us because I was always afraid people might know people who work at Oscar Mayer - they might know people who work for Kraft - and they're gonna call and say, "I just saw the Wienermobile doing- you know." I couldn't even say we were ever speeding because I think it moves so slowly. So there was a lot of fear around us getting into trouble.

**Scott**

Right. And it's not like there are 10 Wienermobile in the Northeast United States that they wouldn't know whose is it. Obviously, they would figure it out.

**Robin**

Yeah, exactly. Because there were only six Wienermobiles on the road at any given time, and our territory was huge - it was Toronto to Virginia to Ohio.

**Scott**

Do they discourage sexual innuendo hotdog puns?

**Robin**

Big time.

**Scott**

I could imagine that's not their brand.

**Robin**

Not at all. They're very milk and cookies. They're very family oriented. So one of the things they told us was to never park the Wienermobile in front of or near unsavory places like a bar or a strip club. I remember when that Anthony Weiner scandal came out - I think this was like seven years ago or maybe longer - somebody said to me like, "Oh, they should totally milk this." I was like, "They're never gonna do that. No way. That's not who they are at all. You can get media, certainly, but it's absolutely completely off-brand for them." They gave us a list of puns and, then, of course, we came up with our own.

**Scott**

What kind of crazy stuff happened while you were out driving this thing?

**Robin**

Well, when we were at the Cleveland air show, I remember, one night, these guys from the Blue Angels were walking around the vehicle. I was a little suspicious of what they were doing but I went upstairs to my hotel room - I think we had to leave early the next day or something, so I don't even think I said anything to Jason. When we came down to leave, our license would have been stolen and on the Wienermobile were fun vanity plates like hot dogs. They're not the most creative hot dog - ours was called "Our dog", one was called "Wiener", the one I always wanted to draw was "Big bomb" because I just thought that was such a fun name.

So I was like, "Oh man" and was really so bummed about that because I never wanted to call Ross for something like that because he put the fear of God in everyone. So Jason took it upon himself to make us a temporary license plate out of a manila folder and washable markers, which is really smart and really, really creative. Anyway, nobody can miss us on the road. So we drove through Ohio. We drove all the way across Pennsylvania. We crossed into New Jersey and within seconds, we got pulled over and I thought it was hilarious. It was about three months into the job. I had a camcorder with me - it was a graduation gift - and I was like, "Oh, this is gonna be great footage for my Wienermobile demo and that demo movie - the documentary. Obviously, we had to obey all speed limits and traffic laws and all of that, of course. But quite often, if you get pulled over, you can give them some "wiener whistles", which are just these little tchotchkes.

**Scott**  
Bribery?

**Robin**  
Yeah, basically. It's funny how a little trinket can get you out of a ticket, or so I thought. I mean, people didn't really carry on cameras then. If they had a disposable camera with them, then they might want to take some pictures with it. So as soon as we got pulled over, I was like, "This is gonna be hilarious." So I was in the back. The way that the Wienermobile is set up is like, you are actually sitting in front of the engine where the driver and the passenger are. Then, we have this thing behind there called the doghouse which covers the engine - that's what we would climb over and, sort of, lean on the engine. I was taking a shot of the side mirror with the police car's lights going - you can see a little bit of the car itself.

**Scott**  
You're already picturing how this is going to play on the big screen.

**Robin**  
I was a storyteller. I was like, "Ooh, I'd like to open with this shot." Jason turned around. By the way, we had uniforms all the time - they were like ketchup-and-mustard colored uniforms. Jason turned around - he got a tie-dye shirt and he was like, "Put that away!" I was like, "Oh, come on. This is gonna be great footage." He was so nervous. "Put it away!" "Fine." And so I did, very reluctantly. The cop came up and this guy was stereotypically, like- he's a New Jersey State Trooper. He was, sort of, like James Gandolfini and a little Danny DeVito but, like, with all the personality of Dick Cheney. So you're expecting that he's gonna think this is funny, right? But he was not having it. He was like, "License registration." Then, he made Jason get out. It's always funny to hear cops who were like, "I need you to get out" and then, like, looked this thing up and down. He was like, "Out of the car." We had a Gullwing door. They still do, sort of, like KITT from Knight Rider - the doors open on the side.

Jason went out and he was shitting his pants. He was so nervous. I was like, "I know what he's so afraid of." He went and talked to the cop. I couldn't really hear what was happening. He came back in. He's still nervous. He said, "He wants to talk to you." In my head, I was like, "Oh, I'm going to take care of this situation. I got this." I went flying out of the Wienermobile. I've got a goofy T-shirt on - it literally has goofy on it. I was like, "Hello, Officer." He was like, "Where are you headed to?" I was like, "Well, tomorrow we're doing a hot dog eating contest in Secaucus." I was, like, giving him our full schedule and I was like, "You should come!" Then, he said, "Where were you coming from?" I was like, "Oh, we were at the Cleveland Air Show." Then, he said, "Do I have any reason to suspect anything illegal in this vehicle?" And I was like, "Illegal? Huh?" He

was like, "Any substances?" And I was, like, right on the spot. So I went, "No, there's no hash in this hot dog." and I was, like, so proud of myself for coming up with a pun right there. But he didn't react to that, but I don't give up.

**Scott**

You're used to this reaction from your audition, though.

**Robin**

That's true. He's not even telling me now. It's like, "Don't even give me 'no'." Anyway, then he said something like, "Well, how do I know you didn't drive this thing up here from Colombia?" In my head, I was like, "What is he talking about? This man is insane." So I said to him, "Well, officer, with all due respect, have you ever heard of Oscar Mayer?" He was like, "Yeah, but how do I know you didn't just slap this logo on the side of your car?" I was like, "Slap a logo? I just happened to have a 23-foot-long fiberglass hotdog car at my disposal." It was insane. So he ended up saying, like, "I'm gonna search it for drugs." I was like, "Be my guest" because I was thinking there are no drugs in here. Then, I went back in - the cop went back to the squad car - and I talked to Jason. I was like, "Yeah, he says he wants to search for drugs." Jason was like, "What???" I said, "Yeah." In my head, I was like, "We're fine." and he was, like, private.

We let people in here every single day. Somebody could have planted something. So, he was, like, so nervous. So he ran to the back of the Wienermobile because the back quarter of the Wienermobile was all storage. He was freaked out. He came back out. The cop went in. He searched the Wienermobile. We were standing out on the side of the highway. He ended up coming back out a little while later and he was like, "We need to impound this vehicle." At that time, I didn't know what that meant, so I was like, "Okay!" and Jason was like, "Shit..." So we were, like, "But why?" He was like, "Well, your registration is not coming up in our system." We called Ross and Ross worked it out with them. This guy had been looking it up as a car but it was registered as a truck and that was all he needed to do. Finally, we were, like, sent on our way.

**Scott**

Even without a real license plate, he let you keep going?

**Robin**

Well, he insisted we get a new one, so we had that shipped out. I think we got it, like, two days later.

**Scott**

But you were gonna get that anyway even if you didn't get pulled over probably.

**Robin**

Yeah. We had a car phone - we didn't have cell phones. We didn't know until we got down to the Wienermobile that the license plate had been stolen.

**Scott**

So you got pulled over.

**Robin**

The first time the Wienermobile was ever pulled up was when somebody drove in New York City in the Wienermobile, which was terrifying because there are no rearview mirror - just side mirrors.

**Scott**

Oh, that seems dangerous.

**Robin**

Yes, it does.

**Scott**

How do you back up?

**Robin**

With help. I mean, the one they have now have that rear camera.

**Robin**

Oh, yeah. When I drove, back in the day, I would need Jason to get out and help direct me. When parking it, you have to take up two spots and park diagonally. I'm a really good driver and I'm a really good parallel parker, but parallel parking that thing is really, really hard.

**Scott**

That's probably one of the big reasons for having a co-pilot too.

**Robin**

Oh, sure. I mean, I was grateful for Jason because he grew up going to, like, lots of NASCAR races because his dad worked at Daytona motor speedway. So he was, like, really into cars. So he was good about, like, keeping the thing running, checking the oil, and all that kind of stuff. They would never want to have two people - like, you get so lonely. Although you could make friends everywhere, we were rarely in places for longer than, like, a day. If we got to stay somewhere for, like, 2 or 3 nights, it was a luxury.

**Scott**

What was it like on your last day on the job?

**Robin**

The last day of this job was so disappointing. The job is usually for a year - they asked me to stay on. I traveled through Canada that summer and I got to travel to some of the regions in the US. I think I saw about half of the states in the Wienermobile, which is a really cool way to see the world. I was back on the road in the States. So, I was finishing up in October and I was at the Clausen Pickles factory on a Saturday to do, like, a family event where they were serving, like, vanilla cake with vanilla frosting pickles. By the way, those pickles are delicious - I love pickles. Anyway, Ross came up which was nice because I got to bid him "Adios". I was traveling with a new part of the hotdogger team. It was pouring out and my job was to give kids a ride in the Wienermobile, like, in the circle in front of the building - it was just, like, doing a loop and it wasn't a big loop. So that was what I was doing. I'm sure I handed out wiener whistles too. So I got to go to Mardi Gras on the Wienermobile. I got to go to the Commonwealth Games in Vancouver on the Wienermobile. I got to wrap up my tour of duty at the Clausen Pickles factory. No one ever asked me about the last event that I did. I mean, it's so fitting for me because it's funny.

**Scott**

That's fun. Well, it sounds like it was quite a great experience, obviously.

**Robin**

Oh, the fun.

**Scott**

Yeah. And it gives you all kinds of great stories to tell. Speaking of stories, you have experience with storytelling. I know people listening to this wouldn't have any idea that that would be the case. Looking at your information online, you are not just a great storyteller, you have actually performed on "The Moth" - which is a podcast that I'm sure a lot of my listeners listen to - and won the Moth StorySLAM 3 times. That's got to be a pretty amazing thing!

**Robin**

Thanks, yeah.

**Scott**

I don't know how you're supposed to respond to that, but I think it's pretty amazing.

**Robin**

I appreciate that. I think it's funny because I call myself I called myself the Susan Lucci of The Moth because I came in second so many times over. I started going to The Moth in 2009 and I fell in love with storytelling. There were other storytelling shows. I live in New York City, which I know that you know, but just to let your listeners know. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I love this!" I lost by a 10th of a point. I mean, I was ridiculous. Then, when I won - you're not gonna believe this, it was last year, it took me that long - I stopped going for a while because I have my own storytelling show and was getting booked on other people's shows. The best part of my first win was that I beat the guy who was going for his 40th Moth win that night.

**Scott**

Wow...

**Robin**

And he's a friend of mine. Just to give, like, a little bit of background for your listeners, if they've ever gone to a live Moth event, when they have StorySLAMs, they pick 10 people out of a bag - they call it a hat. Generally, you got a good chance to win if you are chosen, like, 8th, 9th or 10th because the scores start really low at the beginning of the evening, because people don't know what's coming up, because you don't know who's performing. They only get picked after the last person's done.

**Scott**

Yeah, strategy there.

**Robin**

Yeah. I was chosen 8th, so I was like, "Okay." I knew I had a good story. Then, they have the storyteller pick the next person. So, I reached my hand into the bag and pulled it out, and it was a very good friend of mine, Stacey. I was like, "Damn it" because she's one of them who won a bunch too. She went up and she did a great job, but I was still winning. Then, she picked Matthew Dicks who, again, is a friend of mine - he's a phenomenal storyteller - and I was like,

“Shit, he's tense. He wins all the time.” I didn't know he was going for his 40th. I was like he's in the sweet spot. When he was done, everybody was applauding. My friend leaned over to me and she was like, “I don't know, Rob. He did really well.” In my head, I was like, “Fuck it.” and I said to her, “I'm still gonna do it.” They tabulated the scores. Everybody could see this scoreboard, by the way, and I was like, “Yes!!!” And I beat him. He's incredibly competitive and I was really excited. He was funny because he shared something on Facebook. He was like, “If I'm gonna lose to anybody, I am happy to lose to Robin. It's incredulous. It's been this long without her winning.” Then, it was, like, a snowball effect where I won several after that.

### **Scott**

Well, are some of your Moth performances online on your YouTube channel, maybe, or on your website so that people can go listen to it?

### **Robin**

Yeah. If you go to my YouTube channel for my storytelling shows, it's called “YumsTheWordShow”. I think the title for that video is even, like, my Moth winning story. So you can see that story there. It's such a fun story to tell. I love that story so much. There's a lot of content on my website too at [robingelfenbien.com](http://robingelfenbien.com).

### **Scott**

When I listen to the Moth stories on the podcast, I always wonder— I mean, a lot of these people that do this are not professional storytellers - I don't think anyway. They just have an experience they want to talk about but you don't hear them stumbling for words. You don't hear a lot of crutch words like “um” and “you know” and that kind of thing. It's the first time they're delivering it but it almost has to be memorized completely, right?

### **Robin**

I think a lot of them do when they don't have as much experience. I hate memorizing my stories mostly because I want them to sound as natural and conversational as possible. I've been doing this for 11 years. I'm used to telling stories. Also, to be honest, I just hate rehearsing, but you're really limited to the time - The Moth gives you 5 minutes. It depends. If it's a mainstage show and the directors work with you, then you have more time. But typically, for people who don't generally do this - I do this professionally - they will memorize because they don't have the experience and - this is a generalization and is certainly not the case for everybody - they don't necessarily trust that they're going to remember everything. The thing that I always tell my storytelling students is, “Know your first line and know your last line” because you want to nail those really well. Everything in between— even though we worked on stories together and developed stories together, the audience isn't going to know. We, as the audience, want to know that we're in good hands as soon as you start and we want you to stick that landing in a really satisfying way. Endings are so, so hard to do. Anyway, I just don't like memorizing. The other thing is, when you memorize, I find I'm not as present with my story. I try to relive my stories when I share them as much as I can. I really want to imagine that world again so that you can see that same world that I'm living in.

### **Scott**

All right, I got to ask you this. I don't want to take too much of your time. You had the opportunity to meet a comedy legend, Jerry Stiller because you live in New York City - obviously, he did as well. Can you just tell us about how that went?

### **Robin**

About 15 years ago, I met his daughter Amy Stiller - Ben Stiller's sister. She and I would bump into each other in the neighborhood - I live on the Upper West Side. One night, I was walking home from a first and last date and we just bumped into each other and said hello. I had seen on Facebook earlier that day that it was her father's birthday. so, I said, "Hey, tell my fellow Syracuse grad Happy Birthday." She said, "Do you want to tell him yourself?" In my head, I was, like, doing cartwheels and doing high fives to myself. So I was playing it cool and was like, "Oh, yeah. That'd be great! Sure, if that's cool..." She said, "Yeah, come on." He lived a block away from me - I didn't know that.

So, we were walking into her parents' apartment and I was, like, walking through a comedy Hall of Fame as soon as I set foot in that door because there were photos of Ben Stiller when he was a kid and plenty of pictures of Amy, Anne Meara, and Jerry Stiller all over the place. It was a very cozy home. I was like, "I cannot believe I'm about to meet Jerry Stiller!" I've worked with a lot of celebrities for my YumsTheWordShow, which is my storytelling show here in New York City, but this is, like, somebody who's got a whole other echelon because he's such a legend. I wasn't nervous. I was just excited. We walked into this big living room. Off in the kitchen were these 3 women sitting there giggling.

Then, Amy said, "Dad, I want you to meet a friend of mine." I walk in front of him because his back was facing me. He got this, like, Superman apron on or something. I was like, "What a character!" I said, "Happy Birthday." He was so gracious and so kind. I am a huge, huge Seinfeld fan, but Anne Meara had just passed away two weeks earlier, so I didn't really know, like, "Should I say anything about that? Should I keep it not focused on that?" I wasn't really sure how to approach things and I just didn't want to be that person who was like, "Oh, my God, I love you!" and, kind of, go bananas. So he came out of the gate with so many questions for me, asking me about the work I do. I told him about my YumsTheWordShow and how I make ice cream cakes for it. Amy said, "Dad, Robin drove the Wienermobile." He didn't know what that was, so I had to explain to him what it was. He said, "So what is this? Like a vaudeville act where you pull out a stage in front of this macaque car?" I was like, "No, I didn't perform" I told him about that how I tapped in to get the job, so he thought that I was performing and traveling around from city to city. He was absolutely lovely. He was so genuinely interested in me. He asked me so many questions. Of course, I asked him plenty of questions too. We talked about Syracuse because he's had such fondness for Syracuse too. I never said anything about Seinfeld the whole time.

She said, "Dad, we should go see Robins' show." I said, "Yeah, of course. I would love to have you anytime as my guests." He said, "I would love to come. I can tell you're really funny." which was like - oh my God - the best compliment in the world coming from him. I wish I was like, "Can you say that again? Let me just record you." Then, again, I was trying to play cool because I didn't know Amy or I didn't know Amy that well at that time, so I want to be really respectful. So I said to them, "My aunt went to Syracuse. She graduated in, like, '59. She'd really love the picture. I was 1,000% asking for myself.

### **Scott**

Of course.

### **Robin**

She said, "Oh, yes. Of course!" So we took a couple of pictures - one with him being a little bit of a ham and the other one with him smiling and I was standing behind him. He's got this Superman little apron and he was a love. I don't even remember if I hugged him. I mean, I was

giddy. One of the cool things in their house or their apartment was that they had these-- do you know who Al Hirschfeld was?

**Scott**

No.

**Robin**

So he's this famous illustrator. If you Google it, he used to do all these black and white illustrations of Broadway stars and all kinds of celebrities. If you get one of those, it was like a "You have made it" sort of thing. They had 2 of those in their apartment of, like, Stiller and Meara. I was just so moved by how lovely and sweet he was.

**Scott**

That just had to be almost surreal. Obviously, Amy had no idea how that would have such an effect on you for her to just say, "Hey, come on and meet dad!"

**Robin**

Yeah. It's interesting because I wrote a blog post about it shortly after he passed away. I originally just wrote it as a Facebook post and I didn't want to do anything that felt, like, exploitative given the one time I met him. I spent a few hours writing it because I really wanted to be very careful with how I was, like, paying my own respect to him. We were probably together for an hour and a half. So, I wrote my post and I hit "publish" or "post" or whatever it is. Because I tagged her, I was like, "How would she react? I don't know how she's feeling now that he just passed away." This was in the middle of COVID. I didn't know how she's gonna respond to this. She wound up saying something in the comment and then she emailed me. Then, she called me and she left me the loveliest message. She said, "thank you so, so much for writing that beautiful tribute. It just reinforced why I was so happy that I got to show my friends who the real Jerry was. You just completely captured that in your Facebook post and it just meant so much to me." I said, "Well, I can share it as a blog post if you want, and she said, "Yes, please." So, I'm always trying to be really respectful, certainly, when somebody's family member passes away and when it's that big. She's probably so overwhelmed.

**Scott**

Yeah, for media requests and all that stuff. Well, we'll have that picture on the website in the show notes for this episode along with all your social links and everything. What are you doing now? How can people find you online? What are you up to these days?

**Robin**

I have been doing a lot of things during the pandemic. I wanted to serve as much as I couldn't continue to make people laugh and take their minds off of what I call the C word. So I've been teaching storytelling, I call it "Storytelling Fun-0-1" and it's for anybody who wants to learn how to tell a story. You don't have to ever share it at The Moth. Storytelling is such an unbelievably valuable skill to have in life for moments like this - talking to somebody like you. You can use it for job interviews. You can use it on a date. There are a lot of business reasons for it, too. So I've been teaching storytelling. There's information about my virtual classes on my site.

The thing that I've been most proud of during the pandemic that I created is a show for kids, and it's called "Recess with Auntie Robin". I started that on March 13 and it's a very, very interactive and very fun show for kids. I created it because I really wanted to help out parents who were just thrust into this - like everybody else - very intense time. I really wanted to give them a break

and I really wanted to give kids an opportunity to just play and be so laid in. So, I make it really interactive. We're on hiatus now to bring it back in the fall because I know every school all over the place is doing different things and kids are still gonna be home. They dictate a lot of what happens on this show. I let them have a lot of creative say in the content. It's always really, really fun and I'm really proud of it. So you can find out information about that on my site as well.

Or if you have a company— because there's a company I'm talking to and they want to offer it to their employees as an option too so that, for an hour, they're gonna be so entertained and engaged. I can go take their meeting or whatever it is - whatever they want to do during that time - help give parents a break because there was a big gap when schools were closed, kids weren't able to see their friends, and they didn't have an opportunity to be social which is a huge part of their development. So, I had kids tuning in from all over Arizona, Massachusetts, and Charlotte Bay area, so it's really fun.

**Scott**

Well, this has been a blast.

**Robin**

It's been fun for me. I'm sitting here in the dark. I feel like I'm doing like Blair Witch Project., I don't know why I didn't think to put the light on.

**Scott**

It has gotten dark since we've started this. This is great. I contacted someone a while back, who had also driven a Wienermobile, but he never got back to me. So, I'm kind of glad he didn't.

**Robin**

Selfishly, I'm glad he didn't either. Honestly - I'm obviously very biased - I think it's more fun to talk to somebody who did it a long time ago when we didn't have the conveniences that we do now. I didn't have a laptop when I was on the road. I had to find Kinko's, write my press releases, rent their computers, and fax my press releases. It was a lot more difficult to do with them. There are even pros and cons to both. We didn't have Instagrams where birthday pictures would get shared anywhere.

**Scott**

The Dark Ages...

**Robin**

Yeah. But I'm like one of the originals in a way because the program started in '88. I didn't do it in '88, I did it in '93 or '94, so we're a pretty proud bunch.

**Scott**

Yeah, way back in the beginning. That's cool. Well, thanks for sharing!

**Robin**

Thanks for having me. That's a winner whistle people. These are the ones I drove. I mean, these are the ones I handed out. They've different ones.

**Scott**

I gotta get a picture of that, too.

**Robin**

You mean the whistle?

**Scott**

Yeah. I mean that's what you gave out to everybody, right?

**Robin**

Yeah, I did. Because those used to be part of their hotdog packaging in those days. They had wiener whistles as, like, a prize.

**Scott**

Oh, okay.

**Robin**

They don't do that anymore, obviously. So the only place you can get a wiener whistle is either from the Wienermobile itself - that's actually the only place now. I think you can probably order them online or if you meet me.

**Scott**

I bet they're on eBay too.

**Robin**

I'm sure they are. I'm sure they're what I have. I've got a Wienermobile with my name on it.

**Scott**

Man, the puns are endless.

**Robin**

I didn't mean that but, yes, they are. It's like you don't want to get sandwiched in traffic, but you never sausage a thing, frankly. My favorite one when we say goodbye is "Franks a lot!"

**Scott**

Frank you!

**Robin**

That one sounds worse in some way.

**Scott**

I know. That sounds terrible.

**Scott**

If you haven't heard yet, Raw Audio 6 is now live! You can hear actual 911 emergency calls and the backstories behind those calls. In this new episode:

A woman walks into a bank, not realizing that the bank was being robbed.

**Woman**

He's coming out! He's coming out! He's shooting with the gun! Holy shit!

**Scott**

A man hides in his bedroom closet while burglars are in his home.

**911 Operator**

Do you see someone inside?

**Man 1**

Yeah. He's in there right now.

**911 Operator**

Okay, where are you?

**Man 1**

In the bedroom.

**Scott**

And a multiple 911 calls about an active shooter – in a hospital

**Man 2**

My son is in the hospital. I heard there's an active shooter situation. Is that true?

**Scott**

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I hope you're doing okay and staying safe. I'll see you in two weeks.