

James Robert "Radio" Kennedy

How could a man who never officially attended a high school become the spirit of that school for over 35 years, no less of an entire community? That is the story of James Robert "Radio" Kennedy, of Anderson, South Carolina. Cuba Gooding, Jr. plays the 57 year old Radio in the current movie of the same name. What is his story? How did he become so famous? What role have others played in his notoriety?

At age 5 James suffered irreversible brain damage in an auto collision. When the coaches at T.L. Hanna High School, in Anderson, first found him he was hanging around the practice field with a transistor radio (his constant companion) in his pocket. They would ask his name and other information, but the only noise they heard at the time was coming from the radio. "He always had that transistor," said Hanna head football coach Harold Jones, who then coached the junior varsity. "That's why we gave him the nickname - Radio." Radio burst into Jones's world when he wandered onto the athletic field during practice in 1963 and began mimicking the coach. Jones took up time with him and he soon got Radio to talk through a rewards system.

Harold wanted to keep Radio coming around, so he adopted him as team manager. Little did he realize that Radio was there to stay. Radio showed up for all practices and games. One time a coach tried to lie to him about the time the team would leave for lack of room. Radio showed up an hour earlier than the scheduled departure time. Another time the team bus was so crowded that he was forced to stay behind. Hanna lost the game that night. After that he was with the team for the next 13 games and they won all 13. Ever since, Radio has had a spot on the bus to all games.

The coaches adopted Radio and he became a T.L. Hanna fixture. He began attending track meets, basketball games and even greeting fans at the gate. He never would have dreamed how much Kennedy would have blossomed, and how much the students would accept him. Nor did he realize at the time what an effect he had on the players and students at the school.

At Hanna, he has been accepted as a regular student. He reports first thing each day to the school nurse. Radio spends the school day mopping and running errands for teachers. He gets grades just like the students do. (Usually all "A's" in mopping, but an occasional "C" for good measure). At one time they tried to make him a "Senior," which would have meant graduation and departure, but Radio claimed he was a "Junior" and remains one to this day.

The community has adopted Radio, as well. Numerous articles have been written about him in the local paper. There is even a section devoted to him online called, appropriately, "Radio, The Heart of Anderson." He has his own song, played on local stations, "Everyone knows Radio," the lyrics say. But Radio's pride and joy remains his "Wall of Fame," the numerous articles and awards displayed at Hanna High School. He understands that he has won a place in the hearts of the people at the school - and he is proud. On Saturday, November 1, 2003, fire ravaged Radio's home. He lived there with

other family members. Radio was up before the smoke detector went off in time to warn everyone. No one was injured and the fire was put out in ten minutes, but almost all of his memorabilia was destroyed. The community came together to put the family up in a motel temporarily. Jones said, "The community will help find another residence for them." "They got wiped out," he said. "It's kind of sad, but I believe the community will rally." After all, he is "the Heart of Anderson."

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Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.