

Van Meter uses new lease on life to chase his dream

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Kurt Van Meter counts himself lucky to be alive.

Van Meter, a Dallas police officer and country music artist, who performed Sunday in Dallas, responded to a call of shots fired in Hillsboro in 2009.

“I got shot at from about 8 feet out by this dude,” he said. “He had murdered someone, and we were in pursuit of him. To this day, I don’t know how he missed. I remember seeing the barrel of the gun and the muzzle flash. I dove in my patrol car thinking it was over. I thought I was dead. I remember not seeing Jesus and thinking, ‘this isn’t good, I must have really screwed up.’ Then, I could smell gun powder and I could hear dispatch over the radio.”

The near-death experience caused Van Meter to take a chance and follow his dream.

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Van Meter can remember the moment he knew he wanted to be a singer.

“My brother was giving me a ride to school—I think I was a freshman or sophomore—and he put in this CD and told me that I had to hear this song,” Van Meter said. “It was ‘Friends in Low



Kurt Van Meter, left, plays with his band on Sunday afternoon during Dallas’ Great American Eclipse celebration.

LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Places’ by Garth (Brooks). I was instantly hooked. I was like, I don’t know what this is, but whatever it is, I want to be a part of it.”

But life seemed to take him in every direction but music.

Van Meter played football and became a bull rider at Oregon State University before entering the police force. There, he would sing in the office—but his coworkers didn’t seem to

share in the joy.

“My first gig was marine patrol and they give you a partner,” Van Meter said. “He told me one day, ‘Kurt, have I ever told you how much I love your singing?’ I said no and he goes, ‘then shut up.’”

Van Meter figured maybe he wasn’t that good of a singer, after all.

The first person who told him he had a good voice—other than his mom—was an ex-girlfriend. But music seemed to be an out-of-reach dream.

The shooting changed all of that and, about a year later, at the age of 33, Van Meter decided to chase his dream.

“I realized God gave me a second chance, so I’m going to do music,” Van Meter said. “I’m going to learn how to play guitar, so I got on Youtube and started to learn.”

He also began attending local jam sessions in Hillsboro.

“The only way you learn how to ride a bull is to get on

a freaking bull and ride,” Van Meter said. “You can watch all the videos you want. ... I would see each one get up and play their song. Every one of them was horrible vocally. But they sung their hearts out and were having so much fun and the crowd was having fun. This truth dawned on me that nobody cares, in a good way. They want you to be successful, so take all that energy and put it into a positive feeling and just go out there and have fun.”

The next challenge was finding a way to get his music heard.

“I asked who puts the songs on the radio,” Van Meter said. “People told me it was the program director. I said, ‘OK, let me talk to the program director.’”

Van Meter was put in contact with Scott Mahalick.

“I sit down with him and I tell him, ‘if you believe in me, I can be the next Garth Brooks,’” Van Meter said. “Do you have any songs? Nope. Do you have a band? Nope. Are you playing any-

where? Nope. But if you believe me, I can do this. ... Years later, I’m playing at a show with Little Big Town and am told Scott is one of the seven most powerful guys in country music.”

So powerful, in fact, that Van Meter came close to talking to Brooks in 2013.

“I get this call from a number I don’t recognize,” Van Meter said. “I don’t answer because that’s the general practice from police work. An hour later, I listen to it and it’s Scott with Garth trying to get a hold of me, and I missed it. I’m still sick about it.”

But Van Meter’s career took off relatively quickly. He opened for country stars like Montgomery Gentry. In 2013, he committed to music full-time and played the Bi-Mart Country Music Festival in 2014, alongside artists Eric Church and Blake Shelton.

When he started, Van Meter said his songs had a couple hundred streams and downloads per month. By 2015, those numbers were up to more than 100,000.

As Van Meter has seen his popularity rise, he’s quick to point to his bandmates as reasons for his success.

“When you have a team as strong as this one, it’s in your best interest to get the hell out of the way,” he said. “My role is to not forget the lyrics and not suck.”

Van Meter hopes his kids—and others—can see his journey and decide to follow their passion and to not be afraid of failure.

“Two things are important,” he said. “One is don’t wait until you’re ready to do something. If you want to do it, just go for it. I didn’t know what I was doing. Sometimes, you just gotta go for it. The second thing is you’re never too old. I was 33 when I learned how to play the guitar.”

When he took the stage on Sunday, Van Meter offered a crowd-pleasing set of songs.

“They take all the emotions they felt when they first heard it and input it on us. That’s what they remember. That’s why we’ve been so successful,” Van Meter said.

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