Legendary TV Host Regis Philbin Dies at 88

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Regis Philbin, the legendary, energetic talk show host—best known for his decades on Live! and for emceeing Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—died Friday night of natural causes. He was 88.

“We are deeply saddened to share that our beloved Regis Philbin passed away last night of natural causes, one month shy of his 89th birthday,” his family told People.

The statement continued, “His family and friends are forever grateful for the time we got to spend with him—for his warmth, his legendary sense of humor, and his singular ability to make every day into something worth talking about. We thank his fans and admirers for their incredible support over his 60-year career and ask for privacy as we mourn his loss.”

Philbin was a warm, vibrant TV presence for decades. He co-hosted the syndicated morning talk show Live! alongside Kathie Lee Gifford, and later Kelly Ripa. But he also made his mark in primetime as host of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, which was a blockbuster for ABC when it debuted in 1999 and sparked a primetime game show revival that continues to this day.

The series—which featured Philbin’s trademark line, “Is that your final answer?”—drew as much as 30 million people, and at one point was airing five nights at a week on ABC. It went off the air in 2002, though it lived on for another decade in daytime syndication, and was revived earlier this year on ABC, with Jimmy Kimmel as host.

Philbin spent nearly 17,000 hours of TV, according to the Guinness Book of World Records.

The University of Norte Dame graduate served in the Navy, and then started his on-air TV career with a local San Diego talk show in 1961. Philbin was Joey Bishop's sidekick on The Joey Bishop Show beginning in 1967, through 1969.

He hosted other local talk shows before landing in New York in 1983 for The Morning Show, which became Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee in 1986, and was nationally syndicated in 1988.

Philbin and Gifford started each show by talking about how they had spent the previous evening, with Philbin animatedly sharing stories about wife Joy Philbin and his family.

Gifford left the show in 2000, and Ripa was hired as her permanent replacement a year later. Philbin continued with the show—now called Live! With Regis and Kelly—for another decade, before stepping down in 2011.

After that, he still continued to frequently appear on TV. He was a monthly co-host on Rachael Ray for several years, hosted a daily sports talk show on FS1 called Crowd Goes Wild, and served as an occasional contributor to the fourth hour of Today, which reunited him with former co-host Gifford.

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