

## ***Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and Me**

The TL;DR for the top three questions I get asked:

1. I appeared on the Tenth Anniversary episodes of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* in 2009 and won \$50,000.
2. Regis Philbin was exactly like you would expect after seeing him on TV, a true professional with a quick wit and genuinely nice guy.
3. I walked away from a difficult question about the TV show *The Simpsons*.

That covers the basics, but the whole story is so much more complex, fascinating, and dramatic. I wanted to get the complete story written down, so folks can understand how and why my few minutes on prime time television came to happen and what it all meant.

I will be piecing together several items I've written over the years, to give all the details and behind-the-scenes happenings of the show. It's a long story, but I think you'll like joining me on the adventure.

### **Growing up with game shows**

I grew up in the 1960s, so summer vacations and sick days off from school meant I could watch lots of classic TV game shows. The original Jeopardy! with Art Fleming, Concentration, The General Electric College Bowl, The Dating Game, The Newlywed Game, and so many more.

I enjoyed watching them, but never dreamed of being on one someday. That changed in 1980 while I was in college watching Tic Tac Dough. A contestant, Thom McKee, went on an epic winning streak. Watching the shows and playing along at home, I realized I could probably do well on something like that.

After college, somewhere between 1983 to 1985, Tic Tac Dough did contestant searches in various cities, and one was near where I lived, so I gave the audition a try even though I had no idea what to expect. It was held in a big auditorium, and we had to take a written test. That was no problem for me. The guy running the audition called out the passers, and I'd made it. Most folks didn't make the cut.

Then he announced that he was going to talk with the test passers. I thought that was great, no problem. The introverted nerd that I was could watch a few chats and figure out what to say. He shuffled up the tests, and called on the first person - me. Ouch! With no idea at all of what to say, or how to say it, I was horrible to put it mildly. Waiting and watching while other folks gave great answers, it was obvious who was going to make the cut, and it wasn't going to be me. I had to leave before they played a simulated game with the passers. The dream seemed to die.

### **Who Wants to be a Millionaire debuts**

The first US episode of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* aired on ABC on August 16, 1999. I was immediately hooked. Everything about the show seemed perfectly aimed to appeal to me. It had the possibility of winning a large prize, it was general trivia which was in my wheelhouse, and one of the most important qualities - you didn't need to audition. All you had to do was call a number, answer some questions, and you could find yourself in the hot seat in just a few days!

It's hard to describe how I felt. It wasn't simply that I thought it might be nice to appear on the show. It was more like, I **have** to be on the show. It didn't make logical sense, but for the next decade, that feeling never left me. I would do whatever I needed to make that happen. (The feeling was exactly like what I felt when I first met the young lady I would eventually marry. That story is here - [LINK](#).)

The phone game changed over the years, but it was similar to the fastest finger questions, putting things in order. If you answered all the questions (I think they started at three questions) correctly, you would be eligible for a callback the next day to play another round. If you got all those right, then you could be randomly selected for a trip to New York City to tape a show.

The questions were difficult, but not impossible. The hardest part was trying to remember all the items and sort them into the correct order. I came up with a system that worked for me. I made little pieces of paper, labeled them 1 to 4 for each question. I listened on the speakerphone, then quickly jotted down a word on each slip and sorted it into rough order before the next answer was given. All I then had to do was enter the four digits correctly, which did not always go well. (The dreaded "Fat Finger".)

ABC had started a message board on their internet site for fans of the show. I'd read about it, and checked it out. The folks there were sharing tips and some were making it onto the show. I learned so much, and am grateful for all their assistance and support through the years.

I had a good rate of passing the first round, and waited over 60 times, but never got a callback. Other folks on the message board were getting callbacks, but never me. That was discouraging, but I kept going.

Eventually, the prime time show went away, and the syndicated version began. That brought about a new way to get on the show. (I believe it was to help with some of the perceived problems with the results of a random selection process. Most people who did the phone game at that time were male, middle-aged (to know the trivia), and well, white. They needed to display a more balanced selection of contestants.)

The solution was to do.... auditions!