



‘SINGING MAILMAN’ COLLECTS 25 GRAND

When the quiz show sensation “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” hit America’s airwaves in the late 1990s, letter carrier Andy Walcutt knew it was exactly his kind of show.

“I know a lot of stuff that’s not worth anything,” the member of Zanesville, Ohio Branch 63 says, chuckling.

He also knows a tune or two. In fact, Walcutt’s customers call him “The Singing Mailman” because of his penchant for bursting into song while he delivers the mail.

“I’ll sing ‘God Bless America’ if I’m in a good mood or ‘April Showers’ when it’s raining,” he said.

As for “Millionaire,” Walcutt knew that “to win, it takes more luck than anything else.” And last October, after 10 years of auditions and effort, fortune smiled and he was chosen to be a contestant.

“I started trying out when it was a still a prime-time show on ABC with Regis Philbin as the host,” he recalled. Back then, he traveled to New York City and managed to land an in-studio audition.

“I had to answer 30 questions in 10 minutes, and I figure I got through at least 27,” he said. He wound up making it into the pool of potential contestants, but didn’t get on the air.

As “Millionaire” grew in popularity, its producers held auditions all over the country. “I went to New York, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Indianapolis,” the tenacious Walcutt said. “Sometimes I passed their tests, sometimes I didn’t.” But the chance to sit in the “hot seat” eluded him.

“Millionaire” eventually dropped from its network spot and went into syndication—television personality Meredith Vieira replaced Philbin as the host and episodes now air five days a week.

GOTTA GET A GIMMICK

“That’s when the show began to solicit video auditions online,” said Walcutt, and he decided to play up his Singing Mailman persona in his tryout clip. Wearing his uniform and a floppy hat, he sang a special ditty:

*I’m Andy, The Singing Mailman,
singing along my route.
Sometimes it’s “Happy Birthday,”
sometimes I just shout out!
I’m Andy, The Singing Mailman,
been singing for quite a while—
Hope to sing for Meredith,
hope to make her smile!*

He uploaded the video to the show’s website, completed an online test, and sat back. Just three weeks later, he got the call to come to New York to be on “Millionaire.”

The excited carrier quickly spread the news to everyone on his route. “They all helped me prepare by quizzing me whenever I delivered mail to their house,” he said.

Last October, on his own dime, Walcutt flew to the Big Apple on a Wednesday and stayed with a friend there.

The next day, it was down to the studio and quickly down to business. “They tape a week’s worth of shows, five shows, all on one day,” he said. Before recording began, he got the chance to meet Vieira, the show’s host. “Meredith is just as nice off-camera as she is on,” he said.

Walcutt waited in the audience through three episodes before he was called to the hot seat midway through the fourth.

Show contestants have three forms of help, called “lifelines,” and Walcutt made it to the end of that episode’s taping without using any.



Andy Walcutt is all smiles with host Meredith Vieira on the set of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?"

Along the way, he answered enough questions correctly to earn \$10,000 before time ran out on that program. After a short break, recording for the "next day's" show began.

"They started it off by airing some of the audition video of me singing," said Walcutt, who then treated the audience to an additional, live verse:

*I'll be grinning from ear to ear,
whenever I hear the audience cheer,
Cheering when Meredith finally hollers,
'Andy, you've won a million dollars.'*

NOT A MILLION, BUT...

Walcutt managed to get to the \$25,000 level before he needed to turn to his lifelines. The question: "The world-famous Blarney Stone is located in a castle five miles outside of what Irish city?" His answer choices were Cork, Dublin, Galway or Limerick.

Uncertain of the answer, Walcutt used "Ask the Audience." The gallery guessed Dublin by a large majority. Not convinced, the carrier went to "Ask the Expert." His "expert" was CNN anchor Kiran Chetry, who sheepishly confessed that geography was one of her weaknesses. She picked Cork.

The carrier decided to use up his third and final lifeline, the "Double Dip." He went with the audience's choice of Dublin, which was wrong. Double Dip, however, allowed him to take that answer back and use Chetry's instead—Cork, which was correct.

At this point, Walcutt was guaranteed to take home the \$25,000 he had already earned.

The next question, at the \$50,000 level, was, "What is the English translation of Soyuz, the name of the Soviet-manned spacecraft first used during the Cold War?" The

choices were union, companion, traveler or dawn. Stumped—and now out of lifelines—Walcutt incorrectly guessed "traveler." (Somewhat ironically for the 29-year NALC member, "soyuz" means "union.") The Singing Mailman was out of the game.

Looking back, the 61-year-old carrier says, "I was just happy to get on the show"—and pocketing \$25,000 didn't hurt either, although his check didn't arrive until after the show aired, weeks later.

Plus, he had to sign a confidentiality agreement about his experience and that made things tough when he got back to his Zanesville mail route.

"Most people thought they had it figured out," Walcutt said. "They told me, 'You must not have won if you came back to work!'" He didn't even know when the shows would be on until producers called to give him the air dates—January 14 and 15. Without revealing the outcome, the excited carrier passed the news along to his co-workers, customers and his family, including his wife of 37 years, Susan, and their son, Wade.

Shortly after the second episode aired, a \$25,000 check showed up as promised.

"I had said that if I won big on 'Millionaire,' I could cut back on my work hours or maybe even retire," he said. After taxes, however, Walcutt won't net enough to let him hang up his satchel just yet.

"Fortunately, I won't have to pay taxes on it until 2011," he said, keeping his eye on the bright side. "I've socked away enough to cover that." He also plans to use some of his winnings to help Wade pay off his student loans.

And he'll keep delivering the mail—no doubt still singing a happy tune every step of the way. ☒