

Game Days Past

For some reason, the old game show [“Sale of the Century”](#) from the 1980’s crossed my mind the other day. I enjoyed this show tremendously as a kid, so I looked on youtube to see if I could find any episodes because I don’t really remember what it was all about. They didn’t have any full episodes, but I did see enough bits and pieces to enjoy the nostalgia. And I came across this clip of Simon Cowell’s first tv appearance as a contestant on the British version of this show:

Watching vintage game shows on youtube got my husband thinking about the movie [Quiz Show](#), which is about the game show scandal of the late 1950's. It was a time when quiz shows were very popular, and one of the most popular shows of the time called "[Twenty-One](#)" was exposed for being rigged – in other words, the producers would tell the contestants the correct answers, and when to answer correctly or incorrectly to guarantee or fix the outcome of the show. On youtube, we were able to find the actual episode of "Twenty-One" that was chronicled in the movie and where the scandal broke. [Click here](#) to see it – it's in 3 parts, so you can find parts 2 and 3 off to the side where it says 'related videos'. We also watched a "Time and Again" documentary about the scandal, which included interviews with the contestants involved and was very interesting – [click here](#) to see part 1 of 5 of that show; again, the remaining parts can be linked from the right side of youtube. Surprisingly, the movie "Quiz Show" is very true to the real story of the scandal. When watching the episode of "Twenty-One" that started it all, my husband noted that it was very close to how the movie portrayed it. It's been awhile since I've seen the movie, so I will have to see it again because I didn't remember whether it was close or not.

After watching the interesting "Twenty-One" videos, we moved onto the game show "[Press Your Luck](#)" from the 1980's. It's the one where people get spins on a big game board, and they yell, "No Whammys, no whammys, STOP!" A whammy was like a 'lose-your-turn'. When a contestant spun one, a cartoon character (the whammy) would come out and do something different on the tv screen, like a dance or something silly, but it meant no money and the end of the contestant's turn. If you were like me and a kid watching the show when it was on, then you were waiting for people to get the whammys so you could see the little cartoons. For this reason, I would NOT have liked the episodes that aired with a contestant named Michael Larson, an unemployed ice cream truck driver who

memorized the pattern of the board, and spun a whopping 47 times! He won the following prizes:

1. \$104,950 in cash
2. 1 sailboat worth \$1015
3. 1 trip to Kauai worth \$1636
4. 1 trip to the Bahamas worth \$2636

This amount of cash was unheard of for this show, and the host kept making dumb jokes about how the contestant could now *buy* the Bahamas or CBS. After the show, they gave Michael Larson a hard time about collecting his winnings, but in the end, it was found that his memorizing the board's patterns was not cheating. They reconfigured the game show board, of course, but sadly, Michael Larson's story did not have a happy ending. He had some struggles over the years, and ended up dying of throat cancer in 1999. His life during and after the "Press Your Luck" appearances makes for a very interesting story though; perhaps they should make a movie about that – [read it here](#). They pulled those episodes of "Press Your Luck" in syndication, but they have shown them in multiple specials that aired on tv, most notably the game show network. They even invited Larson's brother to compete against the newly configured Press Your Luck whammy board to see if he could beat it, and he could not. Below are Larson's appearances on "Press Your Luck". Note the reactions of his fellow contestants as well as those of the host. A few interesting notes: While waiting to be on the show, Larson met Ed Long, a Baptist preacher booked for his fourth taping. They struck up a conversation. When it was Ed's turn to go on, Michael said to him, "I hope we don't have to face each other on the show." His wish wouldn't come true, as Ed had won his previous game with \$11,516. Watch for Ed on the clip. Also note the host of the show, Peter Tomarken, who was killed in a plane crash in 2006. He was a private pilot who volunteered for an organization that flew low-income patients for medical needs. His airplane had engine trouble, and he and his wife were killed when their plane crashed into the Santa Monica Bay.

