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The Church of Bob

Coming on down from a giddy experience

"Dude, I hope I get picked as a contestant. I'm gonna bid \$420 on everything. Heh-heh."
"No respect," I grumbled to myself while listening to the stoner standing in line beside me for a taping of *The Price Is Right*. Well, we weren't exactly standing. More like huddling—on a chilly Hollywood sidewalk camped outside CBS Television City.

The endurance test was all for the love of Bob—Barker, that is, the iconic game show host who's calling it quits at the end of the season after 50 years in television, 35 of which were spent on *TPIR*. In other words, my entire life. Talk about a fixture. And unlike Johnny Carson—Bob's late-night equivalent—I didn't have to wait until I was older to get hooked on his show. Bob represents the happiest times in my childhood: vegging at home in the middle of a lazy summer, while being thoroughly entertained by a randy charmer with a disdain for overbids and a passion for homeless pets.



My rapturous moment at the altar.

I picked up the habit again last September. At the time I was bummed and busy and barely had the time for television. But something told me to make an exception for *TPIR*; after all, it's the only show on TV that's guaranteed to bring a smile to my face—and often tears to my eyes, when a lucky contestant wins a car against all odds.

A month later, Bob announced the dreaded news. Considering he's 83, it doesn't come as a surprise that he's retiring. But for a fanatic like me, this is going to be like coming down from a strong drug.

I love *TPIR*. Everything about the show is delightful: Barker's Beauties (one who sued for sexism, one who sued for sizism, one who claimed her missing husband was a CIA spy, one who was stupid enough to marry Ian Ziering)...the variety of games (my favorite being the easy "Clock Game," my least favorite being the overrated "Plinko")...the interactive aspect (the audience is encouraged to "ooh," "ahh" and offer loud advice)...the random prizes (a golf cart—for a crowd full of college students?!).

But most of all, there's Bob. When he goes off the air, game shows will never be the same. As it stands, all that's left on daytime television is a weak *Family Feud* hosted by John O'Hurley, aka J. Peterman from *Seinfeld*, who is one of several candidates under consideration to (shudder) replace Bob. The others include *Saved by the Bell*'s Mario Lopez, *The Young and the Restless*' Doug Davidson and George Fucking Hamilton. (I know!)



Jim's Closet
BY JIM RADOSTA

Rosie O'Donnell has also expressed interest in the position. Wouldn't that be something.

Anyway, now that I've made a case for my obsession, you might be able to understand how I ended up shivering on the corner of Beverly and Fairfax with a few modest goals in mind:

- To hear the words "Jimmy Radosta, come on down! You're the next contestant on *The Price Is Right*!"

- To kick ass, after years of obsessive price memorization. (For example, the sunflower seeds are always \$1.09, and the yellow Mustangs are always around \$20,000.)

- To be Bob's most beloved contestant ever, after charming him with stories about how I used to impersonate him with my Mr. Microphone...how I used to write letters to the producers, begging them to bend the rule banning minors from attending tapings...how I used to draw pictures of myself walking "The Golden

Road" (actually, that's my favorite game)...how I hammed it up in a sketch at YMCA summer camp as a nauseated game show host named "Bob Barfer."

Whoa, did I just put that into print for public consumption? Am I crazy or something?

Crazy about Bob. Damn straight.

And I was surrounded by hundreds of other devotees who felt the same way. In line, wearing a customized T-shirt emblazoned with the proclamation "35: Born to Come on Down," I befriended a fun group of women who met at college in Fargo, N.D., one of whom ended up winning \$100 playing "Punch-a-Bunch."

As for me, even though my name wasn't called, I enjoyed myself immensely. It's probably the closest this atheist will ever come to feeling the "Holy Ghost Power!"

I learned later that *New York Times* reporter Edward Wyatt was at the same taping, according to his May 15 article, which beautifully stated the special appeal of Bob: "His great strength, and certainly the key to his longevity, is that, whatever happens to the contestants, he is able to have them leave happy, feeling unjudged and appreciated."

Amen. ☺

THE PRICE IS RIGHT airs 10 a.m. weekdays on CBS. Catch it while you can.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.