

Omaha man sizzles in 'Millionaire' hot seat

BY BRIAN CARLSON

OMAHA - Decisively answering questions about Volkswagens, the Bible and global warming, Omaha Eric Buske walked away with a cool quarter-million on Sunday night.

Buske, a narcotics officer for the Omaha Police Department and father of UNL sophomore biochemistry major Kim Buske, won \$250,000 on the episode of ABC's "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" that aired Sunday night.

Eric Buske invited dozens of family members and friends to his house on Sunday night to watch. Before the show aired, he and his wife shared the results only with his five children, and none of the Buskes were giving anything away.

But in a clue that he probably hauled some cash back to Omaha, he bought a new big-screen TV for the party.

One person who crashed the party was Omaha Mayor Hal Daub.

"I'm in awe, let me tell you," Daub gushed. "This is better than the College World Series for Omaha."

After Eric Buske qualified for the show through a call-in process, he and his wife, Deb, received an all-expense-paid trip to New York City, where the show was taped on Oct. 5.

"When we went out there, we went with the attitude that the trip to New York was great and anything else was gravy," Eric Buske said.

Eric Buske won \$250,000 by answering the question of which U.S. president was the first target

of an assassination attempt: Andrew Jackson or Abraham Lincoln. It was Jackson.

He then faced a question for \$500,000: "Murdered in 1995, zoologist Dian Fossey was buried with more than a dozen of her gorillas in what country?"

"A. Tanzania. B. Burundi. C. Uganda. D. Rwanda."

Eric Buske said he was "90 percent sure" the answer was Rwanda, but he had already used his lifelines.

He decided to walk away from the hot seat, pocketing the \$250,000. Had he answered incorrectly, his winnings would have fallen back to \$32,000.

Rwanda was the right answer, it turned out.

"When you're watching the show on TV, it's easy to say, 'Go for it,'" he said. "The question on my mind was, 'Am I \$218,000 sure?' That's an easy decision to make when there's real money on the line."

Eric Buske, who answered most of the questions quickly and confidently, said none of them totally stumped him. But he used all his lifelines to reassure himself.

After he stepped into the hot seat, he cruised through several easy questions.

Later, he used an audience sampling to confirm that Las Vegas has more hotel rooms than any other U.S. city. Then he eliminated half the answers on the question about the first presidential assassination attempt.

Asked which author wrote a series about the "87th Precinct," Eric Buske called Sgt. Kirby Warren, who provided him with the correct answer: Ed McBain.

"Good luck, baby," Warren said after he gave Eric Buske the answer.

The crowd at the Buske's home erupted in laughter at that comment. Kim Buske also was one of her father's possible lifelines. On Oct. 5, when the show was taped, she sat in her room in Neihardt Residence Center awaiting a call from her father. She said she wasn't upset he didn't call her.

"No, I was so nervous, I don't think I could have answered any question," she said.

Eric Buske emerged from a field of 10 studio contestants to win a spot on the "hot seat" with host Regis Philbin. He did so by being the fastest to put a list of singers in the order of their birth.

"I love to get you guys in that chair," Philbin said. "I like guys from Nebraska."

Philbin, a Notre Dame graduate and Fighting Irish football fan, also discussed Nebraska's dramatic 27-24 overtime victory over Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., on Sept. 9. Eric Buske was there.

"Everyone in Nebraska went, didn't they?" Philbin said. "Boy, they took over that stadium."

"They scared you to death, didn't they?" Philbin said of the Fighting Irish.

"I don't know about that," Eric Buske said.

The camera showed Deb Buske, who was in the studio for the taping. Eric Buske also talked about his 13-year-old son, Eric, who was diagnosed with leukemia but has been off chemotherapy for about two years. On Sunday night, the Buske household shook with cheers and laughter as Eric Buske rolled through 13 correct answers.



"Isn't this cool?" Kim Buske said.

"It's very difficult to perceive that it's real, even now," her mother, Deb, said.

Eric Buske said he isn't exactly sure how he'll use the money. He plans to buy a motorcycle, and he wants to take a vacation. With five children, he probably will use some of it for tuition, he said.

"All in all, it was a very positive experience," he said. "Even if I hadn't gotten in the hot seat, I had no complaints."

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