

Episode 6 – Who Is Johnny Gilbert?

9/5/22

[00:00:00] **Johnny Gilbert:** From the Alex Trebek stage at Sony Picture Studios, this is Inside Jeopardy!

[00:00:09] **Sarah Foss:** Hello, and welcome back to Inside Jeopardy!, your exclusive and official podcast destination for all things happening in the world of Jeopardy! I'm Sarah Foss and I am joined once again by Buzzy Cohen.

[00:00:20] **Buzzy Cohen:** Sarah, thanks for having me and Jeopardy! fans thanks for having me. Well, you know, I have a little bit of a surprise for you, Sarah, because as you know, I am among the most online of the Jeopardy! community. And last week, our friend Lily, One Eclectic Mom on Twitter pointed out that the Tournament of Champions day one is going to be on Halloween. And she threw out a challenge for, I love this challenge. She threw out a challenge for the fans to dress up as their favorite Jeopardy! champion. Now I want to take it one step further. And you're here. This is an Inside Jeopardy! exclusive. Sarah's looking at me with fear because she doesn't know what I'm about to do. I want everyone to dress up in their favorite Jeopardy! themed Halloween costume. While they're watching that first night of the TOC post a picture hashtag deathly double and a committee selected by me will choose who had the best Jeopardy! themed Halloween costume and get an exclusive, very special Jeopardy! prize. One of a kind, a photograph of Ken Jennings signed by Buzzy Cohen. Wow. Very, very rare. Priceless. Obviously you can dress up as a contestant. You know, some of your favorite contestants from this TOC, you could dress up as your favorite host or your favorite member of the clue crew, but get creative, maybe you're, uh, I think Michael might dress up as rock and roll Johnny Gilbert, right? Maybe a sexy daily double.

[00:01:53] **Sarah Foss:** Wow. The ideas are flowing. I don't know.

Buzzy Cohen: Okay. What do you got? What do you got? Sarah.

Sarah Foss: Okay. So far what I have is, so back in the early clue crew [days, we would actually dress up like famous characters. We would wear costumes. Oh my

God. One of my favorites was I was full Maria Antoinette. So I'm thinking little throwback.

[00:02:10] **Buzzy Cohen:** Sarah Foss as Maria Antoinette.

Sarah Foss: So I would dress up as Sarah Foss as Marie Antoinette. Exactly.

Buzzy Cohen: That that's like when you, when you dress up as a dog wearing a bumblebee costume, it's like two layers. I love that. Yeah. I love that. I love a twist. Plus if you have a Marie Antoinette costume, you can just do hashtag deathly double. And you're all of a sudden Sarah Foss as Marie Antoinette

[00:02:34] **Sarah Foss:** and then I can take it one step further and I can be Buzzy Cohen in the salmon suit from the tournament of champions 2017. Yes.

[00:02:41] **Buzzy Cohen:** How about a dog in an Alex Trebark out there maybe. Oh yeah. What do I don't know? There's a lot of stuff out there. I'm gonna dress up as Mitch, the sound guy. It's a very Inside Jeopardy! move.

[00:02:53] **Sarah Foss:** but a very loved member of the Jeopardy! crew so I think that would be a popular choice.

[00:02:59] **Buzzy Cohen:** Hashtag deathly double. I want to hear it. And all your friends who aren't listening to Inside Jeopardy! are gonna miss out on the opportunity to win this amazing prize. A photograph of Ken Jennings signed by Buzzy Cohen.

[00:03:11] **Sarah Foss:** I love it. Today's wardrobe by Buzzy, skipping ahead to Halloween, today is what, California chic? We've got flip flops and sunglasses in the podcast studio

[00:03:19] **Buzzy Cohen:** I'm still wearing the suit and tie, but it is a heat advisory and we gotta take care of ourselves and the sunglasses. I'm just trying to bring a vibe today, you know, It's the, the LA you know, we're, we're into September. I do not want summer to end, and I'm just trying to, you know, endless summer over here in Inside Jeopardy!

[00:03:36] **Sarah Foss:** Well, I am feeling it. Looking ahead to today's episode, a few months back, I had the chance to speak with our iconic Jeopardy! announcer,

Johnny Gilbert. He reflected on his career highlights his early days as a singer. His time spent traveling and performing in the us army and some of the many shows he worked on before becoming our legendary voice of Jeopardy! So we're gonna share that interview a little later in today's episode, but before we do, as always, we've got your game recaps.

[00:04:25] **Buzzy Cohen:** What a great week of shows. This was, we had four Mattea Roach games. I'm a huge fan. And that Monday show shows exactly why they are such a strong player. In the lead going into final without hitting a daily double, that is not easy to do.

[00:04:42] **Sarah Foss:** And Katie hit a big daily double \$7,000. So she made it close, but Mattea pulled off the victory in that game. Ken even joked to Mattea. You know, first off you paid off student debt, eight wins later. Well, maybe you've paid off grad school.

[00:04:58] **Buzzy Cohen:** Yeah. And [00:05:00] speaking of incredible games, Tuesday. Just as close.

[00:05:10] **Sarah Foss:** Michael Davies exclaimed after this show “one of the best shows we've produced this season”

[00:05:16] **Buzzy Cohen:** Great. Michael Peterson Davies impersonation. I try, uh, love a BA in Botany.

[00:05:22] **Sarah Foss:** How about that chicken or the egg category Mattea rang in and said, what is the egg McMuffin. And then we got the correct response, which was the chicken nugget. And then Ken made the great joke. In this case, the chicken did come before the egg.

[00:05:37] **Buzzy Cohen:** Was it a great joke? It was a joke. I don't know if it was a great joke.

[00:05:40] **Sarah Foss:** I love a Ken joke. I laughed out loud.

[00:05:43] **Buzzy Cohen:** I also, for what it's worth my guess in that moment, egg McMuffin. I was right there with Mattea. It's a generational thing. That final was incredibly close. Ben bet it all and matched Mattea's score. And Mattae had to come up with the correct response.

[00:06:02] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. They didn't play for a tie. Mattea bet \$1 to ensure that if they were correct, Mattea would be the champion.

[00:06:08] **Buzzy Cohen:** And onward and upward Mattea went. Wednesday game we get to see one of our second chancers, Renée Russell. This was another incredibly close and stressful game for Mattea.

[00:06:24] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah, back to back stressful games. I loved in this game that, you know, Mattea had won enough that Ken started making comparisons. Are they Schneider esq or Amodiovian.

[00:06:34] **Buzzy Cohen:** And coming out of that, Mattea ended the Jeopardy! round with a big lead, but Renée fought back.

And what happens in these kinds of games where you have a very strong opponent that's when you get the highest scores, because you have to put up big numbers and this ended up being Mattea's single game, highest winnings with \$42,001

[00:06:58] **Sarah Foss:** Yes, what a game. Moving on to Thursday. Another great game for Mattea now at, you know, a mere \$460,000 and change. 19 day winnings. They're coming in strong for game 20.

[00:07:12] **Buzzy Cohen:** This was a great game to cap off our Mattea rerun because you see what a dominant player Mattea can be and how good Mattea is at final Jeopardy! And that is so important.

[00:07:28] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah, Mattea the only one to get final, correct. At this point, tying Julia Collins as a 20 game winner. And fifth overall in our consecutive games won. This is where Mattea went into the top five of the leaderboard of legends.

[00:07:41] **Buzzy Cohen:** sic semper tyrannis. And on Friday we finally get to meet our good friend, Ryan Long.

[00:07:49] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. Coming in, he's now a five day champion in this game. This is, was his game six, but at the end of game five, probably one of my favorite moments of the season where he pulled out the necklace that his eight year old son had made for him. And he said, you know, I didn't wanna bring it out any

sooner, because I didn't want my son to think that the necklace didn't bring me good luck, but boy it sure did.

[00:08:07] **Buzzy Cohen:** Interesting to have watched these two players back to back because you see very different styles of players. Ryan, very low key, a lot, you know, just kind of in the game, uh, Mattea, much more expressive, you know, different strokes for different folks, but it's gonna be fun to see how, how everyone interacts in this TOC. And I have to say I loved this final Jeopardy! because Lake Baikal is on my bucket list of places I would love to see in my life. And I'm sure you've been there because clue crew's been everywhere.

[00:08:40] **Sarah Foss:** You know what? It's one spot we didn't make it to.

[00:08:42] **Buzzy Cohen:** Are we doing an Inside Jeopardy! field trip? I would love that. You, me and Michael, if Michael and I end our feud. Uh, we will, all the three of us go to Lake Baikal

Sarah Foss: What is the feud? Buzzy?

Buzzy Cohen: Well, I just noticed that after I corrected him on the color of my suit, he has refused to appear on the podcast at the same time as me. So, okay. I'm gonna, you know, maybe I'm reading into it.

[00:09:04] **Sarah Foss:** Well, we've got big plans for the launch of the new season and getting the whole podcast family together. So don't you worry.

[00:09:10] **Buzzy Cohen:** We'll be in Siberia. The person who will not be in Siberia though, is the iconic Johnny Gilbert. I loved this interview. Let's hear what he has to say. I'm such a huge fan.

MUSIC

[00:09:23] **Sarah Foss:** Johnny. You have had such an impressive career in entertainment, but I want you to take us back to where it all began. Newport news, Virginia.

[00:09:32] **Johnny Gilbert:** Oh boy, that is really taking you back but that is where it all began, uh, boy, a long time ago, but you know, it's a funny thing. I'm

an only child, uh, and nobody in my family, uh, had anything to do with show business at all.

Uh, but I had a feeling for it right at the very beginning I wanted to, I wanted to sing. That's what I wanted to be a singer

[00:09:54] **Sarah Foss:** from the way I understand it. You were first singing in your hometown Lutheran church choir. Is that. [00:10:00]

[00:10:00] **Johnny Gilbert:** Of course I did because my grandmother, uh, went to that church. And so I went there.

So I got in the choir, I guess that's where I really got the feeling that I liked singing. Yeah, really. Uh, and then that's when I decided to get, to try to get better at it and, and do more of it. And so I started taking singing lessons, you know, uh, there was only one singing teacher in Newport news at that time.

Uh, and so I started taking lessons with him. He was also an opera teacher, so, and I knew nothing about opera, but it was a godsend because he taught me how to use the voice and the throat and ways that a normal pop singer would never even think about. And I would sing wherever I could. I sang it to USO for the troops.

Uh, as a matter of fact, God, I must have been about 13 years. Uh, that's, you know how it just all came together in Newport news, little by little.

[00:10:51] **Sarah Foss:** And what was that feeling like for you when you would get on a stage or get at the top of the church and perform, what was it that you loved about it?

[00:10:59] **Johnny Gilbert:** [00:11:00] Well, it was, it is wonderful because I loved audiences.

I always loved, uh, I was not afraid. To sing or to speak or to be in a large group of people, uh, that seemed to come natural to me for some reason or rather, and I was really drawn to it. Uh, and I really didn't think much about the talking part of it at the time. Cause singing was really on my mind, but it really was all a part of it.

Uh, I would, uh, get up in front of audiences and talk and without any fear or nervousness at all.

[00:11:27] **Sarah Foss:** And how old were you when you started working with that opera singer?

[00:11:32] **Johnny Gilbert:** Oh, golly. Let's see. I was probably around 14 and I worked with him for, oh, I guess two years, he worked with me off and on. Uh, but that's really kept where we, the whole thing started, you know?

[00:11:47] **Sarah Foss:** And it's interesting that that type of training, like you said, was so different than someone would be trained as a pop star. And that, that level that you were trained in really helped in all your areas of your.

[00:11:57] **Johnny Gilbert:** It really did. He taught me how to use [00:12:00] the voice, how to vocalize, how to, uh, reach notes that normally you, I wouldn't really be thinking about being able to do because it's opera, he was an opera teacher, you know, so he wanted that to come out of all of his students and he really pulled it out of me. Cause opera, I knew nothing about opera

[00:12:20] **Sarah Foss:** so you're in high school and you decide, you want a career, you wanna be a singer. You wanna be in a band now.

[00:12:25] **Johnny Gilbert:** You know, I found this little group of, uh, band people and he said, okay, yeah, you, we need a singer. We can use a singer. So, you know, I said, wonderful, let me do that.

So money was not an object at that point cause they were poor. And so was I, um, but it gave me the experience that I needed to say, let's go on to the, in my mind, you know, let's, I'm gonna do more. But I sang with them and we just sang around, worked around the Newport news, a Hampton area on whatever gigs they would get.

And that got me, got me started for it. And [00:13:00] I, I liked that. That was kind of fun. So then I kind of decided I would go a little bit further and I, I read in a, a newspaper that a big band I wanted to sing with a big band. Big band was auditioning for singers, happened to be in Jacksonville, Florida, but I got on a bus and rode all the way to Jacksonville, Florida to audition for that band.

And when I got there, they were gone. The, uh, item in the newspaper was off on its dates. The band had already been there and had moved on some somewhere

else. So I was stuck in Jacksonville, Florida with no band to audition for, but I found out that there was an agent there, uh, fell up with the name of Sam four.

I still remember his name. And he, I went to him and I told him my story. And I told him that I wanted to sing and could he help me in anyway? So he said, yes, I think I can, I have a nightclub on the outskirts of town and I need, uh, an MC and singer, uh, for the [00:14:00] show. Well, I didn't even know what MC was. He had explained to me that it was a master of ceremonies.

And, uh, so he taught me, he literally trained me and we had a six piece band there. So I got to where I was singing with the band again. And I'd done that before, so that kind of fell into play and that's where it all started. And

[00:14:17] **Sarah Foss:** Before you know, it, you're traveling the country as a singing MC.

[00:14:22] **Johnny Gilbert:** That's right. At that time, there were supper clubs all across the country. Every city had one or two supper clubs, and they always used entertainers. So there was kind of a, a network of agents. They would work one area and they would be in contact with agents from another area. So you could go from one place to the next, if you did well, in one, you do the agent says, yeah, he did a good job here.

You might like him. So they would hire me. And I would go into the next city. No, I was just singing. Yeah. And MC came naturally to me and then I tried to expand on it and I started doing impressions. I could do some impressions fairly well. So I built [00:15:00] that into my act and the audiences loved it. I used to do Maria Lanza, the end of one of his songs where he hits the high note at the end.

And I built that into the act where, and I said, get up to the last note and then I'd say, and then he would hit that high B flat up there. and then I said, well, let me try it. And then I would go ahead and do it. You know, that kind of stuff.

[00:15:20] **Sarah Foss:** So your career is really kind of taking off as a singer and an MC. And then here it is the early fifties and you're drafted into the army right?

[00:15:30] **Johnny Gilbert:** I was drafted into the army. Uh, they came in as a matter of fact, I was working at a club in Nashville, Tennessee. When the boys came and said, you are going into the army. You know, you had to sign up for it

when you were 18, but once you did that, you know, you, you didn't think that much more about it.

And I, it wasn't a big deal. So I, uh, and I was working in a good club too, really liked where I was and they had big signs out in front, Johnny Gilbert here, you know, that kind of thing. So I was in my little heaven, you know, but so when they told me that I was being drafted, that was a shock. And it became a more of a shock as I got out of my, my nightclub world and our dinner club world and into the world of carrying a gun and digging around and trenches, and they take your name away and give you a number. And that becomes your name and everything. Us5309703. You never forget it.

[00:16:31] **Sarah Foss:** Did you head straight into basic training?

[00:16:35] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yeah, right into basic training in Baltimore or outside of Baltimore, Maryland. And I, while I was in training, uh, they were wanting to put some shows together and I told 'em that I was a singer, an MC.

So they put me in, they built a show with me and other entertainers that were also drafted. And we did USO shows while I was doing basic training. As a matter of fact, that's how I got there because my captain during [00:17:00] basic training loved the shows that we did. He thought I did a good job. He said, John, I don't think you, I think you should be in the entertainment area.

Uh, let me, uh, let me see if I can arrange that. So he did, he arranged an appointment for me and I went from there to Washington DC, to the Pentagon to talk to a major, told him my captain had sent me there to see him what I did and so forth. And he arranged for me to go to the, uh, entertainment school in Fort, uh, in Indianapolis, Indiana.

And, uh, I was there for eight weeks and then, then I would do like everybody else to be shipped out. But because I was in the entertainment unit, when I was shipped out, I was shipped out. The Korean war was going on then, but we also had people in Germany. So they shipped me to Germany, which was another lucky break.

And I was there, I guess, about four weeks when they called me up. And they said, we are doing this show and we're getting entertainers together to do it. And we're [00:18:00] having different people, uh, come from all the different branches of the service, uh, and auditioned for different parts. And the, and I didn't know the

writers at that time, there was two writers, one wrote lyrics, and the other wrote the book and, um, and the music rather.

And, um, I met them and talked with them and they said, they want me to try out for the lead. Which was a shock to me and I still didn't know how big it was. Well, it ended up, we had, uh, gush. We had about 20 some people in this cast altogether. It was the story of Marco polo, the story of Marco polo. We traveled.

And we performed mainly in theaters, you know, wherever the theaters were in the different towns and so forth. And then on basis, army bases, Navy bases, wherever they were located around in Germany. So of obviously the, the army and Navy bases were all extremely enthusiastic. They were all GIS and any kind of entertainment they were happy about.

And it was a good show. We had good music in it. The writers did a good [00:19:00] job of creating the show. Uh, and then we, we would perform for the German audiences. And while a lot of 'em were sure what the language meant or anything like that, they liked the music. So it was well received and that's why it lasted as long as it did.

[00:19:15] **Sarah Foss:** It must have been so rewarding though, to be a part of something positive.

[00:19:19] **Johnny Gilbert:** Well, that's what a lot of the, uh, you know, a lot of, uh, of the army brass and Navy brass came to the show, uh, different, uh, generals and people like that. And they would come backstage after the show and tell us how much, uh, we en they enjoyed it.

But more than that, what a good thing it was for us to have this show traveling around, uh, uh, Europe. So we knew that the people really liked it because it was not a, it was an up happy musical, you know, it was all music and it was a happy show with a happy ending, everything. It was all built that way.

And it was, it received that way. So, yes, I think it did probably lift a lot of spirit.

[00:19:58] **Sarah Foss:** Wow. So you go from Nashville, Tennessee singing and MCing, and months later, you're in Germany and you're starring in a traveling performance for the service.

[00:20:09] **Johnny Gilbert:** So all of a sudden this horrible thoughts of being on the front line with a gun, never entered my mind. As a matter of fact, they give you an interesting side point. You know, when you're, when you go into the service at that point, anyway, they issue you a gun. You have a rifle and that's your rifle. Wherever you go, you have that rifles with you. And when I got into the entertainment thing, I had turned in my rifle, you know, gave it to them. I didn't turn it. I gave it to them cause I didn't carried around with me. I never thought anymore about it until it was time for me to come back from Germany. And I was told then that I had produced the rifle and I had no idea. This was a year and a half later. I finally was able to track it down through my base camp.

And it was in a storage area in Munich, Germany. And I got the rifle back. I tell you, when I look [00:21:00] back on this good Lord was sitting on my shoulder, how somebody was to get me through all of that.

[00:21:07] **Sarah Foss:** So how did your time in the service then end up coming to a close?

[00:21:12] **Johnny Gilbert:** Well, I was up, you know, you have two years and when you're up for two years, you can re-up on your own or you can leave the service.

And at that point, uh, Zou had been running for quite some time and it was ending. And so I, there was no reason me to stay in the service cause I wanted to get back into civilian life. I wanted to get back into clubs and to performing singing, uh, on my own as I had done before, because I'd been a success at it in my own status at any rate.

So I was looking for that and, uh, looking forward to it, taught back into entertaining again, or to entertained all around, including new Orleans, uh, and, uh, WDU as a station in new Orleans. And, uh, got booked on that as a singer. And I loved that. I thought that was sensational. [00:22:00]

Sarah Foss: You liked television.

Johnny Gilbert: Oh my God. Did I like it? I, I saw what it could do, how far it could reach, uh, It was like a magic thing. The whole thing was like a miracle.

[00:22:10] **Sarah Foss:** So at this point, you're ready for the big city. You decide I'm gonna head to New York city. You find an agent, you get signed with William Morris agency and you receive your first job on national television. Tell me about that.

[00:22:24] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yep. They sent me up to, uh, be interviewed and audition, really interviewed for the job, uh, of a, a show that was going to replace a, a, one of the hit shows on NBC. And this was just a 13 week daytime replacement. That's what, uh, not daytime nighttime replacement. That's what it was going to be.

And the show was called music bingo. And they were looking for somebody that could both sing and host the show. And I won the interview. I was selected. The show [00:23:00] was only on for 13 weeks on NBC and then the other show. And I can't remember what it was that we'd replaced comes back on for the fall and through the season.

But in the meantime, uh, Bud Grant, who was a VP at ABC, saw the show on the air, knew that it was only going be on for a long time. And ABC was getting ready to set up a daytime network. They didn't have, they only had prime time, but they wanted set up a daytime setup shows during the day. And one of 'em was a show that one of 'em was, uh, a half hour game show that they wanted and they liked music bingo.

So they went to the producer of the program, uh, fellow the name of Harry Salter. And, uh, tell him, told him that, uh, they would be interested in it for day. So he sold it to them. Got it on the air. And we went on the air on ABC. As soon as we finished NBC, about two weeks later, we were on the air on ABC daytime.

[00:23:54] **Sarah Foss:** Who would've thought there would be a show that would combine singing and hosting. Music Bingo. There couldn't have been a better job for you.

[00:24:04] **Johnny Gilbert:** Absolutely. I, I can't tell you just .It was almost amazing. Just almost amazing. I love the show and people would, the contestant would come on stage and we'd play parts of a song. It was really a takeoff on name, that tune Harry just made a daytime version of it, call it Music Bingo is what he did. And the first one that hit their button, if they could name the tune, they would get B I N G O or pick out a letter to put on the board. The first one that got

bingo, one, just as simple as that and people at home liked it. So they did a home game at the end of the show. We did a home game for the folks just at home, and that got a tremendous.

so it was, you know, it couldn't have been better for me really. And the irony of it, all the irony of it all is that my wife's mother used to play the home game of bingo [00:25:00] is that weird?

[00:25:01] **Sarah Foss:** Long before she knew her daughter was gonna be married to Johnny Gilbert himself

[00:25:06] **Johnny Gilbert:** She was still in Tennessee and I was in New York doing this show had no idea, but ironic, I guess. I don't know.

[00:25:15] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. And because of Music Bingo, your music and your albums, you know, your music became popular. You actually were releasing and recording albums and singles, right?

[00:25:25] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yeah. Cut two albums cut two different albums based on Music Bingo. And they did quite well, I mean, not smash yet, but they did quite well from the viewer standpoint. So that kind of solidified me as a, a host singer, I guess, down the line.

[00:25:41] **Sarah Foss:** What brought Music Bingo to an end?

[00:25:42] **Johnny Gilbert:** It all was going so well. Oh, there were so many different things that were popular at that time. But back in those days, they had a, a big scandal, uh, \$64,000 question. The, uh, they found out that leaked the word leaked out, that it [00:26:00] producers to contestant on the game.

They would give him some of the answers to keep him on the game because they were liked by the audience. Cause these shows were live and they'd get feedback from the audiences. And so they'd keep the contestant on a little bit longer by giving him some of the answers. Well, that's obviously a no-no. So when that came out, the FCC went through the ceiling and they pulled every game show on the network, off the air named that tune.

Uh, my show Music, Bingo, uh, 21, there were two or three other shows that were connected one way or another that they weren't proven that anybody was doing

anything. But because of this scandal they'd wanna take 'em all off. So they canceled all the shows,

[00:26:45] **Sarah Foss:** but never fear Johnny's chapter is just beginning. He gets a movie role in 1961. You're in Gidget goes Hawaiian. Now you're doing movies. Johnny.

[00:26:55] **Johnny Gilbert:** Would you believe that? As a nightclub MC in [00:27:00] one of the scenes, and if you watch the movie, you'll see me in it. My manager in New York, I had another manager at that time and he, he has his, he had two other managers that worked with him. One worked in Chicago and the other one worked in LA. And so the manager in New York, uh, Sam said, uh, uh, to our manager in Hollywood. Do you think Johnny might work on one of the movies or something? Is that possible? So they brought me out to California to see if maybe I could get into the movies. They would have me audition for different things. Well, uh, movies were not for me. The only thing I got was that one particular little role, but that's okay. It introduced me to California and I fell in love with California, and I knew that I wanted to be here.

[00:27:51] **Sarah Foss:** Now, when was it that you hosted the Johnny Gilbert show in Ohio?

[00:27:57] **Johnny Gilbert:** Ah, okay. I did the Johnny Gilbert show [00:28:00] when I was in New York, doing various, uh, shows. And then my manager came to me and he said, Johnny, they're looking for a host of a daytime show. Like the Mike Douglas show, a variety show live every day, five days a week. The Johnny Gilbert show a one hour music show with a band, my singing guests, all kinds of guests that would come in through day Dayton for nightclubs and other things. People that have any renown at all for acting and so forth, we would pull 'em in, get 'em on the show. I was running my own show. I had my own staff and offices and so forth. It was a whole different bump game and it was hard work. It really was. That's not an easy thing to do. and it's and you gotta make all of the stations happy with what you're doing. And we did it and we are for renewal at the end of two years. Uh, and, but I was tired. I was really tired. Show was doing well, we were ready to renew the show. Uh, but I've been talking to my manager and I told him, I [00:29:00] said, this ain't going into syndication. And oh, by the way, the five stations that they had, they sold two of them sthe syndication thing went out the window. So now here I am with a successful show in Dayton Ohio. It ain't going anywhere but Ohio and I told my manager, I said, geez, I just don't wanna do

this anymore. I really don't. I mean, I'll have to, if, if I, I don't have another job, he says, well, there's a, there's a show called, um, Celebrity Fast Draw, a game show that's being put together by a company here in New York. And I think I may get you on as the host of the show, if you'd like to do that.

[00:29:37] **Sarah Foss:** So were game shows kind of coming back at that point? Kind of having a resurgence.

[00:29:41] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yes. And they, and this was all now, syndication was such a big thing and they wanted to do this for syndication. So it would work or it wouldn't work, but it was a pretty good company.

So they had a good chance at it. So rather than renew my show in Dayton, Ohio, I said, thank you folks. Been fun. It didn't get into syndication. [00:30:00] I'm gonna go back New York and see if I can get into syndication with the show. And that's what I did. I left, picked up, picked my family, going back to New York city.

And we did a pilot for the show and they got enough stations bought that. They put it into production. What would happen is they stood behind a board of plate glass on each side, celebrities would be with me in the middle and then I would give them a word. Or something and they would have to draw on the inside of the wall through this little glass, they'd have to draw while the other celebrity watched what they were drawing. And they would have to guess what the answer was by what they were drawing. That's why it was called fast draw. And they only had a certain amount of time to do it. When I finished fast draw, the, the, uh, my manager was looking for another job for me. Um, but, uh, you know, in the meantime, uh, uh, there wasn't that much to do and so forth.

And then I got a [00:31:00] chance to come to California because I'd met a guy in New York by the name of Bob Stivers. And, um, he had ceated a new special, a two hour television special. And I had done some run throughs for him of games that he was trying to sell and didn't sell, I did a lot of run throughs in my life.

uh, and he called me and he said, uh, Johnny, I'm gonna do this show. We're doing it in California. It's called People's Choice Awards. Um, and I'd like for you to come out and host it and, uh, announce it. And I did, I did. I came out and did that show. Had no idea what it be. It still goes on. It still goes even today, a game show called Press Your Luck is the one that really solidified my staying in California, because that was a show that was syndicated, uh, by Bing Crosby productions. And

it had a lot of money behind it. Um, so that brought me to California. We went into syndication with that for a year. [00:32:00] And, uh, then from there, I just kind of moved from one thing to another in California.

[00:32:04] **Sarah Foss:** It seems like this is the point in your career when your iconic voice really started steering you towards a full-time career in announcing

[00:32:14] **Johnny Gilbert:** As an announcer, yeah. Oh yeah. I, well, I, you know, while I was in New York also, I did the Price Is Right. You know, with Bill Cullen, uh, when I was in New York, before I came out here.

[00:32:25] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. There's no bigger announcing job than that at the time right?

[00:32:29] **Johnny Gilbert:** No, not, really. That was it. That was great. And so that kept my name in the business alive.

[00:32:35] **Sarah Foss:** What's that like, when you get the call from Mark Goodson to replace Don Pardo as the announcer of the Price Is Right?

[00:32:42] **Johnny Gilbert:** That was something. That was something. And Don Pardo taught me how to do the Prices Is Right. He had been doing it for years and uh, he said, hi, Johnny, how are you, cause it was live, you know, one day a week was live and the rest it was syndicated. So Don and I got to be good friends as a result of that. But when, and I did the things for Bob Stivers, uh, he was such a neat guy. He did all kinds of things. He wanted to do another game show. So we did a lot of run throughs on different game show ideas that he had. And then he created another special that I did several of called, uh, circus of the stars that was Bob Stivers, same guy that did People's Choice Awards. We went up to Las Vegas and did that show, uh, up right at the, uh, um, Caesars. And we'd bring all the, and these were big celebrities. If you remember the show, we had big names on there and they would do all kinds of strange things, you know, aerial acts and so forth like that. I think they never did before to get on this show because it was so highly rated and that was quite an experience.

[00:33:49] **Sarah Foss:** You also got to be the announcer and the audience host for Dinah. And I know you've talked about Dinah Shore being one of your favorite people.

[00:33:57] **Johnny Gilbert:** There should be more people like Dinah. There should be more people [00:34:00] like Dinah. She loved everybody. She really did. And she was able to show it both offstage and onstage and backstage. She cared about everybody and everything. And it was a, you know, I was with her for 10 years. Well, it was eight, eight or 10 years. The audience, they loved her as a person, not as an entertainer, you know, she would sing on the show, of course, but that, wasn't the big thing. The big thing I think was how she met and mingled with the biggest stars in the business.

And she could get the biggest stars in the business on that. Whoever was really hot at the time they got on the diner show. And I think that her ability to deal with them, like folks, next door type thing, you know, on the air. And here she's talking to the biggest names in the business at the time. I think that's what endeared her for so long to the audiences.

[00:34:50] **Sarah Foss:** And what was it like for you to be on that set with the biggest celebrities of the time and just, you know, in one of the places to be at that time,

[00:34:59] **Johnny Gilbert:** seventh heaven, [00:35:00] really seventh heaven. You walked out on stage and you see people, my God look over there such and such. This is such and such, right. The biggest names, you know?

And, uh, they're trying to remember how to do this or to that, or, you know, how they, how do they want to be introduced? I used to go over and talk to some of 'em ask 'em if they had any particular thing that they liked. Cause I could change my introductions to them when I introduced 'em on stage a little bit.

And if there was anything particular that they would like to have brought into it, if I could do it, I would. And I think that worked out very well.

[00:35:33] **Sarah Foss:** Was that the highlight of your career up until that point? Would you say?

[00:35:41] **Johnny Gilbert:** Well, it certainly was one of 'em. There's no doubt about that. Uh, I don't know, honey, I have so many highlights over the years in my career that I don't know which one is better. And cause each one was unto itself. A special thing, you know, it was, it was a special thing. Uh, you don't think of 'em as one being better [00:36:00] than the other or the other, you know, you just know

how much you enjoyed it or how popular it was, how long it went on the people that you would meet know.

Uh, uh, I don't, it it's hard to class on one way or the other. I did the \$25,000 pyramid for many years, uh, with Bob Stewart who created that, he also created the Price Is Right, by the way. Um, and he created, uh, 25,000 Pyramid and we did a lot of shows, different types of shows together that he was always building new shows, creating new shows, cuz he liked to do that. Uh, and once again you meet a lot of people on that show you. It is just you're around him all the time. Uh it's it's a pleasure. It's not work. God it's anything but work, you know, and the audiences come in, they're eager to be entertained. They love the show. That's why they're there. I mean, you know, you're ahead already

[00:36:53] **Sarah Foss:** At this point in your career, you're thinking I made the right choice.

[00:36:58] **Johnny Gilbert:** oh, I think all and everything that [00:37:00] I did, I did at the right time for the right purpose. I don't think there's anything that I can think of that stands out as a mistake. Not really, not any of them. I loved everything that I did. That's the interesting thing about it. Most people go through business, uh, and life, in businesses they don't like, or they're in a profession that they don't care about. I love what I do and what I did so much that it was, everything was a pleasure. And I got to travel all around. You know, it was wonderful.

[00:37:31] **Sarah Foss:** You've had some pretty incredible friendships you've shared with me over the years. One of them being Betty White.

[00:37:37] **Johnny Gilbert:** Oh God. Yeah

[00:37:42] **Sarah Foss:** How did you guys first meet?

[00:37:43] **Johnny Gilbert:** On, uh, \$25,000 Pyramid. She and Bob Stewart were very close friends. Bob was a creator of the show and they were very close friends. So whenever there was a party or anything, uh, I was always invited to it and [00:38:00] Betty was always there and we got to be really good friends.

And then for my 60th birthday, She set up a surprise party on a yacht. One of the big, um, uh, yachts here in the, um, basin that you can rent in the marina. Well, she

set up a surprise and I didn't know about it. And all these people showed up. All of the guys that I'd worked with for so long, over at different shows and things like that, that, uh, and Betty was. And it, what a wonderful pleasure to just to see all of them as a surprise, you, you cry, you can't help it. You know, and Betty and I, uh, we'd had a couple of drinks and we were dancing together to the band to, to, to the DJ on the boat. It just, those are wonderful memories, you know, and the parties that I would go to, Bob Stewart always had Christmas parties.

And, uh, sometimes even during the summer, he would have a party and, uh, Betty would be among the group all the time. So, you know, [00:39:00] you just, and she was, she was everything they say she was. and, and more.

[00:39:08] **Sarah Foss:** Absolutely. One of the shows that was kind of a departure from your usual shows Supermarket Sweep

[00:39:16] **Johnny Gilbert:** well, it was a game show. It was a game show. It really was. Uh, and you know, I've done a ton of them over the years, as we know, uh, we've mentioned a few, but I've done a lot more, you know, anything for money where people will really do anything for money. Uh, that was true. I did that with Wink Martindale, but, uh, Supermarket Sweep was a thing unto itself because I had never, ever, nobody had ever seen anything like that. That's never saw anything like that in your life. Running around, as I've said, many times in the audiences, you've heard me say it running around in the supermarket, grabbing everything, they can get their hands on and going up to the checkout counter and the people that had grabbed the most and it headed up to the most money won. That was what it was basically. And people loved it.

[00:40:03] **Sarah Foss:** I mean, you've announced for award shows, game shows, cartoons, sitcoms, theme park, attractions, you name it. We've heard your voice somewhere.

[00:40:12] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yeah. And probably will for many years on after I'm gone, you'll still hear my voice because they're on shows. And as long as there's syndication, they'll get 'em out and run 'em again,

[00:40:25] **Sarah Foss:** You know, for a person who's had a career that has had so many different twists and turns and so many things you've been a part of. I have to think that the biggest chapter certainly lands at Jeopardy! and that call you received back in 1984, to be a part of what would become such an iconic role for you.

[00:40:45] **Johnny Gilbert:** Who had any idea? We had no idea. Alex, uh, signed for 13 weeks and in order to do it, he signed on as a producer, as well as the host. He would do both jobs, uh, Merv wanted it that way. And, and Merv hired me because, uh, we had met him before in various ways. And so when it started up, Alex and I had become really kind of good friends, even though we'd never worked together because when I was doing something over on NBC, he was doing something and we would meet in the, uh, lounge sometimes or passing on the halls and we got to be friends, you know, and we had mutual friends.

Um, but I had never worked with him. And, uh, frankly, I was delighted when they mentioned my name as being possible to be on the show, even though we knew it was a 13 week show, but all game shows start out as 13 weeks. So that's the way it is. That's the life of the show in the beginning. So when they decided to hire me and I think Alex had a lot to do with it, but it, 13 weeks, 13 weeks, the set, the set was made up of neon tubes. That's what the Jeopardy! set was. And when they finished, we finished taping, then they'd break it all down and stick it over in the corner so they could [00:42:00] do something else on the stage. That's how it started out over on channel 11, as a matter of fact,

[00:42:06] **Sarah Foss:** And all these years later, Johnny, you are the only member of that original Jeopardy! staff and crew.

[00:42:13] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yep. Yep. That's kind of scary. but it's true. It's true. Yeah. And, uh, gosh, I don't know. It has been, it's the rest of my life.

[00:42:26] **Sarah Foss:** Talk about the jeopardy family that you have now been a part of for more than 38 years?

[00:42:32] **Johnny Gilbert:** That's a good word. Family is a good word. And I guess that's true with all shows. I don't know, but it seems so true.

The, the thing about Jeopardy!'s family, uh, and had it been for so many years is that the show was so popular. So it's a special thing. That's why so many of our members, crew members are still with us many, many, many years later. They're still with us.

[00:42:54] **Sarah Foss:** I'm a rookie Johnny. And I've been here for 21 years.

[00:42:57] **Johnny Gilbert:** That's right. That's right. And you're yeah. [00:43:00] Yeah. You, you just got here. Yeah. but you know how the staff is, and they're wonderful people because it's a bright show. It's a smart show. Everybody's interested. You watch the show when we're actually doing it, you know, this better than I do, or as well. Uh, you watch look around at the crew.

They're all listening to the show. They're all trying to come up with the responses in their minds on other game shows. That's not what happened. It's a learning thing all the time. People are always trying to learn something. Even if you're on the staff, you're listening to the material, listening to Alex. And of course the difference was Alex was doing was, you know, he didn't make any mistakes. if he made a mistake, it was a rarity, you know, that absolutely. He never used cue cards or anything like that that. Because it was in him. I remember one day he came out on stage, I introduced him and he came out on stage and he said, I don't know what the hell I'm going to say. And he turned around and walked back off stage and we were all on a state of shock.

[00:44:03] **Sarah Foss:** I know, we know he never did that. That doesn't happen.

[00:44:05] **Johnny Gilbert:** But he, that he did it. I was there, you know, so yes, it's a special thing and a wonderful thing in my career.

[00:44:15] **Sarah Foss:** God. How about the time he came out without pants on Johnny? Do you remember that one?

[00:44:20] **Johnny Gilbert:** Oh, I remember it. Well, yeah, it was about the second day, uh, second or third day of the game, I think. And he, we used to, he sat backstage, you know that in front of his dressing room, in those chairs. Yep. And we'd come out and we'd talk about it. And he'd just, I think the contestants seem awfully uptight. Don't you think? and we all agreed, you know? Yeah, they did. They weren't seemed to be having any fun. They were so hell bent on winning against each other, that there was, there was, there was no levity. No, I don't know what you'd say. Uh, no fun there. And I didn't know he was gonna do it by the way. None of us did he, but no, no, but he just mentioned that backstage and we all agreed.

[00:45:00] Yeah, they are. I don't know that doesn't look like having any fun, but I knew it was on his mind. I figured while he would tell some kind of joke or something and do something, you know, humorous say something humorous,

maybe to get him smile a little bit before he got into the show. So when I introduced him, uh, course I had finished my introduction by the time I saw him or I would never have gotten through the introduction. I just no doubt about it. Uh, yes, that was once in a lifetime thing.

[00:45:28] **Sarah Foss:** Well, I think it was Ken Jennings, Brad Rutter and Jerome Vared. And it is still one of their highlights. Just not something you see every day.

[00:45:36] **Johnny Gilbert:** Nope. Yes, certainly.

[00:45:37] **Sarah Foss:** And not from the consummate professional Alex Trebek, for sure. You guys had such a fun relationship. Um, I loved the way he would joke with you and give you a hard time, especially about not needing glasses that just drove him crazy that at your age, you still didn't need reading glasses, Johnny Gilbert.

[00:45:54] **Johnny Gilbert:** Yeah. And I still, and I still don't. unbelievable. It really was it really how you read that? He would say, how can you read that without glasses? Yeah. That bothered him. I know, but he was wonderful. He really was. And when he went up to play golf with me at his club at my club, rather, he was so good. So kind, so trying to be helpful and every, a different side of Alex. Ah, that was really a pleasure to be around, to be, to know, you know, riding around in a cart with him. Oh, those are good things things to think of.

[00:46:28] **Sarah Foss:** You've done some fun categories on the show over the years, you know, even this season. And it is always a highlight when we introduce a Johnny Gilbert category.

[00:46:38] **Johnny Gilbert:** yeah. And I always worry about them that they're not gonna be any good. And that's a fun thing they really are. And once again, it points out the another heart. This show has so many hearts, but another big heart. And every time if I sit and watch it tonight, one thing it'll come into my mind. My God, how do those writers do it? Mm-hmm that always comes to my mind. They just come up with almost amazing things. They put 'em in the right order, as far as degrees of difficulty, most of the time. Uh, they're the variety. After all of this time, the variety, 38 years later, you want the writers to give you a variety? I mean, that's just unbelievable.

[00:47:18] **Sarah Foss:** I agree. The best of the best. Now, how did the satin jackets come about Johnny? Because I don't, I mean, if I see you without a satin jacket on it, it just seems wrong. Cause I've seen you in so many for so many years. How did that first come about?

[00:47:31] **Johnny Gilbert:** You know, Alex gave me a jacket with Jeopardy! on it for, I don't know it was Christmas or what it was many, many years ago and I wore it on the show. How'd jeopardy. I thought that was good. I'm the announcer. I wanna see who I am, what I'm doing and everybody loved it.

They said, God, that's great. Where'd you get that jacket? Everybody wanted to buy a jacket. Where'd you get that jacket where you can buy 'em where can you buy one of those? So then I had a bunch of them made up different colors and different things over the years. [00:48:00]

[00:48:00] **Sarah Foss:** Well, I never knew. See I'm learning things today too Johnny.

[00:48:01] **Johnny Gilbert:** Some of the simplest things, some of the best things start out the simplest ways. I don't think Alex had any thought of me actually wearing the show during all the shows, wearing the jacket, doing all the shows. I don't think they had that in mind at all.

[00:48:16] **Sarah Foss:** Talking about accomplishments along the lines, you get a Guinness World Record for the longest career as a game show announcer on a single show.

[00:48:26] **Johnny Gilbert:** That's correct. And the interesting thing about it is I break my record every time the show goes on the air again, as a matter of fact, you know, Alex won it, of course, for his hosting before I won mine and he said, one day to me, he says, I wonder when they're going to update these things. because, you know, they they've said it for the dates that, that had happened then. And since then he kept on hosting and I kept on announcing. So you just kept breaking the record every day,

[00:48:51] **Sarah Foss:** So often contestants say, when they hear Johnny Gilbert say their name. What a moment that is for them it's like the culmination of their dream to hear your voice announce their name.

What does it mean to you to know that that's the impact you have on people's lives? Just by saying their name?

[00:49:10] **Johnny Gilbert:** I don't know. It's, uh, uh, to me, I'm in trying to get it right, as, you know, you help me with that all the time. Uh, but for them, I guess, for the voice that has introduced so many people, so many famous winners, if you will, it is something to have your name be introduced. I guess that's what it is.

[00:49:31] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. Well, it, it means a lot to them. It's pretty incredible to see their face the first time they hear you say their name. It never gets old Johnny.

[00:49:40] **Johnny Gilbert:** No, I guess it doesn't. I get it. Thank God. That's good for that. That's good. The emails I get expresses that too. The just wonderful letters I get from people, you know, And when back back when Alex was answering him, you know, if sometimes it would be to Alex and then also would you ask Johnny say, so Alex would sign off for [00:50:00] whatever he wanted to, and then send it over to me, uh, with a note, uh, Johnny answer this, would you.

[00:50:05] **Sarah Foss:** Why do you think that Jeopardy! has been so successful for all these years? What's what's the secret?

[00:50:12] **Johnny Gilbert:** Oh, that's a big question. Isn't it? You can say all of the normal things, you know, it's a good show. It's well constructed. Merv Griffin did an incredible job of putting it together in the history of even how it came together, the putting it, the material in the form of a question, you know, where you answer in the form of a question, you know, things like that, just how it all kind of fell into place.

But I think it's, I think it's popular because people, some people wanna see really bright people. they wanna see people that know things. They wanna see how they react, what they do and so forth. And the other thing is they wanna see how much they know how much they can remember sitting at home when a contestant misses.

He said, I know that, I know that. And it's a personal thing for people that watch it. How much can I guess, how much can I get right? And I think that has a lot to do with it. Yeah. And as I said, Alex's wonderful pre presence made it all so smooth to roll along with,

[00:51:10] **Sarah Foss:** Is there anything I haven't asked Johnny that you wanted to share or talk about or anything I left off?

[00:51:18] **Johnny Gilbert:** Well, you've covered it pretty good, Sarah. Very good. As a matter of fact, you reminded me of certain places that I'd even forgotten about over the years. And it's good to have those back again. Uh, No. I think that the one thing that I am humbled by is that I meet people that find out who I am. Not that I tell 'em, but they find out some other way or the fan mail comes in and they say how much I've helped them, how much I've helped them in their lives.

Thank you, Johnny. And I don't know what I did. I just was Johnny. I just did the announcing. I talked to the people, uh, but you know, people were in the audience and I get letters from 'em after they've gone back home about how much, uh, I help them in their life. And I don't know how I did that. I'm glad they think that, and I'm glad they feel that way about it. Uh, but I really don't know how. God gave me a strong throat and the ability to use it. Can't ask for more than that.

[00:52:25] **Sarah Foss:** Well, and the rest of us have just been lucky that you've shared it with us all these years.

Johnny Gilbert: Thank you, Sarah.

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[00:52:34] **Buzzy Cohen:** Sarah, thank you so much for sharing that interview. Johnny Gilbert is a Jeopardy! legend, a game show legend. Really an icon. Love hearing from him.

[00:52:43] **Sarah Foss:** Yeah. Knowing him all these years, but then getting a chance to really hear those stories that he doesn't often share because it's just, it's just part of his story to him. And to us, they're like these wonderful little nuggets of a well lived life and an incredible career. All right, Buzzy, well moving on now, it's time for viewer questions. One of our favorite parts of the show.

[00:53:03] **Buzzy Cohen:** John asks, I have two questions about daily doubles. First. Are they assigned to specific clues at the time they're written or are they randomly assigned to clues within a given game board? And second, is it accurate to say that a daily double on a \$1,600 clue will be more difficult than a daily double on an \$800 clue? If, so this would seem to impact wagering strategy.

[00:53:26] **Sarah Foss:** Great questions, John. First off, they are not randomly assigned. The writers do select them during their preparation meetings, but sometimes Billy and Michele will mark a clue, a daily double when they're first going over a category. You know, when they see a clue that they think makes just a great daily double, they mentioned this when they joined us on the podcast that a good daily double is more of a figure it out clue, a two step thought process clue, not just, you know it or you don't. And yes, in terms of difficulty, a \$1,600 daily double will be tougher than an \$800 one. So wagering strategy always comes into play.

[00:54:05] **Buzzy Cohen:** Exactly. And this is one of the reasons that as players, we often say people under bet on a daily double, because you have a lot more information, both about the difficulty of the category what's been asked and where it is on the board. Okay. Doug asks, what happens if during a tie breaker, the first contestant to ring in is incorrect. Does that automatically mean the other contestant wins the game or do they also get a chance to ring in what happens if both contestants guess incorrectly? Is there a new tiebreaker.

[00:54:36] **Sarah Foss:** Another great question, Doug. So basically what happens is if a contestant and a tiebreaker rings in and they're incorrect, we reenable the board and the other contestant has a chance to ring in. If they don't respond at all or ring in and respond incorrectly, we move on to another clue and we just keep doing this until a contestant responds with the correct response. Now, one interesting thing is that in the rule book, we do state that we can edit out any of these incorrect clues, because obviously if it was to take multiple clues, that's more time that we have in the show. So just know that when you see a tiebreaker situation, there may have been additional clues that you didn't see if the contestants responded incorrectly.

[00:55:20] **Buzzy Cohen:** We love all these questions so keep them coming to insidejeopardypodcast@gmail.com and we'll keep answering them.

[00:55:39] **Sarah Foss:** All right, buzzy. Well, that is it for today's episode of inside Jeopardy! Thank you for joining me once again.

[00:55:46] **Buzzy Cohen:** My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

[00:55:48] **Sarah Foss:** We're now just one week away from the debut of Season 39 and in our next episode, Michael and I will be revealing all the details about the

upcoming Celebrity Jeopardy! in Prime Time, including the brand new format. We're actually taping the first episodes this Sunday. So we'll have lots to report come Monday. As always, please make sure you subscribe to the podcast, rate us, leave us a comment, share across social and follow us on @Jeopardy! on Twitter, on Instagram, on Facebook and on YouTube. See you next week!