

By Michele Miles Gardiner

REMEMBER William Hung from "American Idol"? He sang Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" so badly and jerked his hips so mechanically that he received fleeting fame.

Or what about the girl who screeched a Mariah Carey song with such confidence, she mistook judge Randy Jackson's befuddled "Wow!" as a good sign?

These are some of the people who make watching "American Idol" fun. They are the deluded. I know them well. You see, I was one of them.

It all started when my mother heard me singing and made the mistake of telling me I sounded good. For years after, I assaulted the public's ears with my overconfident caterwauling — along to our car's radio, during school programs, at the supermarket along with the Muzak.

So convinced I oozed talent, I decided to audition for my eighth-grade class musical production of "Li'l Abner." I wanted the role of Daisy Mae. The song I would sing at the audition? Debbi Boone's "You Light up My Life."

On audition day, I walked across the polished wood floor of the auditorium certain I would wow the panel of judges (three teachers) with my vocal prowess. After taking a big breath, I let loose; reaching for the high notes, my arms spread out wide and my eyes closed in concentrated fervor.

On the last note, I opened my eyes to see the judges' mouths hanging open. I smiled. With stunned expressions (I realize now), they thanked me. And I went out the door, oblivious.

Well, what a shock! I didn't get the part of Daisy Mae. My part was so small I didn't even have a name. And the few lines I had were not to be sung.

This was my first clue that I wasn't as good as I thought. My second came when I noticed my friends turning up the radio whenever I sang along. I made a mental note to check professional singer off my list of likely career paths.

So, I've been there.

Still, I'm amazed how every year "American Idol" hopefuls, without an

atom of singing talent, travel from near and far, confident they have a chance to win a golden ticket to Hollywood. How is it that these people have managed to live beyond childhood without anyone ever saying to them, "Uh — did you know you can't sing?"

But my questions don't stop with "American Idol" contestants.

Are there deluded aspiring accountants who really aren't so great at math and tax laws? Are there baker wannabes who make cookies that taste like salt licks?

Maybe, before I laugh at "American Idol" warblers, I should do a little self-assessment. Hey, it's likely these thoughts I write down are just a waste of time and I could be doing something else, like listening to the presidential candidates? Eh, forget that! I'll keep writing.

And if bad singers keep showing up to audition for "American Idol," I'll probably keep laughing — just the way the judges at my "Li'l Abner" audition must have after I left the auditorium.

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