

miniMAG

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winner winner



Lottery Winners

Bob Gielow

Locals are Big Lottery Winners

By Kiki Pepper, Staff Writer
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STROUDSBURG — As is well-known throughout Monroe County, the \$84 million winning Mega Millions ticket from July was purchased at the Uni Mart in Bartonsville. What almost no one knew until Monday was who was carrying that life-changing ticket. After exchanging a series of text messages with a Philadelphia-based attorney (who asked to remain anonymous), this reporter was invited to sit down on Tuesday evening with the happy and secretive couple. They wanted to tell their story, in their hometown newspaper, without divulging more of their identities than is eventually required by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Meeting in one of the event rooms at the Cinemark Theater in Stroudsburg, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson (not their real names), lifelong residents of Monroe County, described how their elation after realizing

they had the winning ticket turned into trepidation over how they might be treated given their new affluence. They talked about their plans to buy a new home, to travel the world, and to donate to worthy causes. They also talked about their fears that friends and family would begin



seeing them in a different light given they were about to become millionaires. They also talked about their fondness for the people of the Pocono Mountains region as they make plans to move away, at least for now.

The first question I asked Mr. and Mrs. Johnson was whether I could see the winning ticket. I could not, but they did have a copy of it. The actual winning ticket was initially saved in a safe deposit box at the

Johnson's bank. After showing the ticket to their lawyer, the Johnsons drove up to Wilkes-Barre where they turned it in to the Pennsylvania Lottery offices. They documented their identities and also took home the required claim form (though they've not yet submitted it).

The winning numbers were the result of Mr. Johnson's "quick-pick" and were not selected for any special reason. Mrs. Johnson did point out, with a shrug of her shoulders, that both of their birthdays "happen to be included in the randomly selected numbers."

Mr. Johnson said that he rarely purchases lottery tickets but had been feeling down on that fateful July 6th given their "weekend plans with friends had to be canceled due to a COVID exposure."

"It was a spur of the moment decision," said Mr. Johnson. "I thought it would cheer us up a bit if we could fantasize about winning all that money." He fully expected their ticket would be a loser.

In fact, when the winning numbers were announced two days later, Mr. Johnson did not check the ticket he had stashed in his wallet. He had forgotten he had purchased it. It wasn't until July 10th that Mrs. Johnson saw an article in the *Stroudsburg News* indicating the winning ticket was purchased at the Bartonsville Uni Mart. They found and checked their ticket, and, at first, "just sat and stared at each other like idiots."

When it began to sink in that they were big winners, Mrs. Johnson began to cry, "uncontrollably."

"I could not believe how our life had been changed, in the blink of an eye! Paying the mortgage and buying groceries would never again be a problem for us," said Mrs. Johnson. "We would never again have to take the bus into work ... we wouldn't have to even work if we didn't want to."

"It was a pretty emotional moment," added Mr. Johnson. "So many of our daily worries were eliminated. But we quickly realized we now had dozens of new worries to consider."

Those worries include how friends and family will react to their wealth. They have not yet shared their news with anyone other than their lawyer and Mrs. Johnson's sister. They are concerned that some number of their friends and family will be jealous and "will be asking non-stop for handouts."

“I’ve been finding lots of stories on the internet about lottery winners who ended up losing all their money, had their marriages end, and some even lost their lives,” said Mr. Johnson.

Given their concerns, how are Mr. and Mrs. Johnson planning to avoid these pitfalls?

“We’ve decided to receive our winnings in an annual annuity, not in a lump sum,” explained Mrs. Johnson. “We are young enough that it makes sense for us to do that. Besides, we wanted to avoid receiving a huge lump sum of money that would overwhelm us.”

“In addition,” added Mr. Johnson, “we have set up a blind, irrevocable trust that will protect our kids from estate taxes. We also wanted to maintain privacy as much as we could.”

Yes, the Johnsons have two children. No, they’ve not yet told their school-age children about their change of fortune. The Johnsons will tell their kids about the jackpot at the same time they break the news the family is moving to the west coast.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are planning to move “to California or Oregon, hopefully near the water” at the same time they are obligated by the state to complete and submit the Pennsylvania Lottery Claim Form. Within ten days of that date, state law obligates the Lottery to post the names of sweepstakes winners, at least the first names and last initials. The Johnsons want to be moving away as soon as possible to avoid unwanted solicitations and unwanted media attention.

“As we experience these incredible circumstances, we are attempting to maintain our values and our family unit,” said Mr. Johnson. “Although these winnings bring us considerable wealth, they also present unimagined risks to the lifestyle we’ve been fostering. We worry that the values we’ve been teaching our children, including humbleness and frugality ... the importance of relationships over material belongings, will get lost if we start living some sort of extravagant lifestyle.”

Adds Mrs. Johnson, “That’s why we are moving. We don’t want for our kids to become entitled rich kids. Also, we’re afraid everyone who knows us in northeast Pennsylvania, including our kids’ friends, will begin to think of us primarily as ‘those lottery winners.’ Where we are moving, hopefully, no one will know us and we can better keep our family’s secret. We may even change our names so no one can track us down.”

When asked what they will miss most about living in this area, Mrs. Johnson commented on “the work ethic and the integrity” of locals. “I honestly feel that the people of this region can be trusted to do the right thing.”

“But,” I asked, “if locals can be trusted to do the right thing, then why don’t you trust they will respect your privacy and not be greedy asking for money?”

“That’s a good question,” said Mr. Johnson. “We believe that humans are naturally jealous and greedy. The only way for us to avoid experiencing that sort of behavior is to move away from those who know about our winning ticket. We really like this area and all our neighbors but feel it will be best for all of us to be apart, for at least a while. It’s very bittersweet that we feel the need to leave.”

“The truth is,” chimed in Mrs. Johnson, “we’re also not sure we can trust ourselves to know when someone is simply being nice or when they are pretending to like us because of what we might be able to do for them. Maybe we’re being paranoid, but if we move somewhere new and don’t reveal our secret, we can feel confident our new friends are being genuine.”

I asked if there was any organization or any person in the area with whom they will be sharing their wealth.

“There is one person,” said Mrs. Johnson. “We will be sharing twenty percent of our after-tax winnings with my sister. Her husband died after being exposed to COVID back in July and, as we mentioned, (my husband) only bought the ticket because he was feeling down about not being able to get together with them, which was right before his symptoms got worse.”

“In fact,” said Mr. Johnson, “we got the call that my brother-in-law passed away about an hour after we found out we had the winning ticket. Our celebration was pretty short-lived.”

“We were getting incredibly good news at the same time my sister was getting amazingly awful news. We felt like it was fate that we were suddenly in a position to support her and her children. She has been a stay-at-home mom and has some health issues of her own that precluded her from pursuing a career. She was stunned and grateful when we told her about our decision.”

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson have plans to share their winnings with other individuals and organizations, including several local charities that have impacted their family in some way. Another forty percent of their after-tax winnings are slated for “good cause donations.” But, before they put those plans into motion, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are focused on finding their new home (“with a good school nearby”), quitting their jobs (“without causing too much disruption for their employers”), and maintaining their sense of self (knowing those around them are about to see them in a very different light).

Bidding farewell to the lucky couple, I promised to not divulge any information about them other than what we discussed “on the record.” Truth is, other than the story I have shared, I don’t know anything else about the Johnsons. In fact, I never learned their real names. I guess all of us will learn their identities when the Lottery announces the big winners from July.

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Quintessential Asian

Grace Seto

It's that time of the day again, when an unsettling shade of indigo bleeds into the remnants of a once cerulean azure. The warmly-lit canvas is no more, now interrupted by a harsh invasion of stone-cold bleakness. Unsatiated, your orbs begin to wander around, desperate for refuge in something warm— anything warm, really.

A hint of crimson creeps into your peripheral.

Your spin around, appreciative of the cherry-coloured chevron that will hopefully placate your soul for a little longer, but the delight soon turns into consternation when it dawns on you what those crimson stripes entail.

A red scribble of words on your calendar screams BLOODY MURDER more than anything else. It's too *red*, too in-the-face. Now all you see is red. All you can do is despondently bury the tip of your head into the unusually consoling curvature of your palms, attempting to fathom the incessantly ferocious chanting in your head.

Over and over again: “Not again. Not again. Not again...”

The text reads, “ADVANCED MATH TUTORIAL CLASS.”

Just Us

Alan Berger

I hate my job
I hate my boss
I hate me

I Hate the world
In its inglorious
Slaughter
But I tenderly lovingly protectively
Love my daughter

She is the world
To me
But not the one
Outside our door that I see

Her mother left us on a Greyhound bus
Which makes sense for the dog she was
Now it is just us

My little girl will be lied to
And taking advantage of
My living and dying wish is that she finds true love

I thought that once I did
But the only result was my beautiful lovely all that matters is my kid

Be the Change that Nobody is Watching

Kim Kjagain Moes

I drag myself out of bed after hitting snooze like a gazillion times. After my shower, I pull my uniform shirt out of the warm dryer (*the most convenient way to iron!*), and fill my to-go cup. Today I am giving notice at the end of my shift. I just have to make it through my eight hours first. Our gas station has sold, and today everyone gets to meet the new owner.

The traffic is light for a Tuesday after a long weekend, and with my anticipation in high gear, I make it to the station in no time. It's a good thing too, because I'm out of gas. Last time I ran out two blocks from work but a gas can in the hand is better than hitchhiking in the woods. I slide into pump three just as Marcia comes outside. She's working another double, burning the candle at both ends of the dipstick.

'You're late again, Geena.'

I roll my eyes at her and say the words that make her cringe: '*Marcia Marcia Marcia.*' I'm not technically late. Marcia is one of those people who feels late if she's not ten minutes early, whereas I'm the kind who wants my punch card to have a precise time on it.

Once parked, I enter the convenience store office. My punch card hovers a whole fourteen seconds, then clicks in at eight-oh-oh.

My inside shift partner is Erick. He's ten years my junior and a recent high school graduate. The type of person who normally works at a place like this (*the pump life*). He's mentioned to me before that he has option paralysis, a condition that makes it difficult to choose between things.

'Hey Erick, you want cash-one or cash-two today?' Giving him a choice to make is on my last-day checklist of things to do. He smiles,



eyebrows raised in a question mark. 'Oh, are you stuck between a rock and a gas pump?' Erick isn't laughing with me even though he's often a big fan of my humour. Just as he opens his mouth to answer, I suggest he take cash-one today.

All settled in, shift-change duties wrapped up, we're set for the masses. I say a quick goodbye to Marcia after she puts her cash in the

drop. She uses the counter to pull herself up from the cash slot on the floor. 'There's more than one way to skin your knee, Marcia.' I wink at her, but she looks at me like I've said something dirty. 'Nevermind, see you tonight.'

Gas stations with convenience stores get all kinds of regulars. Two-packs-of-Players Sammy, Three-Scratches-with-even-numbers-only Bob, 17-bucks-on-pump-2 Max (he needs to keep \$3.00 in his account for bank fees), and so many more. These people are the highlight of my workday, and the reason I've made it through seven years working for Mr. Rough-End-of-the-Dipstick Charles.

Our boss hates everyone. Yet I'm one of those people who stays until the cows freeze over. But this is my last shift working for Charles and I spent two months creating him a goodbye card. On the front is a man on a stallion with a sun setting in the background. Inside is a foil mirror panel with bits of green on one side. The inscription reads: *Before you ride too far into the sunset on your high horse, take a good look in the mirror. There's some broccoli stuck in your teeth.* Art isn't my Fort Knox, but words are my oyster.

The day flies by, my checklist getting shorter and shorter. I pushed and prodded my coworkers, one by one, until everyone appeared to dislike me as much as Charles did. You need people to hate you in order to become a boss, right? But it's no fun being hated. Is there a better way? I'm stressed to the nines and need some time to decompose.

I take my break early (*gasp!*) and head out back to the staff picnic table. Time is of the imminence and I need to think outside this box of chocolates. Why alienate people just to rule them, when we can be teammates and lead together? Charles is mean to us, sure. Why would I want to become another boss like him? This is about my coworkers. How they offer some good old fashioned elbow grease that only comes from putting your right hand in and then shaking it all about. On my way back into the store, I hit the wind chime made of wooden spoons. I was born with a wooden spoon in my mouth, and maybe that's why my mouth is big enough to fit my whole foot into.

The doors close shortly after 4:00pm and everyone waits for the meeting to start.

This is going to be the meeting of all meetings. Everyone in the room is going to be there. The whispering stops when they see me at the front.

'Hi. I'm Geena. But I guess you all know that. The writing is on the cake.' Nervous giggles echo mine as I place the dessert box on the table. 'Three months ago, I won the lottery. I was living hand to fist and thought I might as well buy a ticket. Now I have more money than I can afford, so I bought this station.'

The room ripples with sideways glances and raised eyebrows. ‘I owe everyone a full-frontal apology for the way I’ve acted today. I planned to quit right before the meeting so I could show up as the owner, all high and dry and mighty fine. All day long I’ve tried to become what I thought a boss was - someone to be hated.’ I peek at Charles. He’s eating a piece of cake. ‘But, friends, it turns out hindsight is 50/50. After pushing everyone’s panic buttons all day, I realized that the best part of working here is all of you.’





Panic Attack

Anna Lesnick

My heart is beating hard so hard so hard and my breath is trapped within my chest within my chest and I feel the walls closing in closing in I see black spots it's going dark trapped breath beating hard heart hurting hurting head heart attack dying I'm dying holy shit I'm dying I cannot breathe I cannot breathe I cannot breathe the darkness caving in the spots the chest beating the breath traps in the chest in the heart heart heart attack dying I'm dying too late it's too late and now everything is too loud too bad it's awful I'm awful all awful can't breathe am dying darkness beating heart tight chest spiral spiraling spirals spiral spiraling around around around around the breath the chest the darkness the spots and then it all explodes and I am exhausted.



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