

*“Everything in life is luck.”
Donald Trump*

Introduction

I *love* entering sweepstakes. I get such a thrill out of finding new ones and reading about all the different prizes that I could win, I get butterflies in my stomach. I daydream about all the various trips I could take, the cars I could drive, or what I would spend the cash on. I *love* getting notified I won a prize. I get all bubbly inside and I grin from ear to ear for hours. *I am passionate about sweeping.*

How Winning Changed My Life

I have good reason to feel this way. Sweeping has actually changed the course of my life. Winning prizes back in 1991 lead to going on a trip to Barbados with my mom... and to the first date I had with my husband.

It was early December 1990 and a popular Toronto radio station was broadcasting their morning show for a week in a large downtown department store’s window. I worked in a nearby office tower and every day I would stop to watch and listen. One morning, they gave away prize packs including tickets to the Ice Capades and a gift certificate for a trendy hair salon, to the first person that could show them a photo of children in their family. I whipped open my wallet and flashed the photo of my little cousins, winning the prize pack.

My mom had been home with the flu, so when I got home I gave her the gift certificate to the hair salon. (All you ladies will understand; I had been having my hair cut by the same hairstylist for five years - almost twenty now - and would never get my hair done anywhere else *even if I won it!*) We decided that when she felt better we would spend the day together; going to the salon, having lunch and Christmas shopping downtown.

The restaurant we had lunch at that day was giving away a trip to Barbados. As we left the restaurant, I realized I forgot to get the sweepstakes entry forms. I made Mom wait as I ran back inside. When I returned I told her I would fill the forms out later, since the restaurant was close to my office. I said, “If I win I’ll take you and if you win you’ll take me!”

On December 24th, we were all at home wrapping gifts in the living room when the phone rang. Mom went into the kitchen to answer the call. I could only hear her side of the conversation. The woman identified herself and stated my mom may have won a trip. Mom really doesn’t like telemarketers and couldn’t figure out what was going on, but since it was Christmas she decided not to hang up right away. The woman asked my mom, “Where is Barbados?” My Mom nearly said she didn’t know. Instead, she said, “In the Caribbean.” She was told she did in fact win the trip and the travel agency would contact her in January to make all the arrangements. My Mom was confused and asked, “How did I win this trip?” I heard that and screamed, “We won! We won!” The woman asked her, “Didn’t you fill out a sweepstakes entry form?” My mom said, “I think one of my kids entered me”, as I jumped up and down around her.

NOTE: In Canada, we are notified we are a “potential” winner and must correctly answer a Skill Testing Question correctly before we are declared the “official” winner. (see You’re a Winner!!)

TIP: Remember to tell your friends and family when you have entered them in sweepstakes. This way they won’t be caught off guard when they are contacted and inadvertently disqualify themselves.



We went the following April. It was really special to spend a whole week alone with my mom—we had the best time and we learned a lot about each other.

I always wanted to win another family trip so that my mom, my daughter and I could go together. November 2005 we won a trip for four to London, England. It was so much fun to go on another vacation with not only my mom, and daughter, but my husband as well!

TIP: If you wish to take children on the trip, read the rules and check out the destination's website to ensure children are allowed at the resort or hotel. It would be a shame to win a vacation for the family, only to discover that only you and your partner can go.

So that's how I won the trip to Barbados, but I know some of you are wondering about that first date with my husband. Well, remember the four tickets to the Ice Capades I said I won? I gave away one set to a girlfriend in my office. Then I started inviting friends to see who would like to go with me. I must have invited thirty people—no one wanted to go. One day I was speaking to Craig, who at the time was a business acquaintance, and asked him to go with me. Unlike those thirty other people, *he* said yes. We had a great time. *I* thought I had made a new friend; *he* says it was our first date and I just didn't know it. We just celebrated our 12th wedding anniversary. Would we have begun a true friendship had I not won those tickets? Who knows?



My Best Win—EVER!

I continued to enter sweepstakes sporadically until I read an article that led me to become a “contestor.” (*For definitions see the NOTE later in this chapter.*) At the time, I had been unemployed for the longest period I have ever experienced in my professional life. One night I was lying in bed, reading the August 2001 copy of Reader's Digest, when I came across an article called “Get in the Winner's Circle! Tips from a contest junkie who's proven that the best things in life *are* free” by Barb Taylor. I read and reread that article and as I did, I made a decision—from then on, I would *win* all the things I wanted in life; like a new car!

Get in the Winner's Circle!

Tips from a contest junkie who's proven that the best things in life *are* free

By Barb Taylor, From Calgary Herald

Vacations in Italy, Hawaii and Mexico. Doing rolls in a stunt plane or being whisked off in a limousine for a night of wining, dining and theatre. Hardly the lifestyle you'd expect for an average-income family of four living in a duplex and driving a rusty old Volvo. Certainly not the lifestyle we envisioned when I left my teaching job 12 years ago to become a stay-at-home mom.

Our magical life began in 1988 after a sleepless night spent attending to our newborn son. The following day I entered a contest sponsored by a local radio station, inviting listeners to send letters to Santa. I pleaded with Santa for one night of uninterrupted sleep. My entry was selected for a one-week trip to Lake Tahoe from radio station CJAY 92. I was hooked.

Now I enter lots of contests, anywhere from 200 to 300 a year. I find out about them while shopping for groceries, listening to the radio, browsing through magazines and regularly perusing a contest newsletter to which I subscribe. Over the years, I've spent three to four hours a week researching new contests and filling out forms.

But the hard work has paid off. I averaged \$10,000 in annual winnings; I've won two Dirt Devils through the Safeway Score & Win; and I've gone on a total of 14 major trips thanks to this winning hobby. My writing talents have won me a fair share of prizes as well, everything from a pair of

\$1,000 earrings for a local magazine's limerick contest to a pair of lift tickets for a Calgary Herald-sponsored Ski Memories contest.

Our winnings have also included clothing, appliances, a backyard barbecue and a patio set. We rarely pay to go to a movie or theatrical production. We frequently dine on gift certificates we have won. The luxuries our income doesn't provide for, my contesting does. Even our children get in on the act and have won a bike, a skateboard and passes to local attractions.

We've watched beautiful sunsets in Maui (courtesy of the Lite 96 jet) and Oahu (thanks to KissFM), walked the Freedom Trail in Boston (Calgary Co-op supermarket and Kraft foods), and even sent my in-laws to Scotland (a cross-Canada random draw from United Distillers). Will it ever end? Not as long as I can fill out an entry for or clip a Universal Product Code, or UPC as it's known (the bar code on products you buy).

Most of the trips I have won fall into the middle "good-and besides it's free" category. While not all-inclusive, your major costs of airfare and accommodation are covered. You stay in above average accommodation, usually a three-star hotel. You are generally responsible for your own meals, spending money and, occasionally, airport taxes. Trips we've won in this category included a one-week trip to San José del Cabo at the tip of Mexico's Baja peninsula. We enjoyed beautiful, uncrowded beaches, drinkable water, and simple but clean accommodations.

My husband and I experienced our "dream come true" trip courtesy of a local real-estate developer. By dropping off three entry forms at a tour of show homes, we won a one-week trip to Florence, which included stopovers in Paris and London. In Florence, we stayed at the Hotel Brunelleschi in a \$650-a-night room that had floor-to-ceiling louvered windows opening onto a tiny flowered courtyard. We had a breathtaking view of the Duomo and the Campanile.

Nowadays, friends often rub my arm for luck before they head off to buy their lottery tickets. I can only shake my head in wonder - I've never won anything in a lottery.

So, you must be wondering, how do I do it? In the world of contesting, luck really has nothing to do with it: It all comes down to effort and persistence. For every contest I win, there are 100 I've lost. Here are some suggestions to put the odds in your favor:

DO

- Pick free contests. These are usually drawbox contests and can be found in grocery stores and other businesses. Radio and television phone-in contests also cost nothing to enter.
- Also, pick the "better odds" contest: Look for contests that have a limited contesting area, offer lots of prizes, require you to "do something" (write a story, solve a puzzle), or that run for a short time span.
- Enter often. If it's a "better odds" contest, I'll enter five to 20 times. Try to space your entry mailings throughout the length of the contest's running.
- Collect UPCs. Remember that hand-drawn facsimiles are usually accepted in mail-in contests, and believe me, they really work. I've won many contests using hand-drawn facsimiles.
- Subscribe to a newsletter detailing currently running contests. A good one is the Canadian Contest Newsletter, P.O. Box 776, Stn. U, Etobicoke, Ont. M8Z 5P9. On the web, you can find them at: www.canadian.contests.com.

DON'T

- Swipe the entry pads and then stuff the draw box. Getting greedy may get you disqualified for taking unfair advantage.
- Don't try to win more than once a month on a given radio station. If you make a nuisance of yourself by trying to win every prize offered, you lower your chances of winning something you really want.

- ☒ Don't waste money sending in dozens, or hundreds, of entries to a contest that gives away only one prize. This is a quick road to contest burnout.
- ☒ Don't get scammed! If you've won a contest you haven't entered—beware! If you have to be earning \$40,000 a year and are required to attend a sales presentation—think twice!
- ☒ Don't send money to receive a prize—*ever*.

Reprinted with permission from the August 2001 Reader's Digest Canada.

The website address and mailing address listed in the article for the Canadian Contests Newsletter have since changed to:

www.canadiancontests.com

Canadian Contests Newsletter
P.O. Box 23066, RPO McGillivray
Winnipeg, MB R3T 5S3

NOTE: See Newsletters to find American equivalent sweepstakes newsletters you can subscribe to.

I began my sweeping hobby by surfing the web, and discovered an entire community of people who enjoy entering sweepstakes. I joined a few groups, signed up for a couple of newsletters and through trial and error came up with an Internet-based sweepstakes entering system that really *works*. How do I know my system works? My results, of course—I consistently win 5-15+ sweeps every month, month after month. I even had a month where I won 83 prizes!

I am so passionate about sweeping and excited about winning, I decided to write this book after about the 100th person asked me what my secret was to winning so much. I knew I was onto something with the system I had developed over the past few years and I wanted to share my discoveries, ideas, thoughts and enthusiasm with others.

Then someone asked me, “Why would you give all your secrets away? Wouldn't teaching others how to be successful sweepers decrease your odds of winning?” It was a tough question...

I was contemplating whether or not I should continue to write the book while driving to a friend's house. On the way I passed a church. The service announcement board out front said “You Can't Lose Helping Others Win.” That clinched it—I thought, “That message is for me! God is telling me it is OK to write the book!”

In this book, I will cover everything from how I began, the ins and outs of the five ways to enter sweepstakes, the Internet Sweeping System I have developed over years of entering (and entering and entering...), stories from fellow sweepers, and what pitfalls to avoid along with many tips and tricks to increase your odds of winning.

In the past, most books on the hobby of sweeping focused on only three methods of entering; in-person, phone-in and mail-in. This left out the field of Internet and mobile phone contests, both of which are the newest, fastest growing, and easiest way to enter forms of sweepstakes available today. This book focuses on the Internet/online method of entering sweepstakes. When I began entering sweepstakes on a daily basis there was no single source of sweepstake information in Canada. My goal is to make this book (and the online resources on my website—www.contestqueen.com) a hub of all the sweepstake resources available today in North America. With all this information at your fingertips, you can choose which methods of entry you want to participate in, which groups and forums you may want to join, and what types of sweepstakes you want to enter.

I feel sweeping is one of the best, most rewarding hobbies around and I am sure you will feel the same way after your first win. By reading this book and using the many ideas, tips and tricks included within, you can enjoy the hobby of sweeping as much as I do.

NOTE: In Canada we use the word contest interchangeably with the word sweepstakes even though by definition they are different. (see Promotion Types)

con•testor (kŏn'tĕst'ər)

n. 1. One who enters contests, sweepstakes, competitions, lotteries and raffles.

*NOTE: You may have noticed that I have spelled the word *contestor* with an OR as opposed to an ER. There is a reason for this. I created the word *contestor* because the proper definition of a *contester* is someone who is protesting or disputing something. We're trying to win cars and big-screen TVs here, not contest a will!*

con·testing (kɒn'tɛst/)

v. 1. The act of entering contests.

con·test (kɒn'tɛst/)

n. 1. A struggle for superiority or victory between rivals.
2. A competition, especially one in which entrants perform separately and are rated by judges. See Synonyms at conflict.

con·test·ed, con·test·ing, con·tests (kən'tɛst/) (kɒn'tɛst/)

v. tr. 1. To compete or strive for.

2. To call into question and take an active stand against; dispute or challenge:
contest a will. See Synonyms at oppose.

v. intr. 1. To struggle or compete; contend:

contested with other bidders for the antique.

Probably from French *conteste*, from *contester*, to dispute, from Old French, to call to witness, from Latin *contestari*: *com-*, *com-* + *testis*, *witness*; see *trei* - in Appendix I.

con·test·a·ble *adj.*

con·tes·ta·tion (kɒn'tɛ-stā'shən) *n.*

con·test·er *n.*

con·tes·tant (kən-tɛs'tənt, kɒn'tɛs'tənt)

n. 1. One taking part in a contest; a competitor.
2. One that contests or disputes something, such as an election or a will.

Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Adapted and reproduced by permission from the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*.

sweep·staker (sweep/stāk/ər)

n. 1. One who enters sweepstakes, contests, competitions, lotteries, and raffles in order to win prizes.

sweeper (sweep/ər)

slang for sweepstaker

n. 1. One who enters sweepstakes, contests, competitions, lotteries, and raffles in order to win prizes.

sweeping (sweep/ɪŋ)

v. 1. The act of entering sweepstakes.

Profession or Hobby?

pro·fes·sion·al (prə-fɛsh'ə-nəl)

adj. 1. a. Of, relating to, engaged in, or suitable for a profession: lawyers, doctors, and other professional people.

b. Conforming to the standards of a profession: professional behavior.

2. Engaging in a given activity as a source of livelihood or as a career: *a professional writer*.

3. Performed by persons receiving pay: *professional football*.

4. Having or showing great skill; expert: *a professional repair job*.

n. 1. A person following a profession, especially a learned profession.

2. One who earns a living in a given or implied occupation: *hired a professional to decorate the house.*
3. A skilled practitioner; an expert.

hob·by (hɒb/ē)

n. pl. **hob·bies** An activity or interest pursued outside one's regular occupation and engaged in primarily for pleasure.

Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Adapted and reproduced by permission from the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.*

What is an enthusiastic sweeper called? I have been called a professional sweeper. The term makes me uncomfortable because a professional is an expert in a specific field and is usually well paid for their skill and knowledge. I consider sweeping to be a hobby because 1) it is not my occupation, 2) I do it for pleasure, and 3) I certainly could not live off my winnings.

There are several terms used globally to describe someone who enters sweepstakes on a regular basis. In Canada we refer to ourselves as contestors because we enter contests. In the United States you refer to yourselves as sweepers because you enter sweepstakes. (If we did that in Canada, people would think we were curlers!) In the United Kingdom and Australia they refer to themselves as competitors because they enter competitions. As Shakespeare said, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." My favorite term to describe my hobby is *winner!*

My Winning Streak

On a very cold gray day in January, I got the email that every sweeper waits for: Congratulations! Your name has been drawn for the **Grand Prize**, Trip for two to L.A. and dinner with/prepared by Bob Blumer, in **Meyer's "The Surreal Meal" contest**, sponsored by Alliance Atlantis Broadcasting Inc. and Meyer Canada Inc. (Along with the trip to Los Angeles, I received an eight piece set of Meyer Anolon cookware and \$500 spending money.)

TIP: You can collect frequent flyer points on the flights you have won. Each person must have their own account to maximize the free rewards on top of a win.

Craig and I arranged to take the trip in March. We arrived at the airport on Thursday morning and met our chaperone from Alliance Atlantis. (They need to ensure that their show's hosts are protected from crazy sweepers.) I mentioned it had been a slow month and I had not won a single thing. We got to L.A. and discovered we had two phone messages; one from my Dad and one from my step-mother. Due to the time difference I could not call until Friday morning. When I called, my step-mother said "Are you sitting down?" I was expecting bad news. She then proceeded to tell me my niece won a trip for four to New York City!

At the beginning of the year I told my step-sister, I was going to start entering my niece and nephew in sweepstakes for children. I thought they would enjoy receiving a neat new toy or DVD in the mail. Little did I know their first win would be "a big one!" (I consider it my win even though I didn't get the prize because I did the entering.) I was so happy for them since they had never been on a family vacation and they were now going on the trip of a lifetime.

We then proceeded to have an amazing time in Los Angeles. We arrived at Bob's home in the Hollywood Hills at 8:00pm on Friday evening. He had called me a few weeks before the trip to discuss the menu. We agreed he would make us recipes from his upcoming cookbook *Surreal Gourmet Bites: show-stoppers and conversation starters*. Bob is also an oenophile so each course was paired with a selection from his extensive private wine collection. He is a wonderful host. Craig and I felt as if we had gone to a friend's home for dinner. I went out and purchased his new book when it was released so I could continue to enjoy his creations and share them with my family and friends.



NOTE: There are no photos of our evening with Bob in this book. It is important to read all the documents you sign with regards to a sweepstakes win. The sweepstakes prize waiver stated all photos taken during our evening are for personal use only and cannot be published. I can publish other photos of us taken that weekend.

We arrived home late Sunday night, tired, happy and feeling lucky that we had such a memorable long weekend. As a sweeper you never know how long a dry spell will last or how long a winning streak will continue. At 10:00am Monday morning Craig got a phone call from a local radio station. He won a two-week European holiday—a nine country, fourteen day bus tour. He was shocked.



We went to Europe that September. The trip was with a tour company that specialized in youth groups 18-35. It was fast paced and had a party atmosphere. Being up late every night, getting up early every morning and running around a new city almost daily took its toll on me by the end of the vacation. I came home with a terrible cold, having sadly discovered I wasn't 21 anymore and couldn't keep up the pace I used to. No wonder they say 18-35! It's really tough on those of us over 35.

TIP: If one half of the couple is under 35 and the other is over, the older person can sign a waiver stating you understand the tour is designed for "young" people.

We visited London, Amsterdam, the Rhine Valley, Munich, Innsbruck, Hofgarten, Venice, Rome, Florence, Lucerne, Paris and then back to London. What a vacation! The two surprise bonuses of the tour were arriving in Munich on opening day of Oktoberfest (Who knew Oktoberfest started in September?) and seeing the last 10 minutes of Pope John Paul II's Wednesday morning sermon in Rome.



The highlight of the vacation for me was the evening trip up the Eiffel Tower. I have always wanted to go to Paris, and standing on the upper deck, hugging Craig and looking over the lights of Paris as the tower twinkled was absolutely magical. I felt so lucky!

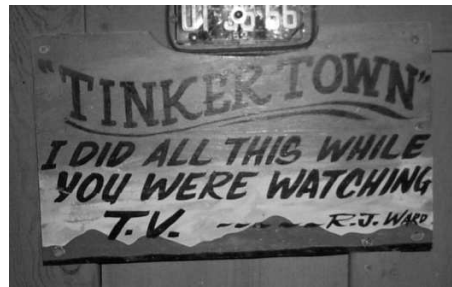
Our best adventure on the tour was the morning we had a \$100 breakfast.

It was the second last day of the trip and we were in Paris. After a brief tour of a perfumery, we found ourselves outside of the Opera House. We were hungry and decided to have a bite to eat, and were tired of eating small, quick breakfasts. Looking around we noticed Le Café de la Paix, Paris' most famous restaurant. (Embarrassingly, I did not recognize the name. Craig did recognize the name, remembering many world famous chefs began their careers in that very café.) We entered from the street entrance and I was thinking we may sit outside. Craig and I discussed our eating options with the Maitre D', and decided we would like to have the breakfast buffet. They sat us inside in a booth opposite the hotel entrance. As we waited for our tea and coffee to arrive we noticed several very well dressed people come into the restaurant.



Then we went to the buffet. I have never seen a buffet like this in my life! There were breads and cheeses from all over the world, twenty different kinds of fresh fruit, four types of fresh fruit juice, and the best scrambled eggs I have ever eaten. They even had an entire section of Japanese specialties. When I came back to the table I said to Craig, "I don't think we want to know what breakfast is going to cost us." We sat for an hour relaxing, eating, deciding what were going to see that afternoon and soaking in the atmosphere. When the bill arrived it was €64 (\$100). It was worth every penny!

Many people ask me when I have time to enter so many sweepstakes. I have to quote R.J. Ward from a sign we found in the Tinker Town Museum just outside Santa Fe, NM:



TIP: For sweepstakes that offer trips as a prize, if the entry parameters are one per household, enter the person with the most flexible travel schedule. Most trips are non-transferable and if the spouse can't go, then a relative or a friend can be invited to go instead.