



Living the not-so-impossible dream

By Denette Wilford
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Carolyn Wilman takes ‘Winning For a Living’ to a whole new level

Who hasn't fantasized about winning a contest, a car, the lottery? I'm sure everyone has their "happy dance" when they learn they've won a million bucks. In case you were interested, mine has some booty-shaking with a little running man thrown in.

Everyone's filled out some sort of ballot, scratched a ticket, or rolled up a rim. Because who doesn't like winning something? But what you probably don't know is that there is a whole other side to contests. While some individuals merely dabble, there are others who are pros at it. Those dedicated, obsessed even, to dancing with Lady Luck are called "contestors".

Winning For a Living profiles four Canadian contestors who devote much of their time, some at the expense of their personal lives, to entering hundreds and thousands of contests. Are these contest junkies in it to win particular prizes or is the thrill of winning that keep them going?

Carolyn Wilman of Oshawa, Ont., may have gotten into the hobby of contesting when she was pregnant and unemployed, but she has since made her hobby her life. She runs her own website www.contestqueen.com, organized the first convention for Canadian contestors, and has written a tell-all book about contesting, *You Can't Win If You Don't Enter*.

TVGuide.ca got a chance to chat with Wilman, who talked about the biggest and best thing she's ever won, provided some handy-dandy tips for future contestors, and revealed what her secret is.

TVGuide.ca: Why are you the “Contest Queen”?

Carolyn Wilman: It's really a marketing moniker. I consider myself the hub of all things

contesting. If you go to my website, it's a reference point. So if you want to know where to go to find sites that list contests that are open to Canadians, click contest sites. If you want to meet contestors, click groups & forums. I try to be the reference point to all things and make it easier for people because when I started, there wasn't any place. All those links, I found individually on my own, one at a time. So now I've made it easier for people and grouped everything together.

TVG: Purely for marketing?

CW: Well, I do win a fair bit. I still do win five to 10, 15 prizes every month. Today we've had a good day. I love March! [laughs] We've won three things already today. A registered letter arrived saying we won a \$100 Sobeys gift certificate, I won movie passes, and we won a set of DVDs and books, *Gone Baby Gone* and *The Assassination of Jesse James*.

TVG: I've actually won a couple of fairly big things in contests, but have never thought of it as a hobby.

CW: What have you won?

TVG: I've actually won two trips.

CW: Awesome! See, you're a contestor, you're just an infrequent. I call you an infrequent.

TVG: I'm less than an infrequent, I'm more of a two-fer because that's pretty much all I've done.

CW: Wow! That is really rare for somebody who does it on a lark to win like that. You're very lucky. I can't believe you're not doing it more with that kind of karma.

TVG: I actually won my honeymoon on the radio.

CW: Wow. I'd start to enter if I was you. You've got that kind of luck.

TVG: It just seems too time-consuming. What kind of commitment does this take?

CW: Well, it's interesting. Because I do know Mike (Smith, also in the documentary). He enters a lot. He spends all day doing it. He does it while he's driving. I average one to two hours a day.

TVG: And you prefer online.

CW: I prefer online. And there are some days I don't do any. I'll spend 10 minutes. When I was running the (National Contestors) convention, there had to be a good month there, where if I got 10-30 minutes a day, I was lucky. But I still won quite a bit. I think part of it's my whole karma. I have a whole chapter on attracting luck.

So I don't put it above and beyond everything else. If I get to do it, I do it, if I don't, I don't. I used to worry about it but now I don't. My thought is, if I'm going to win, I'm going to win. I have fun doing it and I don't stress over it.

TVG: It was a sad clip with Mike and his wife. It's just totally taken over his life.

CW: Well it has taken over my life too, but in a positive way. Thank God he doesn't spend it gambling because in one way, I think it is an addiction. But it's a cheap addiction because it's free. [laughs] It doesn't cost anything to go online and throw in an entry, it didn't cost you anything to call the radio station and win that honeymoon. Just a little bit of your time.

TVG: You've had a good March so far, considering we're only a few days in. How many contests do you enter per year, on average, and how many do you win?

CW: I don't exactly know how many contests, and the reason I don't know is because I count my entries. One of my tips is to increase your odds of winning, don't just enter yourself, enter your friends and family. So, for example, if a contest says 'one entry per person', to increase your odds, enter your husband. Now you've increased your odds. If it's a trip for four, get a couple of contesting buddies, and say, 'why don't we all enter, the four of us, and if one of us wins, we'll go with each other'. That just increases odds again. But you have to have this agreement in advance.

Today, I entered approximately 200 entries for myself, my husband, and my daughter has a few for a kiddie contest. 200 times seven is 1400 times four times... so there's a lot of entries, but most of them are duplicate entries because a lot of them are per person, per day. So maybe it's really 75 contests with 200 entries.

TVG: You prefer to have the odds in your favour. Why would you want other people to win?

CW: First of all, I like to share. And I say 'Don't enter your friends if you don't want them to win'. For example, my sister won a trip to Greece. She didn't take me, she took a friend. But I entered her because I wanted her to have fun. I wanted her to experience what I've experienced. So I say don't enter somebody like that, unless you want them to do whatever they want with the prize. But that's my choice to enter my family and let them win because that's how I am. Some people only enter themselves and nobody else.

TVG: Share the wealth, I suppose.

CW: Yeah, I'm big on the sharing. But that's why I have the website. [laughs] If I didn't like to share, I wouldn't have written a book, I wouldn't have been in the documentary, I wouldn't have started the convention, I wouldn't started the clubs. It's all sharing, sharing, sharing.

TVG: What's the biggest thing you've ever won?

CW: The *Harry Potter* (experience). There's two reasons people enter. You can win things that just aren't in your budget. You can obtain things that aren't financially viable for you at a certain time in your life. Or you can win experiences that you just can't buy. Even if you're wealthy you can't buy it.

So we got to go to London, England, (the contest) was run in 22 countries around the world, there were 150 people, and we had a feast in the Great Hall. Even the platters that the food came on were props from the movie. I have a picture of me in Dumbledore's chair; it was very surreal. You can't buy that. And so that's what I really like with the hobby. My husband got to go around

the track in a pace car at the Indy, he got to be a judge in a Miss Hawaiian Tropics bikini contest. I'm the world's best wife... I won him both of those. [laughs]

TVG: Is there anything you haven't won that you're determined to win?

CW: [laughs] A car! The thing is, now is I've become stubborn. We really could use a new TV. But now I just refuse to spend the money because I figure I'm going to win one. Sadly, I had to buy a new computer. I hadn't won one yet so I broke down and bought a new computer. But I put it off and put it off. I was thinking once I bought it, I'd win one, but I haven't.

TVG: What do you think of some companies trying to stop the "professionals" as they call you, from winning?

CW: I disagree with that. Here's the thing: they want their loyal customers to win. Who are their loyal customers?

TVG: Well, I would assume, you.

CW: Right. So now you're going to piss me off and I'm not going to buy your stuff anymore. I've been a marketing consultant for 20 years and now I consult on promotions. So now you're going to stop me from buying your product, and the average happy customer tells two people and the average disgruntled person tells 11. And now there's the Internet. Are you stupid? [laughs] It's not right. I get marketing companies asking me 'how do we get more people to enter?', because there are two camps. People that think everything's a scam and won't enter, and people like me who think 'oh yeah, we can win'. So the only people that are entering are the sweepstakers and now you don't want us to enter. So who's going to enter? [laughs] Nobody!

TVG: I guess they're just counting on the one-offs, the infrequent as you call us.

CW: Well, then who would that be? What percentage is that?

TVG: Small, I suppose. How much do you think luck plays a factor versus hard work?

CW: Thomas Jefferson said 'I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work, the more that I have.' I think I'm lucky, therefore I am lucky. I get people telling me that it's hard to win and they never win. And then they never win. Part of it is the law of attraction and I believe that I'm going to win. I believe I will consistently win five to 15 prizes a month and therefore I do win five to 15 prizes a month. That is my expectation, that is what I believe, that is what I allow in, that's what occurs for me.

I'm trying to get people to realize that half the hobby is a mindset and half the hobby is hard work. I don't even consider it work. I think if it's hard work, then you should stop. I enter, I dream.

TVG: What's your secret?

CW: Well, there's a 200-page book that tells you my secret. [laughs] It's a lot about being organized, getting all the different methods, making it your own, having fun with it, trying different things out.

TVG: Do you think there will ever be a day where you decide ‘enough is enough’.

CW: No. I just never envisioned myself ever stopping. I learned to never say never, so it may occur one day, but I don’t ever see myself stopping.

Winning For a Living airs on *Doc Zone* on Thursday, March 6 at 9 p.m. ET/9:30 p.m. NT on CBC

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