

Players

by Nancy Martz

Emma Sassman won \$348 today playing the Lottery. She sat down heavily at her kitchen table, her right hip stinging with rheumatoid arthritis, but her face was crinkled in joy. Out of her basket she took a pencil and yellow tablet, the bills for the month, and the clippings she had saved from newspapers others had put in the recycling bin. Her brow was now furrowed as she first wrote down a number she hoped would save her from another scolding threat by her landlord. She was behind on the utilities, too, and studied her electric bill, deciding to leave her phone and the heat turned off. She would use her candles again. Her prescription drugs she could reduce to every four days. Then she turned to her clippings and began searching for affordable grocery items with the money left. She couldn't get the canned tuna without sacrificing on fruit and a vegetable. She decided on a small loaf of day old white bread and threw out the coupon on whole wheat from Wal-Mart. Emma sat there for hours going over and over the list on her yellow tablet, crossing out most items and adding a couple others, deciding to wait another week to wash her clothes. The Lottery windfall was life saving but not enough to quell her fears of the next week and the week after. Still, she praised God for tipping the Lottery scale in her favor and asked that her son not forget her and the money he said he would bring.

Jack Pilier also won the Lottery today. He raised a fist and pulled it down to his chest in victory. Stowing the money in his baggy jeans pocket and keeping his hand on it, he glanced around and hurried to his girlfriend's Valiant, where they kissed and hugged jubilantly before heading off to his dealer in another part of town. That night, they celebrated in her mother's bathroom with lines of cocaine on the toilet tank.

Edmund Connor gave a fleeting thought to his second mortgage but then gave his Lottery money over to the church, where it was used to buy the body and blood of Christ.

Patricia Langley looked at the photographs on her beige wall and then sat down at her desk and wrote checks to each of her children and grandchildren with her winnings.

Sal Martinez didn't win. But he tried. He took the \$348 he got from panhandling along Speer and Broadway and bought \$345 worth of Lottery tickets and a bottle of cheap gin to celebrate. But it was premature. He could have fed his kids and rented a roof over their heads for two weeks. But he thought he would win. He had such a good feeling when he bought those tickets. It was going to make them rich, him and his family. He knew in his heart and soul that God would see how hard he'd tried to find a job before panhandling just this once and turn the Lottery into loaves and fishes for them.

Billy Raile bought a round for the house and was clapped on the back as a jolly good fellow. Later when he was totally drunk and bummed out about having no money left, he got in a brawl with his newfound buddies and one of them shot him in the head.

YEAR LATER UPDATE: Emma froze to death that next winter; her son couldn't be located. Jack is in prison. Edmund's son was raped by a priest. Patricia celebrated her 80th birthday at Beatrice and Woodsley with over 50 relatives present. Sal and his family are panhandling full time now and no longer play the Lottery.