

# UNL student spins for cash

## 'Wheel Of Fortune' contestant wins \$22,050

By AMY KELLER  
Staff Reporter

UNL student Chad Pekron faced an audience of hundreds and a ticking time clock to rack his brain for answers and take home more than \$20,000 — but he couldn't tell anyone about the experience for almost a month.

Pekron, a senior political science and economics major, was a contestant on "Wheel of Fortune," where he solved two puzzles the first day and one on the second day to win a total of \$22,050.

The show was taped on Feb. 28, but didn't air until March 20 and 21.

"I thought it would be a lot of fun to at least try out. I like game shows."

This was Pekron's attitude when he went to a tryout for "Wheel of Fortune" in Omaha last April.

At the audition, each person took a written test and answered practice questions. Then those who were chosen to compete were given a phone call a few weeks before they were scheduled to appear on the show.

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When he got the call, Pekron said his first reaction was, "I was pretty excited. I wasn't really expecting it, and it came out of the blue."

Although he didn't study for the show, Pekron said he tried to watch the show every day and did the crossword puzzles in the Daily Nebraskan.

Pekron flew to Los Angeles for the filming of "Wheel Of Fortune." The game show did not pay for his three-day trip expenses, but he said he felt it was a good investment in view of the money he won.

On the show, Pekron's answer puzzles were "New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani," "Sharon Stone-Age" and "Leather-Bound Organizer."

Although he didn't win the grand prize, he did well enough the

first day to qualify for a second day's competition. After the filming, Pekron knew his results but no one else would know until the show aired right before spring break.

George Sturgeon, associate chemistry professor, was among those at the viewing party. Sturgeon is an adviser for the local Golden Key chapter, of which Pekron is an officer.

Sturgeon said he thought Pekron was a good contestant because "he's very determined and hard-working, extraordinarily bright, has lots of self-confidence, and he's very personable."

When asked what he plans to do with the money, Pekron, who graduates in May, said he will use most of it to pay for law school next year at Yale.

# Learning to live, love again painful

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and Longstein talked and she cheered him up, Todd said. That night, they had their first date.

Longstein was a savior for him because she was detached from the sad part of his life, so she offered an escape, he said.

"It was nice to feel like a normal guy again," he said. "We didn't talk about that stuff. We just had fun."

Todd changed quickly and said his mother noticed he seemed his old self again, he said. After meeting Longstein, he started looking into the future, he said, instead of the end of the day.

His new relationship helped him put his life back together, he said. It took away his numbness and let him enjoy his emotions, he said.

"It was nice to start laughing again and feel it."

### Cloudy to clear

Pat and Stan Harms received hundreds of letters from people admiring them for their strength in facing such tragedy. Some said they were inspired by their courage.

"They kind of put us on a pedestal," Pat said.

Although Pat and Stan said they tried to be brave for two years while bearing the intense suffering, coping with the murder of their daughter cast them into a private, complex ordeal.

Pat and Stan also were struggling with each other, they said. The pain and pressures wore on them and their marriage, Pat said, and they realized their problem through counseling.

While trying to be strong for each other, they weren't sharing their painful feelings, she said.

"We were each communicating with other people but we weren't communicating a whole lot between ourselves," she said.

Knowing that 70 percent of marriages in which a child dies ends in divorce, Pat and Stan opened their communication lines, they said.

"You're going down the road on parallel paths and you don't know what the other person is doing," Pat said. "So you need to go back and check on each other and see where they are."

Pat went through times when she stopped communicating and became angry and distant, Stan said. He found the best treatment was to make her sit in a room until she finally spilled her feelings, he said.

Pat said Stan's problem was speaking for both of them when she felt differently. For instance, she said, Stan agreed to speaking engagements and interviews that she didn't want to do.

During their grieving, Pat and Stan also found personal ways to cope with their loss.

Stan found solace in wood working, an art he had not practiced for years.

His motivation was Candi's love for art. She had especially liked to draw and left her parents with many sketches she drew in high school, he said.

"Seeing her drawings and realizing the talent, the potential she had that was never going to be developed just inspired me into getting back into my artwork," Stan said.

After Candi disappeared, Stan spent a lot of time in his workshop and created two perpetual calendars: flat wooden reliefs with frames to slide the days of the month into. One he gave to Pat's parents, the other to his mother.

Pat said she released a lot of her emotions when Stan's sister asked for help renovating a house. They helped knock out wooden laths and plaster from between the studs of the walls.

"We were exhausted physically and not mentally for a change," Pat said. "It felt good to beat something."

But Pat said her best grief therapy came from work at Bryan Memorial Hospital.

"Work gave me my focus," Pat said. "It kept me occupied. I think I lived at work for a couple years."

Pat said work was the one place she could break down because she was

away from Stan and because her co-workers were a strong support system.

"I'd always find myself at work staring at my computer screen, and I'd have tears rolling down my face," she said.

During one day at work, she was so upset, she called a co-worker across the room and the only thing she could say was a squeaky "Help." Her friend came running and comforted her, she said.

Pat admits, though, her emotions eventually got the best of her, and she took for granted those in whom she found support.

"I was a pretty irritable person," Pat said. "I had very little patience for ... for most anything. I didn't like being that way, but I couldn't seem to help me either."

After other workers complained about Pat being rude, her boss said she needed to improve her disposition, Pat said. Once Pat realized how her grief had affected her, she turned herself around, she said.

Meanwhile, Stan found that his work as a loan underwriter seemed more difficult.

"I don't think for a long time my mind really worked," he said.

His head was usually clouded, and his memory started to fail him, he said. His work was consistently interrupted as he pulled out manuals to remember how to do his job, he said.

He and Pat both struggled with diversions during daily tasks. Even Pat, who had long-distance phone numbers stored in her head, couldn't go from the phone book to the telephone without forgetting a number. But they learned during therapy that memory loss is normal for griever, Stan said.

"We feel like it took us a good two years for our heads to really feel clear," Stan said.

"It makes you feel so happy," Pat said. "It's like you feel reborn. But boy does it take a long time."

**Her memory lives on**

Stan, Pat and Todd say they still think about Candi every day.

But sometimes the memories are hard. For Stan and Pat, they said it's most difficult to see the opportunities and the joys in life Candi has missed: her friends' weddings, baby showers and birthdays.

Even simple things like a movie or music group she would have liked makes Stan sad.

"I think, 'Why can't she be here to enjoy those things?'"

For Todd, the reminders are everywhere, he said. As he drives around Lincoln meeting with advertising clients, he sees places he and Candi went to for dates. As he drives down Cornhusker Highway, he refuses to look at the sign for King's Drive-In Restaurant, he said.

But his own birthday on May 28, is the worst reminder, he said, because it's one day before Candi's.

"It's like a big blaring reminder that I'm here and she's not," Todd said.

And every day from July 17 to Dec. 6, Todd remembers what he did with Candi, or for Candi, in 1992.

"It's like I play back 1992 every year," he said.

Todd said some reminders bring good thoughts, though. Candi made a tape of songs for him. The second side was blank except for two songs. The last one was "Love Me" by Collin Raye. Todd thinks the song is a message for him because the song is about an old woman who is about to die and writes a note to her love telling him, "Wait for me. I'll meet you there."

The song that reminds Todd of Candi most is the Garth Brooks' song "The Dance," which also was on the tape and the first song they danced to.

"The whole song is about if I'd known how things were going to turn out, I might not have taken the time to love you. But I'm glad I did, even though you're not here anymore."

"I'm glad I took the chance to get to know you."

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