

UNL student wheels her way into appearance on 'Fortune'

■ Page Baumbach can't reveal how she fared on the show, but said the experience was a chance of a lifetime.

BY AMANDA SCHINDLER
Staff Reporter



DANIEL LUEDERT/DN
PAGE BAUMBACH, UNL senior nursing major, sits before her home computer adaptation of the classic TV show "Wheel of Fortune." Baumbach spun the wheel and is expecting to see the show on which she was a contestant tonight at 6:30 on Channels 7 and 11.

Of all the things that college students are forced to buy these days, a vowel is not usually one of them.

Senior nursing major Page Baumbach, however, bought her share and more when she was a contestant on a "Wheel of Fortune" episode that will air tonight. The show will be on Channels 7 and 11 at 6:30.

Baumbach was taped on the show Oct. 26 at the Buell Theater in Denver. She was one of 13 contestants who spun the wheel during the daylong taping of five episodes. Although she can't disclose the outcome of the show before it airs, Baumbach said she fared well.

"I think I was pretty fortunate, but not extremely," she said.

Baumbach originally applied to play on "Wheel of Fortune" in May 1996 when she replied to an advertisement in the Daily Nebraskan. After auditioning with about 60 other applicants in Omaha, she received notice that she had been chosen as one of the top 12.

It wasn't until a year later, however, that she finally was called to tape an episode.

"It's about 18 months (from the time of application) to the show," she said.

The day of taping started with a 10 a.m. orientation for the participants and tips for the actual taping, which began at 2:30 p.m.

Baumbach said the contestants were advised to buy vowels and

"pick smart letters," she said.

"It was really nerve-racking."

Baumbach loved the experience, though, especially the atmosphere of the event.

"It was very energetic," she said. "We got a chance to spin the wheel and pick letters beforehand, and watch the audience practice clapping. Everyone was going crazy."

Baumbach was a bit nervous during the taping of the show, not only because it airs on prime-time network television, but also because it is not edited.

"It just goes on," she said. "I'm sure if Pat (Sajak) or Vanna (White) fell, they would (edit it), but not if, say, you choose a letter that's already been chosen."

Baumbach played against students from mostly Colorado schools, and one University of New Mexico student.

"When they announced the schools, I got booed and hissed at," she said.

Her mother, Kathie, and brother were in the audience when they had a similar experience.

"At first, (the families) didn't know who everyone was," Kathie Baumbach said. "They booed at Nebraska, and it was overwhelming. But after dinner we got to know each other, and then we got some parents on our side."

During the day of taping, Baumbach was able to meet host Sajak, who got along well with all of the contestants, she said.

"He's a funny, short little guy, and very energetic," she said. "I really enjoyed him."

When the show airs tonight, her family will be taping it. "We're telling everyone we know," Kathie said.

Baumbach said the overall experience was the chance of a lifetime.

"I loved it," she said. "It brought 12 people together, and we all just clicked. I wouldn't change it for the world."

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Williams' impending execution day nears

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die in the electric chair Dec. 2.

He will become just the third person executed in the state since Nebraska reinstated the death penalty in 1972.

State Penitentiary Director Harold Clarke said there was a simple reason for the recent increase in executions in Nebraska.

"The pace is picking up because they (the current death row inmates) have been there for a long time," he said. "All of their avenues are, or have been, exhausted."

J. Kirk Brown, assistant state attorney general, agreed, and said states also are making sure how the executions are carried out are now constitutional.

"The states are making sure they meet those (constitutional) requirements," he said. "And a lot of the guess work on how to do this appropriately has been eliminated."

Clarke added that the pace could continue.

"A date can be set for any one of them at any time," he said.

Tuesday, Williams made his first attempt to delay his execution since the date was set by the Nebraska Supreme Court on Oct. 10.

His attorney, David Domina of Omaha, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Lincoln arguing that the three jolts of electricity

prison officials use during the execution violated state statutes and the use of the electric chair violated basic human decency rights.

Domina did not return calls to the Daily Nebraskan Wednesday.

Brown said even if the lawsuit were successful, it would probably not be enough to keep Williams alive.

"I don't believe that is an argument that would keep the execution from happening," he said of the latest court maneuver.

But past experiences, Brown said, have him a little reluctant to feeling absolutely certain the execution will take place as planned.

In 1995, Williams came within three hours of death before the state Supreme Court granted him a reprieve.

"I've gone past being confident and gone past predicting," Brown said. "If it comes off, it comes off."

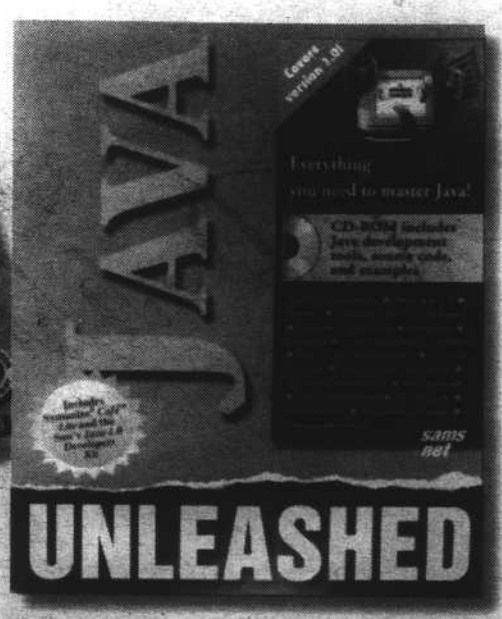
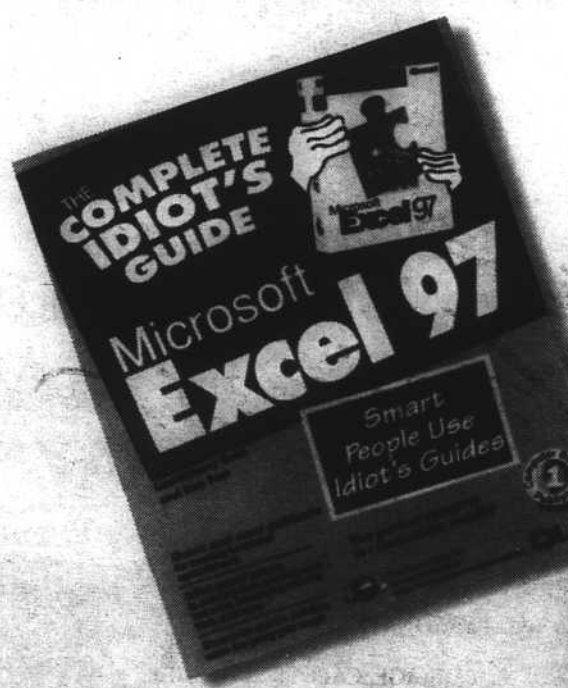
If it does come off, Clarke said it won't come off just after midnight on Dec. 2.

To thwart the large and unruly crowds of death penalty protesters and proponents who had gathered outside the prison for the previous two executions, Williams' execution is set for sometime between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., Clarke said.

Prison officials have said they are banking on people being at work that Tuesday morning, instead of out getting drunk and coming to the prison to protest.

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