

# 1.3m reasons to be cheerful

Everyone fantasises about winning Lotto. KATIE BLEASDALE meets someone who did. This is the story of Tory Whanau, who won a cool \$1.3 million – and she was just 20.

For almost two weeks, Tory Whanau had a feeling she was going to win Lotto. It was so strong she almost expected to win.

"I had this burning sensation that I was going to win, like when you know you're going to pass a test."

On the morning of September 13, 2003, Whanau and some friends bought tickets for that night's draw.

A second year media studies student at Victoria University, Whanau, 20 at the time, went back to her student hostel as she was on duty that night as a resident associate.

She watched the draw in the RA room in the hostel. As she ran up to her room to grab her ticket, it slowly dawned on her that most of the numbers matched the ones on her ticket.

As word got around, a group of people crowded into the RA room to watch the rest of the draw.

Five minutes later Whanau realised she had won a substantial amount of money. From that night on her life changed.

She had won \$1.3 million.

Looking back on her win almost two years later, Whanau, now 22, can recognise how things changed for her and reflect on her family's reactions to the news.

"My dad was very calm. He called me at 3am after he finished work and said: 'I've been told you've won. Well isn't that nice'. But my mum got trashed.

"My sister just kept screaming her head off and swearing."

Whanau moved to Wellington in 2001 to complete her secondary school education at Aotea College. She had spent most of her life in the small town of Patea, south of New Plymouth.

After graduating from secondary school, Whanau decided to stay in Wellington and do media studies at Victoria. At the time she won Lotto she was struggling financially, working both as an RA and part-time at Royal Sun Alliance.

In hindsight, Whanau says it became something of a test to figure out who her real friends were and who just hung around because of the instant money and popularity.

"I had people coming up to me and being like, 'Hi! How are you?' when I hardly knew them. My close friends were still really friendly but backed off a bit because they were worried it'd look like they were just hanging around me for the money."

One of Whanau's good friends, Aaron Macrae, 23, has known her since their first year at university. He supported Whanau after her win and invited her to move out of the hostel and live in his flat.

Macrae says winning Lotto has given Whanau a more positive outlook on life: "It has allowed her to have more self confidence and freedom to make career and financial advancements."

Whanau's cousin Sharelle Sweet, 21, remembers how Whanau felt obliged to pay for things. Particularly as her friends were fellow students who were struggling financially.

"They would all use Tory's make-up when they came over because Tory had the best make-up. And when everyone wanted to order pizzas, Tory just felt she should pay for it. After a while they kind of expected her to pay for it," says Sweet.

Sweet was watching *Pirates of the Caribbean* on the giant IMAX screen in Auckland when she received a text message from her mum saying Whanau had just won Lotto.

"I rang my mum and she told me. I couldn't find the exit to the theatre so I ended up standing right at the bottom of the screen and talking on the phone. It was during a loud climax part of the movie so I was yelling into the phone; it was all just so surreal."

Then Sweet gave Whanau a call.

"I was standing in the foyer of the movies screaming, 'One point three! One point three!'"

The next morning Whanau got her nan to get the ticket checked and when she heard how much she'd won, she quit her RA job immediately and left the hostel to live in a flat with Macrae and other friends.

"I had a nice bubbly feeling of disbelief for about the next 24 hours," she says.

"I quit my RA job, moved out of the hostel and had the best summer of my life."

Many people daydream about how they would spend so much money.

Whanau gave a lot to her extended family and made the money more accessible to her immediate family.

"I got this money through pure luck," says Whanau, "so there's no reason my family shouldn't be able to use it."

Sweet says Whanau paid for her plane fare from Queenstown to Wellington when their grandmother passed away late last year.

"I feel safe," says Sweet. "Now there's that added security of knowing that if I needed to I could get out of trouble, say if I was in some country and civil war broke out and I had to get home."

Most recently Whanau gave money to fund most of the extended family to hold a wananga at their marae in Patea.

The money has also helped feed Whanau's long-running addiction to shopping. She shopped almost every day after the win.

Sweet recalls how nervous she and Whanau were about going into stores like Versace and Louis Vuitton when she flew up to Auckland for a shopping spree soon after winning.

"We kept walking past Versace and not actually going in. We didn't know if we were actually allowed to go in because that's where the elite shop. But finally I dragged Tory in," says Sweet.

"Then we went for a fancy dinner down at the Viaduct and we didn't know how to act. Tory wasn't even sure of the proper way to pay the bill!"

When asked if Whanau has changed, Sweet says she is very different in some ways.

"Tory always liked quality things and she worked hard to get them. She was more conscientious about it all. Now she seems to buy things on more of an impulse.

"She has heaps of pairs of shoes and some of those shoes she hasn't even worn."

But the experience hasn't been entirely easy for Whanau. Her love life became difficult as word of her win got around different social circles. With the small town-like atmosphere of Wellington, Whanau found the details of her bank account always preceded her when she met someone.

"It was hard for me to find a guy because everyone knew," says Whanau. "I never knew what they really wanted."

She decided to stay away from relationships for a while after winning and just have fun. "There was no way I could get into anything," she says.

After two years of fun Whanau is ready to settle down. Yet she seems to have the same problems other single women face.

"It's hard to find someone that's genuine."

However the future holds a lot of opportunity for Whanau.

"She is a fun, friendly, kind-hearted person," says Macrae. "I can see her getting into media relations or event management and planning in the future."

But before that she hopes to travel — after finishing her studies.

At the moment, Whanau and her friends are planning a trip to Fiji at the end of the year.

"I just want to go somewhere sunny!" she says.

Whanau is content staying in Wellington for now. The biggest decision at the moment is whether to further her studies or to finish at the end of this year.



PHOTO: CARRIE WHANAU

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?: Tory Whanau.

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