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The Lucky Lotto
by Kay McGowan
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Abstract
This paper looks at the Michigan lottery and the effects of winning the $6 million prize on an inner city Latino family. May working people in Detroit dream of winning the lottery so they can be rich, quit their jobs in the auto factories and jet set round the world. This essay looks at what really happens when the “Lucky Winners” get rich quick.

Working class friends and neighbors exploit the new found wealth of their friends, the lucky winners. The new neighborhood rejects the lucky winners, and as a result the lucky winners do not belong anywhere. The real winner is the state of Michigan only.

Michigan, as well as many other states, has a legalized state lottery with prizes awarded in the millions of dollars. The lottery was established in exchange for much needed revenue for Michigan’s General Fund. The lottery was approved by Michigan voters because they believed it would aid Michigan schools and relieve the property tax burden on the individual.

Since its inception, millions of dollars have been awarded as prize money to the “lucky” winners.

Popularity of the Michigan lottery is based on the broad appeal of the $1 cost of the tickets. Payday in poorer sections of Detroit is evidenced by long lines of people waiting to buy their lottery tickets. Winning numbers are announced on Detroit television stations every Wednesday and Saturday night.

One lucky winner was “Felipe Rodriguez” of the Latino barrio in Detroit. Felipe and his wife, Flora, won the Super Lotto worth $6.7 million.

Felipe had lived all his life in the barrio in Detroit. When Felipe won the big prize, he and his wife and daughter were living on the second floor of a two family flat on a side street. Flora was Felipe’s second wife. His first wife and two sons lived a few blocks away. Felipe sees his sons regularly.

Felipe and Flora could not believe their good fortune. They were millionaires overnight! They were so happy. The entire barrio was overwhelmed by the winnings of Felipe and Flora. Lottery ticket sales increased in the neighborhood. Friends and neighbors called with happiness. People who had not called in years called with requests to borrow money to buy more lottery tickets. Friends and family members who had not spoken to Felipe for years called from the new riches that were being spread here and there, and that they would never again have to borrow from Felipe or any of his friends. Felipe and Flora gave generously to their friends and neighbors, and borrowed but never repaid a penny.

So just a few years after winning their fortune, Felipe and Flora were living in the barrio. Felipe worked as a day laborer, and Flora worked as a sales clerk, delivering newspapers. The new found wealth of the “lucky” winners had not made a difference in their neighbors’ lives. The “lucky” winners were not where they were in the barrio in Detroit. The neighbors called them “Felipe and Flora.”

Felipe and Flora’s friends and neighbors used the money they had borrowed from Felipe and Flora to buy more lottery tickets. They had not changed their lives in the least. Their attitude toward winning the lottery was the same as before. They were more ambitious than ever to win the lottery. They wanted to get away from their homes and live in an expensive suburban neighborhood.

They did not think of Filipino money as theirs. After losing all their money, they had to go to a relative in the suburbs and live in a tiled walled home with a white picket fence. The house was not large by American standards, but it was the perfect location. They had a small income. A four and a half room house was not big enough for the Rodriguez family. They needed more space. They borrowed cash for the property, and bought a four bedroom, two story suburban home. They could not resist viewing this as an opportunity to “improve” the property they owned.
neighbors came by in droves to share their happiness. People Felipe had not seen in years called with congratulations. They wanted to share their good fortune, so they gave generous gifts to friends and family. Friends and family also began to borrow from the new millionaires; a few hundred here and there, with all their money they would never miss it. The friends that borrowed from Felipe and Flora considered it a gift. Felipe and Flora considered moving to get a way from all the “friends” who borrowed but never paid the money back.

So in just a few short months, Felipe and Flora no longer felt “at home” in the barrio. Felipe, a long time factory worker, and Flora, who had worked as a sales clerk, decided to move to an exclusive suburban neighborhood with people whose “income” was more in line with theirs. After looking for just the right home, the couple found the most expensive home in an exclusive neighborhood. A perfect location for a family with their income. A four bedroom, four bath home had recently been redecorated by a doctor and his wife. The beautiful home, 4,000 square feet inside, had a beautiful yard with a wooded area in back. Just what the Rodriguez family had in mind. Felipe paid cash for the property. Also living in this neighborhood was the author, who could not resist viewing the neighborhood situation from an anthropologist’s perspective.

Felipe and Flora had their own ideas about decorating. Storage was also becoming a problem, so they decided to “improve” the property. Cement contractors were called and the wooded area became a private parking area for the $100,000 mobile home that the family would use for traveling. Felipe had flown only once—to Texas when his grandfather died—and he swore he’d never do it again, so he would travel in style in his mobile home.

Felipe had suddenly developed an interest in large boats now that he lived on the water, so he bought a 32 foot cabin cruiser that he named “Lucky Lotto.” He and Flora hoped to spend a weekend or two out on the river in his big boat; but for just jetting around, Felipe bought a really fast speed boat with two 100 HP motors. Both boats were covered with canvas tarps and were sitting on the newly constructed concrete parking area.

Michigan has lots of snow in the winter, and now with all of their free time, the lucky lotto winners would have time to go snowmobiling. Snowmobiling was something that had always looked like fun to them, so they purchased two snowmobiles that were identical and a big tractor for hauling them to the wide open spaces for snow adventure. These vehicles now sat beside the two boats and the mobile home.

Felipe had always wanted a ’57 Thunderbird, a ’69 Corvette, and a classic BMW, and now they were his! His sons came over on Sunday and they would wash all three vehicles, polish them and arrange them on the circular driveway. The family stood and admired their lovely vehicles, but rarely drove them.
"Everyday" transportation was a Dodge Ram pick-up truck. Flora had a Ford van (a large one). The parking area out back the adjacent driveway were almost full. Felipe and Flora were continuously moving these vehicles around to get out the one they wanted to drive.

The neighbors were aghast at the blatant display of wealth, not to mention the gaudy Christmas display! The Christmas display involved a complete full size plastic nativity scene with blinking lights, Santa and his eight reindeer and full sized sleigh. Blinking lights covered every shrub and bush all around the house. Every window and doorway had colorful lights in a display that would rival any major department store. The Rodríguez family had a lot to be thankful for that Christmas.

The neighbors had the simple, but to them tasteful, real wreaths with traditional red bows and a spotlight on the lawn focusing on the front of the house highlighting the wreaths. The annual neighborhood Christmas cocktail party was being held at the home of a bank president who lived across the street from the Rodríguez family. The only neighbors not invited were Felipe and Flora.

Felipe and Flora were now being called the “Clampetts” by the neighbors, named for an old television show called "The Beverly Hillbillies." The plot of the television program was the story of a family from the hills of Kentucky who strike it rich when oil is found on their property. The Clampetts head out to California to live the good life, but somehow they never fit in. The hillbillies buy a mansion next to the local bank president and life becomes unbearable as the Clampetts try to adjust to their new found wealth.

The Rodríguez neighbors never openly referred to them as the Clampetts; in fact, the neighbors never spoke to them at all.

Neighborhood children who trick or treated at the Rodríguez home observed that in spite of their millions of dollars, they only gave out inexpensive treats, such as lollipops or gumballs. A close neighbor, Mr Wharton, who owns a steel company, has a table in his foyer filled with every candy bar made! The full size candy bars, even more than one, can be selected by the children as they trick or treat at his home. Mr Wharton is known as a generous and kind man who “adores” children.

Flora Rodríguez dressed up in costume for children as she passed inexpensiv treats. No one seemed to notice and the parents waiting in the street for their children to get their treats were not impressed. The Rodríguez’s noticed that at the other neighborhood homes, the parents went right up to the door step to exchange pleasantries. The neighborhood used Halloween as an opportunity to socialize with their neighbors.

Two or three neighborhood socialites laughed about seeing Flora carrying so many Jacobson’s bags that she could hardly get in the house. They wondered how she could find anything to fit her at "Jake’s" (shop) since she never seemed to go there. The neighborhood itself has a rustic appearance and electric lights are not an area of concern for the area. The neighborhood is full of homes—no additions, no additional exteriors.

Felipe and Flora’s new home in the basement of the electrical contract for the property at 6 feet of the sale of the Rodríguez home. They noticed the house as it looked, the card lot."

Felipe and Flora’s neighbors turned and black helmets. Bones looked like 80. The ponytail of school 20 years ago was a big Harleys arrived. Flora also.

The building was up for sale, and sales continued. Mr Wharton remembers the Harleys.

Felipe and Flora were two communers from the barrio assessing their wealth to belong to neighborhood. The situation was based on face to face dealing.
“Jake’s” (short for Jacobson’s Department Store) since she was neither tall nor thin.

The neighborhood rides itself on its rustic appearance: no sidewalks, no electric lights, just the untouched beauty of an area of beautiful old trees and historic homes—no aluminum siding, no tacky additions, no outdoor sheds.

Felipe and Flora were more at home in the bright city lights so the electrical contractor came and installed 20 electric lights along the length of the property at 6 foot intervals. Everyone, especially the salesmen, could now find the Rodriguez house. On the darkets of nights it looked, the neighbors said, “like a used card lot.”

Felipe bought himself a complete set of leather clothes—the black jacket and black helmet with skull and crossbones looked good with his long ponytail. The ponytail he had sported since high school 20 years ago. All Felipe needed was a big Harley Davidson motorcycle to go with his leathers, and two days later the Harleys arrived! Felipe had bought one for Flora also.

The bank president put his house up for sale, and in the barrio lottery ticket sales continue to grow. Each barrio family remembers the good fortune of Felipe and Flora.

Felipe and Flora are ostracized in two communities; too wealthy to belong in the barrio anymore and too blatant in their wealth to belong in the wealthy community. The situation points out that class is based on factors other than wealth. The homeowners association is considering writing a tasteful letter asking the lucky Lotto winners to find another spot to park their mobile home, the two boats, the five cars, the tractor and snowmobiles, plus the Harley Davidsons.

What, the anthropologist must ask, is so lucky about Michigan’s Lotto?

According to Daniel W Rossides (1990:406) social class in the United States is based on occupation, income and education.

One of the underlying premises in American society is that any person can move up the social ladder through effort and motivation. Winning the lotto or “sheer luck” it seems, does not quality a person for higher status acceptance because the status was not earned by the mainstream ethics of hard work and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps.

Membership in the upper class “is rarely a simple matter of ‘either-or,’ but instead takes the form of combinations that often yield confusing and ambiguous statuses,” according to Marger (1994:53).

In the case of the Lucky Lotto winners, their ethnic background as Latinos further restricted any social mobility they might have otherwise enjoyed. The particularly wide gap between the “old money” and the “Barrio Latinos” presented a contrast not lost on the neighborhood participant-observer.

The anthropologist, a product of a middle-class environment, saw the irony of the situation on a class and racial level. The forlorn hope in the Barrio of
getting rich quick by winning the lottery and not by aspiring to higher education, reflects the contrasting values of the two extreme social classes in the United States, the educated upper elite and the lower class uneducated product of racial discrimination.

The neighborhood anthropologist, after being faced with the situation, began to realize that she was the only person interacting with both classes. Anthropology is, after all, the study of people in our cities, in our community, and even in our own neighborhood.

References

Marger, Martin N.

Rossides, W Daniel

CALL TO ORDER


Concerns were expressed at the meeting that revenues exceeded expenses by only $1,800. Since annual expenses usually exceed revenues in a business environment, this is unusually high. There were no concerns regarding the financial health of the organization.

In discussing the revenues for the previous year, it was noted that expenses were close to $1,800. The organization has been able to cover expenses with our student membership dues. This is an important revenue stream. Dues are necessary to keep up with expenses.

ITEM 3: Election of Officers (University) is the next

ITEM 4: Southern Anthropologists as Southern Anthropologists will be very slow. This is due to having moved to