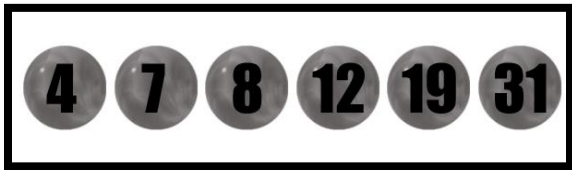


Lottery Winners

On Saturday night the winning numbers for this week's lottery were drawn. The winning numbers were 4, 7, 8, 12, 19, 31.

Only one ticket was sold with those same six numbers. That ticket was an exact match. The owner of that ticket has won 43.5 million dollars.

The only problem is that three different people claim to own that winning ticket.



Andrea Jansen

Andrea Jansen buys a lottery ticket every week. She always picks the same numbers. "They bring me luck," she explained. "At least I hoped they would bring me luck."

Andrea uses numbers from her kids' birthdays and ages. "My son's birthday is April 19. He's 12. So I use the numbers 4, 19 and 12. My daughter's birthday is July 31. She's 8. So for her I use the numbers 7, 31, and 8.

"So every week I buy a ticket with the numbers 4, 7, 8, 12, 19, 31."

She went to the gas station last Thursday. She asked to buy a ticket with these numbers.

Andrea's friend Cheryl Thomas was working at the gas station that day. Cheryl printed the lottery ticket with the numbers. She handed the ticket to Andrea. Andrea and Cheryl talked about their plans for the weekend.

"I was telling Cheryl about my son's birthday party," Andrea said. "She pointed out that he wasn't 12 anymore. He had just turned 13. She asked me if I wanted to change my lottery numbers. So I agreed. I gave her back the first ticket. Then she printed me a new ticket."

The new ticket had the numbers 4, 7, 8, 13, 19, 31. It was one number away from winning the jackpot. This ticket is worth \$25,000.

"My husband lost his job two months ago, and we've got two kids to take care of. We need money," said Andrea. "\$25,000 is a lot of money. But that \$43 million dollars should be mine. The ticket with the winning numbers was the one I first asked for. I held it in my hand. That money belongs to me and my family."

Cheryl Thomas

Lottery rules allow employees to purchase tickets. They can buy tickets that are printed accidentally or that are mistakes. Cheryl Thomas claims this is what happened. She was the only one working at the gas station that afternoon.

"I took a \$10 bill out of my own wallet. I put it in the cash register to pay for the ticket that Andrea didn't want. I have the winning ticket right now in my pocket. It's mine."

Cheryl does not have any proof that she paid for the ticket.

“I put my money in the cash register. But right then the gas station got really busy. I forgot to print out a receipt. But I really did put the money in there.”

“I need the lottery money. My mom’s been sick. This would help us out a lot.”

Margie Jackson

Margie Jackson owns the gas station. She believes that she owns that winning ticket.

“This is how it works,” Margie explains.

“Whenever a ticket is printed but isn’t sold, someone still has to pay the Lottery Commission for it. That someone is the gas station. Or actually me, since I own the gas station.”

“Every week there are tickets that either get printed with a mistake or for some reason don’t sell. I pay hundreds of dollars every year for those wasted tickets. I wouldn’t be allowed to sell lottery tickets if I didn’t pay for them. I have to make things even with the Lottery Commission.

“This ticket is just like all those others. It’s a wasted, left-behind ticket that I end up having to pay for. That makes me the owner of the ticket and the winner of the jackpot,” Margie claims.

“I feel bad for Andrea and Cheryl. I’m sure it’s frustrating for them to know they each held that winning ticket for a few minutes,” Margie said. “But the ticket Andrea took home won her a lot of money. She’ll get \$25,000. So she should be happy. And Cheryl automatically gets a \$5,000 bonus for being the person who printed the winning ticket. So she’ll benefit too.”

So who actually owns the winning lottery ticket?

It will probably end up being decided by a judge. Andrea has already hired a lawyer. The Lottery Commission is having a meeting to review the circumstances. Then all three people will meet in court so the judge can hear their stories. The judge will make a decision about who legally owns that ticket – and is now a millionaire.