

Big Winners— or Big Losers?



Like most people, Sheelah Ryan sometimes bought lottery tickets, and, like most people, she never expected to win. Then one day she received astonishing news: She was the winner of \$55 million, the biggest jackpot ever in the Florida State Lottery.

Her life changed overnight. She received more than 750,000 letters from people who wanted some of that wealth. She had to leave her home to escape from newspaper reporters, while friends stayed there to guard against thieves. After a few months, she bought a new house and car and then used most of the jackpot to start an organization that helps women and elderly people. Today, she is content with her life.

Not all lottery winners have such happy stories, however. Ed Kammen (not his real name) won \$8.2 million 12 years ago in a state lottery. He lent money to family



members who were in debt and spent the rest of the money on a \$5 million mansion. But he didn't plan for the expenses of such a big house. Taxes, insurance, and even furniture cost so much that he finally lost the house. His wife divorced him because of their financial problems, and he now lives alone in a small apartment.

In fact, nearly one-third of big lottery winners lose all their money in just a few years after their "big win." John Denny, a financial advisor, says too many people believe that money can solve all our problems. "But lottery winners soon find out that money also causes problems," he says. "If you were happy before you won, you will be happy afterwards too. But if you were an unhappy person, winning millions of dollars will only make things worse."

The biggest problem is friends and family members who demand help. Many lottery winners are pressured to put money into businesses that they don't understand, and they lose it all. Another problem is time. Winners usually quit working, but then they don't know what to do. "You can play golf for a few weeks," says Ed Kammen. "But you can't just play golf for 30 years!"

So, what should you do if you're a big winner? "Put your cash in the bank for a while," says John Denny. "Stop and think about what you really want in life and don't make any big decisions for a few months. And be sure to change your telephone number!"