

Nothing puzzling about Niagara University grad's appearance on 'Wheel of Fortune'

Olivia (Bitetti) Breen has strong performance on iconic game show

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

When Olivia Bitetti completed her internship with NFP 10 years ago, the first word of her performance review was "genius." As in, this communicator is putting forth next-level work that is, in fact, genius.

That acumen was on display Tuesday night, for more than 7.5 million people, as Bitetti – now married and Olivia Breen – put forth a strong showing on the top-rated, nationally syndicated "Wheel of Fortune."

The 2012 Niagara University graduate correctly answered the game show's first two "Toss Up" puzzles: "Once Upon A Time" (netting \$1,000) and "Theater Program" (\$2,000).

After landing on "Bankrupt" twice in the first spin-the-wheel round, Breen fought hard to take the second puzzle, which was "Action Figure Of Speech" (\$2,700 and the "Wild Card").

"You made that exciting," host Pat Sajak said.

Despite her early success, Breen found herself in third place, following contestant Rob's big "Prize Puzzle"-winning round. She rebounded well, taking the first and third "Triple Toss Up" puzzles ("Commas And Periods," \$2,000; "Apostrophes," \$2,000).

In the end, Breen successfully solved five puzzles to finish in second place with a total of \$9,700.

Niagara University graduate and former NFP intern Olivia (Bitetti) Breen recently competed on "Wheel of Fortune." Her episode aired locally Tuesday night on WIVB.

(Photo courtesy of "Wheel of Fortune" ©2021 Califon Productions Inc. All rights reserved. Photographer: Carol Kaelson)

As this is "Secret Santa Holiday Giveaway Week," she also won \$9,700 for viewer William L.

Breen, 31, grew up watching "Wheel of Fortune." But sentimental value notwithstanding, "I'm a copywriter. Anything that has to do with words and competition, I'm so there!"

She added, "I've always been a game show person. So, it was really exciting to finally be able to be a contestant."

Family and friends got a kick out of Breen's TV time, too.

"We had a watch party here, which was a lot of fun – but it was also crazy to be on the West Coast, because I had people watching at 4 p.m. my time; 4:30 my time; and then, finally, we got to watch it at 7:30. That was fun," she said. "There were watch parties in Syracuse (her hometown), Saratoga; there was Florida, Charlotte. People are just so excited."

Upon graduating with a communication studies degree from Niagara University, Breen first worked as a New York City-based writer, editor and content creator. She quickly landed placements in



The Huffington Post, at various blogs and with Estée Lauder.

Breen is now working in California. Her recent credits include freelance copywriter at IGK Hair and senior copywriter at JLo Beauty (yup, that Jennifer Lopez). Her website, <https://www.oliviarsebreen.com/>, lists impressive

work samples from myriad outlets, as well as professional copywriting services she provides for new and existing clients.

NFP chatted with Breen about her "Wheel" world experience. An edited Q&A follows.

Q: Tell me about the application process.

Olivia Breen: That was interesting. It's different because of COVID. The application process is virtual now. So, PSA: Everyone should apply now and try, because it's never been easier to get on the show.

It's virtual, and what you do is you send in a video telling "Wheel" why you love the show, and why you want to be on. Super quick. Just be authentic. Mine was like 15 seconds. And I got an email back within a couple of weeks, letting me know that I got picked to move on to the virtual tryouts.

The virtual tryouts are on Zoom, and you basically get linked up with three or four other people, and you play "Wheel" live on Zoom. You basically get like six minutes to solve as many puzzles as you can – and you just kind of have fun and see what happens.

And then I waited for a while. I got that email with the subject line, "Wheel of Fortune" tape date," and I was over the moon.

Q: I interview people on television, and one of the things I ask them about is what it's like to film an episode on a particular date – especially if it's a cliffhanger or something like that – and then to have to sit on that information for weeks and weeks and weeks until it airs. So, similarly for you: When did you film the episode? We saw it (Tuesday), but when did you actually film it?

OB: I think it was Oct. 10. The weirdest part of this, Josh, no one was allowed to come with me. So, Patrick, my husband, couldn't even come. He was the only person I was allowed to tell. And he couldn't come in during taping. It's not even like my parents could have known early.

You know, once upon a time, I think you could bring like four people. So they would obviously know what happened. But I truly walked out of there and was the only person who knew.

That was bizarre – and I'm also not the best secret keeper – but I was so excited to watch people's reactions when they watched for the first time, that that helped me keep the secret.

Q: So, you go there and, like you said, you can't bring friends or family. Tell me about the experience day of. Are you basically playing in front of a camera crew? Is there anybody in the audience?

OB: It was weird. First of all, Sony ("Wheel's" production studio) is like top-tier COVID protocols. And I'm not just saying that – they haven't shut down once. They are very, very, very careful. So, the experience was the best that it could be, I think, with all the precautions in place.

It was just us, the players. They tape five to six episodes a day, depending on if they're doing a Sunday show. And there's three people per episode, so it's 15; and then three alternates, so there's 18 of us. Plus, obviously, the camera crew. Plus, the producers, which are incredible. They hang out with you all day long. They hype you up. I mean, they do this every day, and they're high energy from sunup to sundown. So, God bless producers.

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