B-I-N-G-O â€¦ so it goes

by Jason_Love

â€œLetâ€™s go to bingo!â€•

â€œUm. Okay.â€•

It had never dawned on me that young people could play bingo. I thought there was an age minimum, a picture of my grandma reading, â€œYou must be this old to enter the building.â€•

I let my wife Yahaira drive since it was her idea. As we pulled into the church parking lot, I wondered how gambling fit into the Scriptures. And I wondered what bingo had to do with a farmerâ€™s dog. And I wondered where all these people came from. The place was packed.

We snaked our way to the counter where game cards were sold.

â€œIs this your first time?â€• said the cashier.

It must have been the way I stood there with my mouth open. I couldnâ€™t believe the torrent of cash. In addition to standard games, people were buying raffle tickets, bonus rounds, odds on the trifecta. They had everything but directions to Gamblers Anonymous (betcha I get there before you do).

I paid the church cashier, intrigued by the gaming laws of California. Bingo is okay, but blackjack is not; betting horses is legal, but betting football is not. I can gamble on the border so long as half of my body is in Nevada...

â€œYes, this is our first time,â€• I said. â€œHow much are jackpots?â€•

â€œTwo hundred and fifty dollars,â€• said the cashier.

â€œYouâ€™re kidding.â€•

â€œNope. Do you have a dabber?â€•

â€œA say-what?â€•

She pointed to the dabber stand beside the cafe. Yes, they even had a cafe where you could purchase any number of foods that arenâ€™t useful to your body. I bought a pink dabber for Yahaira. Later, after our dabber war, I was covered in pink. So it goes.

We sat in The Annex, a second room for the too many of us. I looked around with my dopey grin, but no one made eye contact. Across the way sat a sphere-shaped woman playing 16 cards at once. She was double-fisted, a dabber in each hand.

To her right sat a frazzled woman who seemed to be playing for crack money. She kept taking shots of coffee without losing sight of the board. I was afraid that if she didnâ€™t hit a bingo soon, sheâ€™d jump onto the table and hold us all at gunpoint.

Reviewing the program, I noticed that we were not playing the bingo I learned as a kid. These people were way beyond the five-in-a-row thing. First we played â€œWinnemuccaâ€• on the brown four-on. You needed a hardway bingo on three out of the four cards on the brown sheet. Stay with me here.

The bingomaster assumed the position and began calling numbers as fast as he could (the natives grow restless when he dawdles). The round woman sounded like a typewriter dabbing all her numbers. I was still searching for a number they called ten minutes earlier when a lady screamed out, â€œBINGO!â€•

Scared the hell out of me.

Everyone groaned and cursed the winner under their breath. The bingomaster verified the win and displayed the crying ball for players who were one away. An old man cursed anew.

Next was a game of â€œCrazy Kiteâ€• on the yellow six-on. I tried to hold my own, but people were screaming BINGO before Yahaira could explain what a crazy kite looked like.

It was time to change our strategy. Yahaira placed spells on our sheets, willing us a victory. She was in over her neurotic head: the regulars had sacrificed livestock earlier that evening.

In time, I came to recognize a bingo reality: Every game ends just as youâ€™re about to win. Each time my Winne began to mucca, someone screamed out, â€œBINGO!â€• It was genuinely traumatic. Whenever I got close, my gut knotted up, I squeezed the juice out of my dabber...

â€œSomeoneâ€™s gonna win right here, I just know it.â€•

â€œStop that,â€• said Yahaira. â€œYouâ€™re disturbing the energy.â€•

Ten near-bingos later, I decided to give up. I needed to tend to my ulcer. Looking around, I realized why we werenâ€™t winning: We were competing with five gazillion people. What were the odds of winning? Well, Jason, one in five gazillion.

Bingo wasnâ€™t anything like I had imagined. We had lost our money to a game totally devoid of skill. It was a scam, I tell you, an exploitation of our longing toâ€”

â€œBINGO!â€• yelled Yahaira.

â€œWho? You?! Youâ€™re kidding.â€•

Nope. She had just completed a â€œPostage Stamp Collection.â€• Two hundred and fifty bucks! I knew we could do it! Great idea, honey! Bingo rules!

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