

out of jeopardy

By Jason Karpf

Answer: He's the four-time "Jeopardy" champ whose game show experience inspired him to go back to college and change his life.

Question: Who is Jason Karpf?

For years, people had encouraged me to go on "Jeopardy." I had dropped out of college at 19, but along the way I absorbed a stockpile of historical facts, cultural tidbits and other trivia that made me a fan of the show and a good armchair contestant. In 1999, I ran out of excuses. I tried out and won a spot in the contestant pool. In early 2000, I received notice that I had been selected to go on the show.

I ended up with four victories on "Jeopardy," more than \$40,000 in winnings, and congratulations from friends and strangers coast to coast. It was a rush and begged for an encore. Becoming a professional game show contestant seemed impractical. Looking inward, I found my answer for a follow-up act: college.

The journey begins

Community college is the ideal initial step when returning to higher education. To qualify for the business administration track, I had to pass Algebra II. I asked the instructor to be gentle, as it was my first math class since the Carter administration.

From there, it was on to the PACE program (Program for Accelerated College Education). Back in the day, this would have been called "night school." It was not only night school, but also weekend school to accommodate people with jobs, families and lives.

My classmates came from many different backgrounds. Some were younger than me. A few were older. We had a corps of instructors and program administrators who understood us as human beings, students and dreamers. Two years passed quickly, and I had an associate degree. Halfway there.

Overcoming the obstacles

Removing the biggest roadblock to going back to college—the act of just going back—doesn't guarantee an obstacle-free path. As I was finishing my associate degree, I was laid off. My education was put on hold.

In 2004, I resumed my studies by taking advantage of two boons to the adult learner—financial aid and online degrees. I found expertise in both areas at the major online university where I enrolled. The online program emphasized writing and long-distance team building, both valuable, real-world skills. The sense of solidarity I had enjoyed at the bricks-and-mortar school was heightened in the electronic classroom. Students banded together, and instructors were attentive and accessible. No one could hide in the "back of the class." Participation in discussions and group assignments was mandatory.

You don't need a game show appearance to inspire a return to college. You don't need any single dramatic event. Fear and anxiety are normal. Just be ready to give the correct response when you reach your final round ...

Answer: The person who went back to school, got a degree, and charted a new course.

Question: Who am I? 🏆



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