

The answer is “Who is Sharon Lawson?”

Here’s the clue: This University of Lethbridge employee recently ticked a big item off of her bucket list by being a contestant on Jeopardy.

The Jeopardy episode featuring Sharon Lawson (BEd ’88), who provides administrative support in the Faculty of Health Sciences, is set to air on Wednesday, April 22. On Shaw, the show is available at 4:30 p.m. on Channel 76, at 5:30 on Channel 83 and at 8 p.m. on Channel 16.

“It was probably one of the coolest experiences of my entire life,” says Lawson.

While Lawson can’t say how she did on the show, she can talk about the experience of being a contestant.

Upon arriving, Lawson and the other contestants saw a life-sized cardboard cutout of Jeopardy host Alex Trebek and a several showcases featuring photos of celebrity contestants and past winners, along with all the Emmy Awards the show has won. After spending a couple of hours in the green room going over legal matters, rules and how the game would unfold, contestants were shown to the Jeopardy set.

“Walking out onto that stage was just mind blowing,” Lawson says. “It’s just as shiny as it looks on TV.”

Contestants were then led through a short rehearsal to get the feel of being on stage and using the buzzer. Typically, five games a day are taped and contestants are asked to bring a few changes of clothes in case they win consecutive games which would air on different days. Three games were taped in the morning and two after a lunch break.

“I’ve never been pushed so far out of my comfort zone,” she says. “I’m not used to being on camera and I hate being photographed. I’m thrilled the picture with Alex turned out as well as it did.”

One of the highlights for Lawson was meeting Trebek, who’s been battling pancreatic cancer for the past year.

“He’s very engaging and very nice and I thought he looked great considering what he’s been through in the last year,” says Lawson. “We talked about being Canadian.”

Before the game started, Lawson recalls feeling nervous. And when she saw what categories came up, she had a moment’s hesitation.

“The categories were not what I would’ve picked, but I thought ‘It’s OK,’” she says. “Once the game started, I forgot about being nervous. It was almost like an out-of-body experience. You have to be really quick on the buzzer and really be in the zone.”

Without going into details, Lawson says she's OK with her performance on the show and she figures her love of reading helped her out.

"I've been reading since I was three and I read a lot," Lawson says. "You could say I'm a voracious reader and I read a wide variety, everything from Chick Lit to historical fiction and pop culture. I seem to have a head for useless trivia and that I think is pretty key."

A standard part of the show is when Trebek has an informal chit-chat with contestants. Lawson had to provide some topics as part of her application package, like the fact that her cat is leash trained, that she's golfed with two members of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, that she studies medieval history at Cambridge in the United Kingdom during her holidays, and that she, as someone who was adopted as a baby, has tracked down cousins on both sides of her biological family. The last one was the topic of choice for Trebek.

Lawson says she's been a devoted fan of Jeopardy for years. In the late 1990s, she watched and played along with Rock & Roll Jeopardy and found she knew a lot of the answers. She came to the same conclusion when she watched Jeopardy. Her bid to be a contestant started in 2017 when she and a friend took the show's online test. Towards the end of January, 2018, Lawson received a contestant audition invitation. At the end of February, she and 24 others auditioned in Vancouver and learned they would be in the contestant pool for the next 18 months. But when August 2019 arrived and Lawson hadn't heard anything, she signed up for the online test again in January, 2020, figuring she'd have to start the whole process all over again. The day before that online test, Lawson got the call to tape the show February 17 and 18.

"The whole thing from start to finish was a lot of fun," she says.