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Her "Jeopardy!" preparation included studying books with a wide range of facts, like "The World Almanac," and books geared toward specific subjects that the geography major felt weren't her strong suits, including "Literature for Dummies" and "Art History for Dummies." She also surfed the Web for information and, of course, watched "Jeopardy!"

"I'm a nerd. I watch it pretty much every weekday that it's on, or at least I try to," Rozek said. "That's something that I found I had in common with the other contestants. We found that we could all literally talk about 'Jeopardy!' players by name, and how many days they'd been on, and who annoyed us, and who we wanted to do well."

Her father, Dan, accompanied her to Los Angeles for the taping, and her mom opted to stay back home in Cary.

"My mom would have been a nervous wreck," Rozek said with a smile. "We would have been going crazy, with the two of us feeding off each other's nervous energy, and it probably would not have been good."

The filming process was a long, tiring ordeal, Rozek said, explaining that the 20-mile car ride from the hotel to the studio took an hour, followed by more than five hours of signing paperwork, getting hair and makeup done, filming a short interview for the show's website, taping promos, and playing two practice games in the studio "just to sort of get a feel for things."

"About 15 minutes before you're set to start taping, they'll walk into the green room where the contestants are and be like, 'OK, you three -- you're up, you have to go,'" Rozek said. "So it's really nerve-wracking, just sitting back there wondering when you're going to go and who you're going to play against and what they're going to ask."

Then, she walked to the place most "Jeopardy!" fans can only dream of seeing in person.



"Standing behind the podium and seeing the lights and the board -- it was crazy. It was absolutely insane," she said.

Rozek enjoyed meeting host Alex Trebec, and she appreciated his use of funny anecdotes to break the tension during the match, "because we were all nervous as could be."

And what about those buzzers that contestants always seem to blame for their "Jeopardy!" woes?

"They aren't pretending that their buzzers aren't working correctly," Rozek said. "Those buzzers are tricky, let me tell you. They are not easy."

Now, the hard part is keeping the outcome under wraps. Word of her "Jeopardy!" experience has been making its way through campus, though, and it has already brought some perks, including an invitation to meet EIU alumnus Tony Romo (now famous as the Dallas Cowboys' quarterback) at the EIU Athletic Director's Gala on Feb. 14.

But for the most part, she's kept to her regular schedule, which is full of classes, two on-campus jobs and extracurricular activities (including leading campus tours for prospective students) -- and, of course, watching "Jeopardy!"

Rozek will appear on "Jeopardy! College Championship" on Thursday, Feb. 2. In Charleston, the show airs at 4:30 p.m. on WAND, and 6:30 p.m. on WTWO.

