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GA

Sharing Recovery in Gamblers Anonymous

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our founders

Jim W  
1912-1983  
Ray M  
1905-1992

We also dedicate this book to the worldwide Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous:  
those members who came before us,  
those of us in the rooms today,  
and those yet to come.

I SOUGHT MY SOUL,  
BUT COULD NOT SEE.  
I SOUGHT MY GOD,  
BUT HE ELUDED ME.  
I SOUGHT MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
AND FOUND ALL THREE.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Fellowship wishes to thank all who contributed their time, effort, experience, strength and hope to make this book a reality.

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## FOREWORD

Pathological [compulsive] gambling is a destructive, dangerous, and potentially deadly disorder. Yet, this devastating problem is treatable and Gamblers Anonymous [GA] has been and is the single most effective treatment modality for the pathological gambler. This book presents the principles and guidelines of GA which have been used by thousands of people who are being successfully treated.

Lack of in-depth knowledge of GA is the primary reason for any misunderstanding about its purposes, methods, and activities. Simply, it is a voluntary fellowship of compulsive gamblers gathered for the sole purpose of helping themselves and each other to stop gambling. It is a program of 12 steps that provide a framework of hope, structure, and friendship for those that have lived the program and successfully adapted to life. This book describes the routes on the road to this successful adaptation to a life without gambling. This road can be smooth or rocky, but in any case, it is never a painless journey while recovering.

GA is effective because it [A] undercuts denial, projection, and rationalization [B] identifies the serious implications of gambling [C] demands honesty and responsibility [D] identifies and corrects character problems [E] gives affection, personal concern, and support [F] develops substitutes for the void left by the cessation of gambling [G] is nonjudgmental.

The more a person understands Gamblers Anonymous, the more one respects and admires it for its principles, accomplishments, effectiveness, and the lives it has saved.

Robert L. Custer, M.D.  
May 1983

*(This foreword was published in previous editions of **GA: Sharing Recovery Through Gamblers Anonymous**. Dr. Robert L. Custer was an early pioneer in the study and treatment of compulsive gambling and was a proponent of the Gamblers Anonymous Program.)*

**SERENITY PRAYER**

GOD, GRANT ME THE SERENITY  
TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,  
COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN,  
AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

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**PART ONE: GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If you find yourself reading this book, you, or your family or friends, are concerned about your gambling. As compulsive gamblers we understand as perhaps few others can. With this book we offer our collective experience, strength, and hope. There is a solution.

Members of Gamblers Anonymous have discovered that willpower, determination, and self-confidence were no defense against compulsive gambling.

We found that all our reasons for our compulsive gambling are no excuse for delaying our journey to recovery.

If you honestly face the facts about yourself and the illness, if you keep coming back to meetings to listen and talk to other compulsive gamblers, if you read Gamblers Anonymous literature with an open mind and, most importantly, if you are willing to work the Twelve Step Recovery Program of Gamblers Anonymous to the best of your ability, we believe you can indeed join those who experience sustained recovery.

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. Gamblers Anonymous is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and help other compulsive gamblers do the same.

Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real problem gamblers. No one likes to think they are different from their fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our gambling careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could gamble like other people. The idea that somehow, someday, we will control our gambling is the great obsession of every compulsive gambler. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of prison, insanity, or death.

We learned we had to concede fully to our inner most selves that we are compulsive gamblers. This is the first step in our recovery. With reference to gambling, the delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.

We have lost the ability to control our gambling. We know that no real compulsive gambler ever regains control. All of us felt at times we were regaining control, but such intervals, usually brief, were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced that gamblers of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period of time we get worse, never better.

How can you tell if you are a compulsive gambler? Only you can make that decision. Most people turn to Gamblers Anonymous when they become willing to admit that gambling has defeated them. Also, in Gamblers Anonymous, a compulsive gambler is described as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in any department of their life.

Many Gamblers Anonymous members went through terrifying experiences before they were ready to accept help. Others were faced with a slow, subtle deterioration which finally brought them to the point of admitting defeat. Even now many will be asking: "Is this really for me?" Don't worry. Many of us have thought the same thing.

A self-assessment of your gambling might be helpful:

1. Did you ever lose time from work or school due to gambling?
2. Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?
3. Did gambling affect your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Did gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing did you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win did you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Did you often gamble until all your money was gone?
10. Did you ever borrow to finance your gambling?
11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Were you reluctant to use "gambling money" for normal expenditures?
13. Did gambling make you careless of the welfare of yourself or your family?
14. Did you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
15. Have you ever gambled to escape worry, trouble, boredom, loneliness, grief, or loss?
16. Have you ever committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Did gambling cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments, or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?
19. Did you ever have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours of gambling?
20. Have you ever considered self-destruction or suicide as a result of your gambling?

If you find yourself answering "Yes" to some or all of these questions, you may be a problem gambler who has crossed that invisible line into irresponsible, uncontrolled gambling.

Part One of this book attempts to more fully describe the condition of compulsive gambling and the solution to be found in the Gamblers Anonymous Program.

Part Two includes stories from our membership. We hope you will find aspects of your experiences in these stories. We hope you will find that while we may not know you individually, we know you in a collective sense of shared experiences. You will

come to understand we are people who are drawn together by our common problem: an obsession to gamble.

The devastation and far-reaching consequences of our obsession to gamble brings us into the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous. An honest appraisal of our gambling and a strong desire to not return to that way of thinking and living is the foundation upon which recovery can be built.

We welcome you to Gamblers Anonymous.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### GAMBLING AND COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

One definition of gambling is the wagering of money or something of value on an event where the outcome is uncertain, in order to increase the value of the initial wager. Gambling has been present throughout the ages. It has more shapes and styles than there is time to count. Gambling is often a strong component of many cultures and life styles.

Is gambling inherently bad? We of Gamblers Anonymous take no stand on that question. Our primary purpose is to help those whose gambling has crossed an invisible line into irresponsible, uncontrolled gambling. Some of our members have strong feelings about gambling or the gaming industry, but Gamblers Anonymous as a whole does not. If we were to claim some moral high ground about gambling, it would lead us into the arena of public opinion which could create controversy and divert us from our primary purpose.

We are an organization that has a wide variety of members. We are from all walks of life and our gambling styles and amounts wagered are just as varied. In order to make room for all who need us, Gamblers Anonymous uses a very broad, yet strict, definition of gambling.

Gambling, for the compulsive gambler, is defined as follows: Any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends on chance or "skill" constitutes gambling.

Many who come into the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous chafe at this definition. They exclaim, "I have no control over my slot machine play. Why can't I still buy raffle tickets?" "I lost my paycheck at the poker table, what does that have to do with entering the office sport pool?" Our answer to this is simple. A stand has to be made somewhere and Gamblers Anonymous members have found the first bet, of any kind, is the one to avoid. Our collective experience is that total abstinence is a far better path than attempting to control our gambling.

So, what constitutes compulsive gambling? That again is a definition that has many variables, but essentially compulsive gambling is a repetitive return to gambling disregarding the consequences.

Many of our members share common traits in their gambling. One of those shared traits is that our reaction to gambling is different. For lack of a better word we seem to be allergic to gambling. Once we make that first bet, we are at risk of an abnormal reaction. Losing causes us to gamble in reckless desperation. Winning creates in us a desire to win more. In either case, we act outside the boundaries of social gambling.

Another common trait is our mental obsession about gambling. Even when not gambling we are consumed with thoughts about our next gambling session. How are we going to find the time or money? What lies will need to be told? We insist on believing the delusion that our new "system" can't fail. On and on and on. This mental obsession always leads us back to gambling.



What started out as fun or entertainment has become something else entirely. The bottom line is that we have lost the ability to control our gambling, and as we chase our losses, our lives become unmanageable. For example, perhaps we are having trouble with personal relationships; maybe we can't control our emotions and are prone to misery and depression. We might be struggling financially and may have committed or are considering committing illegal acts to finance our gambling. It is likely that we are full of fear and are unhappy. Thoughts of suicide may be present. This is not a normal way of thinking or living. Do you see yourself in any of this?

If you are still saying no, it may interest you to know that there are three other shared symptoms that compulsive gamblers exhibit:

- DENIAL: "Others may have that problem but not me. I have control."
- RATIONALIZATION: "I'm just on a bad run and all would be fine if you would just leave me alone."
- JUSTIFICATION: "I work hard to make my money. I can spend it any way I want."

Many of us have thought and said these same things as we progressed from casual gamblers to problem gamblers to compulsive gamblers.

To gamble compulsively is to gamble recklessly, disregarding any and all consequences. Compulsive gamblers will place the obsession to gamble before all else in their lives. Chapter Three: Frequently Asked Questions, may help to clarify additional questions you have about Gamblers Anonymous and its membership.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

#### **What is Gamblers Anonymous?**

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. Gamblers Anonymous is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.

We are a twelve-step fellowship that meets for help and mutual support in dealing with our common obsession to gamble. There is no hierarchy or ruling class among the members. Newcomers and long-time members are equally valued in our Fellowship. The operating structure of Gamblers Anonymous is based upon voluntary service by its members. Our International Service Office (ISO) is the only part of Gamblers Anonymous with paid professional staff, as it handles the business side of Gamblers Anonymous.

#### **How do I find a Gamblers Anonymous meeting?**

Gamblers Anonymous meetings are found in most states in the USA and in a growing number of countries around the globe. A good starting point for finding a meeting is the ISO website: [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

The website offers a variety of ways to connect you to meetings or helpline phone numbers. You can contact ISO directly at:

Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office  
P.O. Box 17173  
Los Angeles, California 90017  
Phone: 626-960-3500  
Fax: 626-960-3501  
Website: [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)  
E-mail: [isomain@gamblersanonymous.org](mailto:isomain@gamblersanonymous.org)

For meeting information in the United States call:  
855-2-CALL-GA  
855-222-5542

Meeting and Hotline information outside of the U.S. can be found under the "International Meetings" tab on the ISO website: [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

## **What is compulsive gambling?**

Compulsive gambling is an illness, progressive in nature, which can never be cured, but can be arrested. Before coming to Gamblers Anonymous, many compulsive gamblers thought of themselves as morally weak, or at times just plain "no good". The Gamblers Anonymous concept is that compulsive gamblers are really very sick people who can recover if they will follow to the best of their ability a simple program that has proved successful for thousands of other people with a gambling or compulsive gambling problem.

## **What does a compulsive gambler need to do in order to stop gambling?**

We as compulsive gamblers need to have a desire to get well. We need to be willing to accept the fact that we are in the grip of a progressive illness. Our experience has shown that the Gamblers Anonymous program will always work for any person who has a desire to stop gambling. However, it will never work for the person who will not face squarely the facts about this illness.

## **How can you tell whether you are a compulsive gambler?**

Only you can make that decision. Most people turn to Gamblers Anonymous when they become willing to admit that gambling has defeated them. Also, in Gamblers Anonymous, a compulsive gambler is described as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in any department of their life. Many Gamblers Anonymous members went through terrifying experiences before they were ready to accept help. Others were faced with a slow, subtle deterioration which finally brought them to the point of admitting defeat.

## **Can a compulsive gambler ever gamble normally again?**

No. The first bet to a compulsive gambler is like the first drink to an alcoholic. Sooner or later they fall back into the same old destructive pattern. Once a person has crossed the invisible line into irresponsible, uncontrolled gambling, they never seem to regain control. After abstaining a few months some of our members have tried some small bet experimentation, always with disastrous results. The old obsession inevitably returned. Our Gamblers Anonymous experience seems to point to these alternatives: To gamble risking progressive deterioration, or not to gamble and develop a better way of life.

## **Why can't a compulsive gambler simply use willpower to stop gambling?**

We believe that most people, if they are honest, will recognize their lack of power to solve certain problems. When it comes to gambling, we have known many problem gamblers who could abstain for long stretches, but caught off guard and under the right set of circumstances, they started gambling without thought of the consequences. The defenses they relied upon, through willpower alone, gave way before some trivial

reason for placing a bet. We have found that willpower and self-knowledge will not help in those mental blank spots, but adherence to spiritual principles seems to solve our problems. Most of us feel that a belief in a Power greater than ourselves is necessary in order for us to sustain a desire to refrain from gambling.

### **I only go on gambling binges periodically. Do I need Gamblers Anonymous?**

Yes. Compulsive gamblers who have joined Gamblers Anonymous tell us that, though their gambling binges were periodic, the intervals between were not periods of constructive thinking. Symptomatic of these periods were nervousness, irritability, frustration, indecision, and a continued breakdown of personal relationships. These same people have often found the Gamblers Anonymous program the answer to the elimination of character defects and a guide to moral progress in their lives.

### **How does someone stop gambling through the Gamblers Anonymous program?**

One does this through bringing about a progressive character change within oneself. This can be accomplished by having faith in and following the basic concepts of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery and Unity Programs. There are no short cuts in gaining this faith and understanding. To recover from one of the most baffling, insidious, and compulsive addictions will require diligent effort. **HONESTY, OPENMINDEDNESS, and WILLINGNESS** are the key words in our recovery.

### **Can a person recover by reading Gamblers Anonymous literature or medical books on the problem of compulsive gambling?**

The foundation of the Gamblers Anonymous program is compulsive gamblers sharing experience, strength, and hope with each other. GA literature is most helpful when used in the context of meetings, sponsors, and the GA Fellowship. As for medical or reference books, Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside literature.

### **Is knowing why we gambled important?**

Perhaps. However; insofar as stopping gambling, many Gamblers Anonymous members have abstained from gambling without the knowledge of why they gambled.

### **What are some characteristics of a person who is a compulsive gambler?**

1. **INABILITY AND UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT REALITY:** Hence the escape into the dream world of gambling.

2. **EMOTIONAL INSECURITY:** A compulsive gambler finds they are emotionally comfortable only when "in action". It is not uncommon to hear a Gamblers Anonymous member say; "The only time I really felt like I belonged was when I was gambling. Then I felt secure and comfortable. No great demands were made on me. I knew I was destroying myself, yet at the same time, I had a certain sense of security."

**3. IMMATURITY:** A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort on their part seems to be a common character pattern of compulsive gamblers. Many Gamblers Anonymous members accept the fact they were unwilling to grow up. Subconsciously they felt they could avoid mature responsibility by wagering on the spin of a wheel or the turn of a card, and so the struggle to escape responsibility finally became a subconscious obsession. Some compulsive gamblers seem to have a strong inner urge to be a "big shot" and need to have a feeling of being all-powerful. The compulsive gambler is willing to do anything, often of an antisocial nature, to maintain the image they want others to see.

### **What is the dream world of the compulsive gambler?**

This is another common characteristic of compulsive gamblers. A lot of time is spent creating images of the great and wonderful things they are going to do as soon as they make the big win. They often see themselves as quite philanthropic and charming people. They may dream of providing families and friends with a variety of luxuries. Compulsive gamblers picture themselves leading a pleasant gracious life, made possible by the huge sums of money they think they will accrue from their "system". They believe these wonderful things are always just around the corner as they chase the big win.

Pathetically, there never seems to be a big enough win to make even the smallest dreams come true. When compulsive gamblers succeed, they gamble to dream still greater dreams. When failing, they gamble in reckless desperation and the depths of their misery are fathomless as their dream world comes crashing down. Sadly, they will struggle back, dream more dreams, and of course suffer more misery. No one can convince them that their great schemes will not someday come true. They believe they will, for without this dream world, life for them would not be tolerable.

### **Isn't compulsive gambling basically a financial problem?**

No. Compulsive gambling is an emotional problem. A person in the grip of this illness creates mountains of apparently insolvable problems. Of course, financial problems are created, but they also find themselves facing marital, employment or legal problems. Compulsive gamblers find friends have been lost and relatives have rejected them. Of the many serious difficulties created, the financial problems often seem the easiest to solve. When a compulsive gambler enters Gamblers Anonymous and stops gambling, there is no longer the financial drain that was caused by gambling and very shortly the financial pressures may be lessened. Gamblers Anonymous members have found the best road to financial recovery is through hard work and repayment of our debts. Bankruptcy, borrowing and/or lending of money (bailouts) in Gamblers Anonymous is detrimental to our recovery and should not take place.

The most difficult and time-consuming problem with which they will be faced is that of bringing about a character change within themselves. Most Gamblers Anonymous members look upon this as their greatest challenge which should be worked on immediately and continued throughout their lives.

## **Who can join Gamblers Anonymous?**

Anyone who has a desire to stop gambling. There are no other rules or regulations concerning Gamblers Anonymous membership.

## **How much does it cost to join Gamblers Anonymous?**

There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership. However, we do have expenses related to our group meetings and our Gamblers Anonymous service structure. Since Gamblers Anonymous is fully self-supporting and declines outside contributions, these expenses are met through voluntary financial support by the members. Experience has shown that acceptance of these financial responsibilities is a vital part of our individual and group growth.

## **Why are Gamblers Anonymous members anonymous?**

New members may worry about employers, family, or friends finding out about their compulsive gambling illness. In Gamblers Anonymous we want people to feel safe in our meetings, so we respect each other's privacy. This means that we use first names and that no individual speaks for Gamblers Anonymous at the level of press, radio, films, television, and Internet.

## **Is Gamblers Anonymous a religious society?**

No. Gamblers Anonymous is composed of people from many faiths along with agnostics and atheists. Since membership in Gamblers Anonymous requires no particular religious belief as a condition of membership, it cannot be described as a religious organization. The Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program is based on the practice of certain spiritual principles and the member is free to interpret these as they choose.

## **Is there support available for families and friends of compulsive gamblers?**

Our compulsive gambling spread pain, misery, and chaos. Our loved ones are often deeply hurt. Certainly, financial damage has been done, but often even more harmful is the emotional damage our gambling has caused. Just as we gamblers need the Gamblers Anonymous program, the Fellowship, and support of our fellow gamblers, our family and friends also need a place where their experiences are understood.

Gam-Anon is a Fellowship of people whose lives have been impacted by another person's compulsive gambling. The Gam-Anon Program is designed to provide growth and support for affected individuals, whether the compulsive gambler is still gambling or not.

A bond exists between the Fellowships of Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon; however, they are distinct and separate Fellowships. If you have people in your life who might benefit from participating in the Gam-Anon program, we encourage you to help

them find a meeting. We try to be supportive of their recovery journeys, just as we hope they will be of ours.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### ESTABLISHING RECOVERY IN GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

The methods and levels of recovery vary widely in Gamblers Anonymous. What works for one member does not necessarily work for another. However, if you were to talk with those who have maintained recovery for long periods of time, you would find they have one thing in common: They have all actively used the recovery tools available in Gamblers Anonymous.

Essential tools of recovery are: regularly attending meetings, being of service, using a sponsor, reading GA literature, participating in Pressure Relief Group Meetings, and practicing to the best of their ability the Recovery and Unity Programs.

#### Meetings

Meetings are when two or more compulsive gamblers come together for mutual support. There is no one style or format for Gamblers Anonymous meetings. As long as a meeting follows the Guidance Code of Gamblers Anonymous, it can call itself a GA meeting.

Meetings are a core component of recovery in Gamblers Anonymous. Compulsive gamblers retreat into isolation as gambling creates ever-increasing unmanageability in our lives. Family and friends have rejected us. Financial and legal problems cause great emotional disturbances. A comment often heard at meetings is, "I felt I was the only one suffering like this." Those feelings change when a compulsive gambler walks into a GA room. There we find all kinds of people who have also experienced an obsession to gamble. This common obsession is the glue that bonds us together and enables us to help each other recover.

Some suggestions for connecting to Gamblers Anonymous meetings include:

- Attend as many meetings as possible per week.
- Most members find establishing a home meeting strengthens their recovery.
- In every meeting look for similarities with your gambling experiences, not differences. Approach each meeting with an open mind and you will find others who have taken their gambling to the same extremes as you. Shortly, that barrier of isolation will start to fall away.
- Make it a habit to arrive early. Engage other members in conversation and help with meeting set up. Greet newcomers and welcome them to the meeting. If the group goes out for coffee and fellowship after the meeting, join them.
- In order for all to have a chance to recover there needs to be group unity. Gossip or criticism should be avoided. Meetings are a place to practice acceptance, love, and tolerance of others.
- Harassment has no place in a GA meeting. If this occurs in your meeting talk to your trusted servants and sponsors for guidance.



Although the Gamblers Anonymous program continues to grow and new groups are forming, there are still areas where there are no meetings. If you live in such an area, it is possible for you to start a meeting. The Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office can supply starter kits of literature and information to help you.

Information on finding meetings or starting a new meeting is available through the Gamblers Anonymous ISO.

Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office  
P.O. Box 17173  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

PHONE: 626-960-3500  
FAX: 626-960-3501

E-MAIL: [isomain@gamblersanonymous.org](mailto:isomain@gamblersanonymous.org)

WEBSITE: [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

### **Service**

Gamblers Anonymous follows the tradition found in all twelve step fellowships that there is no hierarchy of membership. Newcomers and longtime members all enjoy full membership because they have a desire to stop gambling. In order to create and sustain an environment of successful recovery there needs to be a common effort by all. Meeting places need to be found and maintained. Meetings need to be chaired, rooms set up, coffee made, bills paid, and literature purchased. Service like this provides a place for recovery to happen.

The service of running meetings and the handling of finances is usually done by members with experience, and sometimes specific lengths of abstinence from gambling may be required. Those new to Gamblers Anonymous can also play an important role. They can arrive early, help set up the room, clean up after the meeting and in doing so, strengthen their own recovery. As we attend meetings and our recovery progresses, other service opportunities will present themselves.

Another important service is making ourselves available to help the still-suffering compulsive gambler. We can accomplish this by sharing our experience, strength, and hope at the level of our own personal recovery. This can be done inside or outside of meetings by practicing the Recovery Program's Twelfth Step: Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

### **Sponsorship**

A very important service opportunity in the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous is offering mentoring or sponsorship. Sponsorship gives an opportunity for members to work on a one-on-one basis to achieve recovery by sharing, practicing, and working the Twelve Steps of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program.

Sponsorship, one gambler helping another, is very important in Gamblers Anonymous. This benefits not only the sponsee but also the sponsor. The sponsee gets guidance and suggestions. The sponsor is able to give back what was so freely shared with them and, in doing so, strengthen their own recovery.

How can you choose a sponsor? Attend meetings and listen and watch other members. Look for someone who has the recovery you want and ask that person to be your sponsor. Will they always say yes? No, that would be ideal, but in the real world it will not always happen. For many reasons the person you ask may not be available to take on a sponsee. Do not be discouraged. Continue your search for a sponsor. It is important to work the Steps with a sponsor, as it will certainly aid in your recovery.

There is no one way to sponsor. This relationship is often critical to our growth in recovery. It is important that we are clear that this is not a "best friends" relationship nor is it authoritative. It is a relationship based upon mentoring and guidance. A strong, effective sponsor may often make us uncomfortable as we learn to become a more honest individual. Ultimately, a sponsor is someone that can be trusted with your confidences and with whom you feel safe. There are several pieces of GA literature that can help in defining the relationship and give guidance to sponsors and sponsees.

## **Literature**

Gamblers Anonymous has a wide variety of literature, including books, workbooks, pamphlets, wallet cards and slogans available through the Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office (ISO). A complete listing and online shopping is available on the ISO website. Many meetings offer literature for sale at cost.

To keep a meeting within the Guidance Code and the Unity Program requires that only Gamblers Anonymous approved literature be used, displayed, or sold at a GA meeting. Approved literature has been conceived, written, and reviewed by compulsive gamblers in GA. It is sold through the International and Regional Service Offices. Members may make use of literature from outside of GA and find it helpful in their personal recovery. Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on that literature. In order for us to keep our focus on GA recovery, outside literature should not be used in the meeting.

Daily reading of Gamblers Anonymous literature is a powerful recovery tool. This resource is a way to learn more about recovery in GA and can also help combat urges. Many members start off their day with the Gamblers Anonymous *A Day at a Time* book. Some will carry GA literature (and a meeting phone list) with them to help safeguard their recovery.

## **Pressure Relief**

Another tool of Gamblers Anonymous to help prevent a return to gambling is the Pressure Relief Group Meeting.

Within individual meetings (or areas) there are members who offer the service of Pressure Relief. These Pressure Relief Groups meet with those members still struggling to calm the chaos created by their gambling. In doing so the aim is to assist the return to a normal way of thinking and living.

The Pressure Relief Group Meeting may also help alleviate financial, employment, or personal pressures. Adherence to it will aid in your recovery.

Literature regarding the Pressure Relief Group Meeting is available through the ISO. Ask your trusted servants or sponsors about how to connect with Pressure Relief in your area.

### **The Recovery and Unity Programs**

These Steps are the basis for the entire Gamblers Anonymous Program and practicing them is the key to our growth. They are a proven, workable plan of action that help to create the changes required for long-term recovery. Applying the principles found in the steps to our daily lives transforms uncomfortable abstinence from gambling into serene recovery.

The Recovery Program is directed towards personal recovery principles. The Unity Program gives us guidelines to create and maintain a healthy recovery environment for all within the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous and shows us how to deal with the world outside of Gamblers Anonymous.

Both of these programs are essential in Gamblers Anonymous. Their importance is such that they are explained in greater detail in their own sections of this book.

Be patient. Establishing recovery in Gamblers Anonymous is a process. The days and weeks will pass soon enough, and as you regularly attend meetings, abstain from gambling, and follow the guidelines of GA, you *will* experience continued recovery.

Louisville '19 Attachment #76  
DO NOT USE, DISPLAY OR DISSEMINATE  
in any Gamblers Anonymous room  
This is not approved or appropriate literature

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE RECOVERY PROGRAM

As you will read again and again in this book, meetings are essential to recovery in Gamblers Anonymous. Meetings are where we gather for mutual support and fellowship. By openly sharing our experience, strength, and hope we help ourselves and other members.

Some members are able to achieve abstinence from gambling simply by attending meetings, listening, and sharing. Transforming abstinence into recovery from compulsive gambling requires bringing about a character change within ourselves. We do this by working the Twelve Step Recovery Program of Gamblers Anonymous. This character change is looked upon by GA members as our greatest challenge that should be worked on immediately and continued to be practiced throughout our lives.

Many of us come to Gamblers Anonymous with the belief that gambling is our problem. We are also hurting, scared, confused, angry, disconnected, and struggling with relationships. Many of us suffer from terrible loneliness, grief, or loss. Abstaining from gambling for a few weeks or months can improve our financial situation, but the emotional chaos and distress remain. We find that simply abstaining from gambling is not enough.

As we continue to attend meetings, speak openly and honestly, and listen to other members, we begin to realize that gambling was the solution that we used to deal with the emotional disturbances and disappointments in our lives. Gambling made those problems worse, as well as created new problems. We have a problem with dealing with life on life's terms and tried to use gambling as a solution.

The Recovery Program of Gamblers Anonymous is a plan of action that helps us to address our problem with living. By admitting our powerlessness over gambling and coming to believe that a Higher Power can return us to a normal way of thinking and living, we begin to change. With a moral and financial inventory, we see the truth about ourselves and find the courage to share that truth with someone else. The inventory also gives us knowledge of our character defects and we become entirely ready to have them removed with help from the Higher Power of our own understanding. In the amends process we address the harms we did while gambling. Our self-respect, so long absent, begins to return. From that vantage point we continue to review our actions, asking for our Higher Power's guidance. We strive to practice the Spiritual Principles of the Twelve Steps in all our affairs. This equips us to carry the message of recovery to the compulsive gambler that still suffers.

#### **Recovery Step 1**

**We admitted we were powerless over gambling - that our lives had become unmanageable.**

We in Gamblers Anonymous believe our gambling problem is an emotional illness, progressive in nature, which no amount of human willpower can stop or control. We believed, at one time or another, that all our problems could be solved with a big win. Some, pathetically, even after making a big win found themselves in worse trouble

within a short period of time. We continued to gamble. We found we had risked loss of family, friends, security, and jobs. We still continued to gamble. We gambled to the point where it resulted in imprisonment, insanity, or attempted suicide. We still continued to gamble and were unable to stop. We fell victim to a belief that if only our financial problems could be solved, we would be able to stop gambling or even be able to gamble like normal people. Many times, we swore we would not gamble again believing we had the will power to stop gambling. We believed we had the power to stop or control our gambling. We believed a lie. Our inability to honestly look at our gambling problem enabled us to continue to gamble. In spite of all of the evidence from our past, we still denied the truth about our gambling.

Upon entering Gamblers Anonymous, we must develop the ability to honestly look at our gambling. This is the first step in our process of recovery. Without honesty, we cannot admit our powerlessness over gambling. We must honestly accept, admit, and unconditionally surrender to this powerlessness in order to proceed with our recovery. Any reservations we had or may presently have that we can gamble again means that we believe we are not powerless over gambling and that we have not admitted or accepted our powerlessness. Either we have power over gambling or we don't.

Members who have difficulty with admitting their powerlessness over gambling, can write about their gambling, the destruction their gambling has caused, and their countless futile attempts to stop gambling. The Twenty Questions can be a guide for this process.

Step One of the Recovery Program is a statement of the problem: powerlessness and unmanageability. Compulsive gamblers cross an invisible line into irresponsible and uncontrollable gambling. We experience an abnormal reaction to gambling. This compulsion is activated with the first bet. When we win, we continue to gamble with reckless abandon, usually turning wins into losses. When we lose, we chase our losses and continue gambling until all readily available money runs out. Many of us can't stop there. Some of us turn to illegal or immoral sources of funds to continue the chase. Our reaction to gambling is not normal.

The only way to keep from returning to obsessive, compulsive gambling is to avoid that first bet. No matter what. If we make that first bet, the abnormal reaction takes place and will lead us once again into irresponsible, uncontrolled gambling.

So, if we just don't gamble our problems are solved? If only that were the case. The physical act of placing a bet is only one part of our powerlessness. The other form of powerlessness that exists for compulsive gamblers is the mental obsession. While we may not actually be gambling, we are consumed with thoughts, schemes, and lies to support our gambling. Some examples: finding time and money for our next gambling session, lying to cover our tracks, believing our new "system" cannot fail and convincing ourselves we deserve to go gambling. Compulsive gamblers make many excuses. Some of us after a period of abstinence believed we could control our gambling. We could not. From the newcomer with 30 days to the long-time member with 20 years, this mental obsession with gambling is a form of powerlessness that is a real danger. Dealing with this mental obsession is a high priority for all compulsive gamblers in recovery. Working the Twelve Step Recovery Program of GA will free us from the mental obsession.

The second part of Step One addresses unmanageability. The unmanageability in our lives may be obvious or subtle. We compulsive gamblers are masters at hiding or denying the truth. We are skillful liars who spin a web of deceit to conceal our gambling. We are desperate to hide the truth about our gambling from others and ourselves. We practice denial, rationalization and justification as the chaos created from our gambling swirls around us. This chaos impacts relationships, financial stability, work performance, and even our health. Often, we are blind to the true cause of these disturbances: our gambling. To acknowledge unmanageability might lead to an unwanted admission that we are compulsive gamblers in the grip of a progressive illness.

Abstaining from gambling is essential to recovery. Once that is in place, the work of dealing with the mental obsession can start and unmanageability begins to be reduced.

An important concept that recovering compulsive gamblers embrace is worthy of repeating: compulsive gambling is an emotional illness, progressive in nature, that no amount of human will power can stop or control. Dealing with that emotional illness by creating a progressive character change within ourselves is the purpose of our Twelve Step Recovery Program.

Only with the awareness and acceptance of the hopelessness, helplessness, and desperation of our situation as compulsive gamblers can we develop the open mindedness required for Step Two.

### **Recovery Step 2**

**Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.**

Our problem is powerlessness over our gambling and the unmanageability in our lives that compulsive gambling creates. We need a solution. Step Two is the beginning of that solution.

In Step One we accepted our powerlessness over gambling and the unmanageability of our lives. Now in Step Two we are learning that only a power greater than ourselves can restore us to a normal way of thinking and living. This means we cannot do it by ourselves. Many of our members have found a resistance or reluctance to accept the concept of a Higher Power. The idea of a power greater than ourselves, restoring us to a normal way of thinking and living, does not always come easily to us. At this point, we must begin to develop open mindedness. Only by beginning to be open minded can we start to understand the meaning of Step Two. When we truly believe that we are powerless over gambling and that we have an illness that will progressively destroy our lives, then we are desperate enough for a solution.

Our solution is living a spiritual recovery program with guidance from a Higher Power. This spiritual recovery program can create character changes that cannot be accomplished through willpower alone. We need a source of power that is greater than ourselves to bring about these changes. What will develop with practice of the Twelve Steps is spiritual growth. Kindness, generosity, honesty, and humility will replace our character defects and aid us as we face life rather than running and hiding from it by gambling.

Many struggle with this step as the concept of a Higher Power is often referred to as God. Gamblers Anonymous is a spiritual recovery program, not a religious recovery program, and holds no opinion on how its members define a Higher Power. The right to a Power of your own understanding is total and without any catches. Members' personal beliefs are just that -- personal.

No matter what our histories, Step Two invites us to explore the concept of a loving, caring Power that is stronger than our disease of compulsive gambling. We need a Power that can give us hope on our journey of recovery.

As we continue to attend meetings and work the Steps, we notice that the days and weeks are passing without a return to gambling. We realize that a Power greater than ourselves has been working in our lives. For some members, this recognition is an "Aha!" moment. We can often sense the presence of a Higher Power in our meetings. Together, we experience continued abstinence where willpower alone had not succeeded.

We compulsive gamblers tend to be rule-breakers who think life's responsibilities and expectations do not apply to us. A spiritual recovery program is hard, if not impossible, to sustain if we continue to act in an immature, self-centered manner.

Personal recovery depends upon group unity. In our meetings, arguing, criticizing, or promoting a specific Higher Power is contrary to the principles of our program. Gamblers Anonymous members have varied spiritual beliefs and practices which are respected within our groups.

In Step Two, we have opened our minds to the idea that a Power greater than ourselves, and greater than our gambling addiction, can and will assist us in our struggle toward wholeness. In Step Three, we become willing to ask for help from this Power of our own understanding.

### **Recovery Step 3**

**Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this power of our own understanding.**

In Step One we honestly admitted our problem. In Step Two we opened our minds to a Higher Power. In Step Three we make a decision to ask for help. This step is a commitment to depend on a Higher Power of our own understanding. Step Three furthers the process of breaking the shackles of our gambling addiction. We have an opportunity to live a life directed by the spiritual principles of recovery found in the Gamblers Anonymous Program.

We tried so many times to stop or control our gambling. We just couldn't do it alone. This hopelessness made us recognize that we need help more powerful than our addiction; help more powerful than we are by ourselves.

Let's look at what "a decision to turn our will and our lives over" actually means. How do we make a commitment to turn our desire to gamble over to a Higher Power?

At first this decision can feel overwhelming. Early in recovery there is usually so much pain and chaos that we can see no way out. The core of this step is asking our Higher Power to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We become willing to try a different way.

Step Three calls for us to surrender our self-centered thought process (our will) and the resulting actions (our lives) to the care of a Higher Power of our own understanding. The word *care* is of great importance in Step Three. Many of us have felt judged as defective. Our inability to control our gambling often made us feel disconnected from life, love, and acceptance. No one is asking us to give up our free will. It is our self-will that has led us to our current situation. When self-will is guiding our lives, chaos often follows, and unmanageability is the usual result.

This decision to turn over our will and our lives can simply start with a commitment to embrace the Gamblers Anonymous Program. We begin to understand that no matter how far down into the depths of compulsive gambling we have gone, we are worthy of care and love. We find that going to meetings, sharing in therapy about our struggles, observing successes, and asking others how they work Step Three can make this process clearer. Asking for help from other people and from our Higher Power is key to our recovery. This step is about willingness to ask for help at any and every stage of our recovery.

Any decision is hollow if it is not followed by action. For example, a decision to start a savings account will have no benefit unless we take action and make deposits into that account. Recovery from compulsive gambling cannot be passive. If we do not work Step Three, our recovery may crumble under the weight of the illusion of our own power. Reliance on a Higher Power of our own understanding gives us the support and courage we need to undertake the searching and fearless inventory of Step Four.

#### **Recovery Step 4**

**Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.**

With Step Four we begin a journey of self-discovery. Many of us became complete strangers to ourselves as our disease progressed. We have been confused and hurt by the way we have conducted our lives and now need help to discover the truth about who we are. When gambling, we often viewed our lives in a distorted way.

Step Four is often the most feared step. It is also the most widely written about step with numerous guidelines in existence. The process of self-reflection and confession in order to achieve emotional relief is as old as humankind. It appears in some form in many religious, spiritual, and secular practices.

When the first twelve step recovery program was created in the late 1930's, the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous included taking an inventory and the sharing of that inventory as critical steps toward sobriety. The same is true for those of us addicted to gambling. We must find and accept the truth about ourselves and our gambling. The truth, painful as it may be, will set us free.

We made a decision, a commitment, in Step Three to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power. That decision will have lasting impact on our lives when we complete the inventory called for in Step Four. Step Four in Gamblers Anonymous calls for a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory. Both are important; most often they are undertaken as separate inventories.



## Financial Inventory

Experience has shown that compulsive gambling is an emotional problem, not a financial problem. Money is, however, where much of the pain and consequences appear. Money needed for normal expenditures and the care of our families was often lost to gambling. Despair and desperation drove us as we tried to win back our losses. A financial inventory is essential in order to get a complete picture of our real world. This begins the process of releasing us from the dream world of the compulsive gambler.

Our suggestion is to do a complete inventory of expenses, debts, and income. Normal expenditures should be listed, no matter how small. All financial obligations, not only gambling debts, are included. Income should be inventoried as reasonable expected income. We write down factual and actual amounts, not projections.

This brings up a complicated issue for many members who are in a relationship where expenses, debts and incomes are shared responsibilities. How do you factor in another person's willingness to take part in repayment of debt? Their willingness to participate in financial recovery may vary greatly and is considered on a case by case basis. The emotional cost of dragging others into debt will certainly show up in the moral inventory. Remember this is *your* searching and fearless financial inventory and you need to be able to clearly see your personal situation.

The financial inventory process can be aided by asking for and using the Pressure Relief Group Meeting of Gamblers Anonymous. There are experienced members and literature available that can help in uncovering what is often the painful truth about our financial reality. The Pressure Relief Group Meeting may assist in taking action to lessen immediate financial issues while at the same time structuring a long-term solution.

Until we find the courage to face our financial reality, we remain in denial and our continued growth in recovery may suffer. We can only build a new and better future by accepting the financial damage we have created.

## Moral Inventory

The financial inventory asks us to take an accounting of facts and figures. For many members, the moral inventory is not as direct or clear. In our active compulsive gambling we often lost our ability to determine right from wrong. The moral inventory portion of the Fourth Step helps us look at our character and our moral make-up.

This part of the inventory process is critical. We will seek to identify aspects of our character that have created and driven our compulsive gambling. This is not about good or bad. This is about determining the exact nature of our character, the truth. When we are honest in this process, we may discover what has been blocking us from a Higher Power.

So how do we find out what parts of our personal moral compass (our ability to judge right from wrong and act accordingly) are out of alignment? We do that by looking back over our lives and examining how we have conducted ourselves.

Simply preparing a list of our past harmful acts does not provide a complete picture of who we are. When and how did we act against our own values and principles? Our past indiscretions are for the most part painfully obvious. We have been

running from them, hiding them, been embarrassed by them, gambling over them for a very long time. An effective inventory starts with those issues, and also looks at what parts of ourselves were impacted, and what role we played. This provides information upon which a recovery foundation can be built.

This step is so crucial to long-term recovery that Gamblers Anonymous has a Fourth Step guide that outlines in detail a moral inventory process. That literature is available at most meetings or can be obtained from the Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office (ISO).

The Fourth Step inventory will play an important part in working the following steps. In the business world an inventory is the gathering of information upon which to base future decisions and actions. The same is true in the recovery world. What we learn about ourselves in the Step Four inventory will provide information essential for working Steps Five through Nine.

### **Recovery Step 5**

**Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

So far, we have looked deep into our characters and have uncovered some painful, embarrassing truths about ourselves. Isn't that enough? No, it is not. Now we must muster the courage to share that inventory with another person. Now we tell someone else the exact nature of our wrongs.

If we fail to take this step, if we hold what we have discovered inside ourselves, we risk a return to gambling. Remember, one of the essential aspects of recovery is honesty. To be certain we have taken a searching and fearless inventory we need an objective viewpoint from another person. While it is not a requirement, it helps if the person listening to our inventory is familiar with Twelve Step recovery and the task we are undertaking.

The choice of who will hear our Fifth Step is ours to make, but there are some important things to consider. First and foremost is that we trust the person to not to divulge anything that we share with anyone else. Without this it would be difficult for us to share all aspects of our inventory. A sponsor is often a good choice. Others have used trusted members of Gamblers Anonymous, clergy, or mental health professionals. It is best not to share our inventory with a family member or anyone else who may be hurt by our disclosures.

Another consideration: some professionals are mandated reporters. This means they are required by law to report certain crimes to authorities.

One more consideration is timing. It is strongly recommended that the Fifth Step follow immediately after the completion of the Fourth Step inventory. We have stirred up often painful memories and previously unexamined parts of our lives. We have brought to the surface resentments, fears, shame, and guilt. It is required that we look at our past; however, it is dangerous for us to get stuck there. Now is the time to talk about the inventory so that we can move forward with our recovery.

There is no specific method for the hearing of a Fifth Step in Gamblers Anonymous. Each receiver will have their own way. It is suggested though that timing and logistics be discussed prior to the Fifth Step. When and where are best worked out

in advance. To successfully complete a Fifth Step, both giver and receiver need to set aside sufficient time and find a place that will be free of disturbances or distractions.

Another aspect of the Fifth Step that needs to be mentioned is the service of being a receiver. If we've been asked to hear a Fifth Step, it means that this GA member trusts us and has become willing to share facts about themselves that are usually closely guarded. Honor that trust by making a commitment of confidentiality for all that is shared in that Fifth Step. It is something that should not be shared or spoken about with anyone, anywhere.

If you have never heard a Fifth Step, you may want to reach out to other experienced Gamblers Anonymous members. A Fifth Step is a deeply spiritual, and often physically and/or emotionally demanding experience. Both participants need to be prepared.

### **Recovery Step 6**

**Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.**

Step Six is about becoming willing to change. What does it mean to become entirely ready to have defects of character removed? Through the work of the preceding steps we have identified character defects that caused problems. Acting on traits such as fear, selfishness, and pride have caused us to harm ourselves and others. We now see that a life directed by a compulsive gambler's character defects is a life of conflict and chaos. If we are to live a life directed by the care of a Higher Power, we must change.

We cannot just start at a place of change, and we cannot change what we do not fully understand. We have already worked Steps One through Five. We have grasped the reality of our gambling addiction, have come to believe that there is help for us, and have made a decision to do something about it. We've completed an inventory and shared it. Hopefully, we now have a much clearer picture of who we are and what needs to be changed.

Part of being entirely ready is to recognize we have character defects that we will be reluctant to let go of. Many of us secretly, or openly, enjoy a sense of being superior, and we gossip and judge in order to feel better than others. Are ambition and the drive to succeed a mask behind which lies greed? Self-righteous anger can be a perverse way for us to get back at those who annoy us, or don't act as we expect, and might actually feel enjoyable.

The goal is to have all of these varied defects removed. Members who have worked the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program, however, have found that some negative aspects of our personalities are so deeply ingrained that we consciously or subconsciously resist their removal. The decision we made in Step Three comes into play once again. We have made a commitment to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power of our own understanding. As we continue on a daily basis to embrace that Third Step decision, we can make steady progress in rooting out parts of self that block us from our Higher Power. The simple fact is that in order to have our defects of character removed we must begin a pattern of recognizing them followed by a conscious effort to not act on them.

When we have become entirely ready to have the character defect of dishonesty removed, we make a daily effort to be honest. When we cease to gossip and judge, we learn compassion for others. Turning anger into acceptance teaches us to meet chaos with serenity. These efforts are true signs of a willingness to change. They are true indicators of being entirely ready.

The third part of being entirely ready finds us once again recognizing our need to surrender. Our own unsteady willpower, our misaligned moral compass, and our unmanageability have created a mess in our lives and have negatively impacted the lives of those around us.

We need to understand that a life directed by our defects will lead us back to gambling and a steady descent towards prison, insanity, or death. We need to surrender to the fact that we need help. This help can be found in the Gamblers Anonymous Program and/or our reliance on a Higher Power of our own understanding.

We have seen that letting go of character defects is not an easy task. Now is the time to ask for help. We are ready for Step Seven.

### **Recovery Step 7**

#### **Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.**

In Step Six, we become aware of how our defects of character hold back our recovery. Character defects interfere with our relationship with our Higher Power, with others, and even with ourselves. We want to change. We find that some of our character defects will respond to our efforts to change. Others, however, will require the intervention of our Higher Power. We discover how deeply rooted our character defects are. Our best intention, our strongest exertion of self-will, fails us and once again we find ourselves powerless. Don't be discouraged. Recovering from compulsive gambling will take time, work, and patience. With the help of our Higher Power and the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program we move forward.

Now that we are entirely ready, what does it mean to humbly ask for our Higher Power's assistance? Being humble means that we more accurately know who we are and what we have done. We are probably not the worst person in the world, and we certainly are not the best. We are always somewhere in between. Our egos conspire with our self-esteem to distort our idea of who we are. Pride and shame make it hard for us to know exactly which character defects need removal. We have learned a lot about ourselves in the first six steps; this is the beginning of attaining humbleness or humility.

Humility is not the same as humiliation. Many of us have experienced tremendous humiliation, so we need to be clear about this. Humility is when we recognize that we are simply a person with strengths and weaknesses. Humility means we are strong enough to accurately acknowledge that we truly need help. Humility is becoming open minded and teachable.

We are flawed human beings seeking to find and embrace a spiritual life-style. Character defects, also known as shortcomings, shine a light on aspects of our personality that we need help to change. The solution to our obsession to gamble requires a Higher Power. We can depend on that same assistance to remove these deeply ingrained ways of acting and reacting to life.

We are surrounded by help for working this step. We consult our sponsors. We can ask fellow group members how they did it. When Step Seven is discussed at a meeting, we listen carefully and closely to how other members have approached it.

How do we actually ask our Higher Power for this help? The ways that GA members humbly ask to have their defects of character removed vary. Some of us spend time in earnest prayer. Some of us quietly meditate. Some may seek a place of reflection such as the outdoors to connect with and ask for our Higher Power's help. Not only do we need help to change and grow in recovery; we need to humbly ask for it.

The combination of Steps Six and Seven is where many members find themselves living in recovery. As we develop a new lifestyle based upon spiritual principles, we will be faced with events or obstacles that tempt us to return to our old ways of thinking and living. Recognition of our character defects is the starting point for change. This awareness combined with the willingness to change has made us entirely ready as we humbly ask for help.

Working Steps Six and Seven is a lifelong process. We return to these steps again and again because we are not perfect. When we act on a character defect that we hoped had been removed, we may feel despair and shame. Steps Six and Seven are a proven resource and framework to become entirely ready and humbly ask our Higher Power for help again. We are gradually getting better. If we are diligent and committed to the work of the Twelve Steps, we will see dramatic changes as we move from being abstaining compulsive gamblers to recovering compulsive gamblers.

Now that we can see more clearly how acting on our character defects harmed ourselves and others, we are ready to move on to Step Eight.

### **Recovery Step 8**

**Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.**

With the work of the preceding steps we have looked honestly inward. We are now prepared to look at the wreckage and harms we caused in our past. We have caused a lot of damage. Often there is ongoing chaos which continues to impact our lives and the lives of others. If we fail to honestly face this fact, we are at risk of returning to gambling. The shame and guilt of our past can derail our recovery. We must not avoid Step Eight for this is the beginning of dealing with our past actions. Keep in mind that Step Eight is simply the making of a list and searching for the willingness to proceed.

How can we create this list? For some of us a list already exists in our Fourth Step inventory. Others will start a list with the fresh perspective gained from working the first seven Steps. To the best of our ability, right now, we make a list of ALL persons we have harmed. It can be helpful to include the manner in which we harmed them. There are different perspectives regarding where or whether to place ourselves on this list. Some say we should put ourselves on the list. We have certainly hurt ourselves and would thus qualify. If we do decide to put ourselves on the list, whether we are first or last is also a cause for thoughtful discussion.

Others say that we do not belong on this list. Most of the damage we caused was a result of our extreme self-centeredness. We have lived a life where our wants and needs have been foremost. Now is the time for others we have harmed to come first. Ultimately, whether or not we are on the list is an individual decision.

What kinds of harm have we caused? Here is a partial list of examples. Some harms are financial: stealing from family, employers, friends, businesses, financial institutions, even from our own future. Some harms are physical: bodily injuring others, neglecting to provide for those dependent on us, causing property damage, disregarding our own health. Some harms are emotional: worrying family members and friends, jeopardizing basic needs such as housing, food, or health care, being verbally abusive when our gambling activity was challenged. By working with our sponsors and/or GA mentors we find harms pertinent to our specific situations. Dig deep.

Once we've made the list to the best of our current ability, we review the list with our sponsor. An objective view may enlarge or reduce our original list. As we examine the list we've made, we can prioritize our next actions by looking at how willing we are to make amends for each harm we have listed. Fear of negative responses or consequences, unresolved resentments, and shame about our past actions may impact our willingness. We'll probably discover a wide range of willingness to make amends. To deal with this some Gamblers Anonymous members have found it helpful to divide the list into three categories.

The first category is for those to whom we have the willingness to make amends immediately. The second is for those to whom we feel we will eventually be able to make amends, just not right now. The third category is for those amends we are absolutely unwilling to consider making at this juncture of our recovery.

Because the Eighth Step asks us to become willing to make amends to ALL those we have harmed, the third category has the potential for stalling our progress in recovery. As we work our program, grow in recovery, and gain experience with the amends process, we may find that our willingness expands. But what if it doesn't?

Several possibilities can be considered at this point. Often as we progress through the Ninth Step and make some amends, we find that our fear lessens and our willingness increases. Those who were in our second category may move to the first. Some of those in our no-never third category we are relieved to find have moved to the maybe-one-day list.

Sometimes what we need to do is recognize that we have unresolved resentments against people on our list. Revisiting Step Four at this point may help us to resolve those resentments and move on. Remember: this step is about the harms WE have done. It is not about the harms others did to us. We are striving to take responsibility for our own part and to become willing to make the needed amends.

Sometimes we have amends that we are still completely unwilling to make. One method used successfully by recovering compulsive gamblers is to pray that everything we want for ourselves also be given to those we are unwilling to face. Although this might sound distasteful and impossible, the results achieved through this approach can be healing and transformative.

Some of our members have tried delaying the writing of this list in fear of the actions called for in Step Nine. Remember: Step Eight is simply the making of a list and

searching for the willingness to proceed with the amends called for. Not to do so places us at risk for a return to gambling and for us that is a life-threatening matter.

With our list in hand, and as much willingness as we have today, we move on to Step Nine.

### **Recovery Step 9**

**Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

After a lot of hard work, we have arrived at Step Nine. Many of us tried to make apologies to those we had hurt as soon as we came to GA and worked Step One. Often, we ended up causing even more harm. Sometimes we committed the same harm again. By the time we reach Step Nine, we have a stronger relationship with our Higher Power. We have done an extensive inventory of ourselves, shared it with another, and became ready to ask to have our character defects removed. Looking back at the harms we caused, we made a list as complete as we could, and became willing to make amends. By the time we arrive at Step Nine, we may be fearful, but we have learned that working these Steps offers healing, not punishment. This step presents an opportunity to mend the past.

Honesty, open mindedness, and willingness do not come easily at first, but by practicing the recovery principles of Gamblers Anonymous these cornerstones of recovery become a part of our lives. As we live in recovery we recognize and embrace the changes that are occurring. One of the most powerful changes we hope for is release from the burden of our shame and guilt. That will only happen by taking the actions called for in this step. Step Nine is essential for long-term recovery. This step is about making amends. There is a distinct difference between making an apology and making an amends, although they may be combined.

An apology is defined as an expression of regret for a fault or insult. An amends is defined as payment made or satisfaction given for injury or loss. On a deeper level, amends are about a genuine change in our behavior instead of the never-ending repetitions of "I'm sorry" that we have used over and over again.

Just saying we regret our actions is not enough. Many of those we will seek out during our Ninth Step work have heard us say "I'm sorry" time after time. An amends asks us to be specific about how we have harmed, to offer restitution if appropriate, and to make a commitment not to repeat the offense in the future.

There also needs to be some consideration given to the logistics of an amends. This is another part of recovery work where a sponsor or trusted GA member can offer valuable insight and feedback. While there is no one way to make an amends, there are some general points to consider: when, where, and how the amends will occur; what to do if the harmed party is unavailable or dangerous to contact; or when it might be necessary to seek counsel outside of the program.

Many have found it helpful to schedule a set time to make the amends rather than an amends by ambush. Just as in the Fifth Step, a time and place where some privacy can be had is usually best. As Step Nine clearly states: *We made direct amends (meaning in-person) wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.* Although many of us may prefer to avoid face-to-face amends, we need to remember that a direct amends is the strongly preferred method. However, this is not always possible.

Some of those we need to make amends to will readily agree to meet with us. Others will be reluctant due to past harms. Each circumstance will require its own special consideration. How do we make an amends where the injured party is unavailable, unwilling to participate, or unsafe to contact? How can an amends be made to someone that is deceased? How does someone deal with a harm for which the amends may cause more harm? Good questions all and a very common reality for members working Step Nine.

Experience in the program has given us two possible ways to address this dilemma: a living amends or an amends-by-proxy.

A *living amends* is a deep and lasting positive change in our behavior. We become honest and genuine in our dealing with others. We show compassion and love. We begin to hold our heads up and become contributing members of society. In doing so we are making an amends to the world by recovering from the depths of our gambling addiction.

An *amends-by-proxy* is for those amends for which there is no direct access to those we have harmed. One possibility is to perform some act of charity or service. If a harmed party is deceased or unavailable for whatever reason, we can give time or money as a means of making amends. Before making an amends of this type, many Gamblers Anonymous members find it helpful to pray and meditate on what we are undertaking and why.

Amends to family or close friends that have passed can be very emotional. In addition to an amends-by-proxy, many members have found relief by writing about our harms and expressing our remorse. We can then read that amends to our sponsor, possibly at a gravesite or another special place.

Some more complicated amends may require outside professional help. When necessary, we consult such experts.

No matter what options we choose, we meet with our sponsor or another trusted GA member and share with them the exact nature of the harm and how we plan to make the amends. Our Eighth Step may help us to prioritize our starting point. We seek clarity about the possibility of our amends causing more harm.

Another aspect of working this step is to be prepared to listen to any feedback given. Often a response will feel neutral or even positive. Sometimes a response may feel harsh or negative. We need to avoid arguments or criticism. Remember, we are working toward a release from the chains of our past behaviors, and we are not in a position to demand acceptance or forgiveness. We are on a spiritual quest for a life in recovery. Amending the harms we have done is crucial for establishing long-term recovery.

As we continue our Gamblers Anonymous recovery journey, Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve guide us as we strive to integrate spiritual principles into our daily lives.



## **Recovery Step 10**

**Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.**

By practicing the previous nine Steps, we are firmly establishing a path of recovery. Staying on this path calls for continuing action. Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, often referred to as the maintenance steps, are worked daily to keep us moving forward.

Step Ten asks us to continue to use the tools we have developed in working the Steps so far. On a regular basis we ask ourselves: Am I holding onto anger, fear, shame, or guilt? Have I been selfish, dishonest, self-centered, or inconsiderate in my dealings with others? Have my actions harmed myself or another? If so, have I promptly and directly made amends for any harm? Did I manage my finances with integrity today? Did I remember to seek the help of my Higher Power and the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous? In effect, this is a condensed version of the Step work that has been restoring us to a normal way of thinking and living.

Just as with a physical illness, early detection can prevent disastrous consequences. We compulsive gamblers have led a life directed by our character defects for a long time. As we begin to heal, we must be ever-vigilant against the resurfacing of these failed patterns of thinking and living. Our Step work has made us aware of these issues, so noticing them becomes easier. The real danger to our recovery is comparable to ignoring the symptoms of a physical illness. If we fail to address these symptoms they may intensify to a point where there are serious consequences. In our case: a possible return to gambling.

Our members practice Step Ten in a variety of ways. Some write a daily checklist of actions, emotions, or feelings. Some use their sponsor for an objective view of how they have conducted themselves. Others may spend time in prayer and meditation before going to bed, looking back over the day to be sure it was within their goals for a spiritual recovery. Each member must decide how best to incorporate the working of Step Ten into their life.

One aspect of the maintenance Steps makes them stand out. The general wisdom is that the Steps be worked in the order that they are presented because of their interconnection. If that logic was followed in regards to Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, there could be a significant lapse of time before these steps benefited our recovery.

So, even if we are working on another step, we can immediately start a routine of a daily inventory of ourselves. The simple habit of asking, "How did I do today?" can be a powerful tool at all stages of recovery. As our work on the first nine Steps continues, our Tenth Step work will become more focused.

Many compulsive gamblers struggle at first with admitting they are wrong. We have walled ourselves and our egos off from the world and its reality. We view an admission of being wrong as a weakness. In recovery, we find it is actually a strength. Once again, we need to humbly surrender to our Higher Power. We acknowledge that we can be, and often are, wrong. Failing to admit when we are wrong places us in conflict with others. Out of those conflicts arise all sorts of emotional chaos. That chaotic

place is dangerous for compulsive gamblers. If we allow the pressures of life to become too much, we may again view gambling as a solution. Which, as our experience has shown, it is not.

With the practice of this step we also acquire another valuable tool in recovery. We stop acting so thoughtlessly. We find ourselves creating less damage that needs to be repaired. If rigorously practiced, this step can be the equivalent of a regular house-cleaning. This is far better for compulsive gamblers than waiting until the house is filled with emotional debris requiring another full-blown Fourth Step.

### **Recovery Step 11**

**Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.**

Step Eleven is the second of the maintenance steps we discussed in Step Ten that can be practiced at any point in our recovery. We don't need to wait until we are 'formally' on Step Eleven in order to benefit from it. Seeking improved contact with, and guidance from, our Higher Power is critical to our recovery at any time.

Many of us came into the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous believing that improved self-knowledge would be sufficient to stop our gambling. Steps One and Two made us aware that the fiercest willpower and our strongest determination were not enough. In Step Three we made a decision to seek freedom from gambling by turning our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power of our own understanding. Step Eleven asks us to improve this connection with that Higher Power. In order to maintain life in recovery more action is required. All the work we have done so far in the previous ten Steps has increased our confidence in the GA Program and our understanding of our Higher Power. Step Eleven takes this understanding even deeper. Prayer and meditation are powerful tools in our search for a normal way of thinking and living.

*Prayer* is reaching out to a Higher Power of our understanding asking for care and guidance. The style and wording of any prayer is for the individual to decide. Many of us have found --to our surprise-- that a daily prayer routine has strengthened and deepened our recovery. The wording of Step Eleven gives guidance to the focus of our prayers. We are asked to pray for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us and the power to carry that out. We are not praying for favors or bargains. It is common for gamblers to pray in the midst of action. These prayers are often attempts to divert consequences or achieve favorable results as desperation reaches dangerous levels. A familiar universal prayer of compulsive gamblers in action is: *Please God, just let me win and I'll never do it again!* Of course, win or lose, we continued to gamble.

In contrast to prayers of desperation, the praying called for in Step Eleven asks: *What is the next right thing to do? What action is required of me to maintain this new way of life?* Sometimes the 'next right thing' appears to be a difficult task of either action or acceptance. Fear can enter into our thinking, which is why the step also asks us to seek courage.

While prayer can be described as talking to our Higher Power, *meditation* is putting ourselves in a state of mind where we can listen. It is an attempt to quiet the mind and to be present in the moment. Compulsive gamblers often have busy minds filled with thoughts that may distract us and lead us back to gambling. Meditation helps to clear away those distractions, allowing us to focus on recovery. There are many forms of meditation. Again, any practice that fits the individual works best. Some of us choose to meditate by clearing the mind of thought. Others meditate by focusing on a particular image or sound. Some repeat the Serenity Prayer (or a part of it) over and over. The amount of time spent in meditation will also vary. Initially, even five minutes of meditation can seem overwhelming. Over time, we can each develop a meditation practice that works for us.

Sometimes we are convinced we have received divine guidance. It is a good practice to share what we plan on doing about any revelations with our sponsor or GA mentors. This will help keep us on our path to recovery. Many members have discovered that as their spiritual lives develop, they begin to see things very differently. As we walk a life based upon spiritual principles, the ability to see right action and the courage to act begins to become natural. We no longer fear our past, want to run and hide from our future, or even deny our present reality. The Twelve Step Recovery Program of Gamblers Anonymous is leading us out of insanity and guiding us to a normal way of thinking and living. The ongoing practice of daily prayer and meditation called for in Step Eleven nourishes our continued healing and prepares us to carry the message of recovery in Step Twelve.

### **Recovery Step 12**

**Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.**

Step Twelve is the third of the maintenance steps we discussed in Step Ten that can be practiced at any point in our recovery. A word of caution may be needed in that regard. We cannot give something away that we do not possess. We cannot effectively carry the recovery program to anyone else unless we are practicing the spiritual principles found in the Twelve Steps. Another requirement is a working knowledge of anonymity. Without these two key components there is a possibility of doing more harm than good. As in the previous steps, feedback and advice from a sponsor or more experienced member can help keep Twelfth Step work within the boundaries of Gamblers Anonymous principles.

Through practicing the previous steps, we have made significant changes in our lives. We strive to practice spiritual thought and action in our day-to-day living. We see ourselves and others more clearly. We have become more responsible and more accountable to ourselves and others. Many of us have replaced chaos with serenity. These gifts (and others that we may discover) come with a responsibility. We need to carry the message of Gamblers Anonymous recovery to those that still suffer. That is what those who have walked this path before us have done for us. One of the keys to a life in recovery is to give back what was so generously given to us.

There are many ways that the Twelfth Step can be worked. One way is to be a living example of healthy recovery by conducting ourselves both in and outside of the rooms in a manner that reflects the spiritual principles of the Steps.

Another opportunity happens within the rooms. This is where we can reach out personally to the still-suffering compulsive gambler. By sharing our experience, strength, and hope in our meetings, we have the ability to help other compulsive gamblers find a life in recovery. Sponsorship of other GA members takes this to an even higher level. Outreach to others may be enhanced at coffee or fellowship after a meeting. "The meeting after the meeting" is a place to answer questions or give feedback that would not normally occur within a meeting format.

Service opportunities are abundant. We can assist in setting up and cleaning up at our meetings. We can serve as Trusted Servants at a meeting or Intergroup level. Many members answer calls on their local hotline. There are numerous committees serving our local, national, and international Fellowships. All are places where members can put their talents to good use. These are just a few examples of Twelve Step work.

Carrying the message outside the Fellowship is how we let others know of Gamblers Anonymous and its primary purpose. When doing Twelfth Step work, we need to be aware of and follow the anonymity guidelines of Gamblers Anonymous. With the explosion of media options, it is crucial that we are vigilant about what we share or whom we might identify as a fellow member. Chapter Six, The Unity Program, found in this book is a source of guidance about interactions that take place both inside and outside of GA.

At the very heart of the Twelfth Step is our ability to reach someone who is suffering due to a gambling problem and convey an understanding that no one else can. We can say, "I've been there". We are able to cross barriers that others cannot. Differences that often separate us from others disappear when we share our common problem. The power of the Twelfth Step lies in the paradox that, in helping others, our own recovery is strengthened.

Fellow gambler, take my hand.  
I'm your friend, I understand.  
I've known your guilt, your shame, your remorse.  
I've born the burden of your cross.  
I've found friends who offered ease.  
They suffered too with this disease.  
Although they had no magic cure,  
They showed me how we could endure.  
We walked together side by side;  
We spoke of things we had to hide.  
We told of sleepless nights and debts,  
Of broken homes, lies and threats.  
And so my weary gambler friend,  
Please take this hand that I extend.  
Take one more chance at something new.  
.Another gambler helping you.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE UNITY PROGRAM

The Gamblers Anonymous Unity Program provides a framework for the well-being of individual GA groups and the GA Fellowship as a whole. The Unity Program is outlined in twelve steps and is meant to maintain the consistency of our identity as well as the continued existence of Gamblers Anonymous. Each of the steps explains one specific way in which we protect the unity of our Fellowship. Topics within the Unity Steps include GA's purpose, membership, authority, professionalism, and public relations.

The Twelve Unity Steps help us to answer the question: "How can GA best function, survive, and remain whole for compulsive gamblers today and also for those yet to join us?" It is often humorously noted in the rooms that "The Recovery Program keeps us from harming ourselves, and the Unity Program keeps us from harming each other". Working together for our common good is not always an easy activity. The Unity Steps are intended to provide guidance in this area. The Unity Steps are as much a part of our Fellowship's spiritual foundation as the Recovery Steps.

Experience has taught us that our groups may not only become less effective but can actually fall apart if we drift too far away from the guidance offered by the Unity Steps. So, how do we work to understand the Unity Program more thoroughly? Some of us will go over the twelve Unity Steps with our sponsors or GA mentors. Some groups will decide to read Gamblers Anonymous literature about one Unity Step at each meeting. Maybe we will study them on our own. We often grow in the understanding of the Unity Steps when we participate in service at our meetings or the Intergroup level.

The following pages give the Fellowship an opportunity to initiate discussions about the Unity Steps. These essays are not the final word; this is not a rule book. Our understanding and application of the Unity Steps will grow and become clearer as our Fellowship continues to grow and mature. As long as we are strongly committed to our unity, and to our primary purpose of carrying the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers, we can trust this process.

#### **Unity Step 1**

**Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity.**

Nothing is more important than our unity. In fact, in Gamblers Anonymous we consider unity so important that we have named our guidelines for group survival the Unity Steps. Our very existence as recovering individuals, and recovery for those yet to come, depends on there being a GA Fellowship which offers Gamblers Anonymous groups for us to attend.

Every one of the Unity Steps describe a way that our unity can be threatened by character defects such as greed, ego, fear, and the desire for prestige and power. In this section we will discuss the spiritual principle of Unity Step One: Unity.

The principle of Unity encourages us to look beyond our personal desires toward the needs of the group. This principle also encourages our groups to look beyond the

desires of the individual group toward what is best for the GA Fellowship as a whole. This includes consideration for the compulsive gambler yet to join us.

Unity is not the same as uniformity. We fiercely guard the right of each individual to think, talk, and act as they will. However, we even more fiercely defend the principles that keep our groups in existence.

Gamblers Anonymous has a richly diverse membership. We don't all look alike, think alike, or believe the same things. This brings a vitality that enriches the creativity and talents of the Fellowship. It nourishes our ability to grow and thrive. Unity means that we learn to put the common welfare of the group and the Fellowship as a whole before our individual differences. We work together recognizing that we are simply a small part of a much greater whole.

Two examples of the ways we practice unity are the use of GA-approved materials and participation in each other's recovery.

First, we use GA-approved materials in our meetings so that our message remains clear. Approved literature has been conceived, written, and reviewed by compulsive gamblers in GA. It is sold through the International and Regional Service Offices. Members may make use of literature from outside of GA and find it helpful in their personal recovery. Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on that literature. In order for us to keep our focus on GA recovery, outside literature should not be used in the meeting. Although the format of meetings may differ, the use of GA-approved literature ensures that our Gamblers Anonymous message comes through loud and clear. What is our message? It's that together we can stop gambling. Together we can lose the obsession and compulsion to gamble. Together we can find a better way to live our lives. Together is a word exemplifying the heartbeat of our unity.

A second way we strengthen our unity is by participating in each other's recovery. We encourage each other to speak from the heart. We listen with love to each other, especially to members we may not like or agree with. We work together on service commitments. We learn together at workshops and conferences. We play together at social events. The relationships we develop strengthen the unity of Gamblers Anonymous.

This unity that we cherish so deeply doesn't come from rules or laws, but instead from the loving care and concern we have for our fellow members. It comes from the knowledge that most of us cannot recover from compulsive gambling unless there *is* a group.

Many difficult decisions that we face can be made easier by simply asking: "How will this affect the unity of the group (or the Fellowship as a whole)? Will it divide us or will it bring us closer together?" At each juncture, we also consider how decisions we make today may impact the members of tomorrow.

We come to realize that our relationships with each other, our need for one another, and our commitment to our common purpose are more important than any disagreement or conflict that may threaten to divide us.

When we set aside the differences that could separate us and focus on our shared identity as compulsive gamblers, the spiritual principle of anonymity becomes evident. Anonymity is not only about respecting each other's privacy regarding our attendance at GA meetings. It is even more deeply the recognition that no matter who

we are outside of the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous, inside of these rooms, we are all united in our purpose: to carry the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

When we were active in our compulsive gambling, our personal wants always had priority. Nothing else and no one else ever came first. A gift we receive in GA is that we learn that what is best for the group usually benefits us also. This experience can help us learn to apply the principle of unity to our relationships outside of the Fellowship.

A revelation for many of us in recovery has been the deep realization that self-sufficiency was never anything more than a dangerous illusion. This realization is also a sturdy building block for the unity of the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship. Simply because we are human, we will have disagreements and conflicts. We do not need to be afraid of this. We have the ability to resolve any issue when we put our common welfare first. The strength of our groups and of the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship as a whole depends squarely on our unity.

## **Unity Step 2**

**Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.**

Unity Step Two speaks to two primary issues: service and authority.

Service is a privilege in Gamblers Anonymous. We benefit spiritually by serving our groups unselfishly. Service can help to keep us safer. For example, a service position may keep a reluctant recovering compulsive gambler attending a meeting when they might otherwise choose to stay home that day or evening.

At the group level, the positions available often depend on the group size. Meeting Leader, Treasurer, Secretary, Intergroup Representative, Meeting Set-up/Clean-up, and Literature Person are some examples of trusted servant positions. *Trusted Servant* is what we often call the person who leads the meeting by reading the format provided, but all service positions in GA fall under the Trusted Servant heading. Attendance, clean time, or other requirements for these positions are determined by each group.

We serve best when we show diligence and respect for the trust that others have placed in us. As a group, we also have the responsibility of supporting our Trusted Servants by teaching them their positions, giving them time to learn, and holding them accountable for their service. We share the Trusted Servant opportunities with each other by rotating positions on a periodic basis.

What sort of authority do these trusted servants have? Basically, none. Trusted servants are not elected or chosen to command, order, demand, change or alter anything. Trusted servants serve the group by carrying out the intentions of the group as a whole.

So how do things get done in Gamblers Anonymous? How are decisions made? Where does the decision-making authority rest in GA? The ultimate authority in GA is the spiritual concept of *group conscience* within the framework of the Gamblers Anonymous Guidance Code.

Group conscience is the voice of the group. It can be heard best when a well-informed group gathers to listen closely to each other, to discuss, and to arrive at a decision. Group conscience is much more than voting, although some groups may choose to simply vote. Ideally, a careful group conscience involves respectfully listening

to all viewpoints of the members attending, then working together to reach consensus. Consensus is a solution that all members can agree to abide by. When this happens, a vote is usually unnecessary. A thoughtful group conscience requires a time commitment from the group members.

There may be a distinct difference between group conscience and group opinion. By nature, we compulsive gamblers tend to be strong-willed and self-centered people. It is very easy to let powerful personalities or popularity influence group decisions. Although the wisdom of long-time members is valued, we also listen carefully to the voice of a newcomer.

Group conscience may change over time as a group changes or the needs of the group change. We need not be alarmed by such changes. Just as our personal recovery doesn't always progress in an orderly way, our group may not always grow and change as we might expect. As new members arrive, as current members mature, as a group's situation changes, so may group conscience alter. Hearing true group conscience takes time and patience. We learn to set aside our prejudices and participate in honest disagreement with flexibility and respect for each other. The spiritual guidance of group conscience will never conflict with any of our Unity Steps.

Accepting and rotating trusted servant positions, carefully seeking group conscience, and respecting other groups' choices keeps Gamblers Anonymous a unified and flexible organization.

### **Unity Step 3**

**The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling.**

Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. This is the message of Unity Step Three to any and every person who has a desire to stop gambling. We are an inclusive, not an exclusive, fellowship.

Desire may be the slightest flicker of hope that brings a compulsive gambler to a meeting. Desire may be the bold announcement of a new person asserting their willingness to do whatever it takes to stay free of gambling. Desire may be something in between, visible or not.

No matter how it presents itself, a desire to stop gambling is the only requirement of Gamblers Anonymous membership. This single requirement is a quality that not one of us has the ability to measure. This means we are free to offer hope to all who seek it.

A desire to stop gambling doesn't always mean that the urges have gone away. It doesn't always mean that an individual is happy about coming to a meeting. Desire can't be measured by the number of relapses or the amount of time free from gambling. Desire lives in our hearts, and any compulsive gambler can be grateful to be experiencing this gift on any given day.

Often we think we can guess at another person's willingness or desire for recovery. Unity Step Three asks us to put aside this self-righteous delusion and offer unconditional love and acceptance to each other. This step supports the unity of the Fellowship by ensuring that we give every compulsive gambler the opportunity to stay long enough to nurture any level of desire into a solid foundation for a recovery that works. Many times, the experience of simply listening to other members sharing their



experience, strength, and hope during a meeting has helped a struggling compulsive gambler to find or to rediscover the desire to stop gambling.

We are all equally vulnerable to the devastation of this illness. We each deserve an opportunity to recover. Unity Step Three provides every person who has a desire to stop gambling with a warm welcome to our Fellowship.

#### **Unity Step 4**

**Each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.**

Unity Step Four presents groups with a challenge: How do we balance the freedom of group self-direction with each group's responsibility to GA unity as a whole?

*Self-governing* means that each group is free to operate in the way its members believe will best carry the Gamblers Anonymous message of hope. The groups do this while practicing an awareness of and a respect for the spiritual principles contained in each of the other eleven GA Unity Steps.

One way this freedom is expressed is in the variety of meeting formats offered. Some common meeting types are step studies, speaker meetings, and topic discussions. Within the individual meeting format, methods of sharing may also vary. One possibility is to go around the table in order. Another is to have people speak as they are inspired. Some groups might prefer to have a trusted servant call on individuals and invite them to share. Groups individually decide if comments or feedback may be given on another member's shared therapy. A Gamblers Anonymous recovery community that offers a variety of meetings creates greater opportunities for GA to reach a wide range of compulsive gamblers.

Some meetings offer a safe space for gamblers with common needs to gather in groups where they feel they can share their whole story more comfortably. These may include women's meetings, men's meetings, LGBTQ meetings, and ethnic or language specific meetings, to name a few. We respect each other's right to a safe place. We always remember, however, that since our primary purpose is carrying the message, any gambler seeking recovery may attend any meeting. In keeping with the principles of Unity Step Six, common needs meetings do not have an affiliation with any outside organization. They do, however, provide an environment where recovering people can share without fear of judgment or misunderstanding.

Whatever the format, the purpose of the group remains the same: to carry the GA recovery message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. As a group grows and matures, it may discover ways to carry the message that perhaps no other group in the area has implemented.

When we consider our freedom to self-govern, we remember to think about how our actions might impact other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. For example, if a GA group does not pay its rent regularly or is inconsiderate in its use of the meeting space, other groups may have difficulty reserving rooms in that same place or in other nearby facilities. To the general public, each GA group represents the entire Fellowship. In addition, no group can dictate to another group or force any sort of compliance upon them. No group has the authority to change the format or style of another meeting.

Freedom does not remove the need to present the Gamblers Anonymous message consistently in all meetings. If we don't adhere to the Recovery Steps and the Unity Steps, our success in carrying the message will be impacted. Newcomers need to hear the message of hope that GA offers. It is important to be thoughtful about the message we present to people in their first meeting. It is not difficult to alienate a compulsive gambler. Many of us came to the Fellowship expecting that we wouldn't fit in. Some of us hoped, or were even afraid, that our situation was different somehow. Consistent messages of recovery in the program and how the program has helped with gambling-related issues give newcomers a chance to identify and to recognize hope.

If a contradiction exists between a group's actions and the Twelve Unity Steps, it is possible that spiritual principles need to be more fully considered in group conscience.

All this being said, Unity Step Four gives groups tremendous freedom to make mistakes. Each group has the right to be wrong. Each group has the right to strive and learn in its own way. Keeping concern for other groups and for Gamblers Anonymous as a whole in mind, each group can grow and evolve to do its best for any compulsive gambler who seeks our help.

### **Unity Step 5**

**Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.**

Our primary purpose for existing as a group is to help each other find freedom from the disease of compulsive gambling. If we allow our focus to be blurred by other endeavors, our ability to help the still-suffering gambler diminishes. This Unity Step guides our energy and efforts to where we can be the most effective: helping the compulsive gambler who still suffers. This is our area of expertise. We can offer identification, empathy, hope, and experience at a level that no "never-been-a-compulsive-gambler" person can. This singleness of purpose provides a consistency across all meetings that recovering compulsive gamblers can count on.

Who is the compulsive gambler who still suffers? It may be the person who is walking in the door for the first time. It may be the person who has just hit bottom and finds the hotline phone number. It may be the person who has tried and tried, again and again, to stop and desperately needs to hear a message of hope. It may be the person sitting next to you with years of abstinence who is struggling with urges. It may be the person in prison or in an institution who has never heard of Gamblers Anonymous. These are just some of the possibilities.

A wonderful paradox of our healing is that we can best keep the gift of recovery by giving it away. Therefore, a dedication to our own recovery along with a love for others creates within us an enlightened self-interest that saves lives. We are offered this spiritual gift as individuals when we work the Twelfth Recovery Step. As a group, we practice this same spiritual principle with Unity Step Five.

One of the ways we try to carry the message is to make Gamblers Anonymous accessible to everyone who needs us. This means that as a group we support GA services such as public information, hospital/institution outreach, Intergroup, hotlines, the International Service Office (ISO), and GA literature. We do this not only with our

monetary contributions but also by contributing service hours. We are not a secret society. Our outreach services help people to be able to find us easily when they need help. This is an important part of our primary purpose.

How can a group measure how well it is fulfilling its primary purpose? The Fifth Unity Step in particular provides a starting point for examining a group's performance and motives. To accomplish this, a group may schedule a separate business or group conscience meeting.

Groups are free to design their own questions to best evaluate how well they are carrying out their primary purpose. Some groups use the Twelve Unity Steps as a guideline. Here are some questions a group might use to guide a group discussion:

- Does our meeting consistently focus on the message of recovery?
- Are there compulsive gamblers in our area that are unaware of our group's existence?
- How can we make our meeting more accessible and open to a variety of compulsive gamblers?
- Does our meeting start on time?
- Do newcomers come back to our meeting?
- Do our members focus on sharing experience or are they giving advice?
- What else can we do to make new members feel at home?
- Are we supporting our Intergroup both financially and through service?
- Has the atmosphere of recovery diminished in our group?
- Might our meeting be perceived as "cliquey"?
- Does our meeting format keep our primary purpose in focus?
- Are service opportunities being shared by many members or are they covered by the same people over and over?

Unity Step Five provides a helpful basic guideline for groups to look at their motives and their actions in any context. A periodic group discussion may help us to evaluate how well we do what we do every week.

Our primary purpose is to carry the GA message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. We strive to help all members feel welcomed and part of the group regardless of clean time. Unity Step Five supports our unity and our integrity as a Fellowship by keeping our focus on what we are best qualified to do: carry the Gamblers Anonymous message of hope, freedom, and a better way of living to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

#### **Unity Step 6**

**Gamblers Anonymous ought never endorse, finance or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.**

Unity Steps Six and Seven are both about the importance of financial and identity boundaries in supporting our Fellowship's unity. These steps help us to keep our all-important primary purpose in clear focus. They also keep us from being linked to causes

or organizations that may harm the public acceptance of our individual groups or the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship as a whole.

In this section we will discuss why Unity Step Six cautions us not to endorse, finance, or lend the GA name to any related facility or outside enterprise. Unity Step Six counsels us not to expend time, money, or energy supporting outside causes or organizations. This step also discusses the dangers to the unity of the Fellowship that can result.

First, some clarity about what *related facility or outside enterprise* means. A *related facility* might be a treatment center, a hospital, or even a law enforcement entity. Although we are eager and willing to carry our message of hope into these institutions, we must remain clear that we are conveying the message of Gamblers Anonymous, not acting as agents of the related facility or institution. This demonstrates to the compulsive gambler who still suffers that they have choices in the type of help that is available.

Some examples of *outside enterprises* are organizations, businesses, religions, agencies, or political groups. This includes other Twelve Step fellowships. If we use literature or allow announcements from outside enterprises, we not only blur our own message; we connect our purpose to theirs.

Now let's look at the terms *endorsing, financing, and lending the Gamblers Anonymous name*.

*Endorsing* is publicly expressing approval. This approval may be direct, as in suggesting a newcomer go to a particular treatment center, or it may be implied, as in closing a meeting with a prayer not found in Gamblers Anonymous literature. Newcomers deserve to have clarity about the independence of GA, and not feel pressured to attend a certain type of treatment or to subscribe to any particular religious practice.

*Financing* is providing money. Giving money contributed by members to worthy but non-GA causes such as food shelves or to meeting facilities over and above rent costs diverts funds from our primary purpose. Members need to know that the money they contribute each week is going to pay rent, buy literature, and support the other ways meetings directly carry the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

*Lending our name* is giving permission for a non-GA organization to use the name "Gamblers Anonymous" as part of the advertised services they provide, or to justify any funding they may be seeking. It would also be *lending our name* to let Gamblers Anonymous be used in the title of their organization. People seeking recovery may be easily confused by meeting places, halfway houses, or counseling centers, especially since individual members of GA may have employment at such locations. We can't control the actions or the decisions of these outside organizations, so linking our name to theirs would make the reputation of Gamblers Anonymous vulnerable to public perceptions of those organizations' actions.

It is important to keep in mind that the Unity Steps apply to how we act as a *group* and how Gamblers Anonymous acts as a *Fellowship*. Individual GA members certainly have complete freedom outside of GA to personally endorse, finance, or lend their own name to any facility or enterprise they wish. However, Unity Step Six clearly and strongly insists that neither the name nor the funds of Gamblers Anonymous be given for use to any outside organization.

## **Unity Step 7**

**Every Gamblers Anonymous Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.**

In Unity Step Six, we discussed how Gamblers Anonymous money should be spent only for Gamblers Anonymous purposes. Unity Step Seven adds further clarity to how we handle our finances by examining how we bring money *into* GA. All of our dealings with money support our primary purpose: to carry the Gamblers Anonymous message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

When we were gambling compulsively, many of us thought that money would fix the problems we had. We may have tried to get as much as we could, from as many people as we could, as often as we could. When we came into recovery in Gamblers Anonymous, we found that being self-supporting brought the gift of freedom.

Unity Step Seven guides us in collecting sufficient money to provide for our group's needs and obligations. In our GA money-handling practices, transparency and accountability are essential. When the group has a surplus, we send it on to Intergroup or to our International Service Office (ISO) so that the funds can fulfill our primary purpose on a larger scale. The decision of how to handle a surplus is decided by group conscience. If groups hang on to large sums of money with no immediate intended purpose, controversy and disunity often result.

Our Gamblers Anonymous literature states that there are no dues or fees for GA membership, and Unity Step Three states that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. We want to make it perfectly clear that our individual presence is valued more than our money. We do, however, have financial responsibilities. Most meetings are required to pay rent. Hotlines come with phone bills. Gamblers Anonymous literature is distributed in the form of printed books and pamphlets. When our Fellowship (or the group) takes care of its own financial needs, it has the freedom to carry the message exactly as the group conscience chooses. Paying our own way is an act of gratitude that nourishes our recovery.

Being self-supporting is not only a financial endeavor; it is also a physical one. A meeting is supported by members who attend regularly, open and set up the meeting, greet newcomers, and fulfill service commitments at the group, Intergroup or Trustee level. It is important to recognize that a group can fall apart as quickly from unfilled service positions as it can from a lack of money. Contributing to our meeting financially and through service is evidence of our commitment to each other as members. It is an expression of our gratitude and recognition of our dependence upon each other for our very survival.

Unity Step Seven says that the *group* is self-supporting. We consider it unhealthy to allow one or two well-off members to cover the group's expenses, just as it is unhealthy to allow only a few members to continuously do the group's service work. If we don't each do our part to keep our group self-supporting, we risk some members feeling overwhelmed or underappreciated, while others may feel jealous or left out.

In order for the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship as a whole to be self-supporting, it relies on contributions from individual meetings. A vital part of a group being entirely self-supporting is contributing to the service structures that support it.

Intergroup and ISO are not in themselves self-supporting. They directly depend upon group contributions to do their work which includes: providing meeting lists, hotline and website services, public information, literature publication, and coordinating outreach to institutions such as hospitals, treatment centers, and prisons. The contributions of the groups also help our Trustees to attend Board of Trustees meetings where they serve as representatives of their respective areas.

Sometimes when a new meeting is started, it counts on the Fellowship to assist it in becoming self-supporting. Nearby groups may donate literature or make a special effort to support the new group with attendance. An area Intergroup may help with materials or by getting the word out about the new group. When a new group notifies the ISO of its existence, the International Service Office will send out a starter kit.

The latter part of Unity Step Seven addresses why we do not accept or solicit *outside contributions*. Outside contributions are funds from anyone who is not a member of Gamblers Anonymous. If anyone were permitted to contribute to Gamblers Anonymous other than its members, that person (or entity) might expect the right to voice an opinion as to the manner in which we choose to run our Fellowship. We are also careful not to accept funding or materials from outside entities such as businesses, related institutions, or any other organization. We maintain the freedom to carry our own message by not accepting money from outside sources.

On a larger scale, the work we do in Gamblers Anonymous is something that families and other organizations appreciate. Sometimes they may try to show that appreciation in a monetary form. Although we value their gratitude, we cannot accept donations from them. Our freedom as a Fellowship depends upon our willingness and ability to shoulder the responsibility of paying our own way.

We gratefully accept the responsibility of providing for our own financial needs and obligations. By doing so, we are free to run our Fellowship the way we believe best carries out our primary purpose. Through our financial and service commitments, we ensure that Gamblers Anonymous will always be there for the compulsive gambler who has a desire to stop gambling.

### **Unity Step 8**

**Gamblers Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.**

There are two main ways that Unity Step Eight protects the unity of the Fellowship. The first is that we do not charge for sharing our experience, strength, and hope, one compulsive gambler to another. This is the heart of the GA program and allows us to freely carry the Gamblers Anonymous message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. The second part of Unity Step Eight recognizes there are some tasks which are necessary to keep the Fellowship functioning and that require the employment of professionals-- people who receive money for their services -- who may or may not themselves be recovering compulsive gamblers.

First, and most importantly, we do not charge for sharing our personal recovery experience. Our members don't charge for carrying the message, and our meetings don't charge any dues or fees. We are more than compensated by the continuing freedom from compulsive gambling and the spiritual development that we receive as the

result of our efforts. Some ways we freely carry the Gamblers Anonymous message of hope are: welcoming newcomers, sponsoring, sharing at meetings, serving on committees, and/or volunteering on the local GA Hotline. We have learned that this Twelve Step work can best be done by people with direct personal experience of recovery. Each group member is an expert in their own recovery, completely qualified to share that experience with another compulsive gambler seeking help.

Gamblers Anonymous members are free to seek outside help if they choose to do so. However, if professional therapists were to operate within the Fellowship, not only might their views conflict with Gamblers Anonymous principles, but the very heartbeat of our program -- one compulsive gambler helping another--would be compromised.

Unity Step Eight clearly distinguishes our Recovery Program work from other types of services needed to keep the structure of GA growing and strong. Gamblers Anonymous members are generally the most qualified to conduct many of the Fellowship's affairs. There are times when it may be necessary to hire specifically trained professionals. Examples of this might be accounting, clerical, legal, or printing services. Sometimes it is possible to hire a GA member for a position that requires a professional.

By remaining non-professional at both the therapy and at many administrative levels, Gamblers Anonymous avoids many conflicts and controversies which could destroy the Fellowship on which our lives depend.

### **Unity Step 9**

**Gamblers Anonymous, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.**

Gamblers Anonymous functions through the spirit of service, not through the force of authority. Unity Step Eight explained that the groups weren't professional themselves but could hire professional help as necessary. Similarly, Unity Step Nine states that the groups themselves are not organized, but they may create organized committees to serve them. Once again, the purpose of this provision is to keep the groups focused on their primary purpose: to carry the GA message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

As Unity Step Two states, we are a Fellowship of equals. No member can give orders or expect obedience. No member possesses the authority of an executive or can be perceived as being in charge. We have no rules, but we do follow the Gamblers Anonymous Guidance Code. Trusted Servant positions are rotated on a regular basis so that many members can have an opportunity to serve. Positions are also rotated in order that the Fellowship can benefit from a variety of perspectives, and so that no one person holds any position for too long a time.

In Unity Step Nine we apply these same principles to our greater service structure. Boards and committees are created only to serve the groups, not to govern. The primary way that the service boards and committees are kept directly responsible to the groups is through communication. Each group is encouraged to have a representative at the local Intergroup. We also elect Trustees to represent our Area at the national and international levels. These trusted service positions are critical to the

health and survival of Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. The service entities can't be effectively held accountable unless the groups take an active and responsible role in their relationship to the larger service structure. However, as Unity Step Four makes clear, this representation is not mandatory.

When Unity Step Nine states that GA "ought never be organized", we see this as an encouragement toward simplicity, not an excuse for chaos. We do rely on some organization in order to function. An example of organization is that our meetings generally have written formats that are followed each week. Also, our Recovery Steps are written in a particular and meaningful sequence. Unity Step Nine advises us not to use these organizing principles to create a hierarchy or to exert control as a business might. Our boards and committees exist in order to build an effective and efficient environment of spiritual harmony that will support the groups in carrying the GA message. In order to accomplish this mission, these entities need a sufficient degree of organization to complete their assigned tasks.

The goal of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Steps is freedom from compulsive gambling. The goal of the Unity Steps is to bring that freedom within the reach of all compulsive gamblers who desire it. Unity Step Nine supports the unity of the Fellowship by freeing the groups to concentrate on our primary purpose: to carry the GA message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. Our service boards and committees, which are created to serve the groups' needs, must themselves be organized to effectively sustain the overall support needed to carry out that purpose.

#### **Unity Step 10**

**Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the Gamblers Anonymous name ought never be drawn into public controversy.**

In Gamblers Anonymous we unite to solve our common problem. We do this best in an atmosphere free of controversy. We are a Fellowship of many, many different people. Variations of race, age, religion, sexual orientation, politics, and nationality are some of our diversities. These bring us great strength, creativity, and credibility as a true Fellowship.

As individuals we will always have a wide assortment of opinions on outside issues and causes, but the group and GA itself can have no opinions on anything other than the program of Gamblers Anonymous. As a group or as a Fellowship, we neither support nor oppose any outside causes or issues. To make public pronouncements on non-Fellowship matters would inevitably split the group. It would also divert our attention from our primary purpose: to carry the Gamblers Anonymous message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. As Unity Step One emphasizes so strongly, personal recovery depends upon GA unity.

What are outside issues? Anything that is not part of the Gamblers Anonymous program of recovery is an outside issue. Most outside issues are easy to recognize because they are not related to compulsive gambling or recovery. However, there are a significant number of gambling-related issues that people might expect our Fellowship to have official positions on. People are often surprised to find that, as a Fellowship, we have no opinion on gambling itself. No opinion on the expansion of gambling. No opinion about treatment centers. No opinion about other Twelve Step fellowships. In



fact, we don't even claim to have the only solution to the problem of compulsive gambling. We remain neutral on these sorts of issues in order to preserve our focus on our one and only area of expertise: sharing recovery from compulsive gambling with one another. As individuals we may have very strong opinions about the topics mentioned above. A key part of diversity is variety, including different points of view. Each member can have their own opinion on any issue, but the group or the Fellowship cannot.

We must be particularly careful when speaking in public about Gamblers Anonymous. Even if we carefully preface our comments with the clarification that these are our personal opinions, the audience we address will still see us as representatives of GA itself. We might say it is not our fault if people misinterpret us, but the resulting complications for Gamblers Anonymous as a whole can still be quite serious. As individuals, we may also be deeply and personally concerned with a variety of worthwhile causes. As we recover from compulsive gambling, we regain our roles as useful members of society. We each have the opportunity to act on the issues of our time. As stated earlier in Unity Step Four, we fiercely defend individual freedom in Gamblers Anonymous. However, in order to keep our meetings safe places, we try to leave discussion of these topics outside of the rooms.

When outside issues are impacting our recovery, we try to share about how we use the Gamblers Anonymous program to stay abstinent in spite of our feelings and reactions. We strive to focus on our feelings, as they impact our recovery, without identifying our personal stance on any issue. While it is essential for us to share about what is impacting our recovery, we avoid bringing controversial subjects up when we share. We also avoid using controversial items as a meeting topic. When outside issues press heavily upon us, one good option is to talk with our sponsor or with fellow members at a time separate from the meeting.

We take extra care to respect Unity Step Ten during times of public stress and political upheaval. It is especially important at these times that all members can feel safe and welcomed no matter what their personal opinions are on outside matters. Here are some questions we might ask ourselves when deciding what to share in our group meeting space:

- Am I sharing my experience or am I sharing my opinion?
- Am I seeking a solution or am I focusing on the problem?
- Am I genuinely speaking to how my recovery is being impacted or am I trying to convince people to be on my side?
- Could I be perceived as promoting a resource outside of GA, such as a therapist or treatment center?

Of course, we have the ability to create plenty of *inside* controversies. These are a normal part of learning to live and work together. Disputes about how to use treasury funds to best carry the message, changes of meeting formats, how to best organize a workshop day -- these are some examples of inside issues that can cause controversy. Unity is critical to our survival and to our ability to carry our message; therefore, we try to avoid righteous indignation or justified anger. An indispensable tool in these instances is the group conscience process as discussed in Unity Step Two. Love,

Careful listening, speaking respectfully, and remembering that most of our squabbles concern ways to make GA more effective will help us to weather these storms.

Unity Step Ten helps us to focus on what we have in common: a desire to carry the message of freedom from compulsive gambling. It also illustrates the loving dependence that a widely diverse group of people can share with each other. Focusing on outside issues can eventually only bring disunity and destruction of the group or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. We cannot afford to be distracted or destroyed by the opposing views we may have on outside issues. Compulsive gambling affected us in many different ways, but in the rooms of GA, we all belong. Keeping outside issues outside of the group supports our unity.

### **Unity Step 11**

**Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and Internet.**

We are not a secret society. We have a public relations policy because we interact with the public as individual members, as groups, and as a Fellowship. Unity Step Eleven provides some guidance for these encounters.

We want people to find us. We want compulsive gamblers seeking help to be able to locate a meeting. Word-of-mouth is not only too narrow in scope, it is also a slow way of carrying the message. It also implies that only people who know a current member would have access to recovery.

What is the difference between attraction and promotion? Why does it matter?

*Attraction* is providing the general public with an accurate picture of Gamblers Anonymous. Attraction is letting people know that we exist and that we offer hope for freedom from compulsive gambling. Attraction is helping people to be able to find us easily. Some examples of attraction are:

- Billboards, bus shelter posters, and public service announcements that give our hotline number and our website address.
- Listings of meeting times and locations in neighborhood newspapers.
- Maintenance of local and international websites.
- Distribution of area meeting lists to professionals who encounter compulsive gamblers in crisis on a regular basis (e.g. hospitals, treatment centers, clergy, and probation officers).

*Promotion* is distinct from attraction. Promotion often uses manipulation, exaggerated claims, and false promises. Promotion frequently involves celebrity or individual endorsements.

Unity Step Eleven recognizes that our Fellowship is grounded in compulsive gamblers sharing their own experience, strength, and hope with one another. We are not a money-making endeavor. We aren't trying to talk anyone into doing anything. The only membership requirement is a desire to stop gambling. We are a program for people who *want* recovery. We are freely offering hope.

As our literature states, compulsive gambling is an emotional illness. Part of that illness is selfishness and a self-centered ego. If any one of us, celebrity or not, were to speak for Gamblers Anonymous at a public level two things might happen. First, if that person were to relapse, our image as a Fellowship would be impacted. Second, the ego-feeding created by such a representation may easily put that individual's recovery in great jeopardy.

These are some of the reasons why the principle of anonymity--the unity resulting from individuals remaining nameless--is so critical. Our personal survival, and also the survival of the GA Fellowship as a whole rely upon this principle.

Unity Step Eleven makes a very clear distinction between the Fellowship fulfilling its obligation of helping compulsive gamblers to find us and cautioning individuals not to anoint themselves as representatives of Gamblers Anonymous.

Unity Step Eleven tells each of us, as individuals, not to speak for GA at the very specific *public* levels of press, radio, films, television, Internet and other methods of communication that may arise in the future. This is one of the ways we protect ourselves from worsening the ego-driven sickness of our disease. Unity Step Eleven, however, says that the Fellowship as a whole can use public media to fulfill our primary purpose: to carry the message of Gamblers Anonymous to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

Unity Step Eleven does not address whether or not a person ought to disclose their Gamblers Anonymous membership to family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers. In fact, letting those closest to us know about our recovery can help keep us safe. For example, we are less likely to get invitations to participate in gambling activities. In other instances, however, disclosure may jeopardize employment or cause legal consequences. This personal choice is ours alone; no one else ought to decide this for us.

Some of us will choose to remain silent about our GA membership. Some members will want to talk about it. Either choice is fine so long as none of us takes it upon ourselves to speak for Gamblers Anonymous as a whole at any time, particularly at the level of press, radio, films, television, and Internet. It is impossible for us to imagine what new forms of communication will be common in the future. The spirit of Unity Step Eleven will remain the same in guiding our Fellowship.

Unity Step Eleven is not a passive step. Our Fellowship, as a whole, has the responsibility to carry our message effectively to compulsive gamblers who need us. We do this best by using the tools of attraction and avoiding the pitfalls of promotion.

### **Unity Step 12**

**Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the Gamblers Anonymous program, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.**

One dictionary definition of anonymity is the state of being nameless. The group is precious to the individual and, certainly, the individual is precious to the group. The group, however, cannot survive if individuals do not know how to work together. Anonymity as a spiritual principle expands to include selflessness and humility; we place the good of the whole above the wants of the individual. Anonymity, the spiritual foundation of our entire program, has two primary applications in Gamblers Anonymous.

The first is that we respect and protect each other's right to privacy. We introduce and refer to each other by first names only. Our phone lists identify us no further than our first name and perhaps the first letter of our last name. In the meetings we often say:

*Whom you see here  
What you hear here  
When you leave here  
Let it stay here*

This level of privacy offers some comfort to compulsive gamblers seeking recovery. We often enter these rooms full of shame, fear, and secrets. When we honor each other's right to privacy, we help to create a safe place for healing.

A second way we apply the principle of anonymity in the rooms of GA is by putting the needs of the group or of the Fellowship as a whole before our individual identities, ambitions, or desires. Although none of the Unity Steps place a limit on our personal freedoms, all of the Unity Steps teach us how to give priority to our unity as a group and as a Fellowship. We don't recover alone; we need each other. Our individual recovery depends on the existence of Gamblers Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous depends on the existence of our unity.

Rich or poor, educated or illiterate, working class or professional, no matter what our religious or political affiliations are: who we are outside of the rooms doesn't matter in a GA meeting. None of the characteristics which influence our lives so strongly outside of the rooms has any meaning or weight inside the meeting. When we walk through the doors of Gamblers Anonymous, we are simply recovering compulsive gamblers seeking and carrying a message of hope to other recovering compulsive gamblers. The GA Fellowship is not guided by individual personalities; it relies on all of us practicing spiritual principles with unity of purpose. This common purpose can only be carried out with the humility and unity that results from the practice of anonymity. The concept of placing *principles before personalities* extends this humility ever forward, asking us to listen to what is said rather than judging who said it. We seek to apply the spiritual principles underlying the Unity Steps instead of fighting for our self-interest. We don't generally come into the Fellowship with skills for this. We gently learn from each other over time. Practicing and understanding the Twelfth Unity Step will support us as we grow.

### **Conclusion**

These Unity Steps, when studied and practiced by our groups, protect the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship from potentially destructive forces from inside or outside the Fellowship. The Unity Steps are not a rule book. They are the spiritual principles that keep Gamblers Anonymous free and flourishing.

Summarized, Unity Steps One, Three, Five and Twelve all clarify our relationship and service to each other. Unity Steps Two, Four, and Nine establish that we have no authority over one another in that relationship. Unity Step Eight makes it clear that our

recovery efforts are not for sale. Unity Steps Six, Seven, Ten, and Eleven set up clear boundaries for our relations with the public.

These principles provide strong guidance if we work toward understanding and practicing them to the best of our ability.

Louisville '19 Attachment #76  
DO NOT USE, DISPLAY OR DISTRIBUTE  
in any Gamblers Anonymous room  
This is not approved or appropriate literature

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RELAPSE

Relapse is a return to the obsession and compulsion of gambling. Relapse happens. Relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. Relapse can be deadly. Sustained recovery requires diligent, daily maintenance. When people slip into old ways of thinking and living, relapse becomes more likely. It is critical for anyone, no matter how long they have abstained from gambling, to be able to recognize warning signs of relapse.

In this section, we will discuss urges and how working the GA program can help us to stop urges from turning into a relapse. We will also talk about emotional turmoil and self-care issues that put us at greater risk for a relapse. We will discuss how our own or another member's relapse can unexpectedly teach us how to strengthen our individual programs.

Most importantly, we will discuss how vital it is that we return immediately to the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous after a relapse. We will also talk about how we absolutely warmly welcome everyone each week to our meetings, relapse or not.

#### **Coping with Urges**

As compulsive gamblers in action, we were consumed with an obsession to gamble. That obsession impacted the very essence of our existence. Now, as recovering compulsive gamblers, it is unrealistic for us to think we will never experience urges to gamble. When we were compulsively gambling, our minds were occupied with constant thoughts of where, when, and how we could place our next bet. We were obsessed with covering our tracks and creating the lies we needed to tell ourselves and others in order to continue gambling.

It is crucial to recognize that urges do occur and that we need to develop strategies to defend against them.

While urges to gamble can happen at any stage of recovery, they are particularly common to those new to the rooms. When we stop gambling, we may experience a variety of withdrawal symptoms. These might include: sleeplessness, irritability, changes in appetite, anxiety, gambling dreams, and mood swings to name a few.

As newcomers, we have expressed our desire to stop gambling and we have started to attend meetings. We have learned that the only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling. We are often surprised by the void that has opened in our lives where gambling used to be.

How do we fill that empty space which used to be filled with our obsession? We go to meetings and there we find a solution. It begins with the principles of recovery. We get a sponsor. We make frequent contact with that sponsor and other recovering compulsive gamblers. We seek out opportunities to be of service. We continue to attend one or more weekly meetings. We seek more contact with a Higher Power. Daily reading of GA literature is another basic recovery tool that we use.

We learn to be honest and we develop the willingness to be open about the urges we feel. Often the newer member who has stated a desire to refrain from gambling hasn't yet fully grasped the solution of the Recovery Program. This is a

dangerous place. If we are having urges, doubts, and questions, we may instinctively want to isolate and hide these issues. It is important that we don't. The power of the Fellowship lies in one compulsive gambler helping another. When we talk about having urges in a meeting, fellow GA members will offer us a variety of useful strategies for coping with those urges. Urges are simply thoughts. Gambling dreams are simply dreams. We do not have to act on them. The urge *will* pass. Some members have said that the pause between thought and action *is* recovery. As we continue to regularly attend meetings and work our program, awareness of the spiritual principles of the program will grow, and the chaos of our lives will begin to calm.

Urges can also occur in recovering compulsive gamblers with longer periods of abstinence. In fact, our Combo Book speaks to that condition:

*"When it comes to gambling, we have known many compulsive gamblers who could abstain for long stretches, but caught off-guard and under the right set of circumstances, they started gambling without thought of the consequences... We have found that willpower and self-knowledge will not help in those mental blank spots, but adherence to spiritual principles seems to solve our problems. Most of us feel that a belief in a Power greater than ourselves is necessary in order for us to sustain a desire to refrain from gambling."*

Awareness that urges are common, and that they *will* pass, is a tool all compulsive gamblers can use for coping with them. There is GA-approved literature available that addresses this topic. If not available at your meeting, it may be purchased through the Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office (ISO).

### **Emotional Turmoil and Self-Care Issues**

Life circumstances such as relationships, health, work, and finances can cause stress and emotional turmoil. These pressures can lead us back to old ways of thinking and living which puts us at risk of relapse. When we work the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery and Unity Programs with our sponsors and GA mentors, we learn to survive these stresses without relapsing.

Even when we diligently work the GA Recovery Steps, sometimes our issues are beyond the scope of the Gamblers Anonymous program. At these times members may need to seek help from an appropriate professional. Seeking such help is an outside issue about which the Gamblers Anonymous program has no opinion.

Not paying attention to our physical well-being can also be a potential sign of impending relapse. When we were gambling, we often ignored not only our physical health, but also our immediate bodily needs and emotional well-being. In our recovery, when we become too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (often remembered as HALT), our thought processes become distorted and we are more vulnerable to relapse. For some individuals, substance abuse would also come under this category of insufficient self-care.

While every individual's relapse might feel different, in our experience we find many commonalities in what members share about what they did or did not do that led to their relapse.

Members who have relapsed usually tell us, first of all, that they stopped making meeting attendance a priority. They also say that they stopped practicing the guidelines found on the last page of our Combo Book. Some say that they began to focus on work, family, and debt repayment, neglecting much-needed regular meetings. Some people say they thought moneyless games (such as computer/internet sites) would be safe. Some thought that they could safely attend concerts or buffets at casinos. Sometimes isolation, GA personality clashes, and/or unresolved resentments led to the relapse.

We are never safe from how we try to rationalize our behaviors. Sometimes we forget that contact with a Higher Power, not self-reliance, is the source of our new freedom.

### **After a Relapse**

*The first, and most important, thing to do after a relapse is to come back to meetings.* This simple act can help to interrupt the obsession to gamble. A relapse gives any compulsive gambler clear-cut evidence that willpower alone is not sufficient to combat an obsession to gamble. Meetings are where we find other people who understand this disease of compulsive gambling, and who have also survived relapse. At meetings we work together. We re-focus on the steps and practice the spiritual principles that free us from compulsive gambling.

Relapses are far from ideal, but they do happen. A relapse becomes a learning experience when it is used to strengthen our commitment to recovery. Sharing about what led to our relapse in the GA group may save another member the same agony.

### **Welcome Back**

So, what should be the response of a meeting and its members to someone that relapses? Unconditional love and acceptance as they find their way back to the rooms is a good starting point. Meetings in Gamblers Anonymous are intended to be safe havens. To criticize, judge, or demean another compulsive gambler because of a relapse goes against our primary purpose found in Step Five of the Unity Program: "*Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.*" Isn't a member returning after relapse clearly a still-suffering compulsive gambler? After all, isn't this what brings us together--a gambling problem? Where else can compulsive gamblers expect to find a solution if not with our peers? Recovery in Gamblers Anonymous is comparable to an old saying: "Success in life is achieved by getting up one more time than the number of times you fall."



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUICIDE

Untreated compulsive gambling leads to prison, insanity, or death. Sometimes we are reluctant to talk about these topics, especially death, in our meetings or with each other. In this chapter we try to initiate a conversation about contemplated and attempted suicides by compulsive gamblers.

If you were to gather one hundred people from all walks of life and ask them if they had ever contemplated suicide, the majority would say no. If you ask that same question of one hundred compulsive gamblers, the majority would answer yes. This is a reality that we of Gamblers Anonymous must recognize. Studies by professional mental health organizations have shown that as many as one in five compulsive gamblers have actually attempted suicide. Multiple studies state that compulsive gamblers also have the highest rate of suicidal thoughts among all addictive disorders.

Obsessive-compulsive addictions all carry a risk of contemplated, attempted, or actual suicide. Why is this danger even greater in compulsive gamblers? We don't know. What we can do is share several insights from members who answer 'yes' to Question 20 of the self-assessment found in the introduction of this book: *Have you ever considered self-destruction or suicide as a result of your gambling?*

*"Since I was a habitual liar and a skilled manipulator, the true nature of my gambling and the resulting financial damage was a dark secret until the day I was cornered, and the truth emerged. Having to face this reality overwhelmed me and suicide seemed my only way out."*

*"I couldn't think of any other way to stop it."*

*"The illegal acts I had committed to finance my gambling (bad checks and embezzlement) brought me face-to-face with legal consequences. Because I held an important corporate position, I was afraid of public humiliation. The very real possibility of incarceration made me feel that suicide was an actual answer."*

*"I had caused so much financial damage to my family. I had emotionally blackmailed them for bailouts so many times that all trust was shattered. I couldn't explain to them why I couldn't stop gambling. The insane idea that 'they would be better off without me' seemed logical."*

*"During the long drive home from yet another failed and way-too-long bout of gambling, I would be depressed, and my thinking was clouded. I was definitely over-exhausted and I knew it was reckless to be driving. I'd be thinking: 'I did it again!', 'I'm such a loser!', 'How am I going to cover these new losses?' These awful thoughts made the idea of driving into a bridge abutment seem appealing."*

*"I wanted to hurt myself so badly that I would be unable to go to the casino. I hoped I would end up in a hospital for two or three weeks and then the urges would go away."*

*"I went from a place of being an engaged and active mother, spouse, and daughter, to being completely unreliable and not present in the lives of the people I loved the most. I thought it would be better for me not to be there."*

*"I was going to go on one last binge for the weekend. By the time I walked out of the casino, I knew I was going to end it one way or another. I am afraid of heights, but I jumped from a forty-foot high parking garage."*

*"I saved up a lot of pills, just in case."*

*"I was in a homeless shelter and in despair. I thought that riding my motorcycle into oncoming traffic would make the pain stop. Surprising myself, I called my sponsor instead."*

*"In the first six months of my recovery, when I was working on my Fourth and Fifth Steps with my sponsor, a lot of things started coming out. I told her about my suicide attempts. It was so easy to talk to her about it that I brought it up in my meeting that week. I was amazed when others started talking about their own suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts. That's when I finally felt like I belonged. People in GA really understood me."*

*"I had several years of freedom from compulsive gambling and I was scared and confused by the suicidal thoughts I was starting to have. I gathered my courage and shared at a meeting. Other members surprised me when they reassured me that my thoughts were not uncommon even for a long-term recovering GA member. It meant a lot to me to find out that I wasn't the only one who ever thought this way. It also meant I needed to focus more on working the Gamblers Anonymous program."*

We want to make it perfectly clear at this point that the above statements are from members who are currently experiencing and enjoying continuous one-day-at-a-time recovery in Gamblers Anonymous. They found a path through the pain. We want you to know there is hope.

It is important to keep in mind that Step One tells us we are powerless over compulsive gambling. Sadly, we have known people who have committed suicide. The list includes sponsors, sponsees, friends who made it into the GA program, and some who didn't. We might feel that we should have been able to prevent a suicide from happening. Step One means that we are powerless not only over our own compulsive gambling, but also over the compulsive gambling of other people.

How do we help each other? First and foremost, we recognize that the very real risk of suicide is part of the disease of compulsive gambling. We of Gamblers Anonymous are not trained professionals in suicide prevention. We can, however, help by sharing our experience with similar thoughts of suicide, the resources we used to get

through them, and the hope we found in talking with other recovering compulsive gamblers. We know suicide ends any possibility for the miracle of recovery contained in the spiritual principles of Gamblers Anonymous to take place.

Suicidal thoughts and, sadly, attempts are real. We share as honestly as we can and deliver the message that there is hope for all of us in the Gamblers Anonymous program.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### HOPE AND PERSISTENCE

Compulsive gambling is a frightening and insidious disease. It takes a lot of work to recover. We are fortunate to have the program of Gamblers Anonymous as a proven solution.

The previous chapters have extensively described the disease of compulsive gambling, the program of recovery, how we work together in unity, the very real risks of relapse, and the sad facts about common suicidal thoughts.

Gamblers Anonymous offers hope for a normal way of thinking and living free of compulsive gambling. We can have every reason to hope for our own recovery because we see recovery happening in fellow members. We feel renewed hope for ourselves when we reach out to a newcomer and share our own experience and strength.

When compulsive gambling dominated our lives, our waking hours were often full of terror about consequences, bewilderment at our behavior, frustration at our inability to stop, and despair that none of this could ever change.

In recovery, we attend meetings, work the Steps, ask each other for support, and extend a warm welcome to all compulsive gamblers seeking help. In return, our lives can be filled with contentment, usefulness, possibility, and hope.

Living a life of recovery does not grant us immunity from the winds and storms of existence. Births, deaths, serious illnesses, marriages, divorces, job promotions, job losses, victories, and disappointments are a part of life. Staying strong together gives us the tools to survive the ups and downs of life -- free from compulsive gambling.

The Gamblers Anonymous recovery program offers freedom from compulsive gambling. The program works for introverts and it works for extroverts. It works for people from all walks of life. The program also works on all types of compulsive gambling. It will even work on forms of gambling that had yet to be conceived when this book was written.

The recovery program of Gamblers Anonymous works. It will work for you, if you work it to the best of your ability. The GA Fellowship exists to help you.

You have come to the right place. You are not alone in this. We are the people who have experience and a deep understanding of this disease. We know how it feels to try to recover, and to keep on trying. Recovery happens when the hopeless find hope. Recovery happens when worn-out people persist in coming to meetings, working the program, and trying to help others.

Never ever give up. Whether you are new to GA, returning to GA, or a longtime member, your experience is precious to us. You are precious to us. Everyone gets tired and overwhelmed sometimes. Urges are a fact. We don't expect you to be perfect. Share as honestly as you can. Your story is going to be the exact one that will help someone else. Never ever give up.

The next part of this book contains stories of recovering compulsive gamblers. We are all different individuals, but we share a disease with very familiar commonalities.

Together, with hope and persistence, we do recover!

**PART TWO: STORIES OF RECOVERY**

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## INTRODUCTION

“I don’t know you, but I **know** you.” Shared experiences are often our entryway into recovery from compulsive gambling: one recovering compulsive gambler sharing their experience, strength, and hope with another. We do this face-to-face in meetings every day. In someone else’s story you may see your own. We hope you will find your own experience reflected here. If you don’t, try to find some similarities. We encourage you to share your story when you have the opportunity. We are stronger when all of our voices are included in our Fellowship. Each story is special and yet never unique. Our experience is that often when we speak about how we *don’t* fit in, another member will thank us for speaking their truth. This process of identification with each other is a core component of recovery. It is a starting point for the ending of isolation. We find that others have gone through not only the same experiences, but have felt similar feelings. We have thought the same thoughts, felt the same fears, and experienced the same desperation and bafflement at our inability to stop gambling -- no matter how much we wanted or needed to.

When we share our stories, we often feel less alone and less ashamed. When we listen to other recovering gamblers’ stories, we often hear our own.

This section of our book presents individual stories: stories about our founders and the early days of Gamblers Anonymous; stories from the pioneering members of Gamblers Anonymous; and stories by current members from around the world as our Fellowship has truly become global.

## THE FOUNDING OF GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

Compulsive gamblers Jim W and Ray M are credited with creating Gamblers Anonymous as it exists today. On his own, Jim W experienced many difficulties trying to establish Gamblers Anonymous. When Ray M joined Jim W in his efforts, together they finally got GA off to a solid start. These two men became partners and Gamblers Anonymous owes them both a great debt of gratitude.

### Jim W's Story [1912-1983]

Jim W was born in Southern California. He learned the basics of card playing from his father, and by the time he graduated from high school he had become an experienced poker player. During the 1930's, the era of the Great Depression, the job market was bleak, and Jim turned to poker for his livelihood. Though he eventually obtained steady employment, gambling dominated his life. Jim used his wages to finance higher-staked poker games and for his new gambling passion: horse-racing. This new obsession was so consuming that he started to take jobs only to build up betting stakes and walked away from those jobs when the gambling went well. Not surprisingly, Jim's betting "systems" for horses failed miserably. The debts mounted more quickly than his horses ran.

At age thirty, Jim joined the military and was introduced to a vast new arena of gambling action. During his years of service, Jim's compulsion worsened dramatically – to the point where he began to doubt his own sanity. The agonies of losing were becoming intolerable, relieved only by the vain hopes of even heavier wagering. After World War II, Jim returned to Los Angeles where he resumed his life of losing at the racetrack. Jim blamed his losses on the frivolous atmosphere at the racetrack – an environment unsuited to a "professional" gambler like himself. Next, Jim moved to Reno, Nevada and developed "systems" for blackjack and roulette. However, like his other gambling "systems", these stopped working, and once again he was broke.

The old pattern of taking jobs to finance betting kept him going for a few months, but it wasn't long before Jim hitchhiked back to L.A., broke and alone. Jim got a well-paying job in home construction soon after he returned but gambling still bankrupted him weekly. The glaring contradiction of high income on one hand, and deep debts on the other, forced Jim to consider stopping gambling, and he abstained for a while.

However, he was soon back to gambling and even further in debt. Demoralized by his losses and his inability to stop gambling, Jim began to drink heavily. He drank to celebrate a win, to forget a loss, and to pass the time in between bets. Jim realized that his drinking was a problem and he joined Alcoholics Anonymous. By following that fellowship's program, he began to experience recovery. It was in AA that Jim met Sybil, whom he married in 1951.

Although Jim was abstaining from alcohol, his gambling was completely out of control. Now, two lives were in chaos. Somehow, through this turmoil came the beginnings of an idea that would eventually save the lives of thousands of compulsive gamblers around the world. Quite simply, Jim began to apply the spiritual principles of

AA to his gambling problem. Sybil saw that her husband was making progress and suggested that he contact others with a gambling problem. Jim took her advice to heart and began talking to anyone who would listen about his gambling problem and his desire to stop.

In the summer of 1955, Jim recruited three compulsive gamblers from AA and started a meeting to help other compulsive gamblers recover. At their first meeting they decided on a name for their fellowship. The name, The Algamus Society was coined. "Al" for alcohol, "gam" for gamblers and "us" for the four members. Despite the hopeful start, however, the Algamus Society fell apart after the second meeting. As Jim recalled, a major reason for the failure was that the second meeting's conversation strayed away from therapeutic discussions of gambling to small talk and other matters of lighter import.

Jim's faith in the possibility of recovery from gambling was sorely tested in the months after the Algamus Society collapsed. In his solitude his thoughts strayed frequently to gambling. Fortunately, Sybil was able to help. Sybil worked at AA's Central Office and she occasionally received calls from those with problems other than drinking. Whenever a gambler called, she referred that person to Jim. In November 1955, Jim arranged to meet with Art M, also a compulsive gambler, to discuss their mutual problem. Jim also invited some friends who were trying to control their gambling, including former members of the Algamus Society. Meetings took place at Jim's apartment and continued sporadically for several months, but eventually attendance dwindled away. In early 1956 Stan R, a horse-betting addict, contacted Jim through a referral by the AA Central Office. Jim could offer no group meeting but suggested that the two of them meet and talk regularly, which they did. Eventually, Stan R stopped gambling.

Not long after, Paul V. Coates, a prominent radio announcer and newspaper columnist, asked Jim, his wife Sybil, and Stan R, to appear on his show to discuss their efforts to control their problems with gambling. All eagerly agreed. The three were introduced as representatives of "Gamblers Anonymous." Thus, the name was coined and the Fellowship was conceived. The show seemed to be a great success as each told his or her story, but a suggestion that interested listeners call in produced no calls. By the end of the night just one man had telephoned, asking Jim for advice on how to win at the racetrack. All were dismayed.

Stan R eventually went back to gambling and fell away from the Fellowship. Gamblers Anonymous, such as existed, now had only one member. In spite of these discouraging events, Jim's dream to start a fellowship for compulsive gamblers was still foremost in his mind and he would take another step forward with a chance meeting with another gambler in 1957.

Sybil, who was now managing AA's Central Service Office in California, received a call on Christmas Eve from a gentleman named Sam J. Sam called AA's office for help with his gambling problem. Sybil referred the call to Jim who immediately phoned Sam, and after talking, they agreed to meet the next day for coffee to discuss their gambling problems. They met periodically for the next several months helping each other refrain from gambling. Sam had two character traits that Jim valued highly: a willingness to admit that a problem existed, and a sense of humor. The two became instant friends, and because of their mutual support, neither gambled.



In August 1957, Sam and Jim responded to a call from a woman who sought help for her husband's gambling problem. Upon visiting the couple at their home, the two GA members quickly learned that the husband wasn't interested in quitting. Grateful for their attempt to help, the woman said she thought Jim's idea of helping compulsive gamblers was very admirable and wanted to help by getting him some publicity. She offered to put them in touch with an influential newspaper columnist.

Much to Jim's surprise, the columnist called the following day. An article soon appeared in a Los Angeles newspaper, giving some publicity about a fellowship called Gamblers Anonymous. Again, the name Gamblers Anonymous was introduced even though the actual fellowship did not exist. Despite this excellent exposure, Jim was once again met with disappointment – no one responded. The reporter persisted and he and his producer invited Sam and Jim to appear on their weekly television show. Once again, their hopes burned brightly.

Jim's excitement at the prospect of appearing on a popular television show was cooled unexpectedly. Sam told him that he would not go on, fearing that he might be recognized and possibly jeopardize his insurance business. Jim did not tell the interviewer about this, afraid that the arrangements would fall through. Instead, Jim brought along a "ringer" from AA, and introduced him as a new member of GA. Jim was not proud of this deception. He reasoned that a fellowship, such as GA purported to be, needed to have more than one member. Despite the confusion, and the fact that both men appeared with paper bags over their heads, the show went well. The broadcast ended with an offer to handle any inquiries the audience might have.

On August 20, 1957, the same day the newspaper article appeared, Ray M had just arrived home from a gambling binge. Ray returned home with 11 pennies, but left thousands of dollars in bad checks behind him. That night, Ray's wife Ann received a phone call from their daughter, suggesting Ray watch a show airing on Labor Day about compulsive gamblers. Ann managed to get Ray to watch the program. During the show, Jim W explained what compulsive gambling is and how someone could be helped.

At the conclusion of the program, the host advised his viewers that if anyone wanted further information about compulsive gambling, they write to him at his studio. Ann wrote in to the show, as did about twenty other people. The letters were forwarded to Jim and Sybil who responded to them all, advising them of the address, date, and time the Gamblers Anonymous meeting would take place. On Friday, September 13, 1957, the first group meeting of Gamblers Anonymous was held. Thirteen people were present. They were Jim W, Sam J, Sam's wife Leah, Ed T, Patricia B (the first female GA member), Ray M, his wife Ann, a man named Sol, and a man who refused to give his name. Four of Jim's AA friends also attended.

Jim chaired the meeting and explained he had a plan to help compulsive gamblers recover from a gambling problem. He read the Twelve Steps of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program which were slightly different but patterned after the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Sam J had a problem with the word "God" and successfully convinced Jim to remove the word from Steps Three, Five and Six, and the phrase "spiritual awakening" from Step Twelve.

During the meeting, some of the newcomers were silent, others had many questions. The formal meeting lasted for an hour and a half, but the informal discussion

that followed lasted into the early hours of the morning. Most importantly, a second meeting was planned.

The second meeting of Gamblers Anonymous was held on Friday, September 20, 1957. The meeting was attended by four people: Jim W, Ed T, Patricia B, and Ray M. Gamblers Anonymous again came dangerously close to failing with only three members left after Patricia B returned to gambling and stopped attending meetings.

From this small beginning the Fellowship slowly started to grow. Los Angeles and Las Vegas churches placed notices in church bulletins about GA. A gambler and his wife traveled from San Francisco and took the Program back to the Bay area. Ray M travelled to San Diego to plead a compulsive gambler's case in front of a judge which led to the start of another GA meeting.

Jim's appearance on the Art Linkletter show "House Party" in 1959 brought more awareness of this growing Fellowship. Ray M's wife Ann, upon seeing a letter from the wife of a compulsive gambler in an Ann Landers column, wrote Ann Landers about Gamblers Anonymous. Ann Landers subsequently wrote an article praising the work of GA and recommending that problem gamblers explore the merits of Gamblers Anonymous. As a result of Jim's appearance on Art Linkletter's television show and Ann Landers' column about GA, a multitude of letters asking for help began to arrive at the GA post office box. Jim read the letters and turned them over to Ray to respond. Ray subsequently borrowed a typewriter from his employer and dictated a form letter to his wife Ann. Before the end of 1959 they had responded to nearly 500 letters.

Letters began arriving requesting information on how to start Gamblers Anonymous meetings. Larry R of San Francisco provided the answer by developing a seven-page pamphlet called "How We Did It." Larry sent the pamphlets to Ray in Los Angeles, and they were mailed out. Harold D of New York received one of these pamphlets. Harold released publicity about Gamblers Anonymous and subsequently started the first Gamblers Anonymous meeting on the East coast on January 30, 1960 in the Bohemian Hall in New York City. There were forty-nine people at this meeting.

The "How We Did It" pamphlet reached others interested in the program. Soon meetings were to be found in Miami, Boston, Philadelphia, Toronto, Detroit, Newark, and Cleveland. An inquiry from Phil S in Australia resulted in the first GA meeting outside of North America. Gamblers Anonymous was truly established as a viable resource for the recovery of compulsive gamblers. Since that time, the Fellowship has grown steadily, and groups are flourishing throughout the world.

In these early years, Ray M did much of the necessary work for Gamblers Anonymous because Jim W's job with the City of Los Angeles and serious vision issues (he was declared legally blind by the State of California) did not allow him to do so. Ray was often making outside sales calls, which allowed him to perform services essential for the growth of GA. Eventually Jim left his job with the City of Los Angeles and took a part-time job so that he could devote more time to building Gamblers Anonymous. Jim W was the Fellowship's first National Executive Secretary. Ray M then assumed that role as Jim was spending his time writing pamphlets and the first Blue Book of Gamblers Anonymous.

Gamblers Anonymous held its first National Conference at the Hacienda Hotel in Fresno, California on June 28, 1959. There were fourteen people in attendance. That

event laid the foundation for today's International Conferences with hundreds celebrating recovery in Gamblers Anonymous.

The history of Gamblers Anonymous is the story of one compulsive gambler's hope realized through the help of many others. Today that dream not only lives but flourishes far beyond its humble beginnings. Through the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous, tens of thousands of compulsive gamblers have been able to find freedom from the obsession and compulsion to gamble. By the practice of the spiritual principles found in the Recovery and Unity Steps, compulsive gamblers have found a way to face life with its ups and downs. Doing so continues to guarantee the future of Gamblers Anonymous by embracing Unity Step Five: *Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.*

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## Ray M's Story [1905-1992]

When I was fourteen, I sat in a friendly poker game with my father and some of his friends. I was extremely lucky that day. I won several dollars, which seemed like half the money in the world. As time went on, my father allowed me to continue playing in those poker sessions and I won most of the time. I clearly remember a remark by my aunt at one of those games. She said I was a naturally lucky gambler and that someday I would win an enormous amount of money. This idea that luck was on my side became my fondest delusion and contributed, I believe, to making me a compulsive gambler.

When I was sixteen, my father died. I quit school to work at a neighborhood bakery. Each Friday night, after getting paid, I would play nickel slot machines until all my money was gone. As I went on to other better paying jobs, I always found a way to gamble. As I look back, even when I won, I did not want to stop. I often continued to gamble until I was stone broke. In retrospect, I believe this was me subconsciously playing to lose.

This behavior continued until, at thirty, I met and married my wife. A job transfer took me to Arizona and while there we were blessed with two daughters and my gambling was limited to friendly home games. Upon a return to Los Angeles I was introduced to "scratch sheets" that listed horses running at various race tracks around the country. A small wager paid a nice payout and the fires were reignited. My ego soared. Not only was I lucky, I was a smart turf analyst to boot.

I had everything a person could want: a fine wife, two wonderful daughters, very dear relatives, many close friends, a good job, a debt-free home, a cabin in the mountains, money in the bank, and numerous stocks and bonds. None of that mattered! That two-dollar parlay led me to daily gambling. I was soon placing bets with five different bookies and spending nights in the Gardena poker clubs. I gambled every day for the next eight years.

I lost my job, my home, my cabin, my bank account, and all my stocks and bonds. I had "borrowed" money from my employer and was making installment payments to the bonding company so that they did not take the matter to the authorities. Several finance companies and my bank were calling in my personal loans. I was forced to move my family in with friends. I could not pay the rent. My wife begged me to stop gambling. I told her I was working on a system to beat the races and soon all would be well. I must have been a good salesman as she believed me. To make matters worse I believed it myself.

With no job in sight, I decided to become a professional gambler. Financed by my weekly unemployment check I played cards every day. Finally, a friend got me a job. I was overjoyed with this second chance and vowed to stop gambling. All went well until I once again made that first bet and I was right back in the rat race. My losses piled up and I once again "borrowed" from my new employer with the dream that a big win would fix everything. I was soon found out and lost that job. My employer and yet another bonding company again agreed to let me make payments rather than prosecuting me.

To my surprise, I was offered yet another well-paying position. With another fresh start, I told myself I would never gamble again but after a few years the obsession

returned. My wife took on a job and loans to keep our family housed and fed. I made many tearful, heartfelt commitments to her that I would stop. I did not.

I went on a weeklong binge that took me from Gardena to Las Vegas and then back again to Gardena. My wife desperately tried to locate me and called all the card clubs, hospitals, and the police. Upon returning home, my wife and daughter prodded me into watching a television interview on the night of Labor Day 1957. A couple of men were claiming they had an organization called Gamblers Anonymous. I was impressed with the program but did not do anything about it. My wife did. She wrote and asked for further information on the organization. A man by the name of Jim W answered my wife's letter and told her there would be a meeting of this fellowship in downtown Los Angeles the following Friday. On that Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 my wife and I entered a shabby little room in a slightly run-down office building where eleven other men and women were gathered. Being skeptical, I asked Jim W a great many questions. I suppose I was trying to find some flaws. Jim's answers were impressive, so I joined Gamblers Anonymous.

By 10:30 the next morning, I was on my way to becoming the first slipper in GA. I rationalized I could go to the track for the last time that day, win a lot of money, pay all my pressing debts, and then be a good GA member forever. When the big win at the track didn't happen, I went in search of it at the card clubs. I would repeat that cycle two more times before reaching a point of complete disgust with myself. After that last night of gambling I was finally ready to admit complete defeat. My life as a compulsive gambler flashed before my eyes and, with great clarity, I saw I could not stop on my own. Then and there I accepted the first three steps of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program. I felt reborn.

I attended the next GA meeting, confessed my slip, and to this day have not wagered a single penny. My life since joining GA has been wonderful beyond my greatest expectations. As promised by Gamblers Anonymous, good things have certainly happened to me. Most important is that I have peace of mind.

## EARLY MEMBERS' STORIES

### I am a Compulsive Gambler and I Can't Erase That

(At the time of this interview Bill B was the most senior member of Gamblers Anonymous and a sitting Trustee with 56 years of clean time.)

I started gambling at a very young age, I was six or seven years old. It was during the Depression and I gambled for pennies, nickels, and dimes. The games I played were pitching coins and playing cards. I lived right across the street from my high school, but I wasn't very interested in attending. I often skipped class to attend ball games which upset the principal and she demanded I stop doing that. I had learned how to play bridge from my parents and was soon teaching others at my high school, and was even given a room in which to play bridge at lunch hour.

After high school I attended a large Midwestern university and became a dealer of the parlay cards that were used for betting on baseball and football games. I would back the cards monetarily and run them. I played poker in the bars and taverns. I always wanted to look older so I grew a beard and smoked cigars. I left school and went to work in my father's business.

Shortly after leaving school, my grandfather died, so I called up his stockbroker and I introduced myself and asked him if he would like to be my stockbroker. I bought and sold stocks in my early twenties and made good money doing that. I still had a strong interest in playing poker which eventually led me into a part-ownership of a gambling establishment where I could play dice, and whatever other games were offered. I was the house bank and I soon lost all the money I'd made in the stock market.

I didn't go to the race track as I thought it was a waste of time. I thought the horses were just dumb animals. I did go to indoor midget auto races to bet on the outcomes. The noise and the stench of the races was all a little ridiculous. It was difficult to place bets because you couldn't hear or see what was going on. I would also go to Madison Square Garden and bet on the professional wrestling matches. I was still smoking 10-15 cigars per day. I thought that was not right because I could use that money to gamble – so I stopped smoking.

After I was married for six years, we bought a house, and I signed for a mortgage. Even with that new financial obligation I continued to gamble. The whole time I gambled I knew it was wrong and I tried to stop many times. I went through all the possible help I could imagine: psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, clergy. On March 1, 1962, I arrived at the Concourse Plaza Hotel, near Yankee Stadium, to attend my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting. Seven men were in the room. They were all about 20 years older than me. Every one of them smoked, lived in the Bronx, and they all bet on the horses. Different from me, but I thought, "They had stopped their gambling, why can't I?"

People come to Gamblers Anonymous for many reasons. Me, I wanted to stop gambling and deal with the financial chaos I had created. Even though my mortgage was low, I was behind six months and I owed everyone: the bank, gas station, grocery store, etc. It would eventually take 17 years to repay them all.

The Thursday night meeting in New York was in the Bronx, and they said at the end of that meeting, "See you tomorrow." The Friday meeting was held at 110 West 98<sup>th</sup> St. (The Fraternal Club House). At first, I had difficulty in going to that meeting because the owners of the building were clients of mine. I didn't want them to know about my gambling, so for two months I snuck in through the back door. The group was having problems with the lease so I told them I would approach the owners and take care of it – and I did. The owner of the building thanked me and he would call me from time to time when he knew of someone who had a gambling problem.

In our meeting in the Bronx, another member had to have surgery. He was the treasurer and told me now I would be the treasurer. I thought that was rather silly as I was a compulsive gambler, but this turned out to be my introduction to service. In 1962, there were five meetings in New York. We had two phone numbers to contact for meeting information.

I would write to Jim W at least twice a week. He was the greatest person and so enthusiastic about Gamblers Anonymous. In 1965, I invited Jim to come out to New York for a conference. We used S&H Green Stamps to pay for Jim's trip. I had never given any thought to what Jim would look like. I discovered he was a slightly-built man, legally blind, and not well physically. In the early 1970's, I went to the International Service Office (ISO) in California. Jim had a red helmet hanging on the wall, a motorcycle helmet. I asked Jim, "How do you ride a motorcycle when you are legally blind?" He said, "I get behind a brightly colored car."

I began to take an interest in what was going on in Gamblers Anonymous. In 1962, we got literature from California and found out that there was "West Coast literature" and "East Coast literature". There was no uniform message of GA recovery. So, we combined those different pieces of literature, had a member that was an English teacher do an edit, scraped together money to get it printed, and sent copies to California. This led to the name of what is still today (after numerous changes over the years) a core piece of Gamblers Anonymous literature: The Combo Book. This service work in GA kept me active in local meetings and Intergroup. I was elected as a Trustee and even served as chair of the Board of Trustees.

People will ask me, "Why do you still go to meetings after 50 some years?" I tell them, "Well, I learned one thing by going there – I am a compulsive gambler and I can't erase that."

## I Couldn't Stop – I Didn't Know How

I made my last bet on November 21, 1964. Three days later my wife and I went to our first meeting of Gamblers Anonymous. I didn't know what to expect and I had no idea how they could help me. I did know, however, that I was a very sick person with an addiction to gambling.

My gambling experiences are as fresh in my mind today as they were then. Going to meetings regularly ensures that I never forget the misery and unhappiness I inflicted upon my wife and children.

I started gambling at age 15, playing poker with friends every Friday night. I owed money from the first day I gambled and the pressures of having to pay back began very early. I constantly had to freeload, as I never held onto money long enough to even pay for a late evening snack after the poker game.

I quit high school because I wanted to gamble full time. I told myself I was gambling to help support my mother, but this was all nonsense. I never really had a normal social life. I devoted all my time to gambling. My weekly card game continued but I added sports and horse betting. Though I gambled constantly during these years, my debts never skyrocketed. My earnings were comparatively low and I had not yet established credit.

My most vivid recollections during my gambling years were unhappiness and depression. I can remember leaving a racetrack with tears in my eyes, praying to God to cure my affliction.

I met and married my wife in June of 1956. I did my best to hide my gambling from her. Soon after my marriage, I started a new career and my income increased rapidly. My gambling also accelerated and my need for money began to exceed my capacity to earn it. In order to feed my ever-increasing gambling habit, and to maintain some semblance of financial stability at home, I literally begged, borrowed, and stole from everyone around me. I owed banks, finance companies, bookmakers, family, and friends. In addition, I began to embezzle money from my employer giving no thought as to how or when I could get the funds back to where they belonged. My debts increased steadily, and my situation was out of control.

Before coming to Gamblers Anonymous my life had become completely unmanageable. I constantly lied and conned in order to continue gambling. I knew at this time that I was a very sick man, but I didn't know how to stop gambling. I even tried signing myself into a hospital but was informed that there were no beds available for the mentally ill.

Just prior to attending my first GA meeting, my debts were enormous, and I was awaiting the discovery of my stealing. My entire life had become too much to bear. I was destroyed emotionally. I no longer dreamt of the day when I would win all the money I could ever need. I felt hopeless and feared I would die that way.

My sister-in-law heard of Gamblers Anonymous and she made the initial call to the Fellowship. She was told that there was a meeting that night. The information was passed on to my wife, who asked if I would go. I jumped at the chance to attend, as I would have done anything in order to stop gambling. As I would learn later, I had two things going for me even then. I knew I was very sick and I had a sincere desire to stop gambling.



My first Gamblers Anonymous meeting was an absolute revelation to me. I was burdened with guilt and I had a low opinion of myself. It was a relief to see and hear others with a similar sickness. I was able to communicate with people who understood my problem and, more importantly, to accept their help. What I saw that night ignited a flicker of hope in my heart. I kept asking myself, "If these people can stop gambling and begin a better way of life, why not me?"

During my early weeks in the program I sought advice constantly. My problems didn't evaporate overnight, but I was told how to handle them, one day at a time. Everyone in the room helped me. They shared their gambling experiences. They answered my questions during the coffee break. They telephoned me between meetings. And more importantly, I sensed that they really cared about me.

My financial problems did not disappear, but I was told by experienced members how to face them and minimize the pressures they created. I was told specifically how to talk to my creditors. I had to get a part-time job in order to pay my monthly living expenses and have something left over for my debts. I listened attentively to what these fellow members had to say and I willingly followed their advice.

I liked being part of Gamblers Anonymous. I tried to become more like the members who I admired and respected. I soon became involved in service so I could help newcomers as others had helped me.

I've been coming regularly to Gamblers Anonymous meetings, and as of this writing, I have not gambled for 19 years and 1 month. My family and I have benefited materially and spiritually, and I have noticed other changes in myself. I have reached a point where I like and respect myself. I consider myself a worthwhile part of the human race, capable of sharing what I have acquired from the Gamblers Anonymous program.

I owe my life to Gamblers Anonymous and could never repay the Fellowship for what it has done for me.

## Never Too Old to Change

I was a World War II war bride and arrived in New York City in 1949. Prior to coming to the U.S., I had not engaged in gambling, although my father had gambled away an import business and my mother had to work as a professional cook to feed and clothe the eight children.

My husband was an easy-going, kind, generous man who gave me free license to do pretty much as I pleased in my spare time. He worked a night shift and I had a day job in a law office. For a year or two, I led a fairly routine life but one day I went to the New York racetrack instead of going to the office. I think it was simply out of boredom. I enjoyed the noise and the excitement in the clubhouse and somehow managed to pick one or two winners. The following Saturday I went back to the same racetrack but lost all of my previous winnings plus the entire week's paycheck. Right away I could no longer live the routine life. Spontaneous visits to the racetracks were followed by visits to Las Vegas. Sometimes I would take a taxi to the airport and fly out to Vegas when I should have been at the office working.

I must have visited Las Vegas about four times a year for several years. I had established excellent credit at the casinos. I would write markers for large sums which I would make good on my return to New York. I did this by withdrawing from our savings account. During these years my husband never checked our account, nor did he question my need to make these trips out West.

Shortly after my husband's death in 1966, I decided to move to Las Vegas and make it my home. Since I had won on previous visits, I figured I could live on my gambling winnings, and not pay the expensive airfare back and forth to New York. I thought I was good at playing 21 at the big strip casinos. I played as if money were going out of style. I gave no thought to my future, my health, my living conditions, or anything else. The game was the thing and when I would drop a large sum, I always knew there was more in the bank. One day, after five years of gambling steadily, I discovered to my horror that my bank account was almost empty.

At this time, I was living in a motel paying on a weekly basis. I decided to find an apartment with my remaining funds so that I would at least have a roof over my head for a month. Next, I planned to find work. I found a place to live and placed a deposit on it. Then I went out for one "final" shot at winning back some of the money I had lost. Instead, I lost all the money I had left and could not move into that apartment. Now, my only choice was to stay at a charity hostel. I lived there for three nights.

I walked all over town seeking employment. The only work I could find was to move in with a family, take care of the three children and keep house. It was not easy. Eventually, I was given housing under a seniors' project and received my social security widow's pension.

I continued to gamble with my pension check and usually ended up without sufficient funds to buy food, to ride a bus, or to even sometimes pay the light bill. Once I heard a dealer in a casino tell her relief dealer that I would soon be broke. At that time, I still had a lot of chips on the table. She was right, though. I sat at that table until all the chips were gone. I got up and left the casino, sick at heart, and suddenly I recalled what the dealer had said. I said to myself, "How stupid you have been – with all the money you have given to gambling they look down on you and probably even laugh at you."

It was then I decided that "This is it!" I reached for a telephone and called Gamblers Anonymous. There was a recorded message and I left my home number. The next day I was called and someone picked me up and brought me to a meeting. I couldn't believe there were other gamblers so much like me. Even though I had gone as far as contemplating suicide before this, I hadn't thought of contacting Gamblers Anonymous, until now.

By attending Gamblers Anonymous meetings my personality is changing for the better. I am working as a senior companion four hours a day at a convalescent home. I am learning to survive on a small pension. I have put the past behind me – no use looking back. With the help of GA and my Higher Power I hope to live a useful, sensible life and, one day at a time, stay away from gambling. I know now you are never too old to change. I have repaid most of my personal debts. I am finding love for myself and others where before there was none.

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## A Casual Visit to the Racetrack

On the evening of August 24, 1960, I found myself at the Hotel Lenox. This was where the very first meeting of Gamblers Anonymous in Boston was taking place. I was frightened and embarrassed and had circled the hotel several times before I got up enough courage to walk into Room 101. As I listened to the many stories of heartache, despair, and hope from those who wanted to lead a new and different life, my own life swept before me. It took me back twenty years to when I was 24, married, and held an excellent position with a nationally known organization. Who could have imagined that this fine job, as well as my family and friends, were destined to be thrust aside by my obsession with gambling?

It all started in perfect innocence with a casual visit to the racetrack with a friend. While my friend could take it or leave it, I became hooked from the very start. The pageantry and the color of the track fascinated me, and my early losses did not dull my interest in the slightest. At first I went once a week on Saturdays, but soon that wasn't enough. I found myself hurrying through my work on many days so that I could get to the track. In six months I was sadly neglecting my job as a salesman and received a stiff warning from my employer. That warning had little effect, for I was so obsessed with the urge to gamble that everything else had become secondary. For the next six months I did little or no work and was at last dismissed from my position. I obtained evening employment so that my days would be free. The racetrack was the only important thing in my life.

All during this period I continually borrowed money. First, I borrowed from family and friends, then banks, finance companies, and credit unions. Finally, as a last resort, I borrowed from loan sharks, whose interest rates alone took a large part of my salary. It was inconceivable to me that I could incur such tremendous debts with so limited an income.

For many years my family could not understand what motivated my actions. I was brought up in an atmosphere of honesty and kindness. Although of very modest means, my family constantly came to my rescue, hoping against hope that each time would be the last. Even after they had exhausted all available funds, I continued to pressure them to borrow money for me. I systematically bled every member of my family, always promising that the new loan would be the last. I often thought of robbery and, many times, of suicide.

From time to time I enjoyed a lucky day or a winning streak which served to whet my appetite for more and more. I had now reached a point at which it was no longer a case of winning or losing, but simply of *placing* a bet. Not being able to gamble on certain days was a torture I didn't think I could endure. The racetrack had become my escape, not just from the ring of the telephone or the knock at the door, but from all my inadequacies.

The anticipation of going to the races, the planning, the conniving, the false hope, were all part of the game. I was on a merry-go-round and I didn't want the ride to stop. Actually, it was a toboggan slide, freshly iced every day. The ride to the bottom was inevitable, and I seemed not to care. My friends were friends only if they loaned me money. A new friend was quickly evaluated as to what size "touch" he could stand. My thinking had become so distorted that I shunned anything that held a semblance of normalcy.

It was not uncommon for me at the end of the day's races to drive ninety or a hundred miles to another track where there was night racing. I was always rushing, always deep in a frenzy, helpless against the insidious thing that kept driving me on and on. I would console myself with the knowledge that, if I lost again, there would be a win the next day. I was always making new plans for borrowing money or looking for a new loan shark. I would allow a waiting period to elapse so that the shark wouldn't think I was too anxious. I felt that by playing it cool I could make him think I was a better risk.

On other occasions the only way I could raise funds was to disappear for two or three days. My wife would become panic-stricken, thinking that some harm had befallen me. Then I would make that long-distance phone call and her voice on the other end would say, "All is forgiven, please come home. We'll help you just once more." Again, the borrowing of a large sum of money, again a fresh new start, and, again, a return to gambling with more recklessness than before.

I was filled with remorse and self-pity. I became frightened at the thought of what I might do next. I realized that getting money from my family in this way was a form of emotional blackmail. I began to feel that I was an incurable misfit, incapable of ever coping with the normal demands of society.

Of all the people close to me, my sister was the one who had begun to realize what was happening. She saw that I was sick and unable to help myself. She suggested psychiatry to me and I did consider looking for professional help, but always at the last minute I found some excuse. I was not ready or willing to give up.

It was in April 1960 that I first heard of Gamblers Anonymous. My sister had read an article about it in a Boston paper and passed on the information to me. I wrote to GA headquarters in California and shortly afterward received a letter and a brochure on how to start a group in the Boston area. This had no effect on me and I continued on my not-so-merry way.

It appeared that I was bent on destroying myself. I became a physical and mental wreck. Lack of sleep, working nights, always clinging to the daily ritual of form sheets and parimutuel tickets (which in most cases were torn into confetti). In the late stages I gambled at the lowest possible level, often being without funds after two or three races and then depending on my track acquaintances for money to keep me "in action".

It was on Sunday morning, August 20, 1960, that I got my first big break. A man who introduced himself only as "Jay" called me on the telephone. He told me he was organizing a Gamblers Anonymous chapter in Boston, and before I could start my negative thinking, he went on to tell me some facts about his own life. I was flabbergasted; it was as though I was speaking about myself through his lips. Reluctantly, I agreed to attend the first meeting the following Thursday evening. I am ever grateful to my wife and my sister for encouraging and prodding me into going to that meeting.

Room 101 of the Hotel Lenox was buzzing with excitement when I walked in. It was the first meeting of its kind in New England. A man who had attended meetings in New York greeted me at the door and tried to put me at ease, but my heart was pumping. I sat down in one of the back-row seats and shortly afterward the meeting began.

I heard three men from the New York group speak. They had flown into Boston for this meeting at their own expense. One of them said he had not gambled for four

months and to me that seemed like a very long time. I did not get up to speak, but I heard many people tell their stories and it gave me a tremendous amount of relief. I was no longer alone.

While we were chatting over coffee after the meeting, one man said he had gambled for thirty-five years before coming to Gamblers Anonymous. He hadn't gambled in ten months. I admired him and was suddenly filled with a new kind of hope. I could visualize for the first time the possibility of a life without gambling. The first effects of GA had started to work. When I walked out into the street from that meeting, I had to restrain my elation. I wanted to run and shout the good news. I kept repeating to myself, "There is hope! There is hope! There is hope!"

I knew that this was going to be a tough fight. I was convinced that if I didn't succeed at GA, I would never again have an opportunity to have a normal and peaceful existence. My first action was to see all of my creditors. I made no false promises to them. I fought for and got reduced payments. Everyone saw something coming in, no matter how small. One week led to the next and, finally, I had two months under my belt. I must admit that had our meetings been spaced farther apart than once a week I could never have made it. Many times, I just managed to hold on until the next meeting, which always left me with renewed hope and encouragement. During this time the phone calls between meetings were priceless. The GA theory of members calling one another worked like magic for me. Often while trying to help someone else I found myself benefiting as much as (sometimes perhaps more than) the other person.

My wife attended meetings with me. The meetings helped tremendously with our new understanding of the gambling problem. I don't want to imply that it was easy or simple. Although I had built up a strong resistance against the old urge, it did not entirely disappear. There were many trying days. The monotony of paying out money to my various creditors seemed at times intolerable. Frequently I felt dull and listless, but through it all the Thursday night meetings filled the void.

By now there existed an indescribable bond of friendship between the men who had started together on that Thursday night in August. As time went on, we realized more than ever that only together could we remain free from gambling.

Other things started to happen: there were interviews on the radio and television and we received recognition in newspapers and magazines. Most important, I found myself practicing the Twelve Steps of our Recovery Program. Making direct amends to the people I had harmed was a huge help, but the step that gave me the biggest inspiration was Step Twelve, which deals with carrying the message of hope to other compulsive gamblers who still suffer. Answering all inquiries, calling members old and new, showing the understanding that perhaps only one compulsive gambler can have for another, all meant carrying out the Twelfth Step. The satisfaction I derived from such activity gave me more strength and determination in my fight to recover.

Then came August 24, 1961, which meant that one year had passed since I gambled. The Boston GA chapter's celebration of its first anniversary was for me a dream come true. I now realize how little resemblance there is between my life before and my life now. I have that priceless commodity, "peace of mind". I have the love and respect of my wife and family, the respect of my friends and colleagues. These things I cherish too dearly to jeopardize. I know that for me to start thinking the wrong way again would cause my complete downfall.

This vast change in my personality took place after I was willing to admit to my innermost self that I could not gamble like normal people. The delusion that I could someday control my gambling had to be smashed. These truths were embedded in my mind during all the weeks and months of my participation in GA.

It is now almost twenty-two years since I have gambled. When I walked into Room 101, I asked for a miracle. No one can tell me that miracles can't happen. I experienced two true miracles in my life – first, I stopped gambling; second, I don't feel the need to gamble. I can't say that I don't sometimes have the desire. I am a compulsive gambler and always will be, but the important thing is that I am no longer helpless against the old, obsessive urge.

For these miracles I must thank God and the many others who made this possible: "Jay," who organized the Boston Chapter of GA and every member of Gamblers Anonymous past and present. Also, I want to thank the members of Gam-Anon who always had words of encouragement for me. Especially my wife, who gave me much-needed help every step of the way.

I don't think I can ever write the final chapter to this story because for as long as I live I will continue to need GA. I feel there will always be within me that little spark which, if rekindled, would destroy all that I've worked so very hard for.

In conclusion, I can only say that Gamblers Anonymous has brought me closer to myself, closer to my family and friends, and most important, closer to God.

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## From Skepticism to Amazement

I attended my first GA meeting feeling like a drowning man might when he sees a straw floating by. He knows the straw will not hold him up, but he grabs at it anyway. I grabbed at Gamblers Anonymous in that same way, wondering how a group of strangers could do for me what imprisonment, hospitalization, therapy, religion, and loss of everything I held near and dear could not. I went to that first GA meeting firmly convinced of three things: one, I was a very evil person because of what I had done; two, I was alone with this problem; and three, there was no help for me. I came in skeptical and walked out amazed.

There were about fifteen men at that meeting. As each one spoke, I heard my story repeated again and again. It was as if they had opened my diary and were reading from it. The most amazing part of all was that these men had changed their way of life, a thing I was convinced could not be done. They had managed to stay away from gambling for periods of anywhere from three weeks to three years. I learned from their talks that I was not an evil person but a sick one, that I was not alone with this sickness, and that there was help for me.

All I had to do to help myself was be willing to admit that I was powerless over gambling, and that my life was unmanageable. This I did. I was the last speaker at that meeting. I told of all my hatred for mankind, my frustrations, my inability to cope with my problems, and of my desire to become a member of Gamblers Anonymous.

The need I once had for gambling I exchanged for a need for GA and GA meetings. As I continued to attend meetings, my life became better. Although the monies and the wasted years were lost forever, many things were restored: my own self-respect, the respect of my relatives, my superiors, my friends, and my wife. I also regained my wife's love and the affection of my family. The ability to think clearly and to do an honest day's work returned, as did the desire to share my life with all those I cared for. The greatest benefit of all is peace of mind.

Although I have been in Gamblers Anonymous two years, I still have financial problems, but they are far less acute than they were. In time, I am confident they will vanish completely. Everyday problems I'll always have, but with a mind no longer fogged with gambling, problems can and will be solved.

Today, the need for gambling as a crutch is no longer with me. In its place is a desire to help all the sick compulsive gamblers who still suffer. This wish can never be entirely fulfilled, but in my attempts to fulfill it I manage to remain a lifetime member of GA. I give all I can for Gamblers Anonymous. I am willing to make Twelfth Step calls whenever called upon regardless of distance or of time of day or night. I make meetings not just at my convenience, but sometimes at my inconvenience. I never want to become so complacent that I forget those in need. In return, I am amazed by the blessings I receive from sharing the GA program with others.



## My Gamblers Anonymous Beginning

I'm sitting on the davenport watching the face of a new friend as he speaks, for he has brought Gamblers Anonymous into my home for the first time. His words are about dark paths of disintegration and suffering in the grip of a terrible sickness, for he is a compulsive gambler. I am deeply stirred as my new friend describes in every detail the pattern of my own miserable and hopeless life. I struggle for self-control as the realization dawns that I am not alone, or even unique. Others also suffer from this sickness which has caused so much torment and humiliation to my loved ones, to myself, and to all others who have come within the range of my compulsive gambling. I had grown to believe that I was a freak and an outcast among my fellow human beings. I had lived without hope under the darkening shadows of approaching disaster.

Again, the voice of the man beside me penetrates the confusion in my mind. He is speaking of the founders of the group he represents and tells of their struggles with the same illness and how it led to the formation of the group, and what the group has done for him. Then he speaks the words I so desperately want to hear, that other people, with the help of Gamblers Anonymous, are living in freedom from gambling. Each has found a new life and is making restitution for their past.

Before he leaves, I promise to be at the meeting on Friday. As I close the door behind him, I whisper a prayer of thanks to my god, for in my heart I feel the stir of something sacred. This man has brought me Hope.

Now it is Friday evening and my wife and I are at the entrance of the hotel where the meeting is. Our new friend is there to greet us, and then we are at the open door of the meeting place. We are welcomed with warm, friendly handshakes, and soon the meeting is underway.

The members, each taking a turn, stand and speak of the evils that compulsive gambling has brought into their lives and of the recovery they are making through GA. The humility and sincerity with which they speak touches my heart. I feel a sense of peace and new hope as I listen to each member.

I watch their faces. In some I see marks of long-suffering. The way they stand, the sound of their voices, the look in their eyes; all speak to me of things unsaid. I know I am with my own kind. I am grateful for their presence and their friendship and I am no longer lonely.

Reluctantly, I see the meeting coming to a close. If only I may keep this new feeling that is moving inside me, I can build a new life. I have lived so long in the grip of this awful sickness that I have ceased to believe in the wisdom of words and of advice given me through the years, for I have been unable to follow them. Now, the things that I see before me are helping me to believe again, and I feel at last that I, too, with their help, can do what they are doing. This is the source of my new hope.

The meeting ends and we drive home. There is peace and a deeper understanding between my wife and myself. Day follows day, and as temptation flashes into my mind, I think of that first meeting and the meeting I will attend this week.

It is Friday again and we are at the meeting. They greet us with the same warmth as before. I begin to realize how important each member is to me, and to each other. As compulsive gamblers standing alone, we have been lacking in something vital. There has been an unfilled gap in each of us which has made us prey to this disease. As a group, we can share and help to make each other whole. As we talk, I hold myself open

and feel the missing bits fall into place, bringing greater peace and strength. I am grateful for all my new friends.

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## Gamblers Anonymous Comes to Australia

As a child I had a philosophical bent. I was continually trying to find out what made the universe tick and was usually dissatisfied with the answers I found. That tendency stayed with me later in life. I could always manage other people's affairs, never my own.

My gambling began in billiard saloons. I played for money until the wee hours of the morning. On Saturday afternoons, in the same places, I would set wagers with the bookies one could always find there. Initially, I won. When my losses rapidly overtook my wins, I couldn't accept the fact that losing, as well as winning, was a part of gambling. Losing made me resentful and bad-tempered. After one such day I picked up my nephew, a mere baby, and threw him into his pram. My sister, justifiably, took offence and there was a nasty row.

About this time World War II came to an end. I remember feeling elated. I equated the cessation of war with a stoppage of my own difficulties. Even then I was blaming anything and everything but gambling for my problems. I continued to gamble and inevitably continued to have problems. I turned into a drifter, in and out of numerous jobs. I had good wins and then would do nothing until both money and luck had petered out.

My father and elder brother both died within a period of six months. Despite my apparent indifference to family ties, I had loved both deeply, and the dual tragedy caused me to have an emotional breakdown. Filled by belated remorse, I promised my mother I would find a regular job and settle down.

I found a job which left me with plenty of leisure time. This, I discovered, created its own problems, as I was far too negative to use my spare hours constructively. I recommenced gambling and, very soon, was again habitually occupying billiard saloons. The two sorrowful deaths were completely forgotten in my renewed obsession with gambling.

Another brother started work on the Sydney waterfront. He persuaded me to join him. I didn't need much persuasion because a wharfie's job had long appealed to me. I thought it would be exciting, mixing with characters who had really been around. They had been around all right- especially horse tracks and greyhound tracks, which I began attending regularly.

At this stage of my life I was a frightful mess. I had none of the ordinary ambitions of young men such as a career, romance, marriage, etc. I envied and hated others who were successful along those lines. As these envies and resentments grew progressively stronger, my confidence in myself became progressively weaker.

If my gambling mates were on a winning streak I sponged off them. If they were losing, I didn't want to know them. I didn't worry about leaving my mother and sisters completely broke in order to satisfy my gambling compulsion. I would borrow from anyone I could and hated anyone who wouldn't tolerate my persistent scrounging.

I was a misfit, a warped and unpleasant personality, but I was blind to this fact. Physically, also, the frustrations and tensions were now beginning to have an adverse effect on my health. I looked and felt prematurely old.

I was in this condition when an old companion bobbed up with a proposition. Why use our own money to gamble when we could use that of other people? I listened

willingly and became a thief. The fear of discovery and consequent punishment were with me always. I began even to wish for death. I suffered another emotional collapse.

I went to a brother who lived in the country. I pleaded for help. I broke down completely and cried like a child. He was horrified by my appearance and allowed me to stay for a week. I still could not face up to the obvious truth about my compulsion. I blamed the family for my troubles. I did not deceive him because, when I eventually left, his parting advice to me was "Wake up to yourself!" I didn't. I returned to Sydney and to gambling. I didn't know it then, but salvation was close at hand.

I joined Alcoholics Anonymous shortly afterwards and my life improved. I knew I also had a gambling problem but had no idea about how to address it. About three months later, in September 1961, I met another compulsive gambler. It was, and always will be for me, an unforgettable night. I told him of my gambling problem, the whole story. To my surprise, he informed me that my story was practically parallel to his. Then he told me his own experiences. We were brothers in distress. He told me he had previously tried to start a chapter of Gamblers Anonymous, but it did not take on. He left me some GA literature and the GA address in Los Angeles, California. I wrote to Jim W for more literature and information about the mechanics of the Fellowship.

What followed on November 25, 1961, at the Congregational Church Hall in Sydney, was the first Gamblers Anonymous meeting outside of the United States. There were three other compulsive gamblers at that first meeting. None ever came back. With the help of radio and print, GA grew and, eventually, many parts of Australia came to have meetings.

## The Tram Ride to Recovery in Australia

Forty years ago, I sat on a tram rattling along an inner-city street. I was on my way to the only GA meeting in Australia. After nineteen years of continuous, uncontrolled gambling, I was very sick, heavily in debt, estranged from my family, and living in a dingy boarding house.

The future seemed hopeless and I felt that no one could help me. I had reached the lowest point of my life and had nowhere to run. I had decided, as a last resort, to try Gamblers Anonymous.

As I walked into a shabby old hall I found three people sitting at a table. On sighting me, one stood up, put out his hand and said, "I'm Phil. Welcome to Gamblers Anonymous". I can still vividly recall that handshake. With that warm welcome, my road to recovery began. That road was not easy. My gambling had left a number of painful issues I had to face. The break-up of my family, financial distress, medical problems, pending criminal charges, all that and more tightly wrapped up in shame and remorse.

As I maintained my abstinence from gambling, I found that the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program was not there to just be read, it needed to be worked, step by step. The normal way of thinking and living I wanted would only happen by practicing those steps in my daily life. After getting myself in reasonable order, I involved myself heavily, on a daily basis, in the Fellowship's activities. I found that, apart from helping myself, there was great satisfaction in being of service to others.

One delayed consequence of my compulsive gambling was a court appearance and, although I had stopped gambling, I was dismissed from my good job of some twenty-odd years. I faced that without gambling and after a period of unemployment and menial jobs, I was able to study for and obtain qualifications for a new career.

Before gambling became an addiction, I had done volunteer work for many organizations. My recovery allowed me to once again give back to my community. Before gambling became an addiction, I enjoyed sports as a hobby. What a joy it was to once again find myself on a golf course. While service work inside and outside of GA and having a hobby are pleasurable, the greatest payoff for me has been the healing of my family. During my gambling, three sons were born. I neglected them and my wife terribly. Apart from them going without the normal material things, I was only a part-time father and husband. I deprived them of a lot of family support and caused terrible heartache. We divorced when my sons were aged nineteen, sixteen, and twelve. I now know this affected each of them adversely. Although I saw them regularly there was not the closeness that I wanted. Over the years, by explaining the addiction, discussing in detail our innermost thoughts with each other, and by me giving them my total support, we are all very close.

While gambling, I shunned my four siblings and their families. I was ashamed of what I was doing. After stopping gambling, I gradually became a loved member of their extended families. My siblings and their spouses have passed on but their children are constantly in touch and I have been of help in various troubled times. Without romanticizing too much, I believe I am regarded as the patriarch of our family. Who could have imagined that would come to be? Of all the many gifts I have found in GA, the most precious continues to be the healing with my family.

All this I owe to my Higher Power, the GA members who have helped me, and my living the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program. Thank you, Phil, for that welcome and handshake.

I'm glad I caught that tram.

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## Gamblers Anonymous Begins in Korea

My name is Father Paul W. I was born on a farm near a small town in Northwest Iowa in 1931. I started gambling by matching pennies with my father when I was four years old. I distinctly remember the thrill of taking a chance and winning four pennies and said to my dad, "Let's do it again." However, he replied, "No, that's enough for now." It took me 45 years to get around to saying, "That's enough." and really meaning it. I was ordained a Catholic missionary priest in 1958 and assigned to Korea in 1959, where I worked on and off for thirty-seven years.

Struggling with an unfamiliar language and experiencing several health difficulties, I was under a lot of strain. A lively game of poker was a great escape from all that. I began to go to casinos and soon realized that I was addicted to gambling. It was not just something in my head, but rather something physical, something I felt; the urge to gamble gripped me.

I felt miserable but did not know that it was gambling-related until after I began to go to GA meetings in the United States years later in 1980. When I attended my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting, I did not speak. I was too embarrassed to let them know I was a priest.

At my second meeting, I did speak and spilled out my whole story. I vividly recall that one member kept nodding his head up and down. I could easily see that he understood and was not judging me. That was probably the first and greatest thing I ever experienced at a GA meeting, and I continue to point out the importance of that to other members. I learned through the years that my story was their story and theirs was mine. I continued to attend the meetings until I returned to Korea again the following spring.

I was assigned to Che Ju Island, about ninety miles off the southern coast of Korea. I was able to make a fresh start. I was appointed as pastor to a parish where the Korean head of the parish council would come to visit me in the evenings, and we would just talk. During my three years there, I learned much more Korean and gained confidence in my ability to both speak and understand the language.

However, two and a half years later I returned to gambling in the casino. I honestly thought it would be just an experiment to see whether I could gamble small and with control, as I needed something to help me relax. After twelve trips to the casino I had won a small amount of money. But I was beginning to realize my desire to play the games longer and for higher stakes was becoming ever stronger. I knew I had to stop completely.

After a while, I returned to the U.S. for six months and reconnected with the GA group, who expressed surprise that I had kept away from gambling for even that two-and-a-half-year period without the help of weekly GA meetings. They helped me understand that we cannot combat our addiction alone and that we need the GA group. From then on, I was determined to start Gamblers Anonymous in Korea as soon as I could.

When I returned to Korea, our mission superiors supported me in my plan to start GA and Gam-Anon. I became the pastor of a parish near the capital of the country, Seoul, and started GA and Gam-Anon. I hired a professional language teacher to give

me classes in Korean. He also helped me with the GA work. We worked well together for about twelve years and have remained close friends all these years.

The first thing we did was to translate the Combo Book into Korean and circulate it to police stations. Gambling was not regarded as an addiction, but it was illegal and the police were often arresting people for it. A reporter obtained one of the Combo Books and wrote an article for the newspaper. That brought the first two gamblers to us.

We regarded that as the first GA meeting in Korea, even though one man gave us a phony phone number and never returned. The second man who came has never gambled since, over thirty-five years.

After one year in that parish, I moved into an apartment in order to do GA work full time. That is what I did for the next eleven years. I talked at all the weekend Masses at sixty-five Catholic churches. I had interviews with many newspaper reporters, and also talked on radio and TV a few times. GA members started many more meetings during those years. Gamblers Anonymous in Korea continued and continues to grow from there.

Following twelve years of GA work in Korea, I moved back to Los Angeles due to a serious heart problem. I worked with Korean gamblers there. We helped start Korean language GA meetings in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, Seattle, and the state of Georgia. There are meetings in other American cities now, but a Korean man took over the work and I have stepped back from my role.

Last June, I spent ten days in Korea in order to attend the thirty-five-year celebration of GA and Gam-Anon. At that time, they had fifty-eight weekly meetings of both fellowships all over South Korea. This twenty-four-hour celebration in Seoul was attended by 301 members. Another one in Taegu, about three hours from Seoul, was attended by 260 members.

As I write this, it has been over twenty-nine years since I last gambled. I think that being a non-gambling compulsive gambler makes me a better and a happier person than I would have been if I had never been a gambler at all. And because of that I am living a very happy life, with maybe a few more years to go.



## THE FELLOWSHIP TODAY

### Instantly Cured! (Oh, if Only)

For many years I spent every waking moment (and a good part of my few sleeping moments) thinking, talking, and dreaming about gambling. I had convinced myself I was doing this for my family and friends who would be so proud of me for being such a wonderful and successful person when I got that big win. Of course, this never happened because the illness is never satisfied no matter how big a win, it would never be enough to stop. As a result, I kept pushing everyone that loved me further and further away until no one was left except the one person who never gave up on me – my own mother. I thought I was stronger than this illness, and I could stop gambling for her sake.

Once, as she lay seriously ill in a hospital bed, I had her bank card and systematically cleaned out her account. I gambled the whole time telling myself that a big win would fix everything in my life. Of course, there was no big win and even if there had been, I now know I would not have stopped. There is never a win big enough to satisfy the hunger of this illness – it always wants more.

Finally, my mum loved me enough to turn me in, and I knew what needed to be done. I had gone to GA a couple of decades earlier. This time it was different. I knew I had to change. I was not stronger than this disease and I knew I could never beat it. That was four years ago. I needed to find that person the illness had destroyed and slowly rebuild him, if he was still in there.

I came back to the fellowship and was instantly cured! (Oh, if only it was that simple. Several decades of destruction don't just go away after a few meetings). One member thanked me for showing him that the misery was still out there and helping him stay off a bet. I don't think I had heard anything so profound in my life. I was helping him? Me, desolate and on the verge of ending it all? I was helping him?

So, I put myself in the hands of these strangers and began to rebuild my life, which hasn't been easy. There have been a lot of bumps in the road, but with the help of these Gamblers Anonymous members (who I now count among my closest friends) it gets easier A Day at a Time. Am I cured? Am I a wonderful person? No, but each day that I work my program I get a little closer to who I want to be. Many of the people I pushed away through my gambling have come back into my life and that is priceless.

My life today is full of gratitude for the fellowship that showed me the one thing my family and friends wanted much more than money and things – me in their lives.

## A New Beginning in Missouri

Before I found Gamblers Anonymous, I was on a direct course to prison, insanity, or death just like the literature tells us. You see, I worked at a bank and anybody in GA can guess what I did next: embezzlement. I was twenty-four years old and I believed my life was ruined forever and suicide was the only escape. I drove to the Lake of the Ozarks with three boxes of sleeping pills. I intended to take all three boxes and never wake up again but my Higher Power was looking out for me. Just before taking the pills I heard a strange noise and looked out my motel room window. Everything outside was blurry except for a billboard which read, "ANYTHING YOU HAVE DONE WRONG IN LIFE GOD CAN MAKE RIGHT". Tears of happiness began pouring down my face.

I returned to face what I had done. I found that I was eligible for a diversion program which consisted of one year of supervised probation. If after that year I had not committed any other crimes and had followed the terms of the probation, my record would be expunged, and I would be given a new beginning.

I have used that new beginning to continue attending at least one GA meeting a week. I have returned to college and became an honor student working toward a degree in radiology. My girlfriend has become my fiancée. While I owe this new beginning and a bright future to the progressive new court program in St Louis, I would have struggled with the probation if not for the love and support of my fellow GA members. They walked with me through some tough times.

Today I try and give back to the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship as much as possible. I apply the Twelve Steps of Recovery to every aspect of my life. With help of that program and the love of my Higher Power, I have not had an urge to gamble for a long time. I also understand today I have tools with which to deal with life before it reaches a point where gambling seems to be a rational choice. The simple act of picking up a phone and calling another member or attending a meeting brings me back to a place where I can watch that gift of a new beginning grow and grow.

## A Promise Fulfilled in Brazil

I had gambled in casinos when I traveled abroad, but it was never a problem. I only gambled for small amounts for "fun" and my life was on track when I returned home.

In Brazil, lotteries exploited by the government are very common, but casinos are forbidden. I never set foot in a gambling establishment in Brazil until legal bingo houses were established. It was a phenomenon, attracting many middle-aged women that saw these places as an opportunity to entertain themselves for a few hours.

When my father passed away, I felt lost. I had cared for him for his last two years. I was already retired and my daughter was all grown up. That was when my sister suggested I visit one of those bingo houses to distract myself. I soon was so distracted I was spending up to 12 hours playing bingo. I was not eating. I was getting by on coffee, water, and cigarettes.

My life quickly turned into a nightmare. I pushed my friends and family away. Some of them even thought I was using drugs. I spent my lifetime savings. I was completely out of my mind and could not see all the damage I was causing my daughter and a cousin that was living with me. In the beginning, I escaped to gamble only during the day. But after a while, my gambling routine started at 3:00 PM and ended at 3:00 AM. I cried and cried, could not sleep, but the next day there I was again! It was like a force stronger than me had turned me into a slave. My own willpower was gone. Gambling was the only thing on my mind.

My daughter insisted I see a psychiatrist. I finally gave in and started to see one. I went for six months, but it clearly was not helping; I was still gambling. One night I passed out while gambling, and my daughter was called in the middle of the night to pick me up. I knew I was causing my daughter a lot of suffering. The emotional pain I felt that day is indescribable.

My degradation and my pain led to my salvation. My daughter fled the madness of our home. A cousin confronted me: "You are losing your daughter, can't you see it?" I was terrified she would never return. It was then a friend gave me the phone number of a church that hosted two weekly Gamblers Anonymous meetings. I went that same day. I was not the only newcomer. Another woman that had been gambling on video poker for ten years was also there. It was difficult to tell who was in worse shape, her or me.

I have been a member of GA since then. I am very thankful that the program and my Higher Power have saved my life. I promised my daughter she would have her mother back, and thanks to Gamblers Anonymous I was able to keep that promise.

## A Normal Way of Thinking and Living

I had once again hit a bottom, one of many in my life. My compulsion to gamble, with no regard or care about the consequences had made me homeless, jobless, and broke. My compulsion to gamble had led me to steal cash and pawn electronics from a roommate. I attempted to sleep on my only possession, a motorcycle. I propped myself and the bike against a wall in the parking area of a casino. Security put an end to that grand plan.

So, I found myself a guest of a local homeless shelter, yet another glamorous place my gambling had taken me. Several months earlier I had gone to two GA meetings and even asked a member to sponsor me. Despite that attempt, I quickly returned to gambling and disappeared from that meeting and from any help a sponsor might have been. I had, however, kept his phone number and, in a moment of clarity created by my desperate situation, I called. I told him I was in need of treatment, not only for my gambling but also for a nasty habit of smoking meth in order to find the energy to work after gambling hours and hours.

My sponsor said he was willing to help, but only if I did the footwork. He suggested I talk with the shelter managers and ask about treatment possibilities. I soon found myself doing a chemical dependency evaluation at a county detox facility. They agreed that I needed inpatient treatment, but they could only offer alcohol/drug treatment, not gambling. My sponsor suggested I call a regional treatment facility that did have both gambling addiction and chemical dependency units. They had a bed for me, but the issue became funding. Then the first of many small miracles happened. The county agreed to transfer their funding to that other facility. Yet another small miracle, my sponsor agreed to drive me the 125 miles. He and another GA member tag-teamed me about the reality of my condition and what it would take to start a solution. For the entire drive, I must have heard the word "honesty" 50 times.

After 75 days of a recommended 90-day program, I checked myself out. My self-will and my "I'll do it my way" attitude were still making decisions that were not the best. I was in a hurry to get a job and start earning again. I found housing in a sober house. The rules of the house required that I wait 90 days before finding a job. Once again, thinking I knew better, I set about finding a job behind their backs. I got a good-paying job in my field that was literally within walking distance of my housing. I was on my way! I bought a car and started a relationship (choices my sponsor and other GA mentors cautioned me about the wisdom of doing). While I heard, I didn't listen. Surprise, surprise! I found myself in a short while skipping work and eventually back in front of a machine at a local casino.

The lesson in all this and the reason I write this story is hopefully to help others that think they can out-think the disease of compulsive gambling. I now can see that the roots of my relapse lay within my self-will and the concept that I think I know what is best for me. Thirty years of dysfunction and addiction be damned, I know what's best for me. What a load of crap!

The jarring reality of a return to gambling when everything was good was a real eye-opener. What was the first thing I needed to do? I had to make a humble return to the GA meetings I had been attending, admit what I had done, and start over again. To my surprise, they welcomed me without judgment or anger. They shared with me the

reality that this is what compulsive gamblers do. Good times or bad, we are consumed with an obsession to gamble. I needed to embrace the reality that I am a compulsive gambler and that I am powerless over my gambling. I needed to once again start the process of working the Twelve Steps with my sponsor. Then, and only then, could I ever hope to find and embrace a normal way of thinking and living.

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## **A Priest Learns to be of Service to Himself**

I had returned from a parish meeting that had gone badly. I was the leader and it seemed to me that no one supported, understood, or was willing to listen to my position. I became frustrated. My patience with the group had withered to almost zero. I returned home feeling alone, angry, and in search of escape and relief. I didn't stay home long before I made the decision that gambling would help me to ease the pain and frustration. I am a Catholic priest and I am a compulsive gambler.

That night I went to the casino and restarted a ritual that I had perfected over several years. Go to the ATM. Withdraw enough to get me started. Get sucked into the whirling wheels, blaring music, and siren-calling hope of "winning the big one." I fed my addiction that night like I had on countless other nights. So, what made that night stand out?

In the midst of playing a poker machine, I noticed my eyes were not focusing. I found myself not knowing what I was holding or throwing away. I even threw away a winning hand. That startled me. I looked at my watch and saw it was 2:30 AM, and I realized what I had been doing. I was trying to fix my hurts by hurting myself. Gambling had taken me down to a dangerous level of self-destruction.

My profession as a priest has been one of being there for other people in their times of need, providing forgiveness, healing, comfort, and consolation. All these qualities I've possessed for others. I have nearly 30 years of serving others well. I've been there for so many people over the years. Yet, I have failed to be there for myself. I have neglected the one person God has put within my control: ME. It seems I have tried to do all in my power to destroy that person.

I was confronted about my compulsive gambling through an intervention. I was sent to a treatment facility and returned with an armful of tools to help me recover. What I came to realize, however, is that the best tool is the supportive tables of Gamblers Anonymous. Around these tables I discovered that hearts are shared, lives are cherished, and hope is found. I came into my first meeting broken and alone. I have now been clean for over 1000 days and, more than that, I have recognized my value to God and to the GA Fellowship. Today, I am supported by many, many people who care.

I discovered early on that the program of Gamblers Anonymous needs to be worked. On a daily basis, I need to acknowledge that I am indeed a compulsive gambler and that I do want to be healed. I have a Higher Power, supportive GA members and the Recovery and Unity Steps to help. I pray daily for the courage to live just for today. When I read the Twenty Questions, I remember where I was. When I hear a new person share their story, I hear my story. When I celebrate another member's milestone anniversary, I celebrate the Gamblers Anonymous program's success in my life today.

I am so grateful to my God for bringing me to these tables. I pray that someone reading this story may have it resonate in their life and find the help that our program offers. I will keep coming back.

## I Couldn't Have Won the Life I Have Today

Hello, I am a compulsive gambler. I never thought a few years ago that at the age of thirty-three, I would be introducing myself this way, but here I am.

I started gambling in my early twenties. It began innocently enough, a few dollars here and there, had some fun, I even won a bit – that seems so long ago now. My twenties should have been the best years of my life. I was working a job I loved as a makeup artist. I was marrying the love of my life, and we were moving to our own place. Instead those years became a hell I never want to return to.

As my gambling progressed, I felt I was not earning enough money, so I left the career I loved to earn more – surprise, still not enough! I should have been enjoying planning my wedding, but instead I was worrying how much of my gambling money this “party” was using up. I am sad to admit this now, but I did not enjoy what was supposed to be the best day of my life.

I asked my family and friends to give money to us as gifts for our wedding. I told my husband it was all going towards the cost of the wedding and I told everyone else it was for our honeymoon. We got married in 2006 and we have yet to go on that honeymoon. I thought everything was my husband's fault. He didn't love me enough, he didn't pay enough attention to me...but I was wrong. I was the problem, and it would be several years of a downward spiral before I could see that.

Gambling was a few dollars here and there, once in a while, for entertainment. I could go with a little money, and leave when it was spent. Those days became long ago and far away very quickly. The progression actually surprised me. Long before I realized it, I had a problem. It started with taking a “little more” out of the ATM. It wasn't too long before I was taking out two or three payday loans each week. If I had a win, I would proudly go over and pay them off, but I usually would need to take them out again within a couple of days.

No one knew my secret, but I was dying inside. I became a very angry person. I lashed out at everyone, especially my loved ones. I was missing work because I had been up all night gambling, or because I needed to take time off in order to find ways to get more money. I never slept. When I was alone, I cried all the time. I tried to figure out ways to make it all OK. I am not sure how many times I read my insurance policy while trying to figure out how to die so my husband could get the money and the debt would be paid. I prayed for someone to hit me with their car. I wanted to die.

It didn't take too long for my good credit to run out. I had reached the end of “borrowing” money, and I needed to come clean to my family about my situation. But I wasn't honest. When asked about gambling (they knew I went to the casino “occasionally”), I brushed it off. I said I didn't think it was a problem, but if they wanted me not to go anymore, I was OK with that. And for the next eleven months, I was. My life became a little easier in those eleven months, at least financially. My husband began to trust me again. That lasted eleven months. It would be another few years before I stepped foot into a GA meeting, so I am sure you know where I was. I realize now that there is a big difference between Relief and Recovery. Relief comes very quickly after you stop gambling, but it doesn't last without Recovery, which is the process of changing your life – the Twelve Steps.

So, after my eleven-month relief from gambling I began the process again of obtaining secret loans, lines of credit, and credit cards. I was racking up debt faster than ever before. This time thousands of dollars wasn't enough. I was driving three hours across the border to go to casinos where no one would know me. I was smart this time with family and friends. I was all smiles – no anger. I figured out that anger was a symptom of my addiction and as long as I was a kind and thoughtful daughter, no one would suspect a thing. My parents took me out to dinner one night to let me know how proud they were of me for getting it all in order and not gambling. It broke my heart, but I had no problem telling them the lies I needed to keep them proud, and to keep me gambling. Now even after all this time that memory still brings me to tears.

The day I placed my last bet, I stole money and went to the casino. I sat in the parking lot, crying, knowing that if I went inside, win or lose, I would be leaving with nothing. Eventually I was done, not by my choice. I was out of money and had nowhere else to go. I used to refer to this as the worst day of my life, but upon reflection, it was what I needed to finally realize I was never going to win. Ever!

I did something I never thought I would do. I was desperate with nowhere to turn. I got on my knees, and I prayed. Not like I had done before in the casino, making promises to whomever that “if I only win the big one...” This time I prayed because somewhere in me I knew that this was no way to live. I couldn't live like this anymore. There had to be a better way. Now I don't know who I was praying to; I didn't believe in God. However, I had hope that my prayer would be heard, and I wouldn't have to be this way anymore.

In the morning, I told my husband everything. Everything. I told him that I was addicted to gambling and I needed help. I told him we had nothing left, that everything was maxed out, and on top of the loan we were working so hard to pay down, I had amassed another monstrous debt. I will never, for as long as I live, forget what it is like to see someone's whole world destroyed. My husband is strong, he is kind and loving, and he is tough. I completely broke him that day – emotionally, spiritually, and financially. After all my years of thinking, “I am only hurting myself” and that gambling, “doesn't really affect anyone else”, I realized, in that moment, that my husband was my victim. By loving me, he had now been dragged into this same black hole of hopeless despair, and nothing would ever be the same.

My husband called me at work the next day– he was worried about me. I hadn't answered my phone all day and he was concerned. I assumed he was calling me to tell me he was leaving. He asked me if I knew anything about Gamblers Anonymous. I told him I would look into it. I was willing to consider anything he was asking, I just didn't want him to leave me. So, I looked up Gamblers Anonymous on the Internet and found a meeting list for my area. There was a meeting on Thursday close to home. I decided I would go.

That Thursday it was dark, cold, and raining. I cried through most of the meeting. In fact, I cried through most of the meetings I attended, three a week, for the next six months! In the beginning, I was determined that I would not let my life be consumed by Gamblers Anonymous. I am young, and I have a life outside of this – I did not want being a compulsive gambler defining who I am. I looked around at the people in the rooms and saw that most were twenty-five or more years older than me. They were all talking about this being a lifetime program. I thought that was fine for them, since their



“lifetime” was going to be a lot shorter than mine. They were mostly retired folks. I thought they were probably lonely and needed this group just to feel less alone.

Today, as I write this, it has been four years and three months since that first meeting. I still attend two to three meetings a week. I found a place where I belong. The program has enabled me to live a better life. My marriage is better, my relationships are better, I am a better worker, and I am happy. It has not been an easy road. For me, Step One was easy: “We admitted we were powerless over gambling -- that our lives had become unmanageable”. The fact that I had tried so hard to “just stop”, the fact that I was going gambling even though I didn’t want to be there meant I was truly powerless over gambling – my life was completely unmanageable.

The other eleven Steps did not come so easy. I have always done things on my own, been a caretaker for others, and have been the strong one. Now I had to realize that I cannot control this. I had to face my past. I had to make a moral inventory of myself, make a list of everyone I had harmed, and make amends. I had to look in the mirror and see that I was the problem.

I didn’t think I needed a sponsor. I didn’t want to call people on a phone list and talk about gambling. I didn’t listen to people who told me “You have to...” but what I did do was show up and listen. I listened to people who were willing to open up, to share their experiences, to be honest about where gambling had taken them. What I came to realize is the people who were recovering, getting better, living a good life, were people who did the things I didn’t think I needed to do – they got involved, made friends in the fellowship, they used their phone lists, they had sponsors. It wasn’t about “You have to” it was more like “This is my recovery and what worked for me” and so, I came to realize, if I wanted to recover, I needed to do the same.

I got a sponsor, I made friends, I got involved. I gave back to the program that has given me so much. There is an old saying: “Show me who your friends are, and I will show you who you are” and I can say I am in good company. I get to spend my time with people who work on a daily basis to improve their lives in recovery – and for that, I am blessed. This program has allowed me to live the life I was meant to and be happy. I am OK with this being a lifetime program, no matter how long that may be.

I couldn’t have won the life I have today, but I sure as hell could lose it by placing one single bet.

## Grateful for Meetings in Argentina

I started gambling when I was 18 years old. I would gather with friends on Friday nights and play cards. It wasn't long before I was stealing my mother's jewelry and selling it to get money to gamble. Things went from bad to worse when I went to work in my parents' warehouse. I soon was stealing from the family business to support my gambling. At this time I started to gamble on horse races and the amount of money I needed to do this drove me to steal more and more.

I couldn't stop gambling. I had 60 outstanding checks with no money in my bank account. The bank closed my accounts and my creditors started to demand payment. I mortgaged my father's house for a bailout. I still could not stay away from the race track.

I had not hit my bottom but my wife had. She took steps to protect herself and my two daughters' financial futures. She sold our house and put half the money in our daughters' names. She gave me the other half to settle my debts. She also gave me information on how to find Gamblers Anonymous.

When I finally hit my bottom, I reached out for help from GA. There I found others that were willing to help. There I came to see the truth that had been in front of me for many years: gambling destroys. Gamblers of my type will find insanity, prison, and even death if they continue to gamble.

I was 44 years old when I found GA and am so grateful for the compulsive gamblers that started meetings in Argentina. It was in those meetings that I found the help I so badly needed, and today I remain active in Gamblers Anonymous to help others.

## Internet Gambling and My Experience

I had played poker before with friends on my hockey team as well as relatives at holidays. I began gambling online when I was 18 with a vast majority of my internet gambling being poker-related. My online gambling started in 2003 with a poker website where I would play small buy-in tournaments. I really enjoyed poker as a “sport” and still remember the rush I would get winning.

After about a month of gambling online, I was hooked. I would play for hours on end and multiple tables at a time. Soon I was moving up to higher stakes games and more and more tables. Then I found tournament play where there were many more registered players and multiple tables. Some tournaments would have thousands of players and would go on for more than twelve hours. I was in college at the time and would stay up countless hours playing and it progressively got worse and worse.

I can still vividly remember my first big tournament win and that feeling I got from outlasting a field of about 500 people to win. It changed my entire perspective on how much money could be made and got me hooked in a way that I never thought possible. That intense jump from tenth to ninth all the way up to first was addicting and the intensity and adrenaline were off the charts.

At the time I thought it was a great way to make some money, but soon I saw it consuming everything that I did and everything I was. I didn't want to go to class anymore. I didn't want to eat dinner, shower, or do anything besides sit in front of that computer with ten tables pulled up. I stopped hanging out with my college friends, I was hardly present, and everyone joked how they would be talking to me and I would not hear a word they said. I would play until I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. The access to these websites and finding a tournament immediately was far easier than driving to a casino, and the ability to play multiple games at once made it even more appealing and addicting. I'd lose one game and just jump into another and another as tournaments ran all day and all night.

The most puzzling thing to me, thinking back on all these experiences, was that I worked and grinded so incredibly hard to get back to even or even close to even. No matter how much I won I would always go bigger, and it was never enough. I would always want more, would always find a place to bet bigger, and would ultimately lose it all. As my obsession grew, I wanted to win faster and I wanted to win more. I was chasing the losses I had from the past day, past week, past month. Bad decisions increased and my addiction grew.

I never really saw my gambling for what it was. I broke computers and phones on a regular basis. I was constantly throwing things and swearing. I even kicked in the wall in my room. I was extremely angry, chasing, and was not enjoying anything about the process anymore. Even on the nights that I won, I didn't appreciate it. I was not enjoying anything in life. All my friends were having fun and enjoying their college experiences. I was stuck to a computer screen 15 hours a day, feeling miserable.

College was coming to an end. I had to figure out what I was going to do in the real world. I didn't have the time to play as much poker, so I turned to what I thought was the next best thing and started to bet sports online. I watched sports, which I enjoyed doing, and again I felt that same rush as I did early on in the poker days when I would win. I would bet big money on games I couldn't even watch and follow sports as

random as Japanese baseball on my phone at 3:00 AM because it was the only thing that was live that I could bet on.

The story was simple: the more I lost, the bigger I would bet to get it all back, and that never worked out!

I was looking for different people to bet through, different people to borrow from, and ways that I could place larger bets with money I didn't have. I owed multiple people lots of money and was trying to dodge all of them. I tried to go back to poker and, if I won, whatever I would win I would dump back into the next series of sports bets. My family saw me glued to my phone 24/7 while I lied to them about what I was really doing.

This didn't change for almost two years. I was married. I had a job. I was not present for either. I would gamble during work, gamble at night when I got home, and I was still trying to hide it. Even when I had my first child, nothing changed. Finally, my wife was so disgusted that she started looking at my phone and saw many of my recent conversations with bookies and sports buddies. She found that I had borrowed money, was taking her money, and was selling inventory that I'd stolen from work.

Because she threatened to leave me, I ended up in a Gamblers Anonymous room. I'd acquire minimal amounts of clean time and then gamble again. I would lie about it and act like I was two weeks or a month clean. Despite my lack of genuine participation, the program was slowly starting to work. I heard about compulsive gamblers losing their families and for the first time I worked up to six months of abstinence. Things were getting better at home, even though I still had zero trust from my wife. I felt like I was doing better. Then the big one hit. I gambled on a pointless game that seemed like the surest winner of all time and my wife caught me. She told me to leave.

At the next meeting, I got a sponsor. I began taking the program seriously. I admitted to the most important people in my life that I am a compulsive gambler. Working the Gamblers Anonymous program helped me to start thinking clearly again. I spoke with my sponsor every night and I still do. Now, after more than a year, I am still clean from gambling.

My story shows that Internet gambling is just as addictive as any other form of gambling. There are some aspects of Internet gambling that are distinctive. One is the ease of gambling online from anywhere at any time. Another is that it can be done in the presence of other people who are unaware of what is going on.

Today I am much more present than I have ever been. I look forward to things I never used to look forward to and I appreciate each day for many different reasons. I cherish every day that I am free from gambling.

## Secretive Internet Gambling in Scotland

Gambling hit me relatively late in life, really getting to grips with me when I reached my early 30's. I played the fixed-odds coupon from the age of 16 on, but nothing that bothered my head or my finances. I'd get a relatively "big win" from a really small bet which made me think this was an easy way to make a second living! How wrong that proved to be.

My son was not long born when the secretive Internet gambling started. Football and horses were my thing. When I lost, no one knew. When I won, no one knew. I was thinking about what I was going to gamble on 24/7. No thoughts of my newborn son or partner. Add another baby into the mix eleven months on and I was gambling and lying all the time.

It all came to a head and I came to GA. I left after one meeting, but gambled again so I was back seven months on. Again, I wasn't there for me and I was secretly gambling and not reporting it to my meeting. Then I did something I never thought I would do. I stole money from the family home to "double up and return it" - I didn't. I was on my knees; worst I've ever felt. I'll never forget that time.

I came back to GA for me and it's the best move I've made. I'm now nearly two years off a bet. I'm spending time with my family and I'm debt-free. That would never have been possible if I hadn't been attending my base meeting every Tuesday.

I am a compulsive gambler, and happily, I have no gambling to report.

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## Joining Yet *Another* Twelve Step Program

It was all a big mistake. There was no way that I could become a compulsive gambler. I didn't even like gambling. I had always said that I wouldn't want to win a big lottery because it would change my life too much. I had ten years of solid recovery in another fellowship when I started accompanying my partner to the casino. He went every Friday to "deposit" the greater portion of his paycheck. Eventually, he became a "VIP" and got "free" rooms. I started going along with him to enjoy the hotel amenities. Then I started watching him play. I couldn't get over how bored and dead the people at the machines looked. Soon I started to play a pre-determined, very small amount and stopped when either the money was doubled, or it was gone. The amount gradually increased. We started adding bingo to our repertoire. I started charging the bingo to my credit card to keep more cash available for the machines.

Gambling began to be fun for me. It felt exhilarating when I won. It felt exciting to almost win. It was a particular thrill to be losing a lot and then to suddenly come back to winning. I thought I was getting good at it. I had a "system." I usually felt like an idiot on the way home. I couldn't understand why we were spending so much of our lives at the casino. But I did know that I felt somehow sophisticated going there. And I could get away with misbehaving a little without going to a bar.

My partner's and my relationship changed. Before, we used to do a lot of camping and fun road trips. Now all of our leisure time was spent at the casino. We started off gambling on the same machine or right next to each other. Soon we were gambling in different areas because of our "hunches" about various favorite machines. We started to argue about money. I developed "magic" ritual touches for the machines. I started quietly bargaining and pleading with the machines. I started going to the casino by myself. I started lying to people about where I was. I couldn't stop. I was going when I didn't even want to go. Gambling gave me respite from grief, loneliness, boredom, and anxiety. It gave me something to hope about. I kept thinking that this time it would be "my turn to win."

I tried to limit how often I was going. I tried to just go every six weeks, then just once a month, then every three weeks. The week I showed up at my first GA meeting I had gone three times in that week alone.

I didn't think that compulsive gambling could sneak up on me like that. I was so ashamed of myself for getting caught up in it. I had been sure that I would sense it coming and I would stop before it became a problem. I thought, "Well, at least I am not drinking, drugging, etc." However, like they say, you may not know the exact moment when a cucumber becomes a pickle, but once it does, there's no turning back. I had definitely become a pickle without my consent.

I was bitterly resentful and genuinely miffed about this. I had gleefully chosen and joyfully indulged in my other addiction. I had, after a battle, embraced recovery for that problem and I was practicing it energetically and joyfully as well. I had ten years of solid recovery when I started gambling. It took me four years to admit that I wasn't able to apply the Twelve Steps that I knew and practiced so diligently in the other program to fix this compulsive gambling problem. I did not want to join yet another Twelve Step program.

I really tried, but I couldn't make one Twelve Step program fix a different, though related, disease. I knew that Twelve Step programs worked. I finally showed up at Gamblers Anonymous. I needed my fellow compulsive gamblers to save my life. I needed a GA sponsor, and I needed to work the GA Recovery Steps. To shut my show-off self up, I pretended to myself and others that I had never heard of the Twelve Steps. This was my strategy to make myself as openminded as I needed to be. It worked. I celebrated five years of freedom from compulsive gambling this past August.

The first months were just as torturous as my first time in my other recovery. In fact, I think it was even harder to gain clean time in this program because somehow gambling seemed so different. It felt like the act of gambling had changed my brain, in a way that ingested substances had not. I knew from previous experience that if I walked through the pain, I would eventually come out the other side to freedom and serenity. My previous recovery gave me a solid hope for that.

It was so very, very hard to put those first 90 days together. Part of me wanted to get better, but most of me didn't. Here is exactly how I did it. I went to three Gamblers Anonymous meetings a week. One of those meetings had a breakout First Step group. I joined that subgroup every week for my first year. On days that I wasn't attending a meeting, I made myself call two people from the meeting phone lists. I always hoped for their voicemails.

Another thing I did was to write out and answer the Twenty Questions. I copied down one question a day and made myself fill up one journal page with my answer. That got me through my first twenty days. After that I made sure I read a few pages of GA literature every morning. Reading those two pages a day only took a couple of minutes, and it kept me clear every single day about my disease and my solution.

I got a sponsor. I put great faith and hope in the pamphlets "*Toward 90 days*" and "*Beyond 90 Days*". I believed that something magical must happen at 90 days free of gambling since Gamblers Anonymous went to the trouble of making two pamphlets. Something magical did happen. I was still free of gambling, and it was getting a little easier to cope with the still-frequent urges.

Speaking of urges: Aaaarrggghh! I hate 'em. They come out of nowhere and seem to be a mandatory command that my recovery time is up and that I have to go gamble. But I noticed that every time I get past an urge and I am okay, my recovery feels stronger and a tiny bit easier.

Here are the strategies I learned for surviving urges without gambling:

- **Change the channel in my brain.** I think of something else immediately. Anything. Next week's weather. Happy puppies. Anything. I have learned that if I try to fight the brain's urge with my brain's logic, I will always lose.
- **Call someone in GA.** Surprisingly to me, people were glad to hear from me. Often, they needed encouragement themselves. They were always glad that I called before I actually went to the casino, and that I was really trying to nurture my desire to stop gambling, even when I couldn't feel any desire whatsoever. I think the calling "before" is important.
- **Ask my Higher Power for Help.** I ask my Higher Power (as I understand Higher Power) to do for me what I cannot do for myself. This is the prayer I say: "Thank you for reminding me that I am a compulsive gambler. Thank you that I don't

have to act on this urge today. Thank you for taking the obsession/compulsion away”.

- **Bargain with myself to buy more time.** I acknowledge the urge. For example, if it is Thursday, I say, “I’m not going to act on this urge today. If I feel like this next Wednesday, then I’ll go.” This gives me at least another 24 hours. By “next Wednesday”, I am thrilled that I am still free, and my recovery is that much stronger.

And that’s what it all comes down to in the end. I don’t gamble today. I am stupendously grateful that I don’t *have to* gamble today. It used to be mandatory. Today it is not. It can sound lame to newcomers, but this whole deal is really, honestly, and truly “Just for today”. The time adds up and things gradually get easier and more serene.

One last thing. I want you to know is that I am a bisexual woman with an Earth-based spirituality. I have always felt welcomed in every GA meeting I have attended. I am free to be clearly and proudly myself in Gamblers Anonymous because I meet the only requirement for membership: I have a desire to stop gambling.

Whoever you are, you are welcome. Together we are stronger. Together we recover from this insidious and devastating disease.

Louisville '19 Attachment #10 (S) (Private)  
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## My True Self

I came to Gamblers Anonymous a few months before my 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. Unlike many, I came to GA on my own, had a true desire to stop gambling, and hoped to change the person I had become (not that I really knew how much effort that would take). Twenty-five years later, I proudly share some of where I came from and where I am in my life today.

Like many others, my gambling started not so much as gambling, but with an incredibly competitive personality. I flipped baseball cards, played board games, card games, and even played sports with an all-out-to-win mindset. As I moved into my teens, there were anywhere from six to twelve people in the core group I gambled with. Fortunately for me, three of them preceded me into Gamblers Anonymous and brought me to my first meeting.

What has happened to me since then is truly nothing short of a miracle. The people of GA embraced me and have given me the love, support, and tools to be the person my parents raised me to be. It has allowed me to give to others what has been given to me, with no expectation of anything in return.

I have been supported through the loss of two grandparents, three parents, and the need to evict my co-dependent stepbrother. Four years into GA (at age thirty), I was finally able to accept and live with the reality that I am gay. I wrestled mightily with that for another twenty years before finally coming out, not only in a GA meeting but also in the rest of my life. Last summer I married my partner of ten years and am writing this on the plane en route to a dream honeymoon in Italy! Words can't describe my gratitude to be at this place in my life, especially when I consider that two of the highest demographics of suicide are among compulsive gamblers and gay people.

I have learned about honesty, spirituality, step meetings, unity, service, and sponsorship. I still have my original sponsor and I sponsor several other members. Most importantly, today I have hope and the knowledge that I can accomplish anything. I deal with life on life's terms. I have become respected and trusted. My opinion is valued and I truly try to place principles before personalities.

I am grateful to be my true self.

## A Grateful Recovering Gambler in Canada

My brother, three sisters and I grew up in Montreal, Quebec in the 1950's. Dad was a hard worker and a hard drinker. When he came home drunk, he usually was very abusive towards Mother. When the fight started, I would huddle with my sisters in a back bedroom trying to calm them. Another part of the problem was that when he sobered up, Mom was verbally abusive to him. You guessed it! He would go get drunk. That vicious cycle continued for years. I grew to know the signs and when Dad was not home for dinner by 6:00 PM it meant yet another night of yelling and fighting. At ten years of age I had some money from a paper route and on those nights, I would leave the house and take refuge playing the pinball machines at the corner store. I'd return home only when I was pretty sure Dad had fallen asleep. My habit of using pinball machines to escape the stress in my life would later be replaced with slot machines.

Today, as I look back, I can see that Mom and her parents were compulsive gamblers and for them gambling was a normal way of living. They took me with them to the race track where I placed my first bet. I was betting with bookies by the time I was sixteen. At twenty-one, I met and married my first wife and my gambling slowed down. We moved to Toronto and the first years of our marriage were good and very peaceful. Something that was unnatural for me. I missed the chaos of my early family life. I created my own vicious cycle of drinking and gambling which led to a split from my wife. She was diabetic and during our separation she developed complications and asked me to come back. I was stubborn and said no. I had already started a new relationship with my current partner. A year later my first wife died during a kidney transplant. I didn't talk with my partner about the shame and guilt this caused me. I thought that if I had gotten back with her this would not have happened. It took me twenty years to understand that was not true.

My new relationship was going well. I became the proud dad of a daughter and later a son. I became focused on not being an abusive drinker like my dad, but was not paying attention to the gambling. My partner was busy with the kids and I was busy making a living on the road. Little by little the stress of life grew, and my escape gambling returned. Over the next three years my gambling was out of control and I was about to lose my family, my home, and my job. I decided the only way out was to take my life. I went to our family cottage to get up the courage to do the deed. Instead I found something else.

That day at about noon there was a knock on the door and when I answered I found a man and a woman who were going door to door sharing the word of God. In the forty years I had been going to that cabin that had never happened. After they left, I decided I needed to go to the little village nearby to buy what I thought was to be my last meal. While I was eating my steak and potatoes, I turned on the TV that had only been installed the weekend before and watched two movies in a row. The first was a film about a woman and her treatment for a drinking problem. The second was a film about people devoting their lives to helping others.

I took all these things as a sign from a Higher Power and, rather than take my life, I returned home. I was uncertain if I had a home, family, or job, but I was certain I needed help. I called Gamblers Anonymous the next day and attended a meeting that night. I was warmly greeted by a member who shook my hand and gave me a hug. She

told me she was glad I was there and that there was a solution to be found in GA. All I had to do was to keep coming back to hear other compulsive gamblers share their experience, strength, and hope. In time, I would be able to help my fellows by doing the same.

As I write this, I have been coming back for over 15 years. My life isn't perfect, but the very good news is that I have a life. For one that came so very close to ending it, all that is a miracle! With the GA program and the support of my fellow gamblers I have learned to not run from my life. I have learned how to face the ups and the downs one day at a time.

Today I introduce myself not as a compulsive gambler but rather as a grateful recovering compulsive gambler.

Louisville '19 Attachment #76  
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## STOCK MARKET FIASCO

My life was good. No, that's not completely accurate, my life was very good. I had just turned forty, had a thriving dental practice, a loving wife, and two beautiful children. We lived in an upscale neighborhood, had a lake cabin, a boat, motorcycles, and 4-wheelers. All these material possessions were my benchmark of success. I was not aware of how much these things propped up my self-worth.

In our equally successful circle of friends, our conversations after dinner, on the golf course, or fishing boat often drifted towards the stock market. They'd say things like: "I bought X at Y and sold at Z". "You can't lose in this bull market". "I took my profits out after selling some of ABC and bought my wife a convertible". I was mesmerized. I was sure I was missing out.

I had a financial manager. A trusted professional who had helped guide my family's finances for decades. He had guided my parents and other family members into early, comfortable retirements. I made an appointment with him to talk about this opportunity I was missing. He listened patiently and then gave me some feedback. His experience had shown him that investment worked best with a long-term approach. Slow, safe, steady growth was the goal, not speculation. He could tell this was not what I wanted to hear. So, he reluctantly said that since my portfolio was solid, and that my financial plan was on track, taking a small amount to gamble on the market wouldn't jeopardize my family's financial future. *Gamble* on the market?? I think not. *This* was about an aggressive financial strategy.

To raise cash for this venture, I sold some of my securities and opened another brokerage account. I had excellent credit, and as a result, I qualified for a margin account. I had arrived. How long would it be before I was telling success stories? I listened to tips from friends and colleagues, read the daily market journals, bought investment advice books, and attended financial seminars.

I had the typical ups and downs found in investing. I made some money, and I lost some money. When I made money, I berated myself for not taking a larger position--an opportunity lost. When I lost, I blamed it on something or someone else: wrong information, greedy institutional investors, or insider trading.

Slowly but surely, I became obsessed with this world. At first, I checked the market quotes once a day. Soon it was twice a day, then six times a day, then hourly. I sold more of my "safe" portfolio and invested that in ever more speculative securities. I started to buy and sell futures contracts and took short positions on "sure things". Then there was a major market correction, an across-the-board decline in prices, and overall turmoil in the global financial markets. Very shortly, I was in trouble. I had used my margin account to leverage my buying power and had instead leveraged myself into a financial corner. I dreaded a margin call by my broker.

In our twenty-plus years of marriage, I had taken on all the financial responsibilities. My wife trusted me explicitly. In desperation, I began to abuse that trust. When I told her I thought it would be best to sell our current lake cabin and look for a better one, she agreed. When I told her someone had offered a good price for our existing boat, and that I was going to buy a new model next year, she said that sounded good. When I told her that because of my concern for our kids' safety, I was going to

sell the motorcycles and 4-wheelers, she thanked me for watching out for them. The lies, schemes, and desperation grew.

Finally, our family financial manager grew increasingly alarmed about what was happening. Since I was dodging his phone calls, he reached out to my wife and shared his concerns. The truth was out. I was busted. Life was no longer good. We were at risk of losing everything.

Angry confrontations, tears, threats, and marriage counselors were next. I was dragged kicking and screaming into reality. I was told my behaviors were no different than daily visits to a casino. I was showing all the symptoms of a compulsive gambling addiction. I was in shock. Me? I didn't even like going to casinos.

I was strongly encouraged to attend a Gamblers Anonymous meeting. I was fearful about what I would find, but knew if I refused, my marriage, and possibly my sanity were at risk. What I found surprised me. A group whose gambling, although different than my "investing", had all the same characteristics. The extreme highs of success. The extreme lows of failure. The extreme mental obsession for being in action. The lies, schemes, and toxic big shot egotism.

How could I, a compulsive stock market gambler, fit into this Fellowship? To my surprise I was welcomed warmly, not judged as different, and encouraged to return. And so I did. In the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous, I started to see some of the underlying issues that I had never looked at before. With the help of a sponsor and other members I started to look at my life through the principles found in the Recovery Steps. It was eye-opening to say the least. I had needed to be surrounded by things in order to feel good about myself. I discovered my self-esteem had been based on material success, not inner peace. Rigorous personal honesty became essential to my ongoing recovery.

With the help of many inside and outside of the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous, I have been able to achieve a better understanding of myself and to appreciate what a normal way of thinking and living actually means. To be happy and complete without the chase of more and more. To be grateful for what I have and not envious of what others brag about.

Life was good, then it wasn't, and now it is wonderful. One day at a time.

## One Day, One Step at a Time

I drove into an intersection with two oncoming cars and was almost broadsided from not one side but both. I went through that red light because I was in a complete daze after losing my last dollar...again. I had no food, no gas in my car and no "schemes" left.

On the rest of my drive home, I came up with the clever, but not new, idea to ask my mom to bail me out. My mom is a retiree who lives on a fixed income. I make in two months what she receives for the entire year. Nevertheless, she had helped me over the last two years every time I called her with sob stories of how expensive it was to live here and how it was so hard living on my own. I asked her to pay off my credit card debt. She said "no", but only because she couldn't do it. I wholeheartedly believe that she would have, if she could have. And this is where my life story changed. In that exact moment that my mom said "no", I had to come up with a new solution.

This time she asked why my bills were so high. For the next 30 minutes I weaved a bunch of lies. Then after a bit of silence, she asked, "What do you need?" I said, "I just need to stop going to the casino." When those words left my lips a 10,000-ton boulder lifted off my shoulders and I cried harder than I think I have ever cried. I cried like that for at least 15 minutes. At the end of my episode, my mom (whom, to her credit, never made a sound that whole time) said, "Okay, now what are you going to do about it?"

I had already told myself MANY times that I had a gambling problem. I had picked up the pamphlets at the casinos. I had looked up the Gamblers Anonymous website many times. However, I never went past the home page because I hadn't hit my rock bottom yet.

This was my rock bottom. I told my mom that there was a meeting the next night. I told her I was going to go. Then I asked her for the last time for money. I asked her for fifty dollars to put gas in my car and to buy some food. When I got paid a week later, I still had eight dollars left.

I had made the decision when I walked into that first meeting that I was ready for a change. Nobody made me go, nobody asked me to go. Nobody, except my mother even knew I had a problem. I will take that back: A lot of people knew. The slot attendants and security at all the casinos I frequented knew. My bank manager knew when he called me about all the withdrawals I was making at casinos. I told him it was my boyfriend who kept taking my card...I wasn't ready to admit anything then.

My first meeting was tough. My legs were shaking so badly walking down the stairs that I didn't think I was going to make it. My hands were shaking so hard that I couldn't read the Combo Book. I know that I cried...A LOT. In fact, I cried A LOT for the entire first year. In my first meeting, I heard many stories that were just like mine. I couldn't believe I wasn't the only one who used to sit at a machine completely broke, waiting for midnight to roll around so I could take out money again. Or the only one to sit there waiting for money to go through from one account to the other because I had reached my withdrawal limit on the first account. Or that I wasn't the only one who scrounged for change in my car or took back cans and bottles so I could buy a couple

boxes of macaroni and cheese. Hearing my story come out of other people's mouths made me feel, for lack of a better word, accepted.

The first couple of months I tried to go to three meetings a week. I found that I was way calmer after going to a meeting. Today, I continue to go to the Tuesday night meeting where I attended Gamblers Anonymous for the first time. Meetings are my therapy, my reminder of why I cannot and should not gamble.

In the beginning when I thought about NEVER gambling again, it was overwhelming. But after being in the program for a few months I adopted "one day at a time." This mantra has helped me in my recovery, and in my day-to-day life.

Things are pretty good for me now: I'm happy, I'm calm, I manage money correctly. I save, I spend, and I have fun.

I will continue to go to my weekly meetings and I will continue to listen and learn from my fellow GA members' therapies. I will continue with my recovery, one step at a time, one day at a time. Pretty much everything is attainable at this pace.

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## Feeding My Monster

Good morning and greetings to all who read this. I was asked to write my story so that others like myself (a woman, college-educated, African-American background) could find hope of recovery in the Gamblers Anonymous program. I have to say that bringing my ethnicity into this picture does not begin to describe me or my journey into recovery. When I walked in the door of my first meeting of GA nine years ago, it was the answer I needed for recovery from my addiction, from my pain and suffering. It brought calm to my chaos. Under gambling, my life quickly grew out of control and I was surely heading to an early grave or a rubber room.

First step to recovery: I admitted I was powerless over gambling – that my life had become unmanageable. Thinking back on this and where I was at the beginning of my breakdown, this was an understatement. Yes, I said breakdown, because I was touching insanity almost daily and I was not thinking with any clarity or meaningful purpose. I was working to get money by which I could go gamble, feeding the addiction of my choice. It was my high and my low. It was my escape and my fantasy. It was all I could think of to get through my day of boring and uneventful activities to go feed my Monster. My Monster was hungry all the time. I went without sleep, without eating, without drinking water, not taking medications, and yes, sometimes not using the bathroom. Thank goodness they created and made disposable adult diapers! Yes, I went through this and so much more to keep my Monster fed. I missed work. I stood up family and friends. I checked out on my God, my church, and the responsibilities that I had built up from being a faithful member of my congregation. And most importantly, I checked out and gave up on Me! This is just a beginning to describe the hold my addiction had on me. I was out of control. I stopped paying bills. When I had reached my maximum withdrawal from my banks, credit cards and so on, I came up with elaborate ways of getting a hold of more money from my accounts and family members I told stories to others and to myself to justify what I knew was wrong, but by that time I was so far gone there was no turning back. I was living a big lie, a big shame, and trying to keep this craziness under wraps. It was interesting to say the least of it. Who was I kidding? No one, not even me.

Second step to recovery: Came to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to a normal way of thinking and living. What?! What was this about? Before Gamblers Anonymous, I was nowhere near thinking nor living normally. I had managed to stop casino gambling on my own for three years, or so I thought. But pull tabs, scratch offs, and bingo were still available to me. Yes, I had those. But those were just distractions and I grew tired of them quickly. That kind of gambling was not doing it for me. My Monster needed more. I was going through withdrawals and there was no real constructive use of my time. At that time, I was also working at the local casino and had been for three years, which is why I claimed to have three years of no gambling on my own. Casino rules say you cannot gamble on their property while working for them. So, what happened? I got a morning job away from the casino. I rejoined the workforce world that I had once belonged to before my Monster even existed. The return to normalness had reached me, so I thought. Yes, I returned to a daytime job, but I was not working on me or my Monster. I tried to ignore the ugly beast, but it quickly showed me who was boss. When I gave up my night time job at the casino, and was not actively working there, it kept the beast at bay for a time. Then one day a commercial came on



for another casino. Any shot of normalcy was quickly falling out the window. I was intrigued and wanted to see if I could just go with a budget and come back home. For quickness in the story, the answer was “No way did *that* happen”. It took me over three years to realize that I had a problem and I was not going to get through it on my own. I needed help if I had a snowball’s chance in Hell. So, I revisited Step One – I admitted to my best friend I was powerless over gambling – that my life had become unmanageable. This was BIG. It was huge and humbling to admit this to someone else. I could hear it in her voice. I could hear the disappointment and the letdown. She heard the guilt I was carrying around with me daily. God must have known what He was doing when He directed me to sharing this with my best friend. I surely did not know that it would be my turning point away from the addiction, the beast, the Monster. My friend suggested Gamblers Anonymous. She had a sister and a cousin in the program and they had found hope and help. If they had found this, so could I. She did not give up on me even when I did. She even offered to come with me to my first meeting. I am happy to say that she is still my best friend, more so now than ever. She helped me walk through the door to my recovery.

Third step to recovery: Made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of this Power of my own understanding. The first night I went to a meeting was the first step to my recovery, and I did make the decision to turn my screwed-up life over to the Power of the program and God. I met many people that night and the group was large as it was a pinning ceremony for someone that had ten years of recovery in the program. They had worked so hard to get their life back on track and to living a normal way of thinking away from the addiction, their beast. They had the hands of GA helping them along the way – ONE DAY AT A TIME! I listened to that person’s story and the work that went into their recovery and I was all in. I found parts of my story in their story and felt that if they could get to ten years of recovery, then I had a chance as well. They offered a First Step meeting that night and I went. From that meeting I found hope, dignity, and strength that were not currently existing inside of me. I kept going to meetings -- multiple meetings-- and I found a kindred spirit within all of those that I met. I found bits and pieces of me inside all of them and I was home. I was among others like myself trying to turn their lives around. Trying to be better people than the ones they had become due to their addiction. This program gave me hope. It gave me inspiration to try, and fail, and try again. It allowed me to grow and become a better person than I could have ever dreamt up. One Day at a Time. Remember you have today. You cannot change your past, but you can live a better today for you, and when you live that better day, it impacts others around you. I am so thankful for this program and the help I got from it. It got me ready for Steps Four through Twelve, but that is another story for another day. So, I leave you now with this saying from my Wednesday night meeting:

*I am responsible.*

*When anyone anywhere reaches out for help,*

*I want the hand of GA to be there.*

*And for that I am responsible.*

## A Japanese Gambler Finds a New Life

I felt my life would be better if I went to college. But in fact, I rarely attended classes. Instead I worked part-time in order to feed my gambling habit. That was not sufficient to support my gambling, so I took out school loans and gambled with the money. I left school with debt but no diploma. Life got worse from there.

I worked in a "pachinko parlor" for four years. "I'm still young. It will be all right," I told myself. I dreamed that someday I would get a steady job and start a new life without gambling.

Fast forward another four years and I found myself in a Gamblers Anonymous room for the first time. I attended for twelve months without ever stopping gambling. After the meetings I would find myself in front of a slot machine thinking about GA.

To be honest, I didn't see myself going back to Gamblers Anonymous meetings. I didn't like them. Such a lifestyle seemed like nonsense to me. I still believed I could stop gambling by myself. But it was my continued return to gambling that finally showed me how willpower alone is powerless over compulsive gambling. Was I born into life to live this way? How can I possibly live the rest of my life with this gambling burden? From this despair arose a strong desire to return to Gamblers Anonymous.

There I started to share the "unspeakable" secrets I had carried alone. I found myself talking about things in my past I had never wanted to reveal. That was a giant step forward for me and I started to feel better about myself. I also found a GA sponsor that helped me on this road of recovery.

Today I manage my money and live within my means without having to borrow from my parents. I recently started reconnecting with relatives I had alienated for nearly ten years. I still can be frightened to talk with others. I still worry too much about what others think of me.

With the help I have found in GA I strive to live a normal life, the good and the bad, one day at a time.

## An Unlucky Gambler in Sweden

I live life one day at a time. I am not sure if I will ever gamble again, but when I look at myself in the mirror each morning, I make a promise to myself. A promise to face life gamble-free by embracing the Gamblers Anonymous Twelve Step Recovery Program.

How did it start? One of the worst things that can happen to a potential compulsive gambler is to win big. As a beginning gambler I was a bit "unlucky" that way. I won often and sometimes I won large sums. I managed my gambling for many years with no serious consequences. I slowly increased my gambling until it was a daily routine. I was an equal opportunity gambler who played many different games. As the frequency of my gambling increased, I started to lose. My gambling became more aggressive. To feel satisfaction I needed to increase my bets. I also started to reason I needed to increase my bets so as to win back the money I had lost yesterday. I became more and more dishonest with those around me. No one knew I was gambling every day. I needed wins to calm down my nerves and reduce my anxiety. I could lose large amounts and yet the smallest win could make me delighted.

Just when I was about ready to admit my problem, I was again "unlucky". I won very big at the horse track. In my mind it solved everything. I could set that money aside and use it to get right with my family finances. Of course, I could use a portion of it to win even more. Within two weeks it was all gone. That is when I felt a despair that was out of this world. How could I be so stupid?

Sometimes my monthly salary was spent in one day. The hunt for money was on! I started to manipulate friends to borrow money. I convinced a friend to loan me a large sum: a bailout. I was free of debt. I was in the clear. Now was the time to change my life. After a week, the urge to gamble overwhelmed me and soon I was back in deep financial problems. Another growing problem was the ever-increasing difficulty of keeping all the lies straight. My head felt like a wasp nest. Lots of buzz and a fear of getting stung. I felt I was falling apart and that all was ruined. Again I was "unlucky" and yet another large win postponed the inevitable.

I was experiencing physical symptoms as well as emotional panic and despair. If I did not gamble every day, I felt nauseated and dizzy. Those symptoms would disappear when I would sneak into a betting shop and make a wager. It was like taking a drug. I also was having deeper and deeper mental problems. I sought psychological help but never shared anything about my gambling. No wonder therapy was not helpful.

The confusion, despair, and anxiety were growing. I started to look for more and more desperate solutions. I attempted suicide but failed. After that, I wrote a note that I was leaving and never coming back. I wandered aimlessly around southern Sweden for days. My family and co-workers reported me missing and the police were looking for me.

In the midst of all this confusion, I sensed I wanted to live. It is clear that my Higher Power was watching over me. I returned to the psychiatric clinic and finally shared the truth about my gambling. They helped me find an inpatient treatment program for compulsive gambling. When my family and friends found out about this, they visited and shared their love for me. So much love I could hardly stand it. How could someone who had done what I had done be worthy of love? During that treatment

I was introduced to Gamblers Anonymous and the Twelve Step Recovery Program. In GA I found yet another miracle. I was set free from my gambling addiction with the help of the God of my understanding and the Fellowship of GA.

Today I have a fantastic life. A life I could only dream about when I was consumed by gambling.

Today I have an unbelievable need for honesty.

Today I pray the Serenity Prayer when I am stressed.

Today I share my story. By doing so I get to keep what I have gained from the Gamblers Anonymous Program.

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## Finding a Higher Power Solution in Ireland

I am a compulsive gambler who is a member of the Cork group in Ireland. I was born into a poor family and I am the eldest of six. My mother used to make clothes for our neighbors by the light of a candle (we had no electricity) to help feed our family as my father struggled to find work.

The first dishonest act of my life was to steal four pence from my mother's purse. The love for my mother had no chance against my compulsion to gamble. Though I considered myself an honest man, I stole to gamble.

It is not necessary for me to tell my "war story". If you are a compulsive gambler, an explanation of what I did to gamble is not necessary, and if you are not a compulsive gambler, an explanation is impossible.

When the Higher Power I choose to call God decided to help people like me, he did not use a priest, rabbi, or doctor. He used a "crazy man" named Jim W and his helper Ray M, and so the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous was born. God gives to the sick the gift to help the sick.

Today I know that God took pity on me that last day I left the race track. It is said no human power can release me from my obsession to gamble, but a Higher Power could and would if sought.

With the help and guidance of my Higher Power within GA rooms I have found love and respect. It has been my privilege to never have to contemplate on what might have been, or should have been, if I had continued to gamble.

I have learned to not "quote" the program but rather to lead by example. For me GA also stands for "God's Answer". If you have found your personal Higher Power, no explanation is necessary. If you have not, I encourage you to be open minded in your search.

People in Gamblers Anonymous tell me they love me because of what I am. A long way from my family loving me in spite of what I was.

## Gambling Stripped Away My Soul

As a young woman having a night out with girlfriends, we would sometimes begin by chipping in a couple of dollars each to play the pokies (poker machines)]. It was only for a laugh and a bit of entertainment before the band began. Many years later, I found myself a single parent to three beautiful boys. After a while I began having a night out with the girls here and there. Occasionally we would have a punt (bet), as before, on the pokies, still only a couple of dollars each - no more. It wasn't long before those couple of dollars turned into a full-blown pokie addiction. From the age of thirty-nine I could be found sitting in front of a machine at various times of the day or night. In fact, that is where I was on the night of my fortieth birthday.

Finances had always been tight in my life, even before I became a parent. I often worked two jobs and one of them would usually be in the local pub or club. I always made sure the venue I worked in had bands playing, so that I could then feel as though I was having a night out yet get paid for it. I never gambled before or after my shifts. One evening my shift finished earlier than expected. Feeling a little lost and lonely, I accepted a workmate's invitation to put our tips in the pokies and have a drink or two. My friend left the club many hours before I did with a little extra money in her pocket and she was quite chuffed (very pleased) with that. By the time I left, the club was closing. I was quite tipsy and had a large sum in my pocket. I was ecstatic! The next day my sons and I went shopping. We bought ourselves all sorts of goodies we had not been able to afford. I also paid off a large chunk of my already over-extended credit card. Life was great. I had found heaven. This is where my compulsive gambling began.

By the time I was forty-four, I had sold the house I had worked so hard to buy and maintain. We were back to renting. I was driving a beat-up old car, having sold a better one. I was in debt up to my eyeballs and this was all because of my pokie addiction. By the end of these five years, I was at an all-time low. Morally, physically, and financially bankrupt. My alcohol drinking had increased to an alarming amount and there were no more tomorrows for me. I was constantly racked with the pain of guilt and remorse. My life revolved around lies and deceit. My head always thinking of ways and means to obtain some money and get back to those machines because maybe, just maybe, today might be the day I hit the big one. It got to a point where even if I did have a win, I would often stay longer and try and win more, as "today I must be on a roll", but I would always lose it all again. I lived in a constant state of anxiety, desperation, depression and despair.

There was no romance in my life, no fun nights out with the girls, no pride left in myself or my home, no outings with my kids. My soul was stripped away. I was nothing! I didn't allow anyone to get close to me. I gave away the dog I'd had for seven years, as I no longer wanted to take care of him. I even sent my children to live with their dad and I did a geographical for a while. Funnily enough, my family and friends were none the wiser about my gambling. I hid it very, very well - for a time anyway. My family began to question me in regard to all the money I had been borrowing off them, using my single parent status as the guise. My brothers and sisters (my parents had died long ago) came to the conclusion that I must be on drugs, and I let them go on believing this was the case, rather than admit to my gambling addiction.

During those years nothing else seemed to matter in my life. My children were left without decent food. I was constantly feeding them lies. They were young enough to be unaware of what a gambling addiction was, but old enough to sense and know that something was deeply amiss. Once my ex-husband tapped me on the shoulder whilst I was sitting in front of a poker machine. He started to cry and told me to go home and feed the kids. They were at home alone, with no food in the house. I still didn't, or couldn't, stop.

After about five years of living this soul-destroying life, I took myself off to a rehabilitation unit. By this time my drinking had escalated to alcoholic proportions. It allowed me to medicate and cover up my emotions and feelings of shame, guilt, and despair. I took to the rehab like a duck to water. I was ready for a change because I couldn't take my life any longer.

At the rehab we were taken to various twelve-step meetings. Then a week or two into the program, they arranged for two other clients and I to go to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting. I cried through the whole meeting. I was home! Here was my story being told by someone else. Here were my emotions being expressed by another. Here was a person at where I had been a couple of weeks ago. Here was another person who had been to gaol because of their gambling. Here were people who had gambled yesterday, or not for six months, two years, seven years and fifteen years. Some had had a bust once. Some kept busting. Some had never busted, but they all kept coming back to GA no matter what. Lying in bed that night, I gave thanks for getting to attend that GA meeting. I truly believed that with GA in my life, I would find myself again and begin to feel human once more.

I stayed at the rehab longer than their program ran so I could attend a couple more GA meetings before I went home. I knew there wasn't a GA meeting in the town where I lived and that I would have to travel some distance to attend one. I have continued my meetings since returning home, travelling the distance I have to. I am now in the process of starting a meeting in town. It will begin a week from the day of writing this story. I need to do this to keep myself safe and gamble-free. I look at it also as an act of twelfth-stepping. By me starting a meeting it gives others the opportunity to receive the same knowledge, joy, respectability, and pleasurable lifestyle I am able to have today, thanks to GA.

Just for today, I am able to walk down the street, say hello to people I meet and hold my head high, instead of hiding behind closed doors with secrets and lies, venturing out only when I have the money to get to a machine.

Just for today, I have the love of a Higher Power in my life instead of the loneliness and sadness I had whilst in active addiction.

Just for today, I have the strength and courage to get me to tomorrow, instead of lying around drunk and depressed for days at a time.

Just for today, I have the power that you people of GA give me, by going to meetings, instead of the powerlessness and vulnerability I had as an active compulsive gambler.

Just for today, I am free, I am me and I am beautiful.

## The Abyss

I have no recollection of the first time I entered a club and played the poker machines. Until I arrived at GA, I knew no other way of life. I come from a family of compulsive gamblers. My father is also an alcoholic, as is one of my brothers. Both my parents were extremely physically and mentally abusive. The only time I think my father was truly happy was when he was inflicting pain.

I married when I was seventeen. My husband was also an alcoholic and compulsive gambler. Our marriage lasted twenty-nine years. During this time, I had two beautiful boys. When my husband left, he took everything - the car and what money we had in the bank. He had not paid the rent and most of the bills were in my name because he could no longer get credit. For several months I tried to make the repayments. I found it impossible because the debts were too big. I rang the women's legal advice team and was given the number of someone who could help me. He went through my debts, which were substantial, and advised me to declare bankruptcy. Alternately I could take my husband to court. Eventually he would have to pay something but, because everything was in my name, it could take years and the creditors would not wait that long. I took his advice and went bankrupt.

During this time my older brother visited for Christmas. He had been around recovery programs for many years. I can't remember what he said. I was in a fog and my brain had shut down. I do remember him handing me the telephone and I spoke to a wonderful woman from GA. I remember her words so vividly: "Do you think you have a problem with your gambling, darling?" You see, I had always had other people telling me I had a problem, but this was the first time someone had asked me if I have a problem. She talked for a while about where the local meetings were.

I attended my first meeting on Christmas Eve. I was filled with anger and tears. I was very fortunate to have found the love and support of the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship. Also, very fortunate to have found a sponsor, a GA mentor, to guide me on my recovery journey. Going through the steps was, at times, painful. I now had to take responsibility for my own actions and my part in this disease. I had to look at why I gambled. Denial was no longer an option if I wanted recovery.

For me the most powerful step was Step One. I remember when I finally understood the meaning and feeling of the word "powerlessness" in the context for me as a compulsive gambler. The relief was enormous and I broke down and cried (this is not to say it excused my actions). Through the rest of the steps I had to admit I was selfish, self-absorbed, egotistical, a thief, a liar, and a cheat. I did not know it then, but those steps were a stairway to my Higher Power, God as I understand him.

Recovery has brought great changes into my life. My relationship with myself, my sons, and others are wonderful. Today I am rarely afraid, and when I am, I have the tools to deal with it. My brain has cleared and I have a different view of life. I know I have to be vigilant as I am only one coin away from a bust at a pokie.

At times, using all sorts of rationale, I think I can cut back on meetings, phone calls and service. My ego starts to inflate. I start telling myself that it would be okay to gamble now because I have been in recovery. It won't be as bad this time. I've learned so much I can be a social gambler. I can play within limits. This is the voice of my addiction, my powerlessness over gambling. The only way to silence that voice, that



urge to gamble, is to continue to be an active member of Gambler Anonymous and to practice its principles in all my daily affairs.

For my survival I need to be a grateful, lifelong member of GA and can't let my guard down. Today I am happier and at peace with the world. I am never alone as my higher power is always with me. Today I am free of the terrible soul-destroying abyss of gambling and all it encompasses. I have never been happier and am promised it gets better one day at a time.

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## The Geographical Cure

When I arrived in Australia I was determined not to gamble. This was to be my new start in life. I had gambled on the horses for the previous twelve years and never been out of debt. This was my chance to change. The night before I left South Africa, I flew two hours to the casino where, for the first time in my life, I left with money in my pocket. (That was only because my flight to Australia was leaving in three hours and I was already late.)

As a child, I had spent several years in an orphanage after my parents divorced. When I looked at people with fancy cars and nice homes, I thought the only way I could have these luxuries was through gambling. I thought that was the only way I would get anywhere in life.

I arrived in Australia as managing director of a company. I had a brand-new car and a very healthy bank balance. I had everything I thought I'd always wanted. Now that I had all these things, I'd no longer need to gamble. I was determined to lead a normal life, a life without all the lying and cheating.

Previously in South Africa, my gambling had been relatively controlled because racing was only twice a week and, if you wanted to bet while the races were on, you had to go to the racecourse. The casino was a two hour plane ride away. In those days I would never have thought of getting on a plane to go and gamble as I could not have afforded the airfare.

I had worked at a betting shop to help pay for my studies. I then got an extra job working for a bookie at the racecourse twice a week but most race days I went home broke because I had lost my pay packet. It was at this time that I started borrowing and scheming to get money to either pay back the bookies or get more money to gamble. At one stage I was so broke, I even sold some of my clothes to get money. I stopped answering the phone because it could only be one of the many people to whom I owed money. The receptionist at work was tired of making excuses to all the people who tried to contact me.

The opportunity arose for me to join my mother, brothers, and sister in Australia when I was thirty-one. I jumped at the chance because this would finally get me out of trouble and allow me to start over. I really thought that I would now gamble like a "normal" person. Little did I know that I had brought my disease with me! After only six months, it was like a dam bursting. I went into a TAB and placed my first Australian bet. In a short time, my very healthy bank balance was gone and all my old habits came back with a vengeance: lying, cheating, and stealing. I started going to the TAB every day. I bet on horses that I had never heard of, even on horses running in towns I had never heard of.

I heard about a casino interstate and I thought it would be a great place to visit. It would not be too difficult because I was already flying elsewhere interstate almost weekly. This was my first visit to a casino since my "lucky" last night in South Africa and my "luck" continued at the baccarat table. I took home winnings only because the casino closed at night. That first night I was ahead at closing time. Unfortunately, I lost it all the next afternoon playing blackjack.

I had bet and lost so big that the casino offered me free first-class air travel and all expenses paid at the hotel whenever I wanted to go there. They gave me more and

more credit. After every loss I managed to pay by begging, borrowing, or stealing. I was offered the same deal when a casino opened nearer home. During the week I would fly there and then fly back early the next morning. Nobody had any idea what I was doing.

This double life was making me hate myself and I thought the only way I could solve my problem was by gambling my way out of trouble. I had control of the money of the company I was running and I started "borrowing". The merry-go-round got worse because the more I lost, the more I lied and stole, and the more I hated what I had become. Unfortunately, this casino never closed. I seesawed between getting enough money to pay my debts and losing everything.

Seventeen years ago, I had had enough. I came back from a last fling at the casino and I wrote a letter to my family. I thought I might as well tell the whole story because I was not going to be around much longer. I was so tired that I fell asleep before I could take all the two hundred sleeping tablets I had. Somehow my brother managed to track me down and rushed me to a hospital. I remember waking up two days later and being really angry because I had not succeeded. My family could not believe what I had done. They knew me as a happy, easy-going person without a care in the world. They were shocked to discover my secret life. They distanced themselves from me. One sister-in-law wouldn't even let me in her house.

Another geographic solution. I moved interstate because a former girlfriend offered me a place to stay. She told me about Gamblers Anonymous and, in my normal stubborn manner, I told her I was not interested. She arranged for one of the local members to phone me. I was touched by this stranger taking time to speak to me. I thought I belonged in the gutter and I did not deserve this kindness. I agreed to go to my first meeting. For the first time in my life, I felt I really belonged to a group that I was actually qualified to belong to.

I stayed with my former girlfriend for a few months, going to meetings every week. As I began to get more time up, I felt that it was important for my recovery to return and face up to what I had done. I needed to return and make amends to the people I had harmed. I was in a financial mess that I could not sort out on my own.

I entered into a "scheme of arrangement". This involved a meeting where my creditors would vote to accept or reject my offer to repay my debts. It was necessary to face all of them at one meeting. This was one of the most difficult things I had to do because I had lied to every one of these people. I had taken money from them under false pretences and now I had to face them and admit everything I had told them was a lie. The debts were so big they accepted partial payments over seven years. Now I had a realistic chance of paying. I had faced and made amends as best I could to most of the people I had lied to, and I did not have to hide anymore.

After a while in GA, I realized that knowing why I gambled was not that important anymore. What was important was that I accepted Step One, kept going to meetings, and continued working the Steps. I also learned that compulsive gambling is an illness I could live with as long as I looked after it. As long as I took my Gamblers Anonymous "medicine", the illness would stay away.

Since I stopped gambling, I have achieved most of the things I tried to achieve through gambling. I own my own home. I have a wonderful wife and beautiful ten-year-old twin daughters. I am a very proud member of Gamblers Anonymous because I know that without GA I would not be here today. I will keep coming back!

## It Started as Fun in Aruba

I started gambling in my early twenties. We played a low-stakes game that resembled poker. The challenge of this complex game soon dominated my thoughts. Even at this time I recognized the hold this game had on me was not a good thing.

I was given a scholarship to study in the Netherlands. The opportunity for advanced studies was one reason for my happiness. The other was the thought I could leave my gambling behind. That however was not to be. The weekend social gatherings of my classmates always had gambling, a game similar to the one I had played in Aruba. I soon found myself again consumed with thoughts about the game. The stakes were low so I did not have financial problems but my addiction to the game soon caused relationship problems.

I crafted my weekends with my need to gamble the first priority and my girlfriend at the time a second priority. A painful memory of that was when she had experienced a very painful loss. Instead of being there for emotional support and comfort, I rationalized an excuse to gamble. I told myself this was my way to deal with her tragedy. She left me a short time later.

I continued to play that low-stakes game until I found a group of gamblers that played a much higher stakes game. My gambling addiction progressed, and I soon had financial and professional consequences. My self-esteem took a terrible blow when I lost my job. My gambling took yet another downward turn when I discovered casino gambling.

Even with a break up of another relationship, deepening financial woes and participation in a counseling program about compulsive gambling, I continued to gamble. I returned to Aruba to take a new professional position, leaving behind large gambling debts. In Aruba I was able to go months without gambling and then I would binge gamble and lose significant amounts of money.

I have joined with three other gamblers and with the help of a starter kit from GA ISO we are attempting to start a Gamblers Anonymous meeting. Before I read the Gamblers Anonymous literature, I did not understand the devastating nature of this disease. I could not see that the life I had been living was filled with the symptoms of compulsive gambling. I am early in my search for recovery from my gambling addiction, but I have already experienced the benefit of meeting and sharing with other gamblers. The sharing of this story is for me a part of my embracing the Recovery Program's First Step. I must admit and accept that I am powerless over my gambling and that if I gamble my life becomes unmanageable.

## Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together in Germany

As a child I was a loner. In an attempt to connect with other kids, I joined them in card playing and dice games. In a magic way I didn't understand, I found the world of gambling attractive, and soon found myself gambling all the time.

As I grew older, I continued to feel misunderstood. I suffered in silence and shut down inside myself. I felt I could manage my life by gambling and winning. Instead, I experienced the sad reality of my losses overtaking my winnings. I still continued to gamble for larger and larger stakes. I saw other gamblers winning. Why not me?

I chased my losses for 15 years. I had big wins and yet even bigger losses. The bitter seriousness of all this led me deep into emotional and financial despair. Thank God I was able to finally see I was a sick man. Sick in mind and sick in soul. I sought and asked for help.

I found that help in Gamblers Anonymous. There I found other compulsive gamblers who understood me and gave me advice and guidance. Among them, many became good and fast friends. I started to see the different pieces of my gambling addiction. It was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces were all there, I just needed to reassemble them in the correct way. In doing so I started to experience peace and serenity. Eventually, the obsession to gamble was lifted.

As I look back on this process from today's view, one other miracle has occurred: I no longer feel alone!

## Binge Gambler

I had been to Gamblers Anonymous before, about seven years ago, for a few months. I am quite shy and do have issues with several things, but the root always comes back to gambling.

I am originally from Blackpool but now live in Glasgow. I had been gambling in bookies for a while, but it only started to get serious when I was at university. I managed to get my degree, thanks to a lot of support from my family, especially my aunt who helped me both financially and with the work. She loaned me money a fair bit and I made excuses as to why I needed it.

I consider myself a binge gambler. It is all-consuming when it takes over. My mind races at a million miles an hour and I cannot think about anything else. This has happened to various degrees over the past 12 years.

I have returned to the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous and have been thinking recently that I need to give therapy and tell my story in more depth. While I feel I am doing really well at the moment, I must keep diligent at all times. There are things I must improve: going to more meetings, fellowship outside of meetings, phone calls, etc. I feel I am gradually improving and I have a message on the notes in my phone. "You can give your best at work, GA and home – that is all you can do." I recalled an experienced member saying this and I find myself looking at it almost every day.

I am slowly but surely getting confidence back in my life and GA is a massive part of that. GA keeps me off a bet and helps me calm my mind. My recovery and life are improving. I am starting to listen to my partner, to be there for her, and appreciate the support she gives me. I am feeling ready to tell my aunt the truth and make amends. This is thanks to Gamblers Anonymous.

I have a long road to go and I am doing things slowly. I am doing things that members say to do. I am working through my shyness. With all this in place I have not had an urge to binge on gambling. I live one day at a time.

## A One-Year Pin in Scotland

For as long as I can remember, gambling has played a massive part in my life. I was fascinated by fruit machines from a very young age and worked numerous jobs so I could spend hours consumed by gambling. It was clear that I wasn't a "normal" gambler even at this stage. I was never content whether winning or, in most cases, losing.

My gambling really escalated when I turned 18 and I started playing high-end fruit machines and roulette. At this time, I had a number of responsibilities and stresses in my life. Instead of dealing with these, I hid in the fantasy world of gambling. I was compounding issues, suppressing feelings, and generally not caring about anyone but myself. This horrible cycle continued for 10 years: lying, deceiving, being selfish, and always angry. Generally, not the person I aspired to be.

It's worth noting that I had tried to regulate the gambling through speaking to counselors, self-control, and even hypnotherapy. None of this worked. After another disastrous gambling session, I admitted to my partner I had a problem and needed help.

From the outset, I felt a sense of belonging in the meetings. I could relate to what people said and felt they understood me. I had hope back in my life! I was given some great advice and took a lot from the meetings. Unfortunately, I didn't quite grasp that the GA way was best and I became complacent in my recovery. The result was that I had a couple of falls; all completely due to failings on my part. Thankfully, I always went back to meetings and found the support and advice I needed. I dread to think of how my life would be now if I hadn't had somewhere to turn.

Over the last six to eight months I have really tried to do things the GA way, putting into place the experience passed on to me. I can happily say this is the most settled and content I have ever been. Yes, I've been able to get material things but, more importantly, I feel I am a better person. I constantly strive to keep improving.

Gamblers Anonymous has genuinely been life-changing for me, and I will be eternally grateful to GA and the fantastic people who make up the Fellowship.

Tonight, I will be receiving my first-year pin, which will hopefully be the first of many – One Day at a Time.

## Mister, How Do I Get Home?

The unmanageability of my life had reached the breaking point and I saw no way out. I drove to an isolated area of a park, took the shotgun out of the trunk, and steadied myself to end it all. In this confused, dazed state I was interrupted by a knock on the car window. When I rolled down the window there was a young boy on a bike. He asked me, "Mister, how do I get home?" I don't remember if I answered him, but then he was gone. That divine interruption caused me to stop. Not stop and think, but just stop! Obviously, since I am writing this I did not go through with that planned suicide. I have often wondered: Was that odd or was that God? I like to think it was a message from the God of my understanding.

It took a lifetime of self-centered, selfish, rage-filled behavior for me to arrive at that park. I would like to tell you about that descent into a gambling addiction, and how I found my way home.

I was a slightly-built kid who didn't get a growth spurt until my late teens. Being small, I was quick to learn to strike first if I was bullied or intimidated. I learned violence got me the respect I wanted, but did not feel I had. This pattern of violence and verbal threats would follow me into my adult life. I honed it into the sharp point of my personality.

My home life was also confusing. There were family secrets which left me feeling disconnected from my very large family. Things that nobody talked about which made me feel even more lost. That added fuel to my growing anger issues. I also was carrying a big secret. I was a victim of sexual abuse. That helpless feeling of being abused and with no way to admit it or deal with it left me isolated and feeling it was me against the world.

I joined the Navy and in a short time I grew into a man's body filled with all that anger and rage. I saw the brig on more than one occasion. After my discharge, I returned home and married my high school sweetheart. We started a family and I started a career in car sales. By chance I had found the perfect outlet for all that frustration and anger: wheeling and dealing. The inflated ego created by being the top sales person certainly made me feel like I was better than you. If that top sales figure was threatened, I would lie, cheat, and manipulate my fellow salespeople. Winning was all that mattered. I was very successful in an industry that rewarded aggressive tactics such as mine. Soon I was a manager and as I look back, I was an abusive, verbally threatening and, yes, even a violent manager. Gambling and drinking were an integral part of that sales scene. Whether tossing coins on the sales floor or big bets on the golf course, I had to win. Winning was how I gauged my value, my self-worth.

Over the years I grew ever more angry and caused my wife, my kids, my family, and my employers great embarrassment on many occasions. I didn't care; it was all about me. I had made trips to various casinos for sales meetings, and there found the love of my life: poker. I could show you to your face that I was a winner. If I won a hand, busted you out, I felt great and was many times asked to tone down my table talk. Didn't they understand how important I was? With the arrival of card rooms in my home state my gambling went to a new level. Now I could gamble whenever I wanted and I did just that.



I became obsessed with the card rooms and even better, I discovered poker tournaments. The thrill of beating one table of other players was multiplied many times over when I won or went deep in a tournament. A win got even better when they would put my picture up on the wall. Man, what a feeling of being a "Big Shot", a high-stakes player. My head was so inflated I barely could get out the door. By then gambling had me by the throat. It consumed my every waking moment. I planned my life around the next trip out and made that happen with a web of lies to my family, friends, and employer.

Another top salesman and I decided we were too good to be working for others. We were special. We formed a partnership and started to broker cars to dealerships and used car lots. We had arranged a line of credit for the capital required to make and carry multiple car purchases. By now my gambling was really out of control and my losses exceeded my income. I started to tap into that line of credit to finance my gambling, all behind my partner's back. Eventually the bank wanted to see paper work on these cars I supposedly had purchased. The house of cards I had been building all came tumbling down. The business was not only bankrupt, but so was I. As co-signer on the line of credit, my partner was on the hook for many, many thousands of dollars of debt.

All that in a nutshell brought me to that park in search of a way out. After deciding now was not the time, I visited a doctor because not only was I mentally screwed up, I was a physical wreck. A very insightful man, he asked if I was a gambler. I found some small amount of courage and shared a bit of my reality. He suggested I look up a GA meeting.

So, they tell me I attended my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting. I'll have to take their word for it! I was in such a daze I remember very little. Later two of the members who were at that first meeting and had taken me aside for a newcomers meeting said they had never seen someone in such bad shape and had doubts if I would survive. But survive I did and found my way into a thirty-day in-patient gambling treatment program. Shall we say I was a problem client? The first thing I had packed was all that anger. Completion of that program was in hindsight a true gift. It gave me a break from the chaos I had created. It also was there that I began to see how much my wife and daughters loved me despite all I had done. They were going to stick with me no matter how hard I tried to drive them away. One other amazing thing happened at that treatment center. A GA member who was a peer counselor agreed to be my sponsor. Now this guy was a no BS kind of guy who was not at all afraid of my anger and had no problems confronting me on my behavior.

Upon release from that program, I followed the aftercare advice. I found a home GA meeting and faithfully attended it every week. I talked with my sponsor on a regular basis, did basic service chores at that meeting, and joined in the "meeting after the meeting" fellowship.

So, cue the song, flash the credits, and I march off into the sunset arm-in-arm with my family and all is well. If it were only so. I had done serious damage and it would take a long time to put my shame and guilt in a place where it was acknowledged but didn't control my life. I had serious urges for a long time. When I would call my sponsor or other GA mentors and tell them I was headed to the casino they would all say the same thing: "Call me tomorrow and tell me how it went". They were wise enough to not

engage in an argument which was exactly what I wanted so I could explode in anger and be justified to go gamble. It took the wind out of my sails every time.

I eventually progressed in the program to where I could do a very thorough and fearless Fourth Step inventory. A hard look at the truth and to my shock I discovered I didn't really have a gambling problem. I had a "gambler" problem. It was not my life, my job, or my family that were the problem it was my self-centered and selfish view of the world. I found the courage to share that inventory with another person and then got busy applying the Recovery Program in all my affairs. To find a way to release that hurt, angry boy so that he could find his way home.

Louisville '19 Attachment #76  
DO NOT USE, DISPLAY OR DISTRIBUTE  
in any Gamblers Anonymous room  
This is not approved or appropriate literature

## It's Not About What I Lost, It's About What I Found

To understand my story, you need to understand my addictions. When I was 25, I quit a three pack a day cigarette habit. When I was 37, I quit a heavy drinking problem. Like my father before me, I was proud of myself for quitting. But unlike my father, I went to only three AA meetings, thought I had it licked, and was in recovery. What I realize now was that I did not go to recovery - I went into abstinence.

At 50, I was living my dream. I loved where I lived, I loved who I was with, and I loved what I did. Yet, as irrational as it sounds, as soon as I had achieved everything I had worked for, somehow it wasn't enough. I felt empty. I remember telling a colleague that I had lost my joy.

It was at this moment the old desires for escape surfaced. They say that while we are in recovery our addiction is doing pushups in the parking lot. Thirteen years after quitting drinking and because I had been living an unrealistic version of recovery, my addiction was The Hulk, strong and waiting.

I went to a conference that was held at a casino. While I was at the conference, in between meetings and responsibilities, I gambled at the slot machines. What happened then was, as any compulsive gambler in recovery will tell you, the worst thing that could have happened for me -- I won.

I had gambled before, but it had never consumed me. Stress, anxiety, and a desire to escape played into this moment when the obsession with gambling took over my life. The slots were my drug of choice and I loved everything about them.

When I got back home, I obsessed over the machine I had been playing and won on. I thought if I could just get back to it -- get back to the incredible high I felt -- a high unlike any I had experienced before -- get back to that moment of possibility as the reels spun around-- things would be good, money would be easy, life would be better.

Soon I was a regular at local casinos playing for higher and higher stakes. For me it was all about the high -- the greater the risk, the greater the reward, the greater the rush. I could not lose money fast enough. Within months of my intense gambling, I went through my home equity line and all of the credit I could get from my credit cards. I borrowed from anybody who would give me money -- all under false pretenses. I spent any money I could get to keep gambling. Money was what I needed to get my drug, my high, and since gambling was how I got high, I would get it any way I could.

There are common symptoms among compulsive gamblers. Two of them stand out in my story -- an illusion of control over outcome, and distorted thinking. I firmly believed I would win back the money I had lost. I firmly believed that if I kept playing the same machine it would hit big. When I ran out of legitimate sources of money and began to steal from my employer to fuel an addiction that could never be satisfied, I truly believed I would pay it back. Distorted thinking kept me from knowing what I, as an intelligent person, should have known: that I wasn't doing this for any reason other than the adrenaline rush. Then reality struck.

I was fired, charged with embezzlement, sentenced to two years in prison, and divorced by my husband. I lost my home, my reputation, my self-respect. The damage did not stop there. My family and friends were also the victims of this insidious disease.

I was able to attend my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting before I was incarcerated. I remember that meeting vividly: the fear I felt walking down the steps to the church basement, the emotion, the tears, and the pain. But I also remember that

feeling of coming home. I did not want to be a compulsive gambler, but somehow the folks in that room – they were my people. They understood me, they did not judge me. They had walked before me.

When I was “away” I would visualize the table of people at my Tuesday night meeting. I would feel them with me. GA members sent me GA literature. I read the Blue Book, the Red Book, the Combo Book, *Towards 90 Days*, and *Beyond 90 Days*. I would begin each day with a reading from the *A Day at a Time* book. It was what I needed to keep up my courage in a difficult situation. Each day I had a meeting in my room. I started to grasp, through the help of the Gamblers Anonymous program, that there wasn't enough money in the world to fill that hole inside of me. I learned I had to fill it with something else. That is when my true recovery began.

I have been fortunate since I was released from prison. I am an optimist. I know that if I keep putting one foot in front of the other, I will move towards a better life. I work every day to stay in recovery. For someone who always wanted to take the easy way, it is hard work. But it is not as hard as being fired, jailed, and divorced were for me. Those things were harder.

I am fortunate. I have survived. I did not do it alone. I had a burning desire to get better. I combined one-on-one counseling, peer support, and working the Recovery Steps of Gamblers Anonymous with my belief in a Higher Power. I also had the support of friends and family who did not give up on me. I have managed to get my life back. I have a purposeful career which I never thought was possible. I have a good relationship with my family again. I appreciate every day and give thanks that I am no longer controlled by gambling.

How could this have happened to me - an educated, intelligent woman who should have known better? To someone who had an understanding of addiction? I realize now I understood it in others, but I didn't understand it in myself. I never looked at the hole in me I was trying to fill.

## Finding Recovery in Portland

Compulsive gambling is a place where I don't have a face or a name, where things don't matter. Where depression is a vine that wraps itself around me till I cannot move or cry. It lets me breathe just enough to sustain life. It's just life anyway, I'd tell myself. Life. Whatever.

It didn't happen quickly or consciously. I didn't wake up one day and say, "Oh, I think I'll really screw things up. I think I'll cause more pain and suffering." Fogged in by the desire to escape, I couldn't see a thing. I couldn't see past the moment. My tongue twisted around false words. No truth existed, only loneliness and isolation.

My loved ones wanted to know why. Always asking why. Why? Sadness. Deep down an unbearable darkness. Why? Loneliness. Relating to others seems impossible. Why? I am incomplete. The pieces don't fit together. Why? Addiction. Sometimes I don't have a choice. The wild chemistry takes over and I behave differently than I feel. Even my reasons weren't enough for them. They couldn't understand. No matter how much they tried, they just didn't get it. I thought I was going mad. My behaviors were nonsensical... I repeated over and over again that which was killing me.

I believe I was a compulsive gambler just a few hours into my first casino visit. At this point, my gambling binges were periodic. I lived in San Francisco, so getting to a casino was not easy. I started gambling online — trying desperately to raise enough money to escape a violent domestic situation. But I never cashed out — I just kept gambling. With the help of my family, I was able to make the move to Oregon.

After a few months in Oregon, I discovered video lottery machines. Many had the same games as casinos. It lacked the glitz of a casino, but this way I could gamble the money I would otherwise have to spend on gas to get to a casino. The crazy thinking took over. You cannot go a block in Portland without passing a gambling establishment. Bars, delis, convenience stores... temptation is everywhere.

I hit bottom after bottom. I kept falling deeper and deeper into compulsive gambling. For a while, I was oblivious to the fact that I had a problem. The secrets and lies kept growing. The intense anxiety and depression compounded. I didn't have food. I sat in the dark. It took less than a year to have my first breakdown.

To avoid homelessness, I came clean with my family—leaving out many details, of course. They bailed me out again. I kept gambling. Eventually, with the help of a counselor, money barriers were put in place. I no longer had access to cash, so I resorted to illegal activity to finance my gambling. When the cons didn't work, I would dumpster dive for cans to make a dollar to put into a machine. My misery was unfathomable.

It was obvious now that therapy and psychiatry were not going to be enough. My counselor had suggested Gamblers Anonymous many times. When I was finally ready to walk through the door, I found a place where I belonged, a place where I was finally understood.

My first meeting was a blur. Anger and confusion masked my true emotions. I went through my own versions of prison, insanity, and death. I gambled between meetings for years... but I kept coming back. I truly believe a subconscious part of me

knew I would find my way, and that GA would be part of that. With every meeting, a little bit of light found its way to me.

I finally made a conscious decision to give myself a chance. I remember the light, the surroundings, the sounds. It would become one of the most important moments of my life. This was a moment of radical willingness, radical acceptance -- all the way, complete, total. I realize now how deep it was. Acceptance was in my mind, my heart, my body. Acceptance led to feelings of intense sadness and loss, but a deep calmness followed.

My Higher Power was a mystery all my life—I searched and searched, grew tired and frustrated, then stopped searching. I didn't realize I didn't have to try so hard. When I let go of feeling desperate to find a Higher Power, She came to me. It was pivotal and epic. That's when I truly knew She was with me, and that She'd always been there. I had been blocking Her. I now have a feeling of calm, an incredible feeling I can't describe.

Now I can see why people are so passionate about their Higher Power. How people can laugh with their whole heart. How people can feel so alive. For me, Gamblers Anonymous is a collection of souls, often lost, searching for connection, belonging, meaning, and peace. A meeting is where our paths are forged together, giving us strength to walk with a posture of dignity through our lives. We often hear our own story in the words of others. Listening and learning bond us together in a way that allows our healing to begin and continue.

With the unending support of GA, my world is wide open with so many possibilities. I continue to see Gamblers Anonymous work in mysterious ways. You never know when your life is going to change. It only takes a moment. I see meaning in my life now and carrying the message of GA to other compulsive gamblers is a huge part of that. Service work has been key for me. The more involved I become, the greater the rewards. My sisters and brothers in Gamblers Anonymous never cease to amaze me.

I am not alone anymore. A friend is as close as the phone. If no one answers, I have my Higher Power to keep me company. I cannot put into words how grateful I am to the Gamblers Anonymous Program.

## I Found Myself

My life as a child made me grow up very fast. I ended up being a parent to my mother. Always consoling or guarding her from my father. I remember many, many times leaving the house with my mom and sisters to escape my angry dad. I was a lonely child who had to fight to survive. And of course, I was the peacemaker and hated confrontation.

I brought all of my peacemaking skills into my marriage and rarely rocked the boat. I was the dutiful wife and mother of six children. I thought I had “made it” and survived. Little did I know at the time that all of my childhood feelings, fears, and hunger to live a life of normalcy would come out and rear their ugly heads in the form of gambling.

As a young girl I never gambled and I certainly wasn't competitive. My parents played cards once in a while with family members, but I don't remember having any interest in gambling until I was quite older. I had been married for over 35 years before my gambling started. I started going to the boat and played the slot machines with one of my girlfriends. I also didn't go by myself until one day when we walked in to the casino and she told me she had won on a certain machine and wanted to play the machine again. I thought that was odd because we always went together and didn't remember her winning on that machine. She told me she sometimes went by herself. Well, that's all I needed and it was like I had permission to do the same. The spiraling downfall began from that moment on.

I was going to the casino by myself more and more. Eventually, I was going every day. I started opening credit cards to get cash advances. I got a P.O. Box so my husband wouldn't see all the credit card bills. The lying and scheming to get to the casino put me on a whirlwind of craziness. All I thought about was when I could go again. It got to the point that I realized that it wasn't about winning any more. It was all about escaping. I could sit at the slot machine and never think about anything. I told myself that I was entitled to gamble because I had spent so many years of my life taking care of everybody else but myself. It was my turn to have fun. The fun didn't last long.

I was chasing my losses looking for a win to pay credit cards. I couldn't sleep, I thought I'd never get out from under. I thought the only answer was to commit suicide. I thought of several ways to do that, but was always too scared to follow through. What would my husband do without me? I couldn't bear the thought of never seeing my kids and grandchildren again. Yet, the thought was there and I couldn't shake it. When my husband found out about my gambling and all the lies I had been telling, I felt a sense of relief. I slept better that night than I had in years, however my husband did not!

When I attended my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting I was shaking and scared to death. I cried through most of the meeting, and answered yes to most of the Twenty Questions. I had decided from that first night that I had to stop this compulsive behavior before it killed me. I knew I was powerless and needed whatever help I could get.

The people at the meeting were wonderful. They understood me and their compassion was overwhelming. The meeting leader gave me some great advice. That was to be totally honest with myself, and my husband. To get “everything out in the open”. Oh, he had found out about my gambling, but I hadn’t told him about the post office box and the credit cards. That week I emptied out all my lies and secrets and became willing to face the consequences. He wasn’t happy. Even more powerful was that I could see I had deeply hurt him.

I began seeing a gambling counselor and learned a lot about this horrible disease. I began working the steps and was encouraged to get a sponsor. I mentioned in a meeting that I was looking for a sponsor. After the meeting a woman approached me and agreed to be my sponsor. With her help my recovery grew and a friendship developed that I cherish.

My step work taught me so much about recovery and who I was and who I was not. I started to understand I had some serious character issues that needed to be changed. Within those character defects lay the reasons I was an escape gambler. It wasn’t easy becoming entirely ready to have these removed. With the help of my Higher Power and a deep willingness to change, I soon began to see progress.

I got involved in Gamblers Anonymous and the Fellowship. I lead my home group meeting. I volunteer to help with the mini-conference in our area. I take pride and joy in welcoming new people into our meeting, because I remember how compassionate people were with me when I walked into my first meeting. New members really are a blessing to those of us that have been around for a while. They remind us of the pain, hurt, and chaos of a life consumed by gambling.

I sponsor other people now and that has helped me grow even more in my recovery. I have learned so much from my sponsees. My involvement in Gamblers Anonymous has taken me down many paths. What I love the best is volunteering on the Telephone Hotline. Every time I receive a call for help it takes me back to when I was gambling and my life was a mess. My hope is that I can bring just a glimmer of hope into the life of a still-suffering compulsive gambler. Then I have to let go of whatever decision they make. Let go of whether they do or do not take my advice about going to a meeting. That decision is up to them just as it was for me.

I found that my recovery has helped me not only stop gambling but it helps me in all aspects of my life. I’ve become a better listener to my family and friends. I no longer try to control people or situations. I no longer hide my emotions or run from confrontations. I allow myself to “feel”. My recovery helped me to find I have a voice and not fear using it. I like what I see. I know there’s so much more to learn. I’ve begun to trust other people and I know who my real friends are.

The Serenity Prayer has become my “go to” prayer whenever I see myself falling into my old patterns of behavior. With help from my Higher Power and the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous, my view of life has changed. My past will always be my past, but the true gift of recovery is that I have found myself.



## God Never Gave Up on Me

After another night of gambling, I was sitting on the floor in a dark corner of my bedroom. I was completely empty of all human emotions. I had gathered all the pills in the house and was contemplating suicide without one thought of my two children. While looking at the pills I started crying from a place I didn't recognize. A sobbing, I-can't-catch-my-breath kind of crying. I started praying, calling out to God to help me. I looked up and saw a hand reaching out to me. Was I delusional? I don't know. I got up off the floor and called Gamblers Anonymous. No one answered. I called the local psychiatric hospital and made an emergency appointment. They released me after assessing that I wasn't an immediate suicide risk. I drove to a familiar church. The door was locked. I called my sister and asked if I could come over and talk. She said yes. I told her what I had done. This was my first honest conversation in years.

Earlier, the psychiatrist had told me that there was a Gamblers Anonymous meeting at the hospital on Tuesday nights. For the next five days I walked around my house, hanging on by a thread. But I made it to Tuesday where I began my journey.

I spoke so softly people could hardly hear me. I came back week after week. I started coming early to set up the room and to make coffee. After six months I chaired my first meeting. When they trusted me with the meeting bag, I felt my self-confidence starting to grow. I used everything members told me and what I read in the literature. I could only attend one meeting per week. That meeting was my lifeline. I started to understand my Higher Power. I started working my steps. I began to understand what was being asked of me. I decided to do everything that the only other lady in the room was doing. She had come in fourteen months before me. The literature told me I needed a sponsor, so I asked her. She brought me to other meetings, GA picnics, GA pinnings, and introduced me to other members. I am basically a shy and very low-key person, yet at some point I started using the phone list to connect with other members.

Time passed and I celebrated my first year. Gamblers Anonymous was doing for me what I had been unable to do for myself: stop gambling. Following the guidance given in our Combo Book helped me get a brand-new life, even better than before gambling. I learned to love myself. I began going to national conferences and meeting members from around the world who are my brothers and sisters in recovery.

After six years in the program, at a conference in Montreal, my Higher Power put someone special in my life. We were married for 26 months when he died suddenly. My heart was broken and for a while my life was upside down. By keeping my Higher Power close and letting GA members nurse me through my grief, I keep going.

Today, I continue to sponsor members, do step study meetings, and speak in rehab centers. I have been privileged to offer service to GA as a Trustee, Board of Regents member, and Co-Chair of an international GA conference. I am blessed.

The most important part of all this was my finding a Higher Power, a God of my own understanding. I have a personal, daily relationship with Him. Nothing is possible without my Higher Power. Today I have a family I cherish and a GA Fellowship that loves me. I am healthy: mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Today I travel wherever the GA highway takes me. Although I miss my husband, I am happy today and it all began in that dark corner waiting for the unknown. I thank God He never gave up on me.

## The Persistent Voice of My Disease

*"I wish I had never met any of you people."*

*"I wish my counselor had never recommended that I go to a GA meeting."*

*"I wish my husband had never joined Gam-Anon."*

Everything I just said is absolutely true – according to the voice of my disease that just won't shut up.

This voice is not happy with the direction my life has taken since my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting. She misses the carefree days when we thought of no one but ourselves, never worrying about consequences. She misses the excitement and tries to convince me it is still out there for us. She misses being all alone – just us – free to pursue our obsession with no voices of reason to interfere. It would be so much easier for her if she could isolate me again.

She is tired of going to meetings and tries to convince me that I'm too tired, it's too cold or hot, or too "something", to go. She hates hearing your stories of recovery -- your struggles, your pain, and worst of all your triumphs over your own compulsive gambler's inner voice. She knows hearing your stories gives me hope. She knows hearing your stories gives me strength. Hope and strength are toxic to her.

She wishes I'd never gone for a burger with you after that Saturday morning meeting and shared stories of the stupid things we had done to gamble. She wishes I'd never asked you to be my sponsor. The last thing she needs is another person undermining her influence. She misses the years when she was running the show. In fact, she resents every new GA friendship I've made. She didn't like me coming to your little Christmas gathering, didn't like me volunteering at fundraisers with you, and doesn't want me to go to dinner with you before our Friday night meetings. She thinks it's a waste of time talking on the phone with you, reading texts about how your day is going, or chatting about the weather with you. She doesn't want me to read any of your encouraging emails. You are getting in her way.

She sure didn't like it when I visited another compulsive gambler in jail. Didn't like me looking through the glass partition into eyes filled with the pain and knowledge of just how far she intends to take me if I let her. She hoped I would forget all about it. Imagine her frustration at every letter of encouragement and hope that's been exchanged, every book shared, and every prayer sent between me and my GA friend behind bars. Imagine her frustration in knowing that I've received more strength and hope than I could ever give in this GA friendship.

Oh, she doesn't have a problem with having friends -- especially the "regular" friends -- the ones that don't understand compulsive gambling. These friends never saw the signs of her growing control over me. And, even better, these friends could be used in lies and excuses to cover our gambling obsession. After all, what good are friends if they can't be used, right? But these GA friends are a different breed. Not only do they answer phone calls and texts any time of the day or night -- they can see when her influence starts to weaken me, even if I don't. These friends are wise to her tricks. As far as she is concerned, these Gamblers Anonymous friends need to mind their own business. They put a wrench in her plans.

Picture me sitting in front of a favorite slot machine at 10 o'clock on a Saturday morning. I'm a zombie -- I've been there since 6 o'clock the night before. I've gambled

non-stop, not eaten, and withdrawn a lot of money from credit cards and checking accounts. The money is almost gone now. I've ignored numerous texts and phone calls from my husband. It's been a perfect night as far as the compulsive gambler in me is concerned! Now picture my husband walking toward me. I barely look up or make eye contact. He says he just needed to know I was okay and had come to the casino to look for me. I don't even stop pushing the button on the machine as I tell him, "I'm fine". He waits a moment and then turns to leave, and I still don't stop pushing that button.

I don't apologize. I don't follow him out. I'm annoyed at the interruption. What kind of person does that? A person controlled by the compulsive gambler inside who says, "Don't stop pushing that button! Don't feel anything! Don't think about the damage! Don't think about anyone but me! And whatever you do, make sure you block out this memory. We don't need something like this getting in the way of our next gambling binge."

The compulsive gambler in me is irritated that I'm remembering the ugly gambling details she so purposefully tried to wipe from memory. With each day in the GA program, her tools of foggy thinking, selective memory, and suppressed emotion, lose their effectiveness. Through working the steps, I can now recall the details of the incident I just shared. Now I can feel the shame and guilt and remorse that a normal person – a person not under the influence of compulsive gambling – would have felt in that moment. I can feel it now, ask forgiveness now, and keep the memory as a tool against the compulsive gambler in me.

And then, there are you Gam-Anon people – yes, you know who you are! Offering knowledge, support, and understanding about the disease of compulsive gambling. You've given my husband a place to share his worries, fears, and resentments. You've given him tools to deal with the turmoil – past, present, and future - - of living with a compulsive gambler. How is the compulsive gambler in me going to convince him I'm cured now? That I can gamble like a normal person now? The compulsive gambler in me believes these are still possibilities, and Gam-Anon's support is squashing her big dreams.

And while we're on the subject of annoying people, the compulsive gambler in me has a bone to pick with my sponsees. At first, she thought you were great! Asking me for help with your recovery made me question my own. Was I stable enough to help anyone else? Doubt, insecurity, and fear – these are tools my compulsive gambler could use to get her foot back in the door. But then, something backfired. Every time you resisted gambling urges, every clean date you celebrated, every meeting you led, and every step we worked together, had made my recovery STRONGER! Ouch! Did you hear the door slamming on my compulsive gambler?

But here's the main thing that has sent her over the edge: Page 17. Yes, the last page of the Combo Book – the page with those pesky tried-and-true guidelines for all GA members, especially the newcomers.

There is one sentence on Page 17 that the compulsive gambler in me can't tolerate. Six words: "*Get involved and be of service*". At first, you might think that these innocent words are there because the GA program needs new members to volunteer in order to keep the program going. True, we would not get far without the efforts of our members leading Intergroup, maintaining our website, paying our bills, and answering the hotline. Gamblers Anonymous needs Trusted Servants to unlock and set up our

meeting rooms. We need the members who make the coffee, bring the cookies and donuts, and contribute to every meeting. But, according to the compulsive gambler in me, this sentence has a much more sinister intent. These six little words, when taken to heart and acted upon, are like poison to my disease. When I got involved, I gained a higher sense of purpose, a stronger resolve, and a loyalty to Gamblers Anonymous that the voice of the compulsive gambler in me hasn't yet been able to overcome.

By following Page 17, I can weaken this voice of the compulsive gambler in me, and on good days, silence her. I can't remove her completely, and it is dangerous to underestimate her. But for today, she is not the boss of me.

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in any Gamblers Anonymous room  
This is not approved or appropriate literature

## The Man in the Mirror

At the end of a five-year gambling binge touched off by a nasty divorce, I found myself financially, emotionally, and spiritually bankrupt. Insanity was already present and prison or death were waiting in the wings. Yet I could not stop gambling. Gambling had become my Higher Power, leading me to ever lower levels of unmanageability.

So, was it the pain of that reality that finally brought me to the point of defeat? The point where I placed a call to the local Gamblers Anonymous Hotline? As strange as it may seem, no. My decision to reach out for help started with the fact that I did not recognize the man in the mirror when I shaved in the morning. This man had been raised in an environment of honesty and integrity. He had been shown by example a strong work ethic and taught how to be a productive member of a community. The man in the mirror was none of those. Who was this stranger who would lie, cheat, steal, and manipulate others to further the obsession to gamble without any regard for the consequences? Who was this man who had chosen gambling over being a father to his two children? Being the very confused person I was at that time, my first reaction was that now would be a good time to grow a beard! Then I wouldn't have to look in that mirror. Thankfully, my inability to connect my perception of who I thought I was to the reality of how I was leading my life broke through my denial and I made that call to the hotline.

But that is getting ahead of myself. Let me share what it was like, what happened, and what it's like today. I am the second of four in a middle-class family with roots in Montana. The small ranching community in which we lived was a great place to grow up. I was surrounded by a large extended family strongly rooted in Catholicism. I did not suffer from the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse that I hear in many GA members stories. I felt loved, yet there was a sense that something was missing, something was wrong.

I suffered from a deep feeling of inadequacy -- what I have heard described in the rooms as a "hole in the soul." I felt like I didn't fit in and was fearful that others would find out that I was lacking at \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank]. Thus, from an early age, I began to seek sources outside of myself to fill that hole in my psyche.

One way I did that was to be extremely competitive. I was driven to win. Board games, playground games, penny ante poker, any game: I needed to win. If I could do that, I was better than you and thus felt better about being myself. Early signs of my gambling addiction can be found in those behaviors. Another coping mechanism was that I started drinking at fourteen and was an apprentice alcoholic throughout high school. If I could out drink you and be the life of the party, you would like me.

I went off to college and found myself on an alcohol-fueled campus. Very shortly, I turned apprentice alcoholism into full-blown alcoholism. Alcohol started making life decisions for me. I walked away from football because it didn't allow me to drink like I wanted. I scheduled my classes and field of study to accommodate binge drinking. The poker games usually started Friday afternoon and went until Sunday morning. While I had not yet officially added compulsive gambling to my addictive repertoire, it was a beast waiting in the wings. I added drugs to the mix and remained blissfully inebriated for the remainder of my college days. I somehow managed to graduate but was unable and unwilling to face the prospect of a job or career. I had a career, a full-time job, "smoking and joking". As my peers went forward with their lives, I slid backwards. As

they started careers, got married and had kids, I took on seasonal work, rented dingy rooms, drove cheap cars, and spent winters stoned on the beaches of Mexico.

At age 25 I decided I would clean up my act, stop drinking and doing drugs, only to run head first into the boogey man of addictions: powerlessness. I couldn't stop. I checked myself into an outpatient treatment program. They might as well have been speaking a foreign language. I did not understand the reality of my condition. After completing that program, I stayed sober nine days. The good, bad, and ugly of that program? The good was that I had heard the message of Twelve Step Recovery. It would take twenty years for the seeds of that message to blossom but it was planted in my addled mind. The bad was I did not at all understand I was the problem, not the alcohol or drugs. The ugly, the very ugly, was that what had been open social use became closeted and shameful, giving my addictions even greater power.

I spent the next fifteen years acting sober while becoming very good at hiding the fact that I was still doing drugs. I got married, had two kids, started a business. These were all very adult things to do, regretfully, I was not an adult. I was an immature, self-centered, angry man playing the part of an adult. As I approached my forties, the burden of carrying that secret and the fact that my spouse and I were unhappy in our marriage became too much. The addiction that had been so patiently waiting, gambling, stepped out of the closet and immediately took center stage. I did not step across that line into irresponsible uncontrolled gambling -- I took a running leap! Within a short time, my life became focused on gambling. I slunk even further into that shadow world of a double life.

I started the circus performance of balancing multiple lies in order to explain time and money lost to gambling. The inevitable happened. I got caught up in a lie and the crushing burden of deceit placed my marriage at risk. "I am so sorry." "I won't do it again." "No, I don't have a problem." The litany went on and on. Getting caught up in lies the second time lit the fuse. Getting caught the *third* time set off the bomb. I was asked to find another place to live while my wife decided if she wanted to remain married. As I look back, the barefaced truth about the power of a gambling addiction really showed itself at that time. I was about to lose a marriage, access to my kids and place my business at risk. All good reasons to not gamble. Those of you reading this have a good idea what I did. I went into a gambling frenzy. I stopped paying taxes, I cashed out my retirement funds, I maxed out credit cards, I cheated customers, I borrowed money from relatives. All just to keep in action. Gambling became the anesthetic that dulled the pain of my reality.

The divorce was finalized, driving me further into the depths of my gambling addiction. Thoughts of suicide were present and I withdrew from the world. Thankfully, I was given the gift of desperation. In a moment of uncharacteristic clarity, I was able to see the impending doom. The man in the mirror and I had both finally reached a bottom.

I made that call to the GA Hotline and attended my first meeting. I don't remember much as I was in a daze. Two things stand out. For the first time in a long time I didn't feel alone. There were others who were caught up in a gambling addiction. I also came away with a sense of hope. There was a solution to be found in the rooms of Gamblers Anonymous. I didn't have any idea what that solution was, but I sensed it was there.

I started my journey into recovery. One day at a time, one meeting at a time, one phone call at a time. I was able to abstain from gambling and stack some clean time. I got a sponsor and became accountable to him. He sponsored by example, not by demands. He shared with me his experience, strength, and hope based upon working the steps. He gently pushed me into finding a life in the real world. A life not needing gambling to dull frustrations or to mask the responsibilities of facing life as an adult. I spent my first few years in the rooms dealing with delayed consequences. Facing the IRS, reconnecting with family, learning how to be a non-custodial father, rebuilding my business.

I listened intently as others described their recovery process. I read GA literature. I got involved with my local GA and did service. Slowly but surely my take on life and my fears of inadequacy changed. My experience mimicked a slogan I heard in meetings: "Let us love you until you can love yourself." A major turning point for me was when I was able to do a fearless and thorough Fourth Step. For the first time in my life I had a true picture of my character. That process also gave me information that allowed me to continue to work my way through the remainder of the Steps. I found that the framework of the Twelve Steps of Recovery was exactly what I needed. A way to live life on life's terms. An owner's manual for responsible adult living.

Early on I heard members identify themselves as "grateful" compulsive gamblers. That was a concept that I did not understand. How could someone be grateful to have experienced a gambling addiction? Today I get it. If I had not faced the harsh realities of my compulsive gambling, I would not have the life I have today. Self-love and the love and companionship of others on this journey have been true gifts generated by the Gamblers Anonymous Program.

Today I introduce myself as a grateful recovering compulsive gambler. Today I can look at the man in the mirror and smile.

## Hope in Nova Scotia

For too many years than I care to remember, as I gambled more and more compulsively, I convinced myself that I didn't have a gambling problem. I believed I could gamble and when it suited me stop. This of course was delusional on my part. I stopped only with the intent of "digging out" so as to be able to return and gamble "normally". I did this on a regular basis. Why? I did it because I am an addict. I did it because I didn't want to give up my lover, my confidant. I needed the warmth and escape that gambling offered me. I only cared about myself and my disease with no recognition of the unmanageability and moral corruption that consumed my life.

Then in utter and complete amazement I thought it might be time to seek help. Why? I don't know! How? I didn't know that either but did understand that I needed to find a way to not only stop but stay stopped. I had been to GA many years before. Wasn't for me! Those people were sick, much sicker than me. I got a counselor. I stopped. Four months later I started gambling and the counselor told me there was no more to be done in our sessions unless I also returned to GA. The other option was to stay on that gambling highway to hell.

I had to do something proactive. I was upset and floundering. Rather than a return to gambling I attended a GA meeting and was given the gift of hope. The group promised to love me until I could learn to love myself. They also told me the hard truth that if after 90 days of serious commitment to the GA Recovery Program I wanted my pain and misery back it would be refunded in full and they would wish me the best. The groups love, acceptance and guidance gave me hope and direction. I fought and fought. The disease of compulsive gambling was and still is very powerful. After a couple months of physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms I had an awakening in a meeting. I had to accept defeat, I had to admit I was powerless over gambling and embrace surrender to that reality not the delusion that I could control my gambling. Total abstinence was a better way than any "normal" gambling.

Thankfully and gratefully I chose the path of recovery. Was it easy? No! Has it been all peaches and cream? No! With the aid of many in the GA Fellowship life has become not only manageable but wonderful, one day at a time. The only suggestion I would ever give anyone still suffering from a gambling addiction is to dump the delusions that comes with the obsession to gamble. Seek help, it's there if you want it. Returning to the misery is easy. Finding and embracing recovery takes commitment and hard work.



## Both Feet In

I appreciate this opportunity to share my story. It is one way that I am celebrating my three years of active recovery in Gamblers Anonymous. In fact, the most profound change about this year is that I can look back at the last three years and actually remember how I got here and where I have been! This has certainly not been the case for most years of my life.

Due to consequences of addictions (both alcohol and then gambling) my memory is very spotty. I also have a minor brain injury which may or may not have happened due to my addiction. It is probably from a trampoline accident where I landed smack on my head. In any case, there are a lot of holes in my history and in my sense of self. Childhood plays into these losses as well. From as early as I can remember, I have felt a strong sense of shame. Shame is a thread that has permeated my entire life. As a small girl, I remember thinking there was some mistake. I wasn't supposed to be in this family. Something like the story of the prince and the pauper.

I was ashamed of being poor; I was ashamed of being a burden. I was ashamed that our mom couldn't take care of us and had to put all five of us kids into a children's home while she recovered from heart surgery. I was ashamed about childhood sexual abuse. I was even ashamed of my first name which the teachers always called me on the first day of school. With a red face, I would ask the teachers to please call me by my middle name. As an adult, I was ashamed of losing custody of my daughter and of not being a good mother. I was drowning in shame.

I first came to Gamblers Anonymous seventeen years ago. I wanted to just attend one meeting a week and have that be enough. I would get varying amounts of time free from gambling (twice I got to eighteen months), but I always relapsed because what I was doing wasn't enough. I had one foot in the door, and one foot out. I kept thinking I could do it on my own.

My final relapse involved playing casino games online. I rationalized it by believing that other long-term GA members were playing them, so it must be okay. A person couldn't even win money on these games; only more gambling time. I maxed out yet another credit card. I returned to lying and scheming and contemplating crime or suicide. I finally came clean (as usual) after exhausting all possibilities of attaining cash.

I went to my usual Monday night meeting and asked a woman to sponsor me. When she said yes, my hope began to grow. We began working on the Steps together. She was involved with the entertainment committee for an upcoming GA conference, and she invited anyone who wanted to join her to come to a local Thursday night meeting to practice a play prior to the start of the GA meeting. Unfortunately, my sponsor soon had to leave town to tend to a family emergency. By then, I had gotten into the habit of attending the Thursday night meeting after the play practice. Instead of feeling sorry for myself that my sponsor was away, I decided to consider the entire Thursday meeting group as my fill-in sponsor. This decision was an amazing turning point for me. This meeting is a "feedback" meeting, and I became open to listening to the wisdom of the other group members.

I had attended GA conferences before, but that year's was the first one that I enjoyed. I didn't spend most of my time hiding in my room!

Six months later, two women from the Thursday meeting invited me to road trip with them to a conference in a large city eight hours away. I went, and it was another huge turning point – and a great memory.

The following year I got involved with our local Intergroup and I also joined the area conference committee. I chaired the welcoming subcommittee and through this service, experienced an amazing strengthening of my recovery.

When I first came to GA, I was ashamed, depressed, and I felt completely incompetent about everything. Not anymore. I am so grateful for Gamblers Anonymous. For me, a real benefit of this program is that it helped me to break out of my shame. I think that shame grows in the darkness of isolation. Meetings, connecting, and sharing with others helps me to recognize shame and to keep it from dominating my life.

In meetings I have found support and connection. I've re-connected and awakened to a new spiritual life. I have a stronger sense of who I am and a sense of belonging.

Some days I still struggle with emotions and feelings. I found that challenges in service work were triggering my feelings of shame. I learned that I no longer want to “fly by the seat of my pants” or pretend I know what I am doing.

Today I am choosing to do service work that suits my talents. Although it was useful for a time, “acting as if” no longer serves my recovery. Something is shifting inside of me. I am gradually letting go of my need to people-please, but it is difficult because it is so ingrained. I am exploring my strengths, and I actually like myself! (Well, most days.) I am learning to forgive myself and life has become easier to handle.

I love more now. My wife and I are closer than we've ever been. I am so grateful that I didn't throw away our life together. We've been enjoying a lot of lovely trips together lately, something that had disappeared from our lives when I was gambling.

I can't believe that I have such a rich and blessed life. I now have both feet in the GA program. Thank you all. I am ever grateful.

## In Closing

We hope you have found information in this book that will be helpful in your recovery. We hope you have found tools to aid in the practice of the Gamblers Anonymous Program. We hope we have shown that while we are all individuals, there is a common thread of an obsession to gamble woven into all of our stories.

Simply reading this book will be helpful, but that alone will not be enough to recover from a gambling addiction. We are a fellowship of action. Recovery is not a passive process. If we are to be free, we need to practice the spiritual principles of recovery in all our affairs. Remember what our literature tells us about compulsive gamblers:

*“The most difficult and time-consuming problem with which they will be faced is that of bringing about a character change within themselves. Most Gamblers Anonymous members look upon this as their greatest challenge which should be worked on immediately and continued throughout their lives.”*

We wish you well on your journey within the worldwide Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous.

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