

NEW LIFE

A Journal of Experience,
Strength and Hope in
Gamblers Anonymous

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www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who have joined together to do something about their own gambling problem and to help other compulsive gamblers to do the same. This journal comprises contributions from compulsive gamblers who want to share their experience, strength and hope. The opinions expressed may not be those of the Fellowship.

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Visitors to Ireland can find details of their nearest meeting at **www.gamblersanonymous.ie**

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**A Journal of
Experience, Strength and Hope
in Gamblers Anonymous**



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A NOTE FROM EDITOR

To have been invited to share a part in this powerful magazine is both a privilege and a pleasure. My thanks and sincere gratitude go to Paul, our outgoing editor and the fantastic team he assembled. His vision and drive led to a complete overhaul of the publication to make it fit for purpose in the present time. There will be no changes for change's sake, and our mission is to bring the good news that lies in recovery and in the total honesty of those who submit their stories.

I recently travelled to London to meet 'The Boss Lady' and have communicated, via the ether, with the rest of the team. And what a team! I am sure you will agree that the visual makeover was nothing short of stunning and I, for one, could not wait to pick up the most recent copy. Feedback is already indicating that the visual makeover is impacting positively and the stories within are no less moving; in fact, they represent the core ambition of any compulsive gambler – to recover and lead a healthy life. The meetings and fellowship within GA are critical in recovery, as we all tread a path that will go on for the rest of our lives.

While we rightly focus on our addiction as gamblers, there is a good number within GA who share multiple addictions. I recently had the privilege to attend a GA meeting within the forbidding walls of a female prison. All manner of addictions is part of the day-to-day prison life for some, and their relief in being able to talk freely and share was quite humbling.

One of the most exciting developments within the fellowship has been increased involvement of women and their determination to play their part in its running. My own experiences of meetings have

shown all too often a minority representation, when we know from statistics, this is not the case with compulsive gambling. I am proud to include stories and poems that represent the entire spectrum of the gambler and their struggle.

We recently said a sad goodbye to Paul K, our former New Life editor and former National Secretary within GA, Glyn. Unfortunately, Paul K was involved in a serious car collision last year which left his right leg severely fractured and he is unable to continue his role. Paul K, I wish you a speedy recovery and I promise to pass on the baton as best as I can as the new editor. Thank you for your commitment, dedication and hard work which has breathed life into this magazine. New Life is a great asset to newcomers and old timers. The legacy that Glyn has left behind is still being felt and appreciated by those who pass through our doors. To quote his family; 'GA saved his life!' I know him personally, and I know how humble he was and how his deepest desire was to see others turn their lives around. He realised how much it meant to him and worked tirelessly to help others.

New Life is a hope we all carry in GA, as well as the title of this magazine, please do continue to submit your stories and poems to New Life as we are always desperate to receive the material. Please do tell your own stories. Let us give the hope we have to others who still need it.

Please do keep your contributions coming in along with ideas and suggestions for any features you would like to see included. Please send to:

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MEETING LIST

We have a full list of meetings online. Meetings are free to attend. To find out where your nearest meeting is visit:

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

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The Gambling Lady

My name is Lisa, and I am a compulsive gambler.

I would like to thank Basildon GA for bringing me into the fellowship. Basildon is not my usual group, but it is the one where I attended my first meeting and the one which set me on the road to what is now 57 weeks without gambling.

A bit about me, I am 46 years of age. I have two children Georgia and Danny, who are 23 and 22 respectively, and I also have a wonderful husband, Gary.

When my darling Georgia arrived on this planet, there were complications in her birth. These complications resulted in her becoming starved of oxygen. Consequently, she spent the first two to three years of her life in the care of Great Ormond Street Hospital. I have been her full-time carer for all her life, which has had its challenges.

My Danny is the most thoughtful, kind and loving son anyone could wish for, and he is also a fantastic brother for Georgia.

Now to the story of how I come to gamble with my whole life.

My introduction to gambling came as a youngster when, like many children, I innocently played cards for pennies in our home. At the time, I had no idea my own dad was, in fact, a gambling addict himself. We'd go to arcades at the seaside, and it was my dad who took me to my first casino. The bright flashing lights lured me in, and I've been there ever since. I'd be playing in betting shops, bingo halls and any venue where you can win, but more often than not, lose money.

However, those innocent games turned into something more sinister. Once I was old enough to be earning a wage, I became hooked. As I grew older, it became a release from my problems, my escape into my little world away from reality. But more of that later.

I'm aware that as a woman with a gambling addiction, I am in the minority. The ladies are always fewer than the men in each of the vital support groups that I attend with Gamblers Anonymous. It has taken me so long to see how this affliction can destroy lives, and without getting too emotional at the start of my story, it is only the support of Gamblers Anonymous, and that of my family, that has kept me alive.

The first significant thing to talk about is my biggest high as a gambler. Fittingly, it came at a place I went to so often, a place my dad introduced me to, Rendezvous in Southend. Five of us went there for an evening. I played, as usual, five-card poker. The club was connected to others nationwide and the jackpot that night was a huge sum. That's a life changing amount for many. It was Chinese New Year, the place was packed and soon the hands were dealt.

Immediately I spotted I had a flush of five diamonds, so I thought I might be in with a chance of winning a decent amount. I placed my small stake and then sorted the cards in order. I realised I had ten, jack, queen, king and ace. My heart was pounding so hard it almost burst from my body; such a hand NEVER happens!

Once the dealer spotted it as I laid the cards down, he pressed a buzzer, and the place went ballistic. The managers came over. I was mobbed and taken somewhere quiet and told what would happen. I was even asked to appear in the local Southend paper.

A week later, the cheque came through. At the age of 30, it felt it was a great thing to happen to my family and me. I gave my lovely sister a large sum of money and she bought a caravan. My family all went on holiday to Florida and we did our house up. But instead of making me sensible and helping us out, my windfall simply fed my addiction and paved the way for things to get much worse.

My husband, at the time, tried to help but did not have much idea. We separated but kept getting back together. I was out of control. Without anyone knowing, I remortgaged the house. Twice. The debts were mounting up, and I had taken out loans of considerable sums.

My former husband and I decided it was time to split for good, but before we did, he paid the standard fee it cost back then for me to declare myself bankrupt. I thought this was it the lowest point I could drop to. We had lost our home. The place for Georgia, Danny and I to live in was to be a hostel. It wasn't the type of venue for raising children, so they were loved and looked after by my family, and I was on my own at the hostel.

Somehow, we, or more accurately I got lucky. Within eight weeks we were found a three bedroom flat by the council.

They paid for our rent, and gave other allowances, which meant the children did not go wanting for anything. Our bills were all paid on time. But sadly, I still had money left over to gamble, and I contrived to throw it all away. I could yet feed my habit secretly. I went on holidays, but online gambling had started by this point, and I became hooked. Even when I went to bowling, something I found I was good at, there were fruit machines to play. Bingo and betting on horses and dogs took more money. You've heard the phrase betting on two flies crawling up a wall, well that was me.

I became so good at lying and around the corner came new lows. It should have been sinking in big time that I had a habit. I tried attending GA but gave up after just a few months.

I had a weekly poker competition that I went to in Southend. I was good at it, a rarity, as not many women reach this level. But once the game ended at midnight or 1am, I would go and spend any winnings in the casino or the machines next door. If I got knocked out early, I'd pretend I hadn't and go next door and lose. I lost a few thousand pounds and was in an appalling mess. On the early morning drive home, I called LBC radio and told them I was in a suicidal state. Southend Pier wasn't far away.

In desperation, I contacted my dad for help, and he bailed me out. He paid the money I owed and said he was taking control of my money and debts. It got more manageable for a while. But soon after he got ill and when he was on his death bed, in one of our last conversations, I promised him I would never bet again. But I broke that promise very quickly.

Still ashamed, I got a break. A wonderful new man came into my life. Gary and I took it slowly at first. After a few months, I dared to tell him my story up to this point. He said we would get through it.

My weekly escape to Southend was, I thought, something I could continue to handle. For a while, I was just entering the poker tournaments that I truly believed needed purely skill to win. However, I backtracked, and the old foes rose again. I was still feeding the addiction, and the casino was costing me – big time.

Then came the chance to bet with phone apps. I was gambling on the number of corners, throw-ins and goal kicks there would be in football matches for God's sake!

I was insistent that I was coming home after the tournament ended, but in reality, I was gambling on the machines. People in different casinos, betting shops and bingo halls all over East London and Essex knew me so well. I even went to different new ones to try and keep it a secret.

But things were excellent, and Gary and I decided to get married in Las Vegas, of all places. It was a lovely wedding. After the reception, we went out for a great evening. We arrived back exhausted at silly o'clock, and most people went to bed. I though stayed in the casino for a few hours.

In 2019, I came out of bankruptcy after seven years, and I was immediately flooded out with letters and emails offering me loans – this is something that I think has to stop in today's world! I got into another four figure sum of debt from the money I had borrowed with a payday loan and lost it in a matter of days. I begged my son to bail me out. He did, and I have now paid him back in full.

Then came the moment of salvation. The penny finally dropped that I urgently needed help. I contacted Alex on April 1st, last year. He knew I needed help. Within hours I was attending every GA meeting I could. The deception stopped. Gary and my family know everything. I love Gary so much and do not want to lose him.

With GA, it is one step at a time. We worked out a programme. I feel safe with the people around me. My husband and son have been to meetings and know the environment and are aware of how much it is helping me. It is hard, and I am not going to pretend it is easy. Some days it is one hour at a time, even one minute at a time.

If I was a drug or alcohol addict, the people close to me or my work colleagues can physically see what is happening to me. With gambling, it is all a secret. I wear this necklace with our serenity prayer on it, and we end our meetings with a prayer from our orange book. I have only taken the chain off once since last April, and that was for a hospital examination. I take snippets out of that book and these guide me through the hard times.

GA has both changed and saved my life. It is a unity group, and it is my lifeline. I will need their aid, and my loving family's support for the rest of my life to beat this. It is thanks to both I have now had peace of mind for 54 weeks. It's been over a year since I had a bet of any kind. I need to dedicate three hours a week to GA every week for the rest of my life, and what's more, I want to.

A friend of mine told me that given that I am such an outgoing person who loves people, he found it incredible that I not only kept it a secret for so long but shunned the company of others to go off and do all this on my own.

Looking back, I am angry at the time I have lost that I am never going to get back in my life, spending 12 hours at a time in casinos and other places where I could play on anything. I have told parts of my story to meetings before. It has reduced many grown men to tears. Essentially, this is how it is, some highs, but many, many lows. Gambling is a silent addiction, and it is a silent killer. Thankfully, I am surviving at the moment. I have much in my life to both be grateful for and to live for, and for this, I thank all who have assisted me.

Before I came to GA, I was having nightmares most nights and had a lot of anxiety because of my gambling. Since coming to the GA family, I have returned to a healthier life. I've been able to take my sister and family out for days, treat people to things and go away for weekends without resorting to borrowing money or the credit card. I've used the money I have been able to save because I have not wasted it gambling.

I have peace of mind, instead of worrying about where the money is going to come from for gambling.

Finally, I wish to declare my undying appreciation for everyone at Upminster GA, who have nourished and strengthened me. Without them, I certainly would not be here. I wish to thank Alex, especially. You literally saved me. Lastly, my amazing friends and family who have stuck by me through thick and thin, including Colin, who helped me prepare this story.

From, Lisa.

The Gambling Cabbie

My name is Dean, and I am a compulsive gambler.

My last bet was on Wednesday 5th April 2017 in Nunhead, South East London at approximately noon. For me, it's important to remember my last bet and remember the pain that I was feeling. And to remind myself of how desperate I was. That final day of gambling – I felt very isolated, like a shipwrecked man on a desert island. I couldn't see a future, and I had no hope. I believed I was a hopeless case.

However, thanks to the gift that is the desperation I felt that day, I finally held my hands up and surrendered. I was in constant emotional, mental and physical pain. I was getting pins and needles in my arms, heart palpitations, a knot in my stomach and had tension in my back and neck – all caused by the stress of an 18 month relapse.

I had smashed myself to pieces with relentless hours, days, weeks and months of gambling. I was numb. So on April 6th 2017, I told my wife of the full extent of my gambling relapse. She gave me an ultimatum, and so I went back to a GA meeting, some 24 hours after my last bet. I entered the meeting with my tail between my legs to give it another shot.

Thankfully I was welcomed back with open arms.

I had been no stranger to GA. I had attended GA meetings for 15 years prior and had long periods of abstinence before. Twice I had three and a half years off, but I then stopped going to meetings – a standard indicator for relapsing.

Deep down, I had faith the meetings would work again, although I acknowledged that they would only work by me getting to plenty of meetings and by working the recovery programme and getting a sponsor. I have done each of those things, and I still use each to this very day.

My experience of gambling started when I was very young. At five or six years of age, I started gambling. While other children flocked to the Space Invaders or Formula One car racing games, I only had eyes for the brightly flashing fruit machines of the caravan clubhouse.

Throughout my childhood, I was in a gambling environment – whether I was with my family playing cards, visiting bingo halls, in the pub or at amusement arcades. Gambling was all around me at an early age. I would play fruit machines, donkey derby or a horse racing game in the loft arcades, where they offered money or prizes to the victors. At the time, I truly loved it. I continued to gamble throughout my teens, but at this point, it still hadn't become a problem. However, my gambling was to become a problem at around 24 – just as I became a self-employed London cab driver. Granted, I had been visiting betting shops before becoming a cab driver, but it wasn't until then I began to lose control.

One particular day in 1998, I remember winning big with a very lucky bet. I backed a horse that had my surname in it. Sure enough, it romped home. It was my biggest ever win to that date, the equivalent of two weeks' worth of wages. I had a pocket full of money. I felt incredible; I was the man, or so I thought.

The joy didn't last.

My immediate two thoughts after that big win were; “why didn’t I put more money on!” and “I could make a career or some extra money from this gambling malarkey – it’s easy money.” Straightaway, I wanted more. It wasn’t enough. What dangerous thoughts they proved to be.

I became a certified cabbie in November 2000, and I entered the big wide world of work. I resolved to have a right good old go at these bookmakers and take them to the cleaners! I believed I would not have to work for the life I wanted; I could simply win it. What an ego I had and how wrong would I turn out to be! Very quickly, my big plan to take the bookies to cleaners was down the pan. Within a year or so, I was in the betting shop all day, every day. Sometimes I won, but like all compulsive gamblers, I always gave it back in the end.

To start with, I was betting my wages, but very quickly I was taking out loans, credit cards and borrowing from friends, robbing Peter to pay Paul so to speak.

I was in a financial mess and so was my head, an absolute mess! It got to the stage where:

- I didn’t know how to stop.
- It had got out of hand.
- I was losing more than I could afford.
- My gambling was controlling me.
- I was consumed by gambling.
- Something that started as enjoyable was now painful, I stopped enjoying it.

Although I acknowledge I was still probably getting a buzz and adrenaline rush out of it, I did want to stop. I just didn't know how to.

I was lying to my wife, family and friends as to why I had no money or why I was constantly working. I was irritable and I was angry. I was getting impatient while driving. Alongside losing my money, I was also losing my head.

So, after many failed attempts to stop gambling on my own, I found a GA meeting in London and passed through the GA doors for the first time around

2002 to 2003. I attended GA for six months and got some abstinence under my belt. After I thought I had found the cure, I stopped attending the meetings and quickly started gambling again, with the relapse being worse than before.

This constant process happened for the next 15 years, from 2002 to 2017. It was an endless cycle of going to meetings, abstaining, stop attending, followed by a more significant relapse. Again and again; meetings, abstinence, stop attending and then another more prominent and more disastrous relapse. This cycle continued until Wednesday 5th April 2017.

Today I can proudly say I attend regular meetings and adhere to a daily programme. I feel strong. The other main differences today are:

- Today I attend 2/3 meetings a week.
- I give service, even something simple like making the teas of coffee, or by taking up another service position.
- I work with my sponsor through the 12 steps.
- I write a daily gratitude list – of 10 things.
- I try to meditate daily.
- I try to call other members daily.
- I pray for a clean and sober day.
- I say thanks for a clean and sober day.
- I sponsor and help guide others through the 12 step recovery programme.
- I exercise regularly.

These are just some of the suggestions for improvement that were given to me.

Today I endeavour to immerse myself in recovery and try to take myself out of my comfort zone. By implementing the daily suggestions and twelve steps, I've learnt lots about myself. I am aware of my defects and also my strengths, which we all have. For me, the programme helps me improve my self-awareness, and it serves as a personal development programme.

What's more, it's all for free!

I simply try to take action by doing the daily suggestions given to me by my sponsor. Thankfully, these days I can consider my feelings, and I can live with my feelings/emotions or put them down on to paper. I don't have to run from them anymore.

I now both acknowledge and recognise why I gambled; gambling changed the way I feel. It gave me a high. It was a buzz, butterflies in the stomach, excitement and nervousness which derived from the anticipation of the horses or dogs entering the traps. The difference today is that I now understand and acknowledge my gambling has consequences. I don't know when to stop. Therefore, I choose not to start. I can't have the second bet if I don't have the first.

Today I accept this is an addiction immersed in feelings and emotions.

Thanks to the meetings and the recovery programme GA has provided me, I can better manage and cope with my feelings and emotions. I deal with life, on life's terms. Now I don't run into a betting shop to lift me or to escape. I don't want to either. I urge anyone who is struggling; please don't take 15 years to find and start working on the 12 step programme. It truly works. It's a programme for living.

Thanks to GA.

Hope and strength to all.

From, Dean.

What a Difference a Year Makes

Staying Calm in a COVID-19 World

My name is 'Boss Lady', and I am a compulsive gambler.

I would like to open this prose with a moment of silence for the long-suffering gambling addicts both in and out of these rooms... It was not that long ago I was in their shoes. By the grace and mercy of God, I have stayed off a bet one day at a time. If you are a newcomer and you are reading our New Life magazine for the first time, I welcome you. You are the most important person here in the fellowship, I want you to know you can make a new choice today to stop gambling. The mind is like a parachute, it works best when open. Listen to the similarities and not the differences, get to as many online meetings or in-person meetings as possible. You are safe here, welcome home.

Now more than ever in a new world of COVID-19 also known as coronavirus I cling tight to my GA programme. I did it, I went four seasons without having a bet. I remember when I could not even get a day clean and here I am one year and two months off a bet. You see it is not the length of time you have had off a bet it is more about how you have had a personality change and a spiritual transformation. Recovery does not just happen, you have to work at it. All my life I have chosen the path of least resistance. I have always wanted the easy way out and I hated all manner and forms of restrictions placed on me. I told myself I am a free spirit, yet it was my best thinking that brought me to my knees and back into the Gamblers Anonymous rooms. I work a perfect programme imperfectly and today I am okay with that. I have over-stood and yes I mean to say over-stood, that this is a programme of progress, not perfection.

Handing over my will at Step 3 was a huge turning point for me, as I became enlightened. There is power in the words "Thy will be done." I have no control over the happenings of the world on a global level, yet I can feed and water my mind, body and soul with the 12 steps to heal what ails me permanently. I have always ran from pain, I never wanted to experience discomfort, yet today is a new day and I am able to stay off a bet one day at a time. Although I put on weight in the process as I flitter from one addiction to another I know

that my higher power has got me. I am covered by a loving God who is greater than me and who has restored me to sanity and all I needed to do was to show a willingness to work my recovery. A wise sage told me: "It works if you work it."

I continue to work it! Do not let the word God put you off, you only need to choose a God of your own understanding that is not a human being. I can only share what worked for me and I have a solid belief in God that is unshakable and I am unapologetic about that.

What is helping me stay sane is the fact that I have made a decision to reframe my narrative of negative and repetitive media tags. Self-isolation means a spiritual retreat, social distancing means God's protection and COVID-19/coronavirus means world transformation in whatever shape or form it takes, death means transition onto the next journey. I could sit here and saturate my mind with every news report, television broadcast and death woes globally however, I have other options. I know I need to do my part by staying safe at home and follow instructions; something that would never happen in my gambling career.

Recovery has taught me that I cannot control people, places or things, so I don't even bother. What I can control is how I react to outside stimuli and for damn sure I have no desire to be running back to those slots machine anytime soon. You see I win every night I put my head on my pillow and haven't had to place that first bet that day. I have the privilege to share my strength, hope and experience in recovery and I have valued the lesson of how to deal with life on life's terms.

Currently I am working on my Step 4 and it is the most revealing part of the steps for me personally. I have found it exhilarating yet emotional. I am looking at what ails me and taking note of years of resentments that have made me constantly relapse in all areas of my life. My Sponsor is firm and does not allow me to slack off as I did in my former days. A Sponsor/Sponsee relationship is a sacred one. Often I have felt resistance because I wanted an easier, softer way. Yet the most interesting thing that happened was I realised that I was a workaholic – I have no boundaries with my clients. I would allow them to contact me any time of the night and I was suffering from sheer exhaustion.

Because I was in the madness, I could not see it. One of the first things my Sponsor pointed out to me was I needed to take better care of myself.

Well this was a completely foreign concept to me and I was very uncomfortable telling clients in particular that this would be the new protocol. My people-pleasing self felt super guilty that I was not running myself ragged at their disposal. Then I went on to learn more about my defects and that I moan way too much. I took other people's inventories and can be super negative at times in my self-talk. It was like my sponsor was holding up a mirror of truth to me and on some days, I did not like it, but most days I humbled myself and followed their direction.

I am very good at getting in my own way and I had to get my ego to step aside. I am an advocate of the steps and would highly recommend you get a Sponsor and become accountable to them on a daily basis, as it will help you as you go through the day to day living in recovery and is a fantastic support. When looking for a Sponsor make sure you can connect with them and can relate to their recovery.

It has not all been sunshine and roses in recovery. When my friend Babs died on 27th December 2019, I wanted to break out so bad, as I have never had to deal with death in recovery. I've never cried so much in such a long while. It was a river of tears and going to sleep on that first night was the hardest and I leaned on a very special recovery friend who propped me up and kept me focused. I will always be forever grateful to them.

To be honest, when I first got clean, I told myself I would stay off a bet for one year and then I would be cured and I can go back out there. As I approached my first year in recovery I could instinctively tell I was talking myself into a relapse because, firstly, I knew the signs and secondly, I have a sick, addict, mind that must take my 12-step medicine on a daily basis.

I had to fully concede and submit to my programme and stop being the wilful, poor little girl I was playing. I had to grow up and put my big girl pants on. Deep down I knew I never really wanted to have another bet; I just wanted the pain to stop. I really had to say goodbye to the little girl who liked living on the edge.

When I first became free of a bet, I thought my life was over and I was so boring, when in fact I was balancing out. Unless I had drama in my life, I did not know what a normal life looked like post-gambling. A new normal takes courage and some getting used to. The point that I am making is that, even after one year being clean, my mind told me I could have a bet when the tough times hit. My next step was to go to meetings regularly and expose that lie. I am aware that my next bet could be only one minute away I know that I have a bet in me but I do not know if I have another recovery in me. This is why it is easier for me to stay off a bet than to relapse. To stay clean and bet free, every morning I wake up and I do my sponsor's suggestions which are:

1. Say the serenity prayer
2. Read a Day at a Time (blue book)
3. Read Just for Today (orange book)
4. Meditate
5. Call 2 newcomers
6. Write a gratitude list

With my OCD and coronavirus, I definitely could not see myself back in those grimy arcades/casinos and as soon as my self-preservation was threatened I began to wake up.

I thought, how long have I got left on the planet to continue to fulfil my purpose? When we went into lockdown any grand delusions of being cured and having another bet left me. The obsession was finally lifted and I know, with the help of God, the programme, the fellowship and my sponsor; just for today I will not gamble. I cannot say it will be easy but I know it will be worth it, one day at a time. I wish you well during this turbulent season that we are collectively going through, keep safe, work the steps and you too can abstain from this hideous disease. The greatest advice I can give to you is no matter how much you struggle to stay clear of that first bet:

KEEP COMING BACK!

By 'Boss Lady'

Five Meetings in Five Days

My name is Steve, and I am a compulsive gambler.

To mark a key milestone in my abstinence from gambling, I wish to reflect on what was a truly special week in 2019. I'd also like to discuss how GA has worked for me over the last 17 years. On 18th October 2019, I was proud to reach five years since my previous bet. It is with thanks to the help of GA and the support from close family and friends that I can celebrate such a feat.

To mark this landmark, I resolved to do something a little different, by attempting to attend five GA meetings on five consecutive days. My usual meetings were Nottingham on a Sunday and Chesterfield on a Monday; therefore, I had to find meetings for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

I explored the GA website to look for meetings nearby on those nights. And so, I decided to go to Doncaster on Tuesday, Rotherham on the Wednesday and Sheffield on Thursday. My very own Tour de Yorkshire!

The week arrived, and my customary Nottingham and Chesterfield meetings went well on the Sunday and Monday. I managed to drum up a bit of interest amongst my peers to join me throughout the week at the various other meetings. I was already feeling genuinely upbeat about the three meetings to follow, but words fail to do justice to describe how positive I felt each night commuting home from each meeting. The reaction I got from telling my story to a new meeting was fantastic and I felt humbled by the various feedback I received each night.

I first passed through the doors of GA in 2003 as a fresh-faced 23 year-old man and managed to attain five years abstinence. With this significant time under my belt, I began fading away from the meetings as I started a family and my priorities changed. I then returned to GA in 2014 after a nine month gambling binge. I recognised I had to do things differently, but most significantly I needed to persist with my meetings and refrain from becoming complacent again.

Recognition of this massively spurred me on when I made it to five years clean once again last October. To ensure I do not make the same mistake I had previously, I have sought to make an effort to share my story with others and experience other meetings. I would implore people to visit new meetings like me, as it's beneficial to hear different stories and perspectives on recovery. Some meetings have slightly diverse formats, the general message/concept is the same, and they are all incredibly beneficial.

In the week of my Tour de Yorkshire, I believe I travelled around 300 miles commuting around the various meetings, and guess I met around 90 fellow compulsive gamblers, each with their unique story and it was worth it.

I wish to extend a special thanks to the members of the Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield meetings, for making me feel welcome and for the extraordinary meetings I experienced.

So, what now? I avoid getting carried away and continue to take things one day a time, keeping my meetings firmly in my weekly routine. I will never be cured. There is no cure for compulsive gambling, but with GA, you can arrest it. I will always need GA in my life.

In Unity, Steve.

Going Back

My name is Karun, and I am a compulsive gambler.

Yesterday I went back to my auntie's house. A home I left two and a half years ago, after previously being told never to step foot in the house again. In the interest of adding some context, my mum died when I was a little boy, and my dad struggled to deal with the loss. He turned to alcohol and my aunt and uncle turned to my recently born brother and me.

Yesterday I was reminded of the time my aunt gave birth on the same day as my Year 4 school play. She discharged herself the same day to ensure I'd have

a family member like my 'mum' at the show. My uncle married into the family and is not my blood. Despite this, he always went against his whole family to ensure I was taken care of, as though I was his child. Those two beautiful people were my family, and a family I broke because of my illness.

Two years ago, I stood in that very living room, alongside my distraught wife, my aunt and uncle, and my former employer, from who I had stolen a mind-blowing amount of money. I did so without his knowledge, and by using a vulnerable, old accountant, who I had managed to wrap around my little finger. I will always regard that day as the worst day of my life. Yesterday, I went back to live that moment again.

Even now, I remember walking from that room and apologising, though the word 'sorry' had come out of my mouth more times than most. The boy that cried 'wolf' summed up their feelings towards me that horrible day. They would tell me I was to blame for breaking my family, and that it was better off that my mum was dead, so she didn't have to see me like this, and my wife should never have my children as I'd ruin their lives too.

When I got the message from my aunt yesterday that she had accepted the offer to see me and talk, my heart sunk, I thought I was ready to speak, but in a split-second my world had crashed again. Only this time, I had a wife beside me who said she was proud of me and gave up her evening at her mum and dad's house to be by my side.

My biggest fear had always been the prospect of speaking to my family and being told they wanted money back. Of course, I pay them what I owe every month, but I could never clear off debts all at once, and I knew that. However, as soon as I walked through the door, and sat in the same spot on the sofa as I had two years prior, I quickly realised what the room teaches; "it's not about the money."

I was told how my actions had caused my aunt to sell a house, a house that was her last memory of my grandad and mother. My younger brother needed to be picked up daily, because his immediate family was either dead, or addicted to a life-ruining cause. My cousins, who previously had looked up to

me, blamed themselves for months and were pulled out of private school because of the effect it had on them.

These were a few of the things that I was told.

I had learnt a lot in the last two and a half years, and I explained that I'm a compulsive gambler, but I was treating my recovery seriously this time. After all, it was the first time I'd faced them after accepting step one, "I had admitted I was powerless over gambling and my life had become unmanageable."

I told them that I'd worked hard, and despite being told I'd never work in the PR industry again, I grafted my way back to the top and had a better job than I ever had before. I'd had five positions in the time I'd been away and had gone no longer than two weeks unemployed.

I told them how I hadn't just stopped gambling. I now work on my compulsive nature and manage my drinking, anger and most of all, my ability to tell the truth. I explained that my wife controls my money and that I now come to the room every week. I revealed to them how dearly I miss having them in my life.

If GA and the room has taught me anything, it's one step at a time. Not just with staying away from the first bet, but one step at a time for recovery and life as a whole. Yesterday was a baby step in my recovery, but something which helped me immensely.

Two years ago, I walked away from that very house alone and I tried to kill myself. Yesterday, I walked away smiling, holding my wife's hand as tightly as I could imagine.

Thank you, GA, Acton.

From, Karun.

There Once Was a Time When Everything Was Dark

My name is Paul, and I am a compulsive gambler.

Everything was bleak, and I was getting tired of thinking on my feet. The end seemed so near and all hope was lost. The debts were piling up, no loan or win appeared to stem the financial problem, the hole just got bigger and bigger and bigger. My ambitions drained, and my will to carry on was soon fading. I felt there were only a few options left for me to take.

Then, I found the room and the brilliant strangers within. With each week of attendance, I grew stronger even though it didn't feel that way at the time. I struggled with the first step: yes, I was a compulsive gambler, but I felt my life had never been unmanageable.

Then, it hit me like a brick wall. The reason I always thought I'd managed my life until this point was because I wasn't living life like a normal person. I was digging my holes and expected someone to bail me out. As soon as someone had bailed me out, I would then get to work and start digging another hole for myself to fall into again.

Without the room and the advice I've received over the two years, I wouldn't be here today. I can now provide support to new members close and far, showing them hope that there is life without gambling, and it's a good life. I may never be "normal", but I am happy to share my experience and enjoy living life on life's terms.

From Paul, Wolverhampton.

One Hundred Days

My GA recovery is something that ‘needs’ to happen. Equally, it’s something I must want and that I know I must work very hard for, even though I sometimes do not believe that I am worthy of it.

I would prefer to go through life knowing I am a recovering compulsive gambler who abstains rather than go through life gambling and trying to convince myself that I am not. A dishonest way of life is energy depleting. Living with such an approach has crushed my soul, taken my friends, my family and my very being. For me there is no inbetween. Either I live the GA way of living or I resort back to my destructive gambling. Frankly, I have had enough.

The GA way of life for me is taking things one day at a time; attend meetings, reach out to other members and to enjoy my recovery. GA was here before I was born and will be here long after I die. I am at peace, knowing the rooms will always be there for me. I cannot do it alone – my head is just too messed up.

When in isolation, I convince myself I am ok and that I can control my addictions. I will say that I wasn’t ‘too bad’ or that maybe I deserve the pain of gambling. I turned into a nasty and horrible person. I lied, stole, cared for no one and manipulated others. It was the only way I could feed my addiction and my lonely, broken and deluded mind. I justified things that regular people could not explain. I lacked empathy, heart, guilt and shame. I built a brick wall in front of my emotions to avoid these feelings, and as they went, so did any joy, happiness, love or compassion I had. I was not myself anymore. I was a slave to my addiction. Immature, irresponsible and self-hating. I turned off my conscience so I could not feel.

My goal isn’t merely to avoid betting. It was when I first walked into the room, but now I have a new goal. To love myself enough so that I don’t need to gamble.

Love is the most beautiful and powerful emotion in the world. I had none before GA. I could not look myself in the mirror, I did not truly love others and

I did not love myself. I could not hug my mother and tell her I love her. That is where addiction led me. However, thanks to GA and the love of the rooms, I am starting to get some self-love back. This self-love comes by changing who I was and by becoming a better and decent person.

The mentality and behaviour of compulsive gamblers, drug addicts and alcoholics is wholly irrational. Until you understand that they are completely powerless over their addiction unless they have structured help, they have no hope. I am a gambling addict and I can always revert to gambling, that is what is natural for me. I have done it countless times in the past. I love the lights, the escape, the sounds, the promises. I want to have a bet, but at the same time, I don't. Insanity.

I can indeed recover, but only if I put in the same effort into my recovery as I did into my gambling.

I lied to everyone I loved, spent hours reading odds and tips, ventured miles upon miles to foray into betting establishments and spent whole days just gambling, non-stop. Since I committed to my recovery, I endeavour to be honest to everyone I love, now spend hours reading GA literature, venture miles to GA meetings and spend full days being grateful for what I have. I know as I give to the world, the world gives back to me. I will pour my heart and soul into recovery to give both others and me a decent life.

From Anonymous.

GA: Much More Than Avoiding the First Bet

My name is Paul, and I'm a compulsive gambler.

My homegroup is Bundoran in County Donegal in the Irish Republic, and we are part of the Ulster Region.

On Saturday afternoon, 2nd November 2019, I was in a serious road traffic accident. My wife and sons came to the hospital, where I appeared to be stable and after three hours, my wife took our sons home so as not to distress them further. The assumption was that I would receive pain relief, before being transferred to Altnagelvin Hospital which has a specialist orthopaedic unit, as I had suffered a badly fractured fibia, a shattered kneecap, broken ribs and several broken bones in my back.

But in the evening, I deteriorated.

My blood pressure dropped to 80 systolic. At that point, my wife was called and asked to come back to the hospital. I had stabilised a little, so the nurse reassured my wife that it wasn't critical, but she should get to the hospital as soon as she could.

We live 50 miles from family. It was after 10pm on a Saturday evening and the kids had already gone to bed, emotionally shattered from the day's events. My wife didn't want to wake them up and drag them to the hospital. Nor did she want to annoy neighbours so late, moreover, she didn't feel close enough to them personally. So, who do you call in such circumstances?

Catherine rang her Gam-Anon buddy, Jo. We got to know her and her husband John when they lived here in Ireland. Jo and John, who is a GA member, have been dependable friends to Catherine and I ever since we met. Catherine and Jo discussed her options, and it boiled down to two choices: call a neighbour or call another Gam-Anon member, Madeleine who lives in Sligo, about 30 miles away. The conversation with Jo established that Catherine's heart lay with calling Madeleine, and so she did. We later learned that if Madeleine had not received a call she would have felt hurt.

Around an hour later, Madeleine was at the door and with her was my co-founder of the Bundoran GA Group, Paul C. Madeleine's husband, Patsy, another GA member, had called Paul and informed him of the situation. Paul left his home to drive Catherine the 26 mile journey back to the hospital. Our boys remained sound asleep after their mentally exhausting day and Madeleine merely got into our bed and told Catherine to take her time. My boys, Thomas and Michael, didn't even know Catherine had left.

At the hospital, I was heavily sedated so that a cast could temporarily protect my leg. I'd probably dipped about 9.15pm, but sometime after 11, I got a lovely surprise when I saw my wife and Paul walk into the resuscitation room.

You cannot put a price on the lengths members will go to help one another. Catherine and Paul stayed with me until nearly 4am. Paul wasn't home until way gone 5.

The following day I was transferred to Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry. It is about 40 miles from where we live and with two children at home, it wasn't going to be easy for my wife or other family members to visit regularly. During my stay, GA members became my family. Derry members visited me on multiple occasions as well as Joe (Bundoran) and Raymond (Omagh). One of the Derry members, Eddie C (Carnhill) relieved the pressure on my wife by washing my clothes and bringing me food and company for virtually every one of the thirteen days I was in the hospital. He knew about my accident only because I had the courage to ask for help.

Another Derry member, Eamonn C (Creggan), also couldn't do enough for me. He treated me like I was his kid brother. George and Dermot (Carlisle Road) showed up twice and kept me laughing. So many great memories.

I will never regret this accident because it confirmed my faith in the specialness of people and in particular the specialness of our two fellowships. I can't tell you how many hundreds of minutes I spent on the phone with members in the nearly two weeks I was in the hospital.

The support I have received has been off the scale. What it will do for our family is confirm that there can never be a time in our lives when my wife and I will outgrow our need for our fellowships.

And why would we want to?

Truly, truly blessed! I am only scratching the surface of gratitude here, and I cannot adequately convey how much help and assistance I have received. Who knew, when I walked into GA thirty years ago as a 29 year old boy, that I would be walking into a fellowship that would become my second family.

How blessed I am to be part of Gamblers Anonymous.

From Paul K, Bundoran

12 Years Gamble-Free

My name is Jon, and I'm a compulsive gambler.

I've been attending GA since April 2008 and my last bet was on the 23rd March 2008.

It was on a cruise ship between New York and the Bahamas, during a holiday which was supposed to patch things up with my long-suffering wife. However, I simply couldn't keep out of the casino, and it sounded as though this final straw was to be the death knell for my marriage.

On my return home from the trip, I realised that in my mind, gambling was more important than my marriage. That was devastating to me. However, the comprehension of such led me both to GA and my new life.

When I first went to meetings, I spoke most sessions and this helped enormously. After attending two meetings, I found myself in a situation which nearly led me back to gambling. I honestly didn't want that and so I phoned up the GA member who had chaired my second meeting. He knew very little about me but answered my call and spoke to me for over an hour and a half. I will forever be grateful to him. It was my first feel of the fellowship and unity, which makes GA work. It undoubtedly steered me in the right direction.

Having had such a positive response in my life away from the room, I began using the phone list regularly. To this day I hardly ever go 24 hours without speaking to another GA member. When I knew I had enough and committed to GA, I was candid with my immediate and extended family, and they were all nothing but excellent and still are today. Four of my cousins surprised me by driving 130 miles from Bristol, to attend my ten-year open meeting!

I had a lot to be honest about, having been gambling irresponsibly for 25 years, from bingo and fruit machines to bookies, dog racing and casinos. My addiction was progressive, and as I earned/borrowed more, the more heavily I gambled.

When I look back, I am most ashamed of my final six months of gambling. I went cap in hand to my parents when my debts became too much to handle, and they loaned me interest free enough to clear my debts. Sadly, I left all my lines of credit open, and six months later, I found myself back in the same amount of trouble. I have forgiven myself for that on the advice of GA members, but I will never forget it, and I talk regularly about it in my therapies.

After five years of attendance to GA, the meeting I went to had a regular presence of 50+ compulsive gamblers. I found I wasn't speaking enough, and because of that, my recovery stalled. I resigned as secretary after three years, (you've got to give something back to GA, haven't you?) and opened a new meeting with about 10 members. We now have a regular bunch of around 25 men and women, and I find the new meeting works remarkably well. There is not much room to hide, something I feel we should never give to a compulsive gambler, particularly seeing as we tend to spend our entire lives hiding before recovery.

On a personal note, my recovery continues to go from strength to strength. GA has had such a positive impact on my life and has given me the tools to deal with addiction. It has been a lot of hard work but equally rewarding. I feel blessed with great GA friends and fantastic family relationships.

From Jon

Searching for the Answer

My name is David, and I am a compulsive gambler.

To me, that means, that if I were to start gambling tomorrow, I would be feeding a force inside of me so powerful that everything else happening in my life would be rendered inconsequential. All rational thoughts or opinions would be overwhelmed by wanton destruction that would not cease until nothing was left.

That brutal fact has taken me over 15 years to understand fully. It is this fact that now underpins all aspects of my recovery. Every thought I have that contradicts that point (a dream of being a social or professional gambler, of gambling with control) is a lie, created by my addiction, created by my dark desire.

I first went to GA about nine months ago as well as being enrolled in a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) programme at the National Gambling Clinic, because I wanted *the answer*. The silver bullet solution to make all of this go away. That's all I ever wanted from recovery; to feel better. To feel less guilty, to be 'normal'. To pretend it never happened.

But *the answer* can't be found in a GA meeting room; if it could, someone could email it to you and save everyone the time and trouble. Although acceptance of this was very frustrating initially, what I did realise was that you could find many other things. A GA meeting room is full of stories and experiences of each person's struggles and hopes. What I learnt from listening to them is that every person interacts with this illness in different ways. And yet, their journey will usually resonate in some way.

It's so powerful to be able to learn about myself by hearing your problem described from someone else's perspective. It is a massive comfort that others have and do suffer like myself. They will always listen, and never will they judge. They have faced and overcome the challenges I probably once labelled impossible.

Below are some of my experiences and things I have had to accept about my condition. Hopefully in some way it resonates, if not, others will, and all are there to support you on your journey.

I've been gambling for over 15 years. When I started, I was betting on things I found exciting, like horse racing, blackjack and poker. My habit then evolved, and I found myself gambling on whatever market was available next. Whether it was Russian table tennis in the morning, or the NBA late into the night, it escalated from being a social thing to do with friends to an activity done in pure isolation. From spending a few pounds at the weekend to borrowing massive amounts of pounds to keep going, it became something dangerous.

People often talk about gambling triggers; what makes someone think about gambling, to begin with? For me, there are many. I can be happy, stressed or sad. I can walk past a casino, a bookies or even turn on Sky Sports and see the game is about to start. The critical thing I needed to understand and accept was that I gamble because I want to. I have trained my brain to think gambling is right for me and that meant anything could become a trigger. My addiction desires them, and so, it creates them.

People also ask, why a rational person would continue doing something they know to be destructive? I think it's because I created and fed something just too powerful to stop. My gambling brain was able to convince my rational mind that the only possible way forward is to keep gambling. It does this by subtly disguising itself as though it was logic in internal arguments. "Just focus on winning that last grand back and go from there" it would say. Or perhaps "they won't understand if you tell them, so you need to win that money back" or even "this all goes away if you can just get onto a winning streak." That is the strength of the enemy that I have created for myself. It doesn't allow me to think about the consequences. It doesn't care for who I'm hurting or lying to, as that may give me some cause to stop. Its only objective is for me to continue gambling my life away.

Over the last nine months, I have learnt how powerful my addiction has become. However, I also know I am responsible for allowing that to happen.

For the first time in 15 years, I have started using GamStop and have handed over my finances to my girlfriend. Arguments that I previously made, suggesting this was not required, are borne of addiction, not of recovery. I have begun to be honest and open with my support structure and admitted to the many lies that I have told. Everyone I have been honest with is still with me, despite how appallingly I have behaved. Nobody has turned their backs as my addiction convinced me they would. I have also accepted that wanting to forget that things ever happen is not proper preparation for preventing them from happening next time. Penance must be hard-fought to be meaningful.

GA hasn't provided me with *the answer*, just more understanding and a greater belief that I do not need to do this alone.

From David.

Ever Since I Was a Little Girl

My name is Louise, and I am a compulsive gambler.

When did I start gambling? I am not sure of the exact time. My earliest memories of gambling are from when I was little. My grandma would take me to the slots and would lift me to either pull the handles of a fruit machine or press the hold button when she was waiting for the cherries to all come down on the middle reel. I would feel excited if they did and I would get another glass of Coke if she won. If I were to push the wrong button, I'd get told off and not be allowed to touch them again for a while.

My next memories are of my dad being in the club on Saturday night for the local turn. My mum and brother, aunts, uncles and cousins would all come out, but Dad was always busy in the other room on the bandit. I didn't realise until a lot later that this caused a problem between him and my mother. Looking back, I can see the sadness this caused her. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

I think my problem started with online gambling about eight years ago. The first real website was Jackpotjoy and you could download it onto your computer. It had slots and would lure you in with the temptation of free spins. Before I would know it, I would be skint, and be chasing more wins just to stay in the game.

For the first time, my partner found out I had his credit card details. It ended up causing us to spend our holiday/wedding money, a large amount! We were supposed to be getting married, right up until the credit card company rang him and asked him about the suspicious activity. He rang me and asked if I'd been up to anything, I denied it for the first hour and a half then eventually I confessed to what I did. He forgave me and luckily the holiday/wedding money paid the debt off. No wedding for me, and for nearly two years, I stopped online gambling. I still played the slots at the seaside arcades, but they never really did it for me.

My dad died six years ago from a massive heart attack due to his drinking addiction, as he was an alcoholic and gambled to the extreme as well. Scratchcards had become his latest addiction as well as bandits in pubs. He owed money all over; credit cards, the bank and we also found out he had not been paying the mortgage. My poor mother was going through hell and nearly had the house repossessed. I was secretly gambling while pretending to be strong for my mum. We managed to sort the payments out with the bank. That's when he left and we heard nothing from him for ages. Then, out of the blue, I got a call from a member of my family saying that he couldn't cope anymore. They asked if I could I go and see him in hospital. It was not much longer after this we discovered he had died in his flat alone.

My gambling continued. I was getting deeper into debt all the time and my credit card was fully maxed out. My wage would go within a few days of receiving it. I'd have no money for food, but I would still be smiling and joking on the outside, while secretly dying inside and being constantly angry with everyone but myself. I learnt I was a good liar and teller of sob stories. I would lie to my mum to borrow money for food, pay her back the next month and then borrow it again. Nobody knew about my addiction then.

It got so bad I had the brilliant idea to borrow money to clear my debts off and stop gambling. And so, I did. I acquired another large amount to pay my credit cards off. I felt good that I only one had one debt left. Maybe with one big win, I could even pay that off? Of course, that didn't happen – I spent the lot. I racked my cards back up faster than ever, real trouble for me because I had double the amount to pay! From this point on, I was on a downward spiral. I then strayed into credit card fraud. I was taking cards out in my partner's name without him knowing. "Whose fault is this?" I would think. It was my dad's or my family's, anyones but my own.

I became an angry stranger who lied and sat alone in front of a computer for hours on end. I would clean for five minutes and make dinner in fifteen minutes to make out like I was still coping. I even tried to fall out with my partner by saying I didn't love him anymore, purely so we could sell our home. I thought it would save my problems because the money from the sale of the house could pay my debts off, and he would never know. All of this happened because the letters coming through the door were beginning to escalate. There were at least 50 a week, and I couldn't sleep and spent my life by the letterbox waiting to get everything before anyone else could. When I was at work, I even got my sons to both intercept the mail on my behalf, so my partner didn't discover my secret.

It was bound to come crashing down eventually, and sure enough, it did. A phone call came, and my partner asked that fateful question; have you been up to something again? He was shouting at me to tell the truth, and I knew I had no option but to confess. He told me he didn't want ever to see me again. I packed my stuff up, picked up a load of tablets and text goodbye to everyone. I drove miles. I don't remember it all, but I took all the pills. I was woken by the police the next day. They had me walking up and down, and round and round to keep me awake. They asked me why I had done this, and they asked if I'd been abused physically or mentally by my partner.

I was taken to the hospital to ensure there was no damage caused by the number of tablets I'd swallowed. Once I was given the all clear, a mental health nurse came to see me. She asked me questions and said I could be helped if I wanted to be. I thought about it and realised I simply could not live like this anymore.

I admitted myself voluntarily into a mental health unit and stayed for a week. They provided me with GA's regional number and email address which I must say I already had, but for some reason had not used. I wish I had; maybe things would not have got so bad.

I admitted to everyone my problem and attended my first GA meeting with my family's support, which I am forever thankful for. I was not forgiven, and I didn't think I ever would be. My first meeting was so scary, and so was the prospect of sitting and talking to strangers about what I had done. Be honest, they said, nothing will shock us, don't hold anything back, it's the best you can do. Where the hell was I? I thought I was going to prison! Two ladies sat there smiling at me, as well as about 10 or 12 men. What on earth was I going to say? Should I tell the truth and go to prison, or should I lie?

I told the truth. I cried a lot, but I felt better getting it off my chest. Everyone said well done, and clapped – what a bunch of nutters I thought! I went back week after week, and eventually, things started to make sense and sink in. I accepted what the room said and I admitted I was powerless over gambling. I started the steps. It took me ages to understand everyone was talking about, but I gave it a chance, and that's why I'm here now a year later gamble-free.

It's not easy no, it's bloody hard, but I have a sincere desire to not gamble. I have friends to help good friends who don't judge me to help me. When I think of gambling, I get reminded of the pain it causes.

I don't think I'd be alive today if it weren't for GA. Thank you.

My last bet was the 6th May 2016.

From, Louise.

Poetry Corner

Every Time it Hurts

Every time you lie to us,
Every time you break your promise,
Every time you do not change,
Every time it hurts.

Every time you pick on us,
Every time you fail to buy a present,
Every time you neglect us
Every time it hurts.

Every time you think you'll win,
Every time you chase the pot,
Every time you lose the lot,
Every time it hurts.

Every time we support you,
Every time we try to help,
Every time you throw it back,
Every time it hurts.

Every time you've stolen from us,
Every time you pawned something special,
Every time you made us sad,
Every time it hurts.

Every time you think it's ok,
Every time you ignore us,
Every time we cry,
Every time it hurts.

Every time you say you love us,
Every time we doubt,
Every time you gamble,
Every time it hurts.

From Anonymous.

Before and After

Feelings before GA:

I am unheard, unspoken, unsaid,
Standing in silence, suffocated by cold hands,
Mentally paralysed, my limbs stiff and rigid.

I struggle, I scuff, I spar,
Fighting to no avail,
No escape and no hope,
Chained in this hopeless jail.

I am fragile, feeble, frail,
Covered in haunting marks from lashing whips,
I stumble, stammer, stutter,
Voiceless; my screams fail to escape my lips.

I am small, hidden, invisible,
Yet exposed, bare and open,
To the horrors of my deepest nightmares,
That has left me scarred and broken.

I am confused, lost and misplaced,
Left feeling empty with no love,
Rekindling that inner flame of joy,
Is something now I only dream of.

I am scared, terrified, frightened,
By a world which has left me behind,
Exposed to all my biggest fears,
An addict; with my life in decline.

Feelings after GA:

I am heard, respected, proud,
Free to soar my wings, free to be myself,
Part of the group now, a homely loving crowd.

I smile, I laugh, I reminisce,
Relaxed and content,
I enjoy my new life of peace and bliss,
A life of joy and no resent.

I am sturdy, wiser, strong,
Present, productive, and learning,
I've found a safe place where I finally belong,
No more self-inflicted pain, no more self-inflicted hurting.

My spirit is awakened, resurrected from ash and dust,
The possibilities of a good life are endless,
But a vigilant effort is a must,
Hard work and honesty will help accomplish any dream,
I do it with the fellowship; they're my family, my team,
There is hope for any addict, and I hope you take some of mine,
I can live now feeling good, one day at a time.

A sense of mental clarity and blessed with inner peace,
Uniting with fellow members in solidarity,
There is no better comfort than a GA seat.

From Anonymous.

To My Gambling

My soul is diminishing, damaged and broken,
Caught in the trap of your awful deception.
You said you cared that you would be there, but that isn't the case.
You promised me the world, love, happiness and grace,
I loved you, and you lied to my face.

My friends didn't like you, but I didn't mind,
You gave me comfort, escape, a means to unwind,
But this was all fictitious, false like your promises,
I sensed it from the start, but I was a slave to your dominance.

You kept me clinging on; I'd be there for you whenever,
I loved you, yet was subject to horrendous torment and terror,
You are so unique – I've never met anyone quite so cunning or clever.
I thought you cared; you said I was special,
Now I realise you're the work of the devil.

I gave you time, money, effort, thoughts and care,
But you battered me into a state of helpless disrepair.
But who did I blame? Who did I hate?
Myself, not you – for you were my soulmate.
And when things went wrong, when life went unexpected,
I made sure you were safe; that you were protected.

You were my everything, I held you on a pedestal,
Convincing myself that we were working out,
that your company was incredible.
But you still told me I was no good – a lot of self-condemnation,
So, I punished myself through self-hate and isolation.
But when I'm alone, that's when you quickly attack,
It's vicious and evil; disastrous trap.

You left me alone, stripped bare to my bones,
With no friends, no trust, and high interest loans.

But now things are different; now things are better,
I'll leave you alone, but I'll never forget ya.

There's no more delusion, no more lies,
Gamblers Anonymous has finally opened my eyes.
With my meetings, my phone list, and my GA sponsorship,
I can finally walk away from our toxic relationship.

The inner flame is lit; I just need to keep things simple,
A daily programme so that my soul can rekindle.
You took every minute, every breath and all my energy,
A parasite is what you are, and what you'll always be.

I've found my peace now that I've stopped this war,
In GA I'm safe – you can't hurt me anymore.

From Daniel M.

Mosquito

Gambling, it had me buzzing like a Mosquito. Preying on those around me. Getting in close and striking. Trying to whack me away but I'm elusive. Left my mark though and your itching. Moving on, now I'm rambling.

Meandering along a road that looked so promising. Bright lights and excitement. Heart beat faster. I'm enjoying it. Not yet destroying life, present company excepted. But you don't count do you! How much did you say I owed you? You'll get it 'cause I'm the Mosquito. Oh wait did you think I meant your money. Still on the border between pain and living life on a whim.

You've cottoned on now I'm departing. Another heart in. Pieces, like the betting slip that's the signal that I've lost again, can't refrain from punting. "Hello Joe you ain't got a tenner 'ave you?" Now I'm poncing. But they're not buying it. Why would they? Got no goods as collateral. Holes in my shoes are the giveaway. Mosquito's been biting leather. Lost my groove.

Streets are beckoning. Mosquito's victims have been praying for the reckoning. For all those I've jettisoned pre Tennyson. Poetry – words, making it sound so fluffy! Deceiving like you believe “not him. He couldn't, he's so nice. Lice, never touched him. He wouldn't fuck them would he?” But they weren't there for the holes in the shoes and the smell of piss and sweat that you get when you live life on the edge. Anything but sweet!

Aroma. Now home is a street. Comeuppance. But not coming up, going down. Paradoxically, scratching like I've been bitten by Mosquito. But I'm not buzzing. Too cold in the sleet on the cardboard. God I'm bored. This road, promising, misery like it's part of me. Insipid. Powerless to flip it. No way back from the monotony that's gotten hold of me. Living like a Romany without the colour. Duller, 'cause the losing scratch cards are falling like shards of glass, pinning my feet to the street in the gutter where I mutter “any spare change mate?” Stinking, like the contents of a stoma.

Hope, in short supply, like money in my pocket. Dreaming of rockets shooting me to a penthouse. But it ain't comin'. Impotent. Lack of power, that is my dilemma, but I can't see it. I'm too flea bitten, ravaging my mind and my skin. But I've found dinner. A half eaten McDonald's in the bin. Looks like a happy meal without the toy. Sustenance for what? Another day when I can drop my bollocks in the bookies. Hamster on a wheel. Mosquito's tasting his own blood. Addiction. Gambling's my dope!

End is coming like an inverted summit. No home to call my own. Relying on the generosity of those who don't want to be. Me. I despise them all, the generous and the venomous, as they watch me fall through the cracks, the fissure. Until the fisher of men appears. Not that he knew he was an angler. “Big Issue?” he hears me cry. “Fuck me, Mosquito, is that you?” The angel spoke my language. “Hello, Ron, how's your luck?” And then he tells me the news. If I had any consciousness left I could have spotted the clues. The clothes, the hair, the attentive stare. All in place, along with the smile on his face. “Nah, Mos, no bet for a year. Been going to GA and it's starting to pay – off” he goes, this God send.

“See you here at 7 tomorrow and I’ll take you to a meeting,” he says as he walks away. A little glimmer of something lifted me. Could it be true? Was there a way for Mosquito to get through, a day without succumbing to the obsession to bet. No need to feel the sensation in the pit of my stomach, as fortune started to plummet. Again. Could this be the antidote to the pain? No more shame or looks of disdain as I claim my place in the world. Magnificence that unfurls like a banner, a metaphor as I clamour for a life without chance so I can have a chance to survive with grace. Dignity.

“My name’s Mosquito and I’m a compulsive gambler,” they hear me say as I admit, not redact, the compelling fact of my existence. The floodgates have opened and now I’m spilling this half digested morsel of truth that I’ve been hiding. Empathy as I’m emptying. Nodding heads that say to me; been there, done that, worn the t-shirt. Felt the hurt. Starting to blurt now and the tears fall from my eyes as I lose the disguise. Shedding like a lizard. My turn to cry!

“Pray tell, why do they call you Mosquito?” they ask. Suddenly cognisant, aware, as I shift in my chair. “Because I get close and suck as much blood from you as I can.” Matter of fact I say it, without the defensive pride that comes when you’ve stopped caring about the recipient’s thoughts. I cared now. “What’s your real name?” they asked. “Peter” I say. “Peter, Mosquito is dead if you want him to be?” No need for the epithet, or remorse and regret. Time to move on and admit your wrongs, to yourself and others, for a life of trouble and trauma. Storm has passed, there is another way.

Greeting me with smiles and tea, I’ve come again to hear and see those people, who’ve achieved the impossible. They say they did not gamble, this week, nor sleep on the street. Could it be true? Could this place act like glue and keep me from the magnetised, drift inside, places where I spent so much time. Wasted my resources on horses for courses I did not know. Departed, ashen with nowhere to go. Then I was called to share my news. Did it work or was I an anomaly? “My name is Peter for Mosquito is dead and I’m a compulsive gambler. No bet today or since my last meeting!”

Paul K, Bundoran

Dear Roulette

Dear Roulette,

It's been a while since we spoke,
So, how are you?
Are you still stealing time from innocent people?
Energy and money too.

It seemed you were my best friend,
But in truth, you were my fake friend.
When I was stressed all you did was chase me,
Trying to get me to join in, just like an annoying bee.

I trusted you, Roulette,
And you just made me down.
Now I see you just suck my blood and drain me,
You made me your clown.

Many nights you made me sleepless,
I was always depressed.
Because of you Roulette, I'm taking antidepressants daily,
Now you are something I do detest.

Enough is enough and now is the time,
For me to say,
Goodbye Roulette.

From Mizan.

Moonlight Feelings

Feelings are the enemy right?
This journey was a never-ending run,
This addiction was escapism.
This life is hard,
Relief is all I sought.

Under clouds, amidst rain, a slither of moonlight escapes,
I am that slither,
I am escaping the torrid grip of my addiction.

On the other side I see peace,
On the other side I see acceptance,
On the other side I can cope,
Are feelings really the enemy?

From Ayo.

No More Bets

No more bets is now the order of my day
The spin of the roulette wheel now fades
A distant memory of a time long ago
Mr Gamble was a pretentious friend who has now become a foe
I wiped away suicidal nights with tears of regret
Instead I instilled a positive mindset.

No more bets I hear them say
But it still does not make the pain go away
Marred by gambling was the story of my life
No time to be a lover, a mother or a wife
All bets off is now the life I lead
A change of thinking for my spiritual malady
Slot machine were my drugs
When all I really needed was a hug
You see I have had enough
And I felt like giving up.

Gambling is now a distant memory I'd rather forget
My daily motto is no more bets
No longer do I worry, fuss or fret
I am free with a renewed mindset
The drama is now over
I no longer find my luck in a four leaf clover
I respect myself and my family
By making amends to them daily
I look to the future and not the past
Because I have learned the past does not last
I hold my head held high like an African Queen
For I am living the sobriety dream
A life that is now serene
Because I had the courage to become clean
No more bets I hear them say
I will not gamble, just for today.

By Boss Lady

Caught in a Web

It all started so simple
Like a fresh pressed shirt with no wrinkles
Just a bit of fun – what harm is one?
Alas it was like sending the deer to the lions jaw
I didn't know what I had started
From a friendly affable teenager
To a young man who was scared to look at strangers
Where every call and letter spelt danger.

Caught in a web of lies and deceit
And the only thing that lifted it was the retreat
Back to the gambling lies...
The online sights and the bright lights...
Until once again it was dark...
Then one day the courage filled me
To walk into the rooms and there was a spark
That life could be different
That I could pursue my passions and my interests
Yet it was not easy
Sitting down weekly
Oh I can't be bothered
Well that thought often put me in bother.

This recovery thing...
Sounds like hard work
Yet the alternative was to go berserk
So eventually I found myself a sponsor
And what seemed so terrifying like a monster
Began to recede...
And the experience is beyond my wildest dreams
Doing the work became a gift
With every piece of writing and phone call came a lift.

And before I knew it one day at a time
I began to experience the divine
So all the time in the darkness was what I needed
Because without it I wouldn't have succeeded
Because believe it or not I came to see
Victory only came when I was down on my knees.

From, DM

Definition of a Mature Person

1. We accept criticism gratefully, being honestly glad for an opportunity to improve.
2. We do not indulge in self-pity and have begun to feel the laws of compensation operating in all life.
3. We do not expect special consideration from anyone.
4. We control our temper.
5. We meet emergencies with poise.
6. Our feelings are not easily hurt.
7. We accept the responsibility of our own acts.
8. We have outgrown the “all or nothing” stage, recognising that no person or situation is wholly good or bad and begun to appreciate the Golden Mean.
9. We are not impatient at unreasonable delays. We have learned that we are not the arbiters of the universe and that we must often adjust to other people and their convenience.
10. We can endure defeat and disappointment without whining or complaining.
11. We do not worry unduly things that cannot be helped.
12. We are not given to boasting or “showing off” in socially unacceptable ways.
13. We are honestly glad when others enjoy success or good fortune. We have outgrown envy and jealousy.
14. We are open-minded enough to listen thoughtfully to the opinions of others and do not become vigorously argumentative when our views are opposed.
15. We are not chronic “fault finders”.
16. We plan things in advance rather than trusting in the inspiration of the moment.



Volunteers Required

We are currently seeking a **Graphic Designer**, and **Postal Magazine Distributor** to join our New Life team.

Please email us with your stories or poems so we can share our experience, strength and hope with each other. We are keen to hear gambling stories and poetry from people of different ages, genders and backgrounds. This magazine is produced primarily for the members of GA, and we want to reflect the fact that compulsive gamblers come from all walks of life. Please don't worry if your grammar isn't the best. We have an editor, deputy editor and proofreader who will try to correct any grammatical issues. COVID-19 has seen members attending meetings all around the world by way of Zoom and other online platforms. This magazine is also starting to go out to the world online, and so, if you're a compulsive gambler, we want to hear from you whether you're from America, Australia or somewhere else!

Email: newlife@gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Phone: 07787 177 903 or 07961 356 378

Gamblers Anonymous England, Wales and Ulster does not solicit members. Our intention is to highlight that gambling for certain individuals is the manifestation of an illness called "compulsive gambling". GA carries the message that there is an alternative to the destruction caused by compulsive gambling, namely the GA Recovery Programme. Our members comprise compulsive gamblers who are recovering from this illness, stopping gambling and attaining a normal way of life. These members are ready to help any individual who passes through the door of any GA meeting.

The GA Recovery Programme

12 Steps

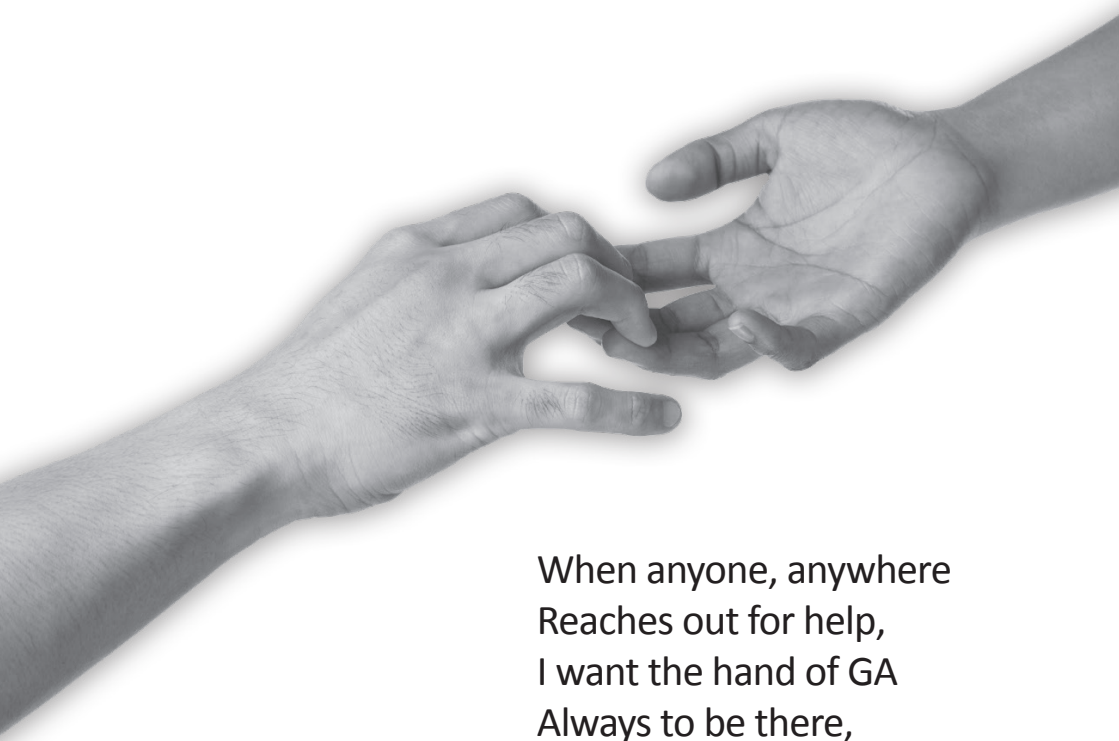
These are the steps which are suggested as a programme of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over gambling – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.
7. Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
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.
12. Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.


The GA Unity Programme

In order to maintain unity our experience has shown that:

1. Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends upon G.A. Unity.
2. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.
3. The only requirements for G.A. membership is a desire to stop gambling.
4. Each group shall be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or G.A. as a whole.
5. G.A. has but one primary purpose – to carry the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.
6. G.A. should never endorse, finance, or lend the G.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every G.A. group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. G.A. should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. G.A. as such ought never to be organised, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. G.A. has no opinion on outside issues, hence the G.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, we must always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and television.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the G.A. programme, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



When anyone, anywhere
Reaches out for help,
I want the hand of GA
Always to be there,
And for that
I am Responsible



**“ 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. ”**

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk