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NEW LIFE

A Journal of Experience,
Strength and Hope in
Gamblers Anonymous



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 is written by compulsive gamblers who want to share their experiences. Opinions expressed may not necessarily be those of the fellowship.

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at www.gascotland.org

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www.gamblersanonymous.ie

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers

A lot has happened since our last edition in March. Some of you may recall that I berated my lack of creativity and essentially said that whilst I was proud of getting the magazine published, I was hoping that other, more 'creative' people might step forward so as to improve the look of the magazine.

Amazingly Aaron L (Coventry), who is studying an MA in creative writing, stepped up and agreed to become Deputy Editor. If that wasn't good enough, at about the same time, a member from the Cleveland Street group in London, who is a life force that goes by the name 'Boss Lady' and who has vast experience in the publishing industry, also stepped forward to get involved and agreed to become Creative Director. Not only this, but she knew another member who is a graphic designer, and this member (who wishes to remain anonymous) agreed to offer her services as well.

This has quite literally transformed our magazine! I'm embarrassed to call myself editor to be honest. I'm sitting back and watching people with vastly more experience than I have, do their thing!

The changes in presentation, I hope you agree, are phenomenal (I can say this because I had nothing to do with them). I am so proud to be working with this team and so pleased that we have stabilised this magazine and hopefully it has a bright future.

I hope every group managed to get their quota of magazines and I am particularly pleased to report that we got 1000 magazines into prisons across England, Wales and Ulster. I am particularly indebted to Simon (Sheffield) for making this happen.

Unfortunately Simon is unable to offer his services going forward and so if anyone is interested in distributing New Life Magazine directly to prisons I would be delighted to hear from you. Address labels and a covering letter will be provided and it would ideally suit someone with a bit of time on their hands. Your efforts may be the difference between a prisoner getting this magazine or not! And so, if anyone is interested, you can contact me on 07961356378 or at newlife@gamblersanonymous.org.uk to discuss this further.

Finally, please keep your articles and poetry coming in, because without your stories there would simply be no magazine. We'd also be interested to hear your suggestions about how to improve our magazine. For example, are there any regular features you'd like to see included? Again, you can submit stories / poetry / comments via our email or via WhatsApp to the number above or even by text.

Thank you again everyone for your commitment to Gamblers Anonymous.

Yours in Unity

Paul K (Bundoran)

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0330 094 0322



There are additional helpline numbers for members in the North West of England and in Ulster.

NORTH WEST: 07974 668999

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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

RECOVERY GA STORIES

The Fear of a Higher Power!

Anonymous

I was at a meeting recently, and there were many references to the twelve steps and completing step work. All of which rang true for me and my recovery. Then, the very next therapy expressed concern over step work and made throwaway comments like "what if I don't like what I find?" and "no thank you, I'll stick with what I know". These concepts baffled me as I was taught from day one that this is a programme of change, a twelve-step programme of self-discovery and denunciation of old habits and traits; how best to stay away from the gambling version of me and to become a different me?

Leading on from this, I immersed myself in an internal investigation of what I'd seen for my time within the fellowship. I'd witnessed countless persons enter the rooms and very few stay. I'd experienced many of those that did stay, struggle to adopt the change portion of the recovery. Additional to all of this, I'd witnessed the most open-minded amongst the fellowship struggle with the concept of a higher power. Members are open to the idea that the room knows more than they do - that the room is, in fact, the Higher Power, up until that point when more is required. When the next stage cannot be

explained by reason, described by tried and tested practice, and they tend to feel like they know all the room has to give. Typically, at this point, I have witnessed three distinct paths followed.

1. The decision that abstinence is enough for them, that their life is ok, as is.
2. The decision that they have finished with GA; that they have learned enough and decided that this given information has made them powerful over their addiction.
3. Or, the decision that step work is the next logical move forward.

I have been around long enough now to have seen first-hand the carnage that can be caused by choosing option one or two. I've also been privy to the dramatic and positive effect that selecting option three has had on many members. I cannot, however, ignore that even in this small majority, there is still resistance and fear over the Higher Power.

Those that enter the fellowship already with a religion seem to have little transition or fear over this aspect, but the religious society we are not, and from my own experience I've witnessed more non-religious members reach the point of attempting step work than I have religious. I'm not saying this is the norm over the whole fellowship, just my small portion of it.

So, leading onto the argument of this little piece; should I be afraid of the term "a higher power" or even more potent the word God? I won't lie; the use of the word God still doesn't sit well with me. But I can happily confess I've found my own personal higher power, and I must also state at this point how comforting this really is; how powerful it can be to tap into this resource, and how thankful I am it is there whenever I am in need.

So what is it exactly; what is my higher power?

Before answering this most obvious question, I want to explain the next problem; the one no one asks until they hear the first answer. What does it do for you? Imagine asking a question

about your life. A decision you need to make, and you want the very best answer to this question, the purist solution, the answer only a mythical angel would provide; that's what my higher power offers to me.

Have I lost you there? Do you now think I believe angels are talking to me? No, no I don't. However, I do believe true virtue lays within myself, the most innocent and selfless person lays dormant in my psyche, untainted but imprisoned by my life experiences. Unable to control my thoughts & actions because more practical and realistic personality types make those decisions for me now.

My higher power puts me in touch with that buried virtuous self, the very best of me, the part of me that answers the questions with the purest of intentions; genuinely incredible stuff. Unknown to me until I was given a map of where to find it. Now comes the hardest part to grasp, the part where even if you've been on board while reading this, I may lose you here; the actual manifestation of the Higher Power! And no, it's not an old guy with a beard!

Essentially, it doesn't even matter what it is. Whether it's a physical object or a memory of someone passed, an old wedding ring of a great heroic grandparent that you imagine is communicating the answers you seek through it. It can be a serene lake at sunrise, perfectly still and quiet that allows you to access that part of yourself. Our own higher powers are entirely subjective and individual to each of us. For me, it's the latter; nature itself. The sheer beauty and strength are visible to anyone wanting to see it. It's been there for millennia before me, and it'll be here for millennia after me. Why not allow this grand vision to be the portal to the purist part of me? Do I believe the trees talk to me? Of course not, but somehow, almost magically, I asked these questions inside my mind while surrounded by my higher power and the purist answer appears in my head, like an internal magic eight ball, it guides me towards peace and serenity.

The realisation of such has the additional benefit of bypassing my inner ego character. This is because the answer was from within; the inner ego is at peace. It is safe in the knowledge that he knew it all along and he is not being told what he must do.

If I haven't lost you yet, and you're not reading this thinking this guy is evidently crazy, then the likelihood is you've already been in touch with your higher power at some point in your life. If you are reading this, scoffing and doubting, I challenge you to attempt finding it and not feel humbled.

Some people search for it for days, and some people search for years. I promise you, those that find their higher power are the ones in your room that have supported you and most new members. They are the members you know that don't shout and don't get angry quickly. They are the members that don't judge, but always seem to give the very best advice. They are the ones that have found their true self and a way to access it to communicate with it.

Why not find yours.

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

"Keep coming back."

90 Days of Sobriety

Boss Lady

"This is insanity", I screamed inside my head as my last few pence disappeared into the machine. I plonked myself down in the black leather VIP chair of the arcade. VIP should stand for 'Very Idiotic Person', or maybe it should be changed to VVP; a 'Very Vulnerable Person', I stared intensely at the Starliner game, imploring that the machine would spit out my money. In thirty, minutes I loss an awful lot, "I was supposed to win," I thought. I pilgrimaged from South London to Kentish Town, in the hope of more significant match play and bigger wins. Let's face it; I was living in a dream world, who the hell was I kidding? Even when I win, I never really win. I am a gambler, and I can't physically stop until every single last penny is gone. Gambling took the best of me; I was crushed, that last bet had brought my world to an abrupt stop. There had to be a better way; this should not be my life, this is not what I was put on the planet for; I am a gift from God, and I was losing my mind and reputation out here in these streets. How sad was that? Gambling had turned it's back on me and left me to rot. I was ready to return the favour...

For the last two months that I had broken out, it was absolute insanity, I was hemorrhaging money, and I was profoundly unhappy. I never had any significant wins, and even if I had, I would not have kept it. I just kept winning the money back I was putting in until it was all gone. What was I running away from? In my head, that stinking thinking had turned me into a zombie, stuck in front of a machine. I was lifeless. There was no one else in the shop, and it's like God just stripped me back of everything that this lonely life had to offer. It was then that I finally conceded that gambling had me LICKED! It was then that

I knew I must to surrender my ego. I knew this simply had to be my last bet.

I took my pride and ego out of the way, grabbed as many crisps, chocolate and drinks as I could carry and left the arcade. I stumbled out into the daylight bewildered and looked across at Barclays bank "shit my car insurance is due today". You and I both know there was not enough money in that joker to cover it and my direct debit would bounce back. I would later go on to get charged eight pounds for the pleasure. My life was completely unmanageable. I was an emotional wreck consumed by gambling, having my next bet was all I could think about. It was such a painful time and experience in my life; I was devastated because now I wanted the pain to subside. I tried to forget the fact that I cannot have one spin and walk away.

I knew I had to have verbal surgery at the hands of GA, and mentally prepared my mind to go to a meeting at Cleveland Street on January 31st, 2019. I was embarrassed to return to the room accompanied with nothing but my empty purse, broken heart and three remaining cigarettes. I felt like a muppet reappearing back after a relapse, but what else was there to do? I boarded the 214 red Hopper bus to Kings Cross and then picked up a connector bus to Great Portland-street, I arrive forty-five minutes early. On the journey, I tore up my free parking tickets for the casino and ripped up all my membership card and threw them out of a moving bus window. I was done and dusted, and I did not want anything tempting me. The words "keep coming back" continued echoing around in my head following my meeting at Cleveland Street. As soon as I stepped in through those GA doors, it was like a welcome home, and a sigh of relief swept through my entire body.

In the early days of my return to GA, my mind was jumbled and was still spinning slots, I was hearing the game music in my head playing over and over again, and was I having flashbacks of the vivid colours those machines had. As per usual, everyone at the meeting was welcoming and encouraging. I was so raw with emotion, and when it came to my turn to share, I broke

down and started balling my eyes out. It was due to that meltdown that the ultimate breakthrough came.

I have realised that placing a bet is not the solution; it only serves to medicate my feelings and is mind-numbing. Today is my sobriety birthday and to be honest I'm thankful I'm out of the madness that gaming had me cocooned in. I now attend three to four meetings per week. Additionally, I have found myself a sponsor, and I'm about to start working one step one. I now finally have money in my purse, one-pound coins are like golden nuggets to me, I can afford a coffee or herbal tea, I can take my friends out to dinner. I am slowly rebuilding my relationship with money and giving it the proper respect that it deserves. The irony of this whole situation is that I'm now really frugal with my money, can you imagine that? Oh, how the tables have turned and the times have changed.

I was able to get to this point of my recovery by staying clean, one day at a time. I kept coming back, putting my bum on seats, especially when I was depressed, stressed or upset. I do my daily readings from the orange book, I read the blue book of reflections daily, and I write a daily gratitude list. I know exactly how much money I owe, and I've made a repayment plan with ALL of my creditors. I will be looking at clearing off my debts in the immediate future, not all of them were gambling-related might I add. I've embraced the fact that I need to grow up and become the definition of a mature person, as stated on page 34. I need to face and clear the wreckage of my past and stop blaming others for my short comings and accept responsibility.

I am grateful for the rooms of GA; they have given back my sanity. I was on a one-way street to self-destruction; I now live on Hope Street, one day at a time. My advice to newcomers and veterans alike that may be reading this is to keep coming back, no matter what. Keep hearing the message of recovery and let it soak through into your skin like Vitamin D sunshine rays. You can recover, despite how bleak it looks. You deserve a life of freedom. Since being clean, I've managed to start clearing my debts. I am more attentive towards my family and friends, and

I can buy my niece and nephews presents for their Easter. I made a choice that enough was enough and that I deserved a life free of drama, I am worth it, and I love myself enough to make positive changes in my life and begin to heal the wreckage of my past. The obsession to gamble has now been lifted.

Just for today, I will not gamble.

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

“This is what my desire to gambling had given me; a feeling of self-loathing and a longing for self-destruction”.

Self-Destruction

Aaron, Coventry

Gambling takes everything you value from you and leaves you with nothing — a common misconception. Indeed, our choice to gamble culminates in us losing an awful lot; money, friends, family, time, self-respect, dignity – all of those things and many more. It's essential, however, to be mindful of what gambling has given us. My choice to gamble has given me the very worst moments of my life.

There's the moment my beautiful mum, who simply lives for her three children, broke down and told me she hates me. There's the memory of my brilliant dad, who I had never seen shout before in my previous eighteen years, scream at me, calling me every name under the sun because I'd decided to do it all again. There's the memory of my fantastic big brother, crying his eyes out when he heard what I had done. There's the memory of my wonderful baby brother, saying all I did was lie and gamble.

There's the memory of me getting caught stealing from work to fund my habit. There's the memory of my day in court, when I looked up and saw my father, my best friend and hero, looking back ashamedly at me. There's the memory of looking down and seeing my name in the city's newspaper for what I'd done. I'm ashamed to say the list is endless.

My gambling compulsion has given me countless memories of shame and pain. It controlled me; made me a spiteful person who didn't care who I hurt, whether it be my best friend who I conned to take out a loan for me or my grandmother who lent me money I couldn't pay back. The compulsion is destructive to anything in its path, and it doesn't care who it hurts on that path. The realisation of this and the person I was becoming allowed me to celebrate the second-year anniversary of my last bet in March. I take no personal credit for this, that is reserved solely for Gambler's Anonymous.

I first entered the room as an eighteen-year-old, six years ago. I was forced there by my parents when they discovered my terrible secrets. I was a young man, in a lot of debt and with a lot of troubles. I needed help, and it was there for me to take. Sadly, I didn't want it. I attended the meetings to keep my parents happy and appeased the room, telling them what they wanted to hear. I didn't need to be there, I thought. I could stop whenever I wanted, I thought. I'd just made a few stupid mistakes, I thought. I attended for a few months until my parents were happy I was on the right track. In a few months, I was gambling once more.

My gambling went hand in hand with my lying. I did everything in my power to avoid getting caught because if I got caught, it was all over, and, in my head, I needed to gamble. I needed money to pay my debts, to have nice things, to visit nice places. Hard work would never bring me these things I so desired, would they? The more trouble I got in, the more desperate I became. I did various things, hatched numerous plots to allow me to maintain this charade I would win enough to stop. Really, it would never be enough.

It was not long before I was stealing from work. I went undetected for some months and took several thousand. Each time I promised it would be the last. It never was. I continued to steal and continued to gamble. I was on a dark path, and there was no way out. Eventually, I was indeed caught, sacked from work and reported to the police. While awaiting my day in court, it all came out again. These days were the hardest, the shame it brought both my family and me, nearly broke us all. Before this, I had never had genuinely suicidal thoughts before. However, in the days that followed there were many times, I was driving and would fantasise of running myself off the road to end it all.

Before going to sleep, I would pray to whoever was listening that I wouldn't wake up in the morning. I would die, and the pain would all go away. This is what my desire to gamble had given me; a feeling of self-loathing and a longing for self-destruction. Fortunately, it didn't happen. I decided to reattend GA. I received a right, royal verbal arse kicking upon my return which was more than well deserved. I'm not sure now whether I genuinely desired to stop or to prove the room wrong that motivated me to keep coming back, but it worked, and I committed one hundred per cent to the room. Sure enough, things got better.

I finally had my day in court. I was convicted of Theft from an Employer and received community service, a suspended sentence and fines. I suspect the only reason I was spared jail was that I had already organised a payment plan with my former company. I'd come very close to losing my freedom. I knew then I really had to stop, and to this day I have succeeded to do so.

The book says we must accept the things we cannot change, which I interpret to mean we as individual entities have to accept our past and not fixate on it. I try to do this, but I am very mindful of my history, my darkest days and the person I once was. I remember the pain and misery I caused. I have no desire to produce any more.

In the two years, I have stopped gambling, I have done more good than the previous twenty-two years of my life. I have re-learned the value of hard work again. I train hard at my boxing, twice a day if I have a fight scheduled. I am completing a master's degree with The Open University. I help out around the house. I spend time with my grandparents. I help the homeless. I work hard in my day job travelling around the country. I chair meetings at my GA meetings. I help new members. I write a blog about my addiction. I do all I can to help people. I have taken the time and effort I channeled into gambling into being productive and helpful, and I am very proud of myself.

I now say with confidence; I am a decent person. If I said that two and a bit years ago, it would have been yet another lie, I can say with an even higher degree of confidence, the biggest reason for me being able to say that is the support of GA along with the help of my family.

GA helped me accept that I can't change what I've done, but I can change who I am today. It taught me there are far more important things to do in life than gambling. It allowed me to comprehend how cruel life can be, and that to continue to gamble would be to add to such cruelty. I had wasted enough time living in such a way. I want no more of it. By attending meetings, I am reminded of the toxicity of gambling, and I could not think of anything I desire less.

I owe my life to GA.

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

"I alone cannot stay gamble free, but together we can".

Stay Gamble Free

John

My name's John, and I'm an addict. This means that when I get supreme pleasure from a drug, drink or bet, I am in danger of jeopardising everything around me.

I first stepped foot in a recovery meeting from a different fellowship over two years ago, from that particular addiction, I managed over two years of sobriety. However, addiction is insidious, and I am vulnerable to repeating that treacherous game of Whack-a-mole, seemingly extinguishing one addiction, only to flare up another. And to this end, I have turned to gambling seven or eight times in my short period of sobriety.

To give a summary of my betting, it wasn't glamorous. I thought it was at the time; gambling a lot of money in the casino or online, sometimes weekly. In reality, my mental health was deteriorating, and the obsession had me in full swing. Whenever I put my phone down, I was continually looking for the opportunity to fire it up again and get on a gambling website. People, places and things became obstacles. Christmas Day, when everyone else is enjoying a family dinner together and reacquainting, I'm upstairs looking to get my next fix. I sit there, entranced by the screen of my phone, desperately chasing another win to change the way I felt.

As many do, I did the old 'geographical' thinking; if I moved away, this might solve my problem, and so, I moved to Australia for a year. But, as they say, sooner or later you're going to bump into yourself, like a long lost foe, and that is exactly what happened. After a few months of managing to keep it down, I managed to get acquainted with 'Pokies', which are effectively rooms full of slot machines underneath most pubs. And so, once

more, the insanity took over; I became hooked, and neglected work, socialising, etc. I had managed to become shackled once more and was soon torturing myself in these small prisons of my creation for the rest of my time there.

When I came back to England, I realised I had hit rock bottom. Now, rock bottom is relative. When in active addiction we are in a lift going down into the basement. Whichever floor we choose to get off, whether that be meekly in pain at level five, or despairing at floor minus five hundred and forty-seven, is beside the point. As long as we can get off and are willing to make changes that are so desperately required. I went to my first GA meeting and didn't come back for two months. Within that time I thought it would be okay to put a tenner on poker online, nothing more. I felt incredibly guilty, as I had been subsidising from my father. However just four days later, I'm betting a lot of money on a random overseas football accumulator, not caring about how much money I'm spending, or borrowing.

So, with newfound vigour and determination, I began to go to meetings, and became willing to do what was suggested by other members; and in doing so, I found the solution within those rooms. I worked through the steps and accepted how insurmountably powerless I had been over my addictions. I went to other fellowships initially, namely NA, AA and CA. In doing so, I have been sober for over two years. But my mind often tricks me into believing gambling isn't a substance; therefore it's okay to have a flutter occasionally. That thought can overwhelm me, until I feel powerless and begin my journey to the casino, culminating in a feeling of complete dejectedness afterwards.

I'm very aware that I have to be careful around gambling, as it's not the physical act of gambling itself but everything that comes with it, and it is something that could very easily lead back to drinking. And I firmly believe, for me to drink again is for me to die. So I go to regular GA meetings now where I can meet with like-minded gamblers, who understand one another and provide lifesaving support to each other. Whether we were

gambling on roulette, scratch cards, lottery, or even free poker games online; if we are sacrificing our own lives in the process, then we may have a problem. It doesn't matter if someone was betting peanuts in comparison to me, or vice versa, I can appreciate how it makes them feel. This process of altogether abandoning one's well-being through the unfathomable desire to gamble is something we can all comprehend, and it takes me right back to my last bet. There is action, and more action, and I am one who certainly cannot rest on my laurels. After going through the steps, I have to regularly check in on the maintenance steps of steps ten, eleven and twelve. Taking personal inventory, a spot check inventory (I feel resentful; what part do I have to play in this?) and step eleven nightly inventories, which I take to my, albeit very hazy, conception of God. Where have I been dishonest, resentful, fearful, and how can I improve? If I lay off the regular inventory, I can become sick very quickly and it becomes easy for me to slip into old habits.

My experience through gambling in sobriety hasn't been one of pure despair. I have put the program down somewhat, gone to a casino, felt guilty, come back and confessed in therapies, then roughly two months later I seem to manage to find myself returning to the casino. To emphasise, alcohol sobriety is the key for me; however, I know deep down that if I allow myself to go to the casino. It won't be long before the gaps get shorter; I will then be going weekly instead of monthly and then it will become daily. Then, before I know it I will be visited by those four horsemen once more; terror, bewilderment, frustration and despair!

So I need to keep coming back to meetings and re-emphasising the message to others, and myself, that I alone cannot stay gamble free, but together we can.

On my recent gambling debacle; I realised I hadn't done any nightly inventory for three weeks, and low and behold, I found myself in a casino once again — dangerous territory. I have since reflected and understood areas in which I can and must

improve on. There is always room for growth, and this is what I love about this program. There is an adage that I likened to poker that is very fitting to my journey of recovery; "it takes a day to learn, a lifetime to master". We're never going to master this fuzziness of addiction until we're long gone; however, we can learn, and relearn, something each new day. This journey is about progress, and I'm not here for perfection. Self-knowledge alone avails us nothing and Faith without works is dead: These are two mantras of mine, that show the triviality of intelligence, yet the utmost importance in action. It has been four days since my last bet, and God willing, I can make that another one today.

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

Sometimes I stop and think of how different my life is now that I am in recovery:

In Recovery

Gavin, Cleveland Street

Instead of starting work at eight in the morning like average days such as today, I used to start at two in the afternoon. Before the 13th of September 2016, the date of my last bet, the excitement of a free morning would have been somewhat overwhelming. I could do what I like; the world was my oyster, or so I thought. This sense of freedom and adventure, was actually my illness, talking to me, luring me toward some form of gambling. Typically, my day would progress in the following manner:

I wake up and instantly plan my free time around gambling with a real sense of excitement.

I put on the mask I created for myself and act extra loving to my girlfriend; a nice bit of manipulation before I go and cause some more harm.

I would lie through my teeth with regards to what I was going to do today.

I'd dread the possibility of her at taking the morning off when she hints that she can, so she can be with me. Inside I cry out "Nooooooooooooooooooooo!"

As soon as I'd seen her off, a half hour before the bookies open, I'd work as fast as I possibly could to tidy up, creating an illusion that I'd actually done something useful.

I'd grab my cash, my cards too. The promise I made myself to control my gambling by leaving them at home fails once more, but I wouldn't care. I'd run up the road with a skip in my step. Oh, the excitement!

I would then proceed to spend as long as physically possible in the bookies, not leaving until every penny I had was gone. It wouldn't be long before I was running like a madman, back and forth, back and forth, again and again to the ATM.

I'd use my phone to apply for a payday loan, or maybe beg my dad to transfer some money to cover some repair or other that simply does not exist. Sometimes, I'd do both. If luck was briefly on my side, I might run out for a bit of cheap junk food, but if there were a queue, really, I would rather starve. I'd be pulling out my hair, clenching my fists, hitting the machine and my heart would be going like the clappers.

Once that last penny was gone, I'd be calling work with an excuse as to why I was now running late - fabricating that my children were ill was always a reliable lie, when in fact it was me that was sick.

I'd quickly go back home to check the post and then, off to work, looking awful, sweating, my head in my chest and a vacant look in my eyes.

Today, now that I am in recovery, I am incredibly grateful that I can say that my day instead progressed like this:

Woke up listening to the birds that sing outside my bedroom window.

Said my prayers. I was feeling serene.

I planned my free time around my recovery.

Hugged my girlfriend, then made and ate breakfast together.

Waved goodbye and headed to the gym where I worked out for an hour or so. Feeling great.

I stopped off at the shops to buy some flowers for my girlfriend and a card for our anniversary tomorrow. I also grabbed some fruit to make a smoothie.

Showered and made myself presentable.

Made lunch to save money, and enough extra so dinner was prepared for when my girlfriend gets home.

Made my way to the Foley Street GA meeting and started this list on the tube.

Listened to the similarities, shared what I needed to share and got the magic in return.

Then, I headed to work with plenty of time to spare allowing me to finish this list.

I arrived at work with my head in the right place and a smile on my face.

What a change! From that to that! A miracle you may ask? That would suggest there was only one miracle. There were loads!

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

Buses and Lorries

Bryan, Watford

Back when I was in gambling, life always seemed much more straightforward than it has been since I stopped. This isn't because things were better back then, it's because nothing else mattered, as long as I could have a bet. At that time, I believed gambling was the solution to all my problems, not the cause. Every day was a new day and every new day gave me fresh hope that I would be able to find that big win, and go and make everything better. All I had to do was get the money together to have a bet. I would then find the opportunity to go and place it and get started creating a list of excuses. There were excuses for not being where I should have been, and there were excuses for where the money that I lost had gone on. Life was simple; then, it required minimal effort, or so I convinced myself. What I now know, is that I was not living in the real world; my brain was not wired up correctly back then.

When I first arrived at GA, I was suicidal; I believed that the only way out of my situation would be to kill myself. Although I had no plan on how or when I would do it, I so badly wanted the pain to stop. Gambling used to numb my pain but for the first time in my life, at the age of thirty-four, I realised that I was in the situation I found myself because I had a problem with betting. I needed to stop; the gambling anaesthetic for my pain was no longer an option. I had to face reality. I subsequently struggled with the other pain that living, in reality, brought me. I struggled with my recovery for two years in GA despite being abstinent since my first meeting. Everything that GA was offering was so very alien to me; everything I was being asked to do seemed so different. I resisted the changes they offered because I couldn't see how they could work for me. I found myself stuck between gambling and recovery, a horrible place to be.

I knew that it was imperative I did not gamble again, but I thought there was no way in which I could face what lay ahead. From time to time, I would stand on the kerb looking at buses and lorries coming down the road and think; this one. Thankfully, each time something stopped me. I have no idea what it was, but I am grateful today that I never did step out. My head was packed full of fear, guilt, anger and self-pity. I had an ego and very low self-esteem. I somehow felt loneliness and unhappiness when I was in a crowd. I felt genuinely uncomfortable for the first time in my life that I could recall. My problem was no longer gambling; I had not bet for two years; my problem was me. Because in my pre-GA life I never listened to anyone else, I didn't want to be like anyone else, I never shared my inner thoughts with anyone, I never believed anyone could be right unless they agreed with me, I never knew how to be honest, I never knew how to be open-minded, I never knew, I never knew, I never knew. This new life that GA was offering came at a price and that price was I had to change, but I did not know how to. For a lot of the time, I didn't actually want to change as I thought I was okay.

When I was gambling, it was all about me, and when I first stopped gambling, it was still all about me.

Apart from not gambling anymore, I made little progress during my first two years attending the room. Other members who came after me seemed to be able to enjoy their new found freedom but not me; it was though gambling had institutionalised me and I was out of touch with the real world. Things began to change when I started to comprehend the fact that I could not do this on my own. It was hard for me and my inflated ego to come to terms with, but I eventually came to realise that I had three choices. Choice one was to carry on being abstinent but extremely unhappy. Choice two, was to go back to the gambling when I was happier, but not living in the real world. Or there was choice three, to let go of my objections and allow GA and the members guide me through the changes that were required. It was not an easy choice to make, but I am grateful I chose option three; the right one. As a result, my ego

no longer ruled my thought process and actions. I came to believe that acceptance was better than rejection when it came to GA and the twelve steps of recovery.

Finally, after dragging my body to meetings for two years, my brain followed. Did these changes make me the perfect person? No, but it was a start, I was gradually making progress, and thankfully my previous suicidal thoughts no longer entered my head. My recovery has been slow and often painful, but the results have been worth it. It has taken me almost thirty years to reach the point I am today, but it would take just one bet to destroy everything I have now achieved.

I have made lots of mistakes since coming to GA, and I kept a secret for the first 6 weeks that almost wrecked everything. In the first two years I heard lots of therapies and a lot of advice but rarely did I listen to any. It took me probably five years before I started to accept that recovery is not all about me. Subsequently, I finally thanked my then wife for supporting me for five years. Too late, it turned out which is why she then became my ex-wife four years later. It took me ten years to complete my first step four inventory but ignored the financial bit to my cost seven years later. At around the ten-year mark, I started a relationship with an alcoholic, although I didn't recognise that at the time. I then went into denial, followed by an insistence that I will fix her problem, culminating in us splitting up around year 17 of my recovery.

For the past fourteen years, I have been in a great relationship with Barbara. It is made so much better because of the fact I do not take her for granted. I tell her every day that I love her, I accept that I am not always right and as a result, we argue very rarely, and when we do I apologise and revert back to normal. I am older now and gaining a bit of maturity with each new day, which has allowed me to appreciate every single day of my freedom from my addiction. Yes, recovery has in many ways been harder than my life when gambling, but it has been worth it.

Yours in GA.

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

"I realised that really no matter how much money I might have won; it would never be enough."

Never Enough

Justin, Beaconsfield

I started attending GA meetings at the start of November 2016. Two days prior to this I had the worst, but possibly the most important day of my life to date. It was the day that I finally admitted to myself, my parents and my girlfriend of eight years that I am a compulsive gambler.

I was not in control of my finances, nor my life. Earlier that morning I made my final deposits into an online sports betting account, in a last-ditch attempt to recoup my previous losses. I did not succeed; I truly had no more resources to drain money from. I'd neglected to pay bills and owed money to my family and friends. I resorted to calling my mum and broke down in tears, confessing that I had gambled away the money I was due to pay her back and I asked her to tell my dad. Stupidly, I chose to tell my girlfriend via text message, and we had relationship showdown talks the following day. I sincerely thought my relationship was over. To try and persuade her to give me another chance, I offered to attend the local GA meeting which happened to be the following day. We made the subsequent agreement it was the last chance to save our relationship.

I attended that meeting feeling broken, looking for guidance. My girlfriend showed her support by dropping me off and coming

to the doors with me. She listened as I went through the twenty questions with two existing members. Before walking through those doors, I had a misconceived perception that everyone I would come across would be scummy and horrible, a connotation that I didn't associate myself with. And yet, the two members weren't that at all. Almost immediately they made me feel comfortable. Finally, I had found people who genuinely understood me. After answering the questions honestly, one of the guys said to my girlfriend "It's great that you are still here supporting him" and her reply was "I'm not ready to give up on him yet". It was a tremendous boost, and although I knew everything wasn't going to be singing and dancing straight away, it certainly did give me hope.

I walked into the meeting and introduced myself as a compulsive gambler. I was told that I would be allowed to speak of my story at some point during the meeting, but I had absolutely no intention of sharing my feelings with a room full of strangers. However, as the session progressed, I began to feel at ease. I realised I had more in common with the people in the room than I would have previously guessed. I gave a short therapy and spoke of the build-up over the previous days which had led me to be there that very evening. I went home after that meeting feeling revitalised. In the room, there were people with much bigger problems than mine, for that I felt grateful. I pledged that I would continue to attend in order to save my relationship and regain some form of control of my life.

In the weeks that followed, I learnt of all the barriers and things that I could put in place to help stop me from gambling. Subsequently, I handed all my bank cards over to my girlfriend and carried no cash on me, with the view that if she were to request to look at my online bank statements, I would show her, no questions asked. I shut all online gambling accounts, and this seemed to work until I got to January 20th, when I broke my abstinence by foolishly purchasing a lucky dip lottery ticket.

I was buying a packet of chewing gum at the time and all of a sudden without thinking, I had a lottery ticket in my hand.

Looking back at it now, I attribute this mistake to my complacency that I was cured, something that I vitally needed to improve upon. I got myself a sponsor just after, as I thought that it was the next step to take. I heard lots of people in meetings talking about having a sponsor and how well it worked for them; I think at the time I asked my sponsor to be my sponsor because it almost felt the "trendy" thing to do, "if he's got one, I want one", kind of thing. As a result of that logic, I didn't use my sponsor for what a sponsor was for; I would call him and have everyday conversations, barely ever scratching the surface of my problems.

Around the middle of March, I relapsed once more. This time it was in a very big way.

It was as though I hadn't learnt anything in all those previous months or from the other member's experiences. In truth my barriers weren't really barriers, I'd left one online account open, to which I had VIP membership. I wasn't prepared to let that go, so I had left it open in the hope that one day I could gamble responsibly. This account already had my card details saved so I didn't need my card and my girlfriend had stopped asking to look at my bank account. Looking back, I'm not sure why I gambled again. Did anything, in particular, set me off? Was it merely the fact that I was an addict and would gamble at any given opportunity? I continued to attend meetings, but I would continuously lie about the date of my last bet. I had managed to accumulate a large amount of money by the middle of May, but inevitably by the end of May, it had all gone and then some. I realised that really no matter how much money I might have won; it would never be enough.

It wasn't until I attended an open meeting on June 25th, 2017 that I realised how wrong I was in doing what I was doing. I had attended a few open meetings and often friends, family members and partners were allowed to speak, but rarely anyone did, until this one.

The partner of a member got up and shared her story. Previously I didn't feel there were any similarities between

myself and this member; only the fact we were both compulsive gamblers. Not long after she began to speak, I soon realised how wrong I was. She spoke of the financial burden he had created, and how it put pressure on her to support them. She talked about the strain it put on their relationship, as well as the lack of trust. It felt almost as if my girlfriend had spoken to her beforehand and asked her to say these things on her behalf. I felt unbearably uncomfortable and hot; I was sweating pure guilt. I went home that evening, and I knew I had to come clean again, whether it meant the end of our relationship or not.

I couldn't keep doing this; I had to stop gambling. Once more I came clean and confessed everything. Unfortunately, I then had to attend a work training course for the next few days which meant staying away from home; this may have been a blessing in disguise, as it gave my girlfriend space and time to think. Once more, she promised to stick by me, but she made me aware it was genuinely going to be my very last chance. I knew that this time, she meant it.

I told my sponsor the following morning. Understandably he was angry and upset that I'd proceeded to lie and pretend everything was fine for as long as I had. The following Sunday I went to the meeting and finally, after nearly three months of gambling and lying to everyone, I admitted it all. This was my breakthrough; I'm in this for me, now. I was expecting a thunderous backlash; for the other members to wash their hands of me, after all, I'd been lying to them all for months. I'm still surprised and sincerely grateful to this day for the support that was shown to me. I vowed to change things, as what I was previously doing was simply not working. I started "The Twelve Step Recovery Program", and now I am beginning to understand myself a bit more. I accepted the fact that I was utterly powerless over gambling.

I now attend at least two regular meetings a week, which I now enjoy and no longer feel like a chore. I also fully utilise having my sponsor. I have learnt it's ok not to be ok, and if I'm having a bad day or something has bothered me, I can get it off my

chest and share how I feel and how I've reacted. I can talk deeper about my past and my experiences. Financially life is getting better, and there isn't the pressure to work seven days a week like there was this time last year. Although I am now more driven than ever to keep working hard, so I can build a better future; to save for a property, start a family and marry my amazing girlfriend.

At first, I used to think that I just needed to get out of debt and I'd be done, but now I know I need GA so that my life remains manageable and somewhat sane. GA has saved me, and for that, I am a grateful member.

A Thank You to GA

By Carol

When I was in addiction,
I was nowhere to be seen.
It pulled me in so tight,
It would not let me go.

It wanted to keep me,
In the dark away from the light.
The only thing I knew was to gamble,
Then I found GA.

It has shown me a different light,
A different way of life.
It has not been without a struggle,
I could not do it on my own.
The fellowship has been great,
Especially when I was feeling low.

I only have to pick up the phone,
And there is always someone there for me.
You are like my second family,
The only people that understands me,
Life would be so empty,
Without you guys.
Thank you for caring and sharing

A New Life

By Bryan, Watford

Gambling solved all my problems, that I believed was true,
Until I arrived at GA and learnt something new.

Gambling was causing me problems, not the other way
around, I attended regular meetings and soon a new life was
found. The twelve steps of recovery are a lifetime plan,
Which if worked correctly, can build a better man.
With each new therapy, lessons of recovery I do hear,
No longer do I suffer from resentment, guilt or fear.

My anger became manageable, now my ego is too,
Follow the twelve steps correctly, it will be the same for you.
Now I am honest, more understanding than not,
My sanity is restored, I seldom lose the plot.

This is a lifetimes program, that gets me through the day,
It always stops my self-pity, from getting in the way.
I am comfortable with myself, I never was before,
I can deal with my life, now that it doesn't feel so raw.

Our fellowship is amazing, the members are so caring,
I adore the honesty, that comes with each person's sharing.
For my gambling habit, I know there is no cure,
I cannot recover on my own, of that I'm so sure.

Now that I have GA, I know I'm not alone,
If I have an issue, a friend is always at the phone.
I appreciate the room has given me back my life,
Gambling has given me nothing, other than great strife.

Pay-Day Blues

By Gregg, Hull

End of another working week, I have now been paid,
It's a happy time for most, but I am just afraid.
Shall I go for straight home, or shall I have a flutter?
Do the second, the voice in my head does mutter.

My heart says go home, don't go and ruin another day,
You've got a family to support and a mountain of bills you
really need to pay.
I decide a small bet won't harm anyone, I'll be home for tea,
I'm kidding no one but myself, cos that's really not me.

Whether it's a horse, kick of a ball, or on the spin of a wheel,
When I'm in my zone, I want to be alone,
I can't tell you how I feel.
Nothing else has purpose, although I know that it is wrong,
Soon I've lost all my cash, a quite familiar song.

I lost every penny, even my bus fare home,
Making up lies and excuses, through the streets I roam.
How can I get hold of more money?
To win back what I just lost, I know that may sound funny.

One win away from a life that I'd call perfection,
Chasing it for years, the worst kind of infection.
I worry about knocks at the door or what may
arrive in the post,
Stress and upset at home, where I should feel safe the most.

The family home is in danger as I've not paid the rent,
I've ignored all the calls and letters many people have sent.

I've been in this situation before and somehow
always get through,
Although it's getting harder each and every day
if only you knew.

A loving but cautious kiss greets me as
I walk in through the door,
For a moment I feel guilty and then I think no-more.

The kids are already in bed, so no
bedtime story from their dad,
They forgotten what that is, can't even remember the
one that they had.

The shameful fact is I don't want to stop, even
though all is not well,
I'll risk losing everything, before having the decency to tell.
So one more week of dishonesty surely won't get in the way
I'll try struggle with my anxiety until my next pay day.

The Penny Drops

Anonymous

Pitch and toss
Profit or loss
When push comes to shove
I've no time for love

When the wheel is in spin
I'm certain I'll win
In my self-centred bubble
Immune to my trouble

Reality waits
Until I wake up to my fate
I've lost the lot
Then the penny drops

Foundations

Anonymous

They say a house without foundations won't stand the test of
time

This doesn't stop anyone destroying each and every wall like I
did to mine. A structure that housed a loving family and for
years stood so strong. Suddenly was left with only its
foundations, something unholy for sure had gone wrong.

I could not see through the dust created by this carnage, a
blanket of self-imposed red mist. I didn't stop when I had the
chance, because addiction is a heartless opportunist. When the
dust finally settled and all that was left standing was me. I
accepted I'd reached step one, I was powerless, that was
obvious to see.

Addiction wants you to live with the destruction, continue to
survive any way you can. No longer could I hide the fact that I
was also broken, a broken piece of man. The ruins that now
surrounded me, resembled my life reduced to pieces rubble. I
realised no-one has a magic wand, I must find my own way
out of this trouble.

Each shard of shattered glass, represented a day of my life
that had been wasted. Chasing the gambler's dream you see,
but no champagne had ever been tasted. Some building
materials survived the carnage, these could be cleansed and
used again, I threw away the damaged parts along with the
past suffering and pain. Family photos lay scattered in the
debris, only the frames need to be replaced.

In time these will hang on the walls again in the rooms they
once graced. The bad memories and mistakes made in this

house they disappeared in the wind of change. I turned over to a new page in life's book, from my former-self I felt estranged.

From the foundations that remained I committed myself to start rebuilding, slowly brick by brick. At first the task seemed an impossible one, the first few days I felt so sick.

Without an illness there's no recovery, I also worked on myself each passing day. Learnt to deal with the complications the rebuild threw up along the way. The first ninety days passed by so quickly, I was happy with the progress that had been made.

It was time to fit some windows the lower course of bricks were laid

Through the panes of glass I saw a future, the time-line was unknown. Only I could to plan my own destiny, my determination over grown. After a year came the first bad weather it interfered with my routine. I struggled to keep the build on track, something outsiders had clearly seen. Helping hands became plentiful, we all worked together through wind and rain. If it hadn't been for the support of fellowship these walls would have fallen again.

My home once again feels occupied, although the family never departed. I was the one who went off the rails, left loved ones broken hearted. I find time for conversations, I love to hear children's laughter. It's not a fairy tale that I'm chasing anymore, just a normal life is what I'm after.

One day the roof will be finished, that certainly isn't the end of the line. I will then have daily maintenance, to try and make sure everything stays just fine. I've also built a new foundation, one that lives deep within my soul. Combining this inner strength with a higher power I reach my daily goal.

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 responsibility for 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 arbitrators 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 about unduly things that cannot 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 become 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

Please email us with your stories and poems and together we can share our experience, strength and hope with each other.

Email: newlife@gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Alternatively, you can contact us via WhatsApp on
07961 356378



Gamblers Anonymous would like to indicate that we are not soliciting members. Our intention is to highlight that gambling for certain individuals is an illness called "compulsive gambling." Gamblers Anonymous provides the message that there is an alternative to the destruction of compulsive gambling and this alternative is the Gamblers Anonymous program. Our ranks are filled with members who are recovering from the illness by stopping gambling and attaining a normal way of life. These members remain ready to help any individual who passes through the Gamblers Anonymous door.

THE GA RECOVERY PROGRAMME

12 STEPS


The Twelve Steps of Recovery. These are the steps which are suggested as a program 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. Make 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 understood 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 UNITY PROGRAMME

In order to maintain unity our experience has shown that:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity.
2. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling.
4. Each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.
5. Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.
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.
7. Every Gamblers Anonymous Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Gamblers Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. Gamblers Anonymous, as such, ought never be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the Gamblers Anonymous name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
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.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the Gamblers Anonymous program, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A scenic view of a valley with unique rock formations and hot air balloons in the distance. The foreground shows rugged, reddish-brown rock formations with some green vegetation. In the background, a valley opens up with more rock formations and several hot air balloons floating in the sky. The sky is a mix of light blue and orange, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

**“ GOD GRANT ME THE
SERENITY
TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I
CANNOT CHANGE;
COURAGE TO CHANGE
THE THINGS I CAN;
AND WISDOM TO KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE. ”**

WWW.GAMBLERSANONYMOUS.ORG.UK