

I am Not a Gambler Chapter 2

When I was in the fog of gambling addiction, I did what my family suggested. I went to the Georgia Lottery website and found the toll-free phone number for problem gambling. I discovered that this number leads you to an operator in Warner Robbins who helps you to find volunteer groups in your area which conduct regular meetings to help gamblers. I had assumed that the Georgia Lottery was funding centers throughout the state, but if they are, I couldn't seem to find them. They only refer you to volunteer support groups. I was told by the operator to attend a meeting at such and such address, which was quite close to my home. I thanked her and made arrangements with my brother to meet him at the meeting room which was in a nearby church at 7:30 on Thursday night. I arrived at the meeting a few minutes late and my brother was waiting for me in the parking lot. We went in and the meeting began with people taking turns introducing themselves. Each person would say their first name and the first letter of their last name followed by "and I am a compulsive gambler." When it came to my turn I said, "Hello, my name is Gerard G. and I am a compulsive gambler," because that was what I was supposed to do.

The people in the room were kind and polite. I felt relieved that I had at last done the right thing. I was ready to admit that I was licked by gambling and would do whatever it took to get better. The first thing they asked me after welcoming me as a new member and I told them that my gambling problem was with lottery scratch-offs was "when was the last time you bought a lottery ticket?" I thought for a minute, should I lie or tell the truth? I decided to tell the truth because my brother was right there beside me and I didn't want to lie to him. He had never bought a lottery ticket in his life and the only reason he was at that meeting was to help me. I replied that I had bought a few lottery tickets on the way to the meeting. My brother was shocked because I had promised him a week ago that I was definitely quitting the habit. Well, the meeting went along well enough and we all went home feeling good about the fact that we were doing the steps and trying to lick this compulsion to gamble. It was nice because all the people in the room could relate to what I was going through because they had all been there themselves. I went to a meeting the next week, this time without my brother and I tried really hard to stop buying lottery tickets but I still continued to buy them and told myself that it would soon be over if I just kept going to the meetings and following the steps. The next Thursday I skipped the meeting. The following week I skipped again, but the week after that I went back. I started to think about how we introduced ourselves, with the "my name is XXX and I am a compulsive gambler." Something about that just didn't sit well with me but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. They told us at the meeting that some people in the population had a disease, the disease of compulsive gambling. For some reason, not quite understood by science, our brains were somehow 'haywire' and we had to follow the prescription of going to weekly meetings and going through the steps and using our belief in our Higher Power, as we understood Him, to help us resist the temptation of gambling, FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES. I was so depressed when I heard that I wanted to crawl under the table and hide for the rest of my life.

"Don't even gamble once, because you'll get right back into the habit" we were instructed. This was a disease and we would just have to battle it for the rest of our lives. They gave us all a beautiful keychain with the Serenity Prayer on it. I had heard the prayer many times before so I just read it along with the group by rote at the conclusion of the meeting. I didn't really, truly, deeply study the words, and understand the significance of that prayer. On my way home from the meeting I stopped at the nearest gas station and lost over \$250.00 in gambling on scratch-off tickets. I used the Serenity Prayer keychain to scratch the tickets. I don't think you are really supposed to do that. I was pretty down.

I went home and cried to my wife that I couldn't stop. She thought that was a rather lame excuse. She told me that my gambling was starting to affect her as well and I better get better, soon. I told her I wished I were in jail, so that way I would have the prison bars keep me from going out and buying lottery tickets. What in the world was wrong with me? I was trying. I was going to the meetings; I was doing the steps. Why couldn't I stop? Why couldn't I stop? This question plagued me and I felt like the main character in a Herman Melville novel. Why can't I stop? I mulled this over and over in my mind for several days. Then I saw my buddy, a homeless man, whom I had seen and talked to around our neighborhood. Chris was panhandling at the Big H food mart where I frequently bought tickets. I told him about my gambling addiction and he told me that he never got into buying tickets but in the past he had gotten involved in some other bad habits. I went home and got my old tennis shoes, which never fit

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me very well so they were still almost like new. I put them in my car along with a few of my shirts and slacks and a nice green blanket. Giving these items to Chris made me feel good about myself and he was very appreciative.

Me: Why are you homeless, Chris?

Chris: Well you know, it's just kinda the way it is right now. Someday I'll get a good job and things will be better.

Me: Do you want me to buy you a tent at Wal-Mart so you'll have a better sleeping area than just the green blanket on the dirt floor?

He looked at me as if to say, "are you insane?"

Chris: It's not on the dirt floor, man. I got a wood pallet down under there with a piece of sheetrock on top of that, THEN the blanket. I'm good for now, man. You done enough for me already, you don't need to do nothing else. I'm good.

A woman drove up. Chris went up to her as she stepped out of the car. "Hey there, my friend. How are you? Do you happen to have a light? I could use a few dollars to get some dinner with, you know. I'm so hungry. Could you spare a few bucks...?"

Chris was actually quite charming, and a good salesman. I stood back into the shadows and observed his game. The lady slipped him a five-dollar bill. I was impressed. She left. I watched. He entered the store. When he emerged with a new pack of cigarettes and a lighter I knew the reason for his homelessness. Or thought I did. He is homeless because he doesn't budget his money. He makes bad choices. It is his own fault. Why should I help him?

I got in my car and drove home. Why does he live under the Lot in a corner of an empty abandoned parking deck in the smelly corner with a blanket on the sheetrock on a pallet on the dirt?

Why would anyone do that?

My mind was getting dizzy with thoughts. Why couldn't I stop gambling?

Why couldn't Chris stop being homeless?

Why, Why Why???

When I was a child, I was told I thought too much and tried to figure everything out. I wanted to know why. I couldn't resist. I had to know. My mind was racing now. Why?

What does it matter? It matters A LOT.

The Lot.

Chris sleeps under the Lot.

Why do they call it the Lot?

Because on the upper level there are two words painted there which say "The Lot."

Duh.

Why can't gambling questions be that easy?

Why is he homeless?

Why can't I stop gambling?
Suddenly I felt a quiet calm.
My mind settled down.
I had a flash of inspiration.

Ask and you shall receive
Seek and you shall find.
Knock and the door will be opened unto you.

The answer to my questions came to me. I remembered a poem I wrote years ago:

**When the eyes are closed,
And the hands are still.
When the air around you is
tranquil and calm,
Listen to the sounds of your inner self.
Hear and evaluate
Each note,
Each rhythm,
Each combination.
Those which you need to hear
At this particular time
Will make themselves known.
Luck is not misplaced. It roams where it wills
And must be snatched before it passes by.
Love is never lost,
Beauty is never wasted,
A winning spirit never quits.
Action reflects mind.
And mind can be conditioned,
With love, beauty and a winning spirit,
To perceive when luck is approaching
And to create the moment
When mind and deed become one.**

I listened. I prayed. I heard.

Why is Chris homeless?
**Because he can't stop being homeless, he just can't.
Because he is addicted to homelessness.**

Why can't I stop gambling?
Because I couldn't stop. I just couldn't. Because I was addicted to gambling.

This was a huge breakthrough.

Why was it so important?

Because it took away all the garbage from my mind, all the misconceptions about addiction, all the moral baggage we all carry around with us. It cut to the core.

It was revolutionary.

It followed Occam's razor: The most efficient explanation of something is usually the simplest answer. Look at what this does, this clarifying of the answer as to why I can't stop. Look at what it does to the following arguments:

"If you loved me, you would stop gambling."

Hogwash.

The reason the gambler can't stop gambling is because he just can't stop. He just can't. And why? Because he is addicted to gambling.

"If you were morally responsible and followed the teachings of all the great religions, you would recognize the sin of gambling and turn from your bad ways."

Bunk.

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"If you just had more self control, willpower, discipline. If you just went to more meetings and followed the steps more rigidly you could stop."

Willpower, shmillpower. These things are meaningless to the person in the fog of the gambling addiction. What is willpower? It has no meaning.

Remember that the reason the gambler can't stop gambling is because he just can't stop. He just can't. And why? Because he is addicted to gambling.

"You're just chasing that dream of getting rich quick. You can't be happy with what you have, oh no, you have to win the jackpot. Well, if you were just more responsible and paid your bills instead of gambling, you could be happy."

Huh? What are these words to a gambler? They mean absolutely nothing.

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"You're so selfish, all you want is that 'rush,' that 'high' from gambling. You don't care about the ones around you that you're hurting. You're just thinking of yourself."

This one hurts the most. The gamblers out there who have been where I have been know the truth: There is no chasing of a rush or a thrill.

Once in the throes of full-blown gambling addiction, you become numb to winning. Money has no value. What is \$50? What is \$500? What difference does it make if you are in the hole \$2000 or \$20000? You're still in the hole.

You just want things back to normal but you don't know how. The only thing you do with your winnings is gamble more. Why, Why, Why?

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