



Gamblers Anonymous & Gam-Anon
All-Ireland / International Convention

"STILL GETTING THERE"

September 28th – 30th, 2018

Green Isle Hotel, Naas Rd, Dublin 22

Céad Míle Fáilte

Welcome — and thank you so much for being here at our Convention where we are celebrating **50 years of Gamblers Anonymous in Ireland.**

Our convention committee are delighted you are here and hope you will relax, enjoy and experience real personal benefit in the company of old friends and also find new friends.

We really want everyone to enjoy the weekend and believe the following suggestions will benefit the convention as a whole:

- **Please attend the workshops on time where possible.**
- **Please refrain from entering or leaving the room while a person is speaking.**
- **Please switch off your mobile phone during workshops.**
- **Attend as many workshops as possible.**
- **Try to share/speak in at least one workshop this weekend — your voice is important.**

If you have any queries or need help with anything at all, please feel free to approach any committee member and we will do our best to help you.

Still Getting There

After my very first meeting on 02/07/87, I declared when I got home that I would only need to go to GA for 5 or 6 weeks and then I would be cured.

(No-one at my first meeting told me that!)

What I did not realise at that time is that GA is a place to learn new skills that were alien to me. I thought I knew it all, but I knew nothing.

I had to learn to change my mind. I had to learn to listen, listen to learn rather than just listen to reply and the truth is; I often replied without listening.

I had so much to learn but as I had always done things my way it was difficult to accept that my thoughts and actions were not going to help me to recover until someone pointed out that my thinking and my actions had made a big contribution to me ending up in the mess that I was.

Things that were alien to me included living in the real world. My addiction convinced me I was doing nothing wrong when I was

gambling. Gambling was my way of getting through my life, it was the solution to all my problems, it was my anaesthetic to the pain that was life itself.

Things began to get better when I came to believe that my life was unmanageable and to accept the help that GA offers.

Although I have been abstinent ever since my first meeting I had little or no recovery in the first 2 years. After my first-year Open meeting my then wife told me that despite my abstinence I was making her life hell and wanted a divorce, we had only been married 9 months.

Another Gam-Anon Lady of 11 years standing, told me that I was the most miserable GA member she had ever met and a GA member over from Canada told me; *"If you are in the program and unhappy then you are doing it wrong — recovery should be enjoyed, not endured"*.

At the time, I thought I deserved to suffer for what I had done in the past, but

now know that I was depressed and wracked with guilt and fear.

Thank God for the 12 steps of recovery and the members who were prepared to lead me through them. Working the program has made such a difference and my life is so much better than I ever imagined it could be.

The program has delivered far much more than gambling ever promised.

My journey is far from finished because the 12 steps are a program for life and the more effort I put into my recovery the more I get out. I am still learning — 30+ years after my first meeting when I thought I knew it all.

The GA Recovery Program is an education without graduation.

I am very grateful to all my teachers, those in GA and Gam-Anon.

Please God may I learn still more about myself, my addiction and my recovery at this year's convention.

I was like a crazy women

I'm not going into the long version of my story, as it would take a book!, so I will shorten it the best I can.

Many years ago I met and married this man, had children, got a mortgage on a house and all was well for years.

My husband is a 'commercial traveller' – he and his brother ran a family business. He was away a lot, so I raised my children alone.

As time went on I had an inner sense that something was not right. I put it aside as I was kept busy. I actually thought there was something not right in our marriage.

There was times when the mortgage would run into arrears, bills not being paid – at one time a family member paid our bills. His excuse was "business was bad". Yet his brother, who was in the same business, was doing quite well; home extensions, nice cars, I could go on.

I still did not know it was *gambling!*

I knew he went to the races as I spent many Sundays with my children at the races with him – bored out of my tree. I just looked on it as an interest he had like other men liked football or other sports. As there were no gamblers in my family, I did not see

the extent of his interest – although now *in hindsight* I saw some behaviour in him I could not understand.

Gambling is a hidden addiction – also him being away working helped him keep his secret hidden.

When his moods got worse, this caused my anger to flare. I was like a crazy woman frustrated with a man who was 'emotionally unavailable'. I became a woman and mother I never wanted to be. It changed who I was. I lost myself.

It was like this for many years until I discovered the problem. Yes, very late into my marriage I discovered the truth, I was married to a 'compulsive gambler'.

I also discovered *Gam-Anon*. What a relief. Gam-Anon has shown me the most important thing was for me to detach from this mans' behaviour – the madness. Some nights at the Gam-Anon meetings you might have nothing to say, but you learn so much from listening to other members, and it helps you to get yourself back – back to the person God created you to be. Not the frustrated crazy woman screaming at a man who cannot or does not want to hear you.

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If the gambler goes for help, great! If not, you the spouse or family or partner etc. go for help. You will never look back.

I found Gam-Anon in my sixties. Far too late you may say – and in many ways for me it is as I have been estranged from one of my children for many years because of all the craziness – also because I did not know about Gam-Anon then.

I was so caught up in the madness of living with the gambler, I guess I was

not a nice mother at that time. I did the best I could in a difficult situation. I was in the dark then, but thanks to Gam-Anon, I can see the sun shine in the mornings.

I am still living in the family home with my husband – he is still gambling. But I am not a ‘gamblers wife’ anymore.

I got my life back. I still have my moments living in the same house. But with the wonderful, caring and sharing people in Gam-Anon I can be happy and smile again.

The First Step To Getting Anywhere ...

I started gambling at 7 years of age at the greyhound track. During my teenage years my gambling got worse and out of control especially after the death of my Grandad.

I had no life, no girlfriends, no holidays and no drive or ambition.

I was brought to my first GA meeting at the age of 21. I went to this meeting weekly and stopped gambling for 7 and a half years and even took up the role of Secretary.

I stopped going to meetings and thought that I could stay stopped on my own and that I didn't need GA or meetings. I eventually went back out gambling. I was out there 3 times and it was hell every time.

I came back into GA in November 2015. In a particular Group I was grabbed and hugged physically and mentally and the members haven't let go since. *(I don't want them to let go either!)*

All the bad things happened in my life when I was outside GA and all the good experiences happen in my life when I am in the rooms with groups and friends.

Today I feel like I can listen and open my mind. I am also willing to try things that members suggest for my recovery.

I carry the follow motto around with me on a daily basis; “The first step to getting anywhere is deciding you're not willing to stay where you are”

Peace of Mind, Love and Contentment

My name is Kevin and I am a compulsive gambler. I haven't gambled today or for a while now.

I came to GA a very sick man but I made my wife Maude and my children very effected as a result of my bad moods, bad temper and I caused a lot of pain for my family. I want to say that again – I caused a lot of hurt and pain for Maude, my loving wife. I didn't know how badly they were hurting until I was in GA for a few months.

I left my family without the basic necessities of food, heat, love, consideration, justice, peace, security. What kind of a husband, father, son would behave like that? (*A very uncaring person.*) It was a horrible situation.

For myself, nobody wanted to know me. All I was – was trouble! I had a chip on my shoulder all my life. If only things were different.

My gambling started when I was about 12

years old and I know now that it is a progressive disease. I stopped when I was 34.

When I came into GA I couldn't read and couldn't write. I couldn't talk. I was socially bankrupt. I didn't have any skills. What a way to be. No love for my wife. No food for my children.

When I started coming to GA meetings, I didn't want to be there. I didn't think that I had a problem with the gambling. (It has been my experience that any person that came to a GA meeting *had* a problem with gambling.)

So I know that step 1: I admitted that I had a problem. Step 2: I came to GA and then I came to believe in GA The most important thing was that I came to GA.

I can't understate the crazy life I caused around me. I met some lovely people in GA who showed me the way along with many more lovely people.

The 1st year was very difficult – a long list of debt to be paid back, a marriage to be saved and all the other bills that have to be paid week to week.

I found the 2nd year more difficult that the 1st – (and if I did – how must it have been for Maude?). Things slowly got better in the 3rd year and I began to believe in GA.

How do I think I stopped gambling? – I know – it was my *Higher Power* came into my life.

You see, I had a lovely sister-in-law who died at the age of 15 with cancer – my wife Maude's sister called Theresa. I prayed to her to help me to stop inflicting the misery on Maude and the children and I do believe that's how I got stopped.

As a result of GA and Gam-Anon we have the greatest love as a family that I could only have dreamed of when I was out there gambling. That

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Forever Grateful

Joining Gam-Anon was the best thing I have done for myself. I was in a bad place as a result of my husbands' gambling. I was alone and depressed.

When a member of GA suggested I should go to Gam-Anon. There I found people with similar problems who offered help and advice to new members like me.

It was the start of turning my life around. I am in a good place with friends I have found in Gam-Anon for whom I will be forever grateful

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feeling of being part of a loving family. To be able to clasp your sons and daughter with the love a father should have for his own children. *This is the greatest gift GA has given me.*

We have children working in some major cities in the world ... thank you GA. We have three lovely grandchildren ... thank you GA.

We have peace of mind ... love ... contentment. We have a fire in our hearts ... we have a spirit ... we have a sense of justice ... we are financially good.

Or could a compulsive gambler like me say we will never go hungry again? We will never have the shame that compulsive gambling brings? That we will never have our car taken from us and the shame that brings – walking home from town with the children and our neighbours wondering where our car is? What a pitiful life to live.

Thank God for showing us the way to Gamblers Anonymous. God bless GA, Gam-Anon and all our members. Step 12: Carry the message of hope to those who still suffer.

**It was all
about me
...
and only
me!**

I am a recovering gambler and alcoholic. My life and my family's life were destroyed from my addictions. But, the main one that caused all the damage was gambling. It destroyed me; I lived each day for a gamble. I gambled from early morning to late at night and because of my addictions it was all about me and only me.

I lied. I stole. I was a monster. In the end, my wife and children did not know who I was or who I had become. I rang Gamblers Anonymous and I admitted I was a gambler and my life was unmanageable. From the first meeting up to today, this was the best decision that I ever took. My life now for me and my family is the best that I could ever ask for (one day at a time). And as for the help I received, our lives are better.

Please remember;
"if it is to be - it is up to me."

If I worked hard that there was a chance

I came to Gamblers Anonymous just over four years ago. I agreed to go to GA at the request of my family. I went without a fight only because I thought that come 'Judgement Day' it would help the judge to not send me to jail!

Despite destroying my career, wasting all of my money - and then some - I honestly believed that I did not have a problem with gambling.

Just 4 days before attending my first GA meeting I broke the news to my wife Mary telling her that I had stolen a sum of money and that I was going to hand myself into the Gardaí.

She was devastated with the news and felt we had been living a lie since we met, nevertheless her instinct was to fight and try to keep me out of prison. Mary called all of our family to let them know what had been going on and to ask for help.

Ultimately, all of the family were too hurt and devastated by the situation to offer me any help, if anything they were so angered they would prefer if I would just go to jail and stay there. My mother hugged me only to whisper *'I was a bastard for doing this to my kids!'*

My first GA meeting was very strange, I sat there with the perception that I was better than the people in the room.

I had previously formed the opinion that compulsive gamblers were sad individuals that spent their days running in between the bookies and the pub, spending their

dole money living a sad lonely life. It was amazing how much I could relate to what was being shared in the room about how these people felt and what they had gone through. Nevertheless, I left my first meeting convinced that I did not have a problem with gambling but I returned to a meeting to keep Mary happy and to get a break from all of the stress that was at home (*the stress I had created*).

Thankfully Mary went to Gam-Anon. There she learned that things could get better and that I need never gamble again if I accepted the help of the 'lads next door'. Hearing this gave me strength, I knew that Mary was under pressure from all of her family to leave me but felt that if I worked hard that there was a chance that she would stay with me. I really wanted us to stay together because we had a young family and I loved them dearly.

I realised I would have to work very hard to have any chance of staying in the family home as one special member of the family that wanted me out was my then 12 year old daughter. Naturally, Mary felt it was vital that she protect her family from me and my addiction. Thankfully Mary made the decision to give me **one** chance ... on the condition that I never gamble again.

This condition scared the shit out of me! How could I possibly live without ever gambling again? I really wanted to stay with my family, but a life without gambling scared me.

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I knew I had to work harder and ask the rooms for more help. the more I opened up in the rooms the more members supported me, I know now that they helped me because they had been in my shoes and gone through the struggles I was going through.

After many months of recovery I realised how bad my situation actually was. I came to realise that I was a sad lonely person who ran from work to the casino and then to work spending all of my hard earned money! I ultimately became suicidal at the height of my gambling and thought that the only way to stop the madness of what I was doing was to 'do away with myself'.

I could not do it. How could I possibly leave the family that I loved so much behind? The fact that avoiding self harm was such a struggle gives me the shivers and shows me that I was a lost sole struggling. I now no longer struggle alone I share my life with my family and members.

Four years on I am free of a bet living in the family home as part of the family and many of the people who turned their back on me are now back in my life and respect that I was very ill when I did what I did and respect me for working hard to turn my life around.

My addiction made me a thief and I did end up in prison for a period of time and I am very grateful to have that part of my

life behind me. The support that GA offered me and my family during this particularly rough time was immense and went a long way to make me and my family appreciate and respect the support that is available in GA. Also, by not gambling I have not stolen since coming to GA and therefore I am no longer a thief.

GA has been beside me everyday and held my hand through a lot of tough times but what I am most grateful for is the fact that I was able to find the strength to fight this terrible addiction (with a lot of guidance). Today I have the tools to protect myself and continue to improve my life with the help of GA and the 12 Step Recovery Program. I have found great friends and support in the rooms and know they will never let me down.

I have often thought about what one thing could I say to someone so that they could find what I have found. The best I can come up with is 'stick with GA'.

However, so far I have not been able to find any wise words that would convince a compulsive gambler that they should stick with GA. The want in me to stick with GA happened gradually by staying away from a bet, attending meetings and as my head cleared the more I realised how much gambling controlled me.

Now the more my life improves the more precious my recovery is and the more important it is to me to keep trying to do the right things so that my head stays safe.

*Of all the sad words of tongue or pen,
the saddest are these; "It might have been"*

The Top Job Of Making The Tea!

When asked to put down my thoughts about this year's celebrations, my mind went back to my very first convention in the *Royal Marine Hotel* in Dun Laughaire, Dublin.

I can't remember the year but can remember the convention, we struggled to get the money together to pay for the weekend. In our case we were a long way off paying back the bills I had managed to build up over the years of addiction, not to mention our relationship and the damage that I had created between us and our family's.

This was going to be the first time as a couple we would sit down in workshops and listen to members and their partners talk openly about their experiences and to tell the truth that scared us.

Thankfully we learned that GA and Gam-Anon is not just all about the horror stories, we saw that there was so much more to recovery that filled us with hope for the future.

It is very hard to explain how this happens and I believe the only way to find this out is to attend a convention. Let's just say this was my first convention but definitely not my last - and over the years I have met and shared some wonderful times with very special people who have been so kind to allow me to be part of their recovery and experience.

One of the more important things I learned over the years about conventions was that I had an opportunity to learn and to get to practice the 12th step while at them

Taking time to speak with members and I don't just mean the members of my own group or friends who I have known over the years.

At my 1st convention, people spent time with me and help guide me through the program even though we had never met before.

It's my turn to give something back and take part in all the meetings I can.

How are things today? Where do I begin, first of all I have not had a bet today and that's a great start, my family are all well and enjoying having recovery as part of their lives today.

I am still attending meetings on a regular basis and part of a wonderful local group that have become a very big part of my life today.

The friends I have made and kept over the years I will be forever grateful to them all. Also a big part of my recovery is getting involved with the running of the group, and having been elected to the top job of *making the tea!*

You may laugh but this I feel is one of the most important parts of the meeting. It's when you get a chance to get to know the members and swap numbers.

Not forgetting that it is easy to work the program *in the rooms* - my problem is when I leave the room and go home or to work.

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That's why it is important to me to use the phone between meetings. Calls for me are not just for when things are not going well, and please try to remember; it is not just the new member that needs that call, those of us who are about a long time also need that call.

I spent many years working on my addiction so why do I think that a two hour meeting is enough to maintain a good recovery? I have no problem admitting that I have to still work on my recovery and that I am still learning about this 12-step program.

What I have found is that if my views and understanding of any step has not changed then I have not learned anything.

I am very blessed to have this program as part of my life today, for what It has done for me and my family I can never repay.

But that will never stop me trying.

Dear Gambling ...,

I wrote a letter to gambling in March 2010 while still 'in action'. Having spent two weeks in GA at lunchtime meetings, I had gone back out.

I wrote...;

Dear Gambling, I hate you, I hate how you make me feel, I hate the way you take me away from life. I hate how you control me.

I wrote this in a school copy book using a green maker, as that was the only 'pen' I could find in that instant, because I couldn't see the forest for the trees.

I still couldn't see it for another 11 more months.

I walked into my first serious GA meeting, second time around on a dark, rainy Monday evening. Arguing in my head all the way into the meeting. *'They are going to recognise me, they are going to say I knew you would be back, we knew you couldn't do it on your own'*.

I had my iPod playing in my ears as I walked and wasn't really listening to what was playing. As I walked in the door to the meeting room Kenny Rodgers *The Gambler* was playing in my ears. It actually made me smile, as it said in the song; **you've got to know when to fold them.** I was ready to fold on gambling.

Walking into that first meeting was daunting, frightening, shocking but also warming and freeing. It gave me a feeling of belonging. That is how I feel every time I walk into a meeting. *I belong*

'ADDICT' – A person who is addicted to a particular substance, typically an illegal drug

Well I am an addict and gambling was my drug. Look at me from the outside and I don't look like an addict, but inside I'm as big an addict as the poor unfortunate who injects himself up a dirty laneway or the drunk who stumbles around the street.

I could be anybody! Your husband - your wife - your son - your daughter - your bank manager - your local guard - your best friend. *I could be you!*

This disease will take anybody. It will destroy you, your family and anybody who loves you or you love. It has the potential to destroy everything in its path.

Today I am gamble free but let me take you back in time to when I wasn't ...

On the outside, everything looked good but inside me was hell. My gambling was secret, online in the confines of my home. This disease drove me to dark places. Beg borrow or steal, it didn't matter once I had money to gamble with.

This disease drove me to be a downright scumbag (*and I don't say that lightly*). In my normal course of thinking, I wouldn't do what I did in the past. I thought my gambling only affected me, sure what harm was I doing?

I was destroying my family, I was killing me. Thankfully today I am not that per-

son, but I know waiting around that corner, just outside that window is my addiction waiting to take hold of me again. My addiction wants me to drop my guard and let it back into my life.

Today I take life as it comes. I attend my meetings to get my 'medicine'. It was told to me early in recovery that if I don't bet again, I won't lose any more money - a simple thought that so many of us struggle with.

To those who are struggling and suffering, put your hand out, ask for help, it's not easy to do - but this fellowship has a way of helping. Come into any room, listen, and talk, get peoples numbers and use the fellowship.

Try get a network of people who you can talk with. Tell them when things are good, tell them when they are bad, seek advice and get your life back.

Take control of this addiction, it will never go away but with our medicine we can put it into hibernation.

This is a lifelong programme. We gave a lot of time and effort to gamble, give time to your recovery and to your fellowship and get your life back.

Be happy, be safe and enjoy your weekend here at convention.

"I'll Throw My Money In The Bin"

I'm not too lucky when I gamble
I lose more than I win
I would probably do better
If I tossed my money in a bin

The next one had a jockey
Who's eyes were badly crossed
I won't tell you how he finished
But, I'll tell you that he lost

Gambling is not just luck
It's timing and some skill
Some gamble for the fun of it
Some gamble for the thrill

To gain back my small pittance
I went to the dog track
My first dog had a rider
A small monkey on his back

To define exactly what it means
To risk money that you've earned
Means throwing out sensible thought
And not heeding what you've learned

In the third race I got daring
And I bet on number three
Once the race got started
He had to stop and pee

For example, I played poker
And I lost most every cent
I lost my mortgage payment
Now, I'm living in a tent

I picked a dog in the fifth race
Just because I liked his name
It was the best one I have ever heard
I bet you sorry that you came

To win it back I chose to go
And get double at the track
The first horse that I bet on
Fell and broke his back

The odds were long but what the hell
I was now gambling just for fun
Not only did he catch the rabbit
My bloody dog had won

The second horse was scratched
I was in for a bad night
My fifth horse only had 3 legs
And he could just turned right

I think I've got the secret now
I know just how to win
If I get tempted to go back and bet
I'll throw my money in the bin

WHAT YOU LIVE WITH YOU LEARN

WHAT YOU LEARN YOU PRACTICE

WHAT YOU PRACTICE YOU BECOME

WHAT YOU BECOME HAS CONSEQUENCES

"It wouldn't be if I didn't do ..."

I started writing my story and kept putting it down for another day. It took a while to figure out why but the answer was obvious when it was identified. I'm at a stage in my recovery where there's few things that annoy me as much as a war story.

In my addiction, and also in my 'go it-alone' approach to trying to stop, I often did the same thing that failed before — believing that I'd get a different result. Essentially the definition of insanity.

For me, simply telling my story, especially if it is done without reflection and emotion is simply repeating ... not too far from insane. By doing this I am essentially telling myself that I'm completely fine with myself exactly where I am and, at least today, I don't want to change.

This doesn't mean that I think I'm perfect, or that there's not a list of things I want to change or improve about myself.

I've stopped gambling, I've stayed stop, and I love the person I am, while knowing there's still more. My daily goal therefore now

becomes to try and becoming a slightly better person in a slightly better place every day. Some days there's great strides and sometimes there's backward slides as I engage in habits and behaviours that I would delay on repairing. In my day to day life, a tool I find really helpful is what I call *Constructive Reflection*. Others may call it differently. What it is in a nutshell is a decision to try to never look at the past for the purpose of beating myself up - but only ever as a way of learning and enabling me to improve.

One of the things that I found difficult for a long time was looking back on past events. I could of course tell my war story without emotion, but when I went through these things in my own time it would regularly bring up hurt, fear, regret, and loads of other things that were uncomfortable.

What 'fixed' me was a word that is thrown around the fellowship quite often, without much of a second thought most of the time; *Acceptance*. I accept what has happened

and I accept that this cannot change. "*It is what it is*" is a phrase that some may find to be a cliché. For me though, it acts as a reminder that the past is not something I can control, therefore it is something I must accept if I want to recover.

I'm not claiming it is a get-out-of-jail-free card either. It is only a tool to enable me to accept that where I stand today is where I am. That does not mean I need to stand here tomorrow.

Consider a sporting event where your club is losing at half time. Half time (the present) is not the time you sit and think about the first half and feel bad for yourself because you're losing. Half time is the time to look at what happened, be honest about what you did wrong, and be resolute that you will do things better in the second half.

You will learn from your mistakes and you will make amends to your team if possible. You won't do everything in the second half you set out to do, but you'll certainly be a better team mate and individual.

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Are We There Yet ?

"Are we there yet?" is a question commonly asked when we are going on a journey to somewhere nice. We concentrate on our destination instead of enjoying the actual journey. The same can be said for many of us on the road to recovery. Although we suffer from impatience we also suffer from procrastination. We want to get there quickly but with the handbrake on. Most of us would get further and quicker if we didn't stand in the way of our own recovery. No need to look back as you're not going there. Keep focused on going forward and never stop. The road to recovery is always under construction with plenty of twists and turns. The most important thing is to listen to your *Sat Nav*, or Higher Power as I prefer to call him and enjoy the ride.

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There's another idea that comes up in discussions from time to time which helps take the hurt out of the past (or my current thoughts of the past). Instead of "*it is what it is*" you could think "*It wouldn't be if I didn't do*".

My life is full today, thanks to the growing string of days I've stayed away from a bet and worked on my life. I have a wife and a child who make me smile every day.

If I go back six or so years ago I had pretty much given up on ever becoming a father. I have a job, co-founded a business, and have never had so many numbers of people I can

call whenever I need them. I have ... *wait for the cliché* ...; **a life beyond my wildest dreams!**

The kicker is, if I could remove my addiction, or my addictive experiences, those things as I appreciate them today, would not exist. I learned to accept the past because it has allowed the present that I love and helps shape my future.

I'm going to leave you here with a challenge and a request. The next time you're asked to do a chair, do not rehash your war story. Talk about what's going on at the minute and talk about what you want to change/work on at this stage of your recovery.

Where do I start? When will it stop?

All the lies and deceit, the tears and the stress?

Not for the gambler, but for everyone else ...

running after him, chasing his tail, worry and

frustration when he goes missing for a day.

The day turns to night and the worry goes on, but not for the gambler who is just on the run.

It's something we're used to, it's like it's always been there. Doesn't make life easier, because, yes - we still care.

We know it's a sickness - an illness of sorts - we know he can't help it - but he has to start trying ... for everyone's sake.

Why doesn't he get it, all the pain and the stress. Why does he feel it's okay, or is it he couldn't care less?

When will it stop? Will we just have to accept that maybe it won't?

It's not easy being the sister of a gambler, to see what it is doing to the whole family. The anguish and worry which has been part of our whole lives, which we wish would just stop. Wishful thinking I know—but you have to hope.

I Am Comfortable With Myself

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 round
And going to regular meetings, led to a new way being found

The twelve steps of recovery are a lifetime plan
Which if worked correctly, could make me a better man
As I learn from others therapies, given freely for me to hear
No longer do I suffer from resentment, guilt or fear

My anger is more manageable, as is my ego too
And if you follow the twelve steps consistently -
it could do the same for you

I'm now more honest than dishonest, more understanding than not
My sanity is restored and I seldom lose the plot

This is a lifetimes program that gets me through the day
And stops my self pity from getting in the way
I am comfortable with myself, which I never was before
And the reality of life no longer seems so raw.

Our fellowship is amazing, the members so caring
I love the honesty, that comes from people sharing
For my gambling habit I now know, there is no cure
And I can not recover on my own, of that I'm totally sure

The *Serenity Prayer* is the common name

for a prayer written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971). Niebuhr, who first wrote the prayer for a sermon at Heath Evangelical Union Church in Heath, Massachusetts, used it widely in sermons as early as 1934 and first published it in 1951 in a magazine column.

The prayer spread both through Niebuhr's sermons and church groups in the 1930s and 1940s and was later adopted and popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs.

The best-known form is;

God Grant Me The Serenity

*God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
the courage to change the things we can,
and the wisdom to know the difference*

The philosopher W.W. Bartley juxtaposes without comment Niebuhr's prayer with a Mother Goose rhyme (1695) expressing a similar sentiment:

*For every ailment under the sun
There is a remedy, or there is none;
If there be one, try to find it;
If there be none, never mind it.*

Why can't I join in?

Gambling was part of my life from an early age. My grandmother was a widow so one of her grandchildren stayed with her. My nana went to bingo a couple of times a week and after we went to the slots.

So to me, gambling was the norm - I had my first bet on a horse aged eight at a race course. I gambled on slots, fruit machines and poker machines up to my late teens and then the horses and dogs in the bookies started. It was on and off between bookies and poker machines.

I now know I am a compulsive addictive person - addiction is prevalent in my family

I met my wife and we had two children—my addiction came out periodically. When I was 36 I moved jobs and had a lot of free time and for the next 10 years my addiction got worse. The last four years was hell on earth.

At work I was constantly chasing my tail - my home life was hell for my family and me. We would spend the evenings in different rooms and when we ate dinner at night, there was no noise. It was quiet until I left the room and then there would be talking a laughing.

From the other room I would hear them and wonder "why can't I join in?"

I was a very angry man and my mental health was affected.

I got found out on 23-1-2013 by my wife. She had a telephone number for GA. I rang and got a member from Sligo and had a chat with him. I then went to my first GA meeting.

My life changed slowly, but the relief of not having to lie was massive. With time, my family life got lots better and I am closer now with my wife and kids.

My life changed for the better when I started learning about and practising the 12 steps. I hope it is changing me for the better.

I Would End Up In Tears , And He Would Walk Out The Door.

If I contemplate what Gam-Anon has done for me it is almost unquantifiable. Because I attend meetings regularly I feel supported, protected and cared for by people who have 'lived my story' and therefore understand who I am.

In my life I have found a peace and serenity – something I would never have thought possible many years ago. We have a happy, 'drama-free' home now and our stresses and concerns are those of 'normal people', not those of a family struggling with the emotional illness that is *Compulsive Gambling*.

As I write this story I am sitting in my garden under a lovely blue summer sky. I feel at peace – a long way from the anxious fearful woman I used to be.

1992 is a year I shall always remember. It was the year my youngest daughter was born and also the year that my husband admitted that

he had a gambling problem. He had (*without my knowledge*) brought our business to the brink of bankruptcy and accumulated debts from a wide variety of banks and institutions.

I had accepted his lies and broken promises for years. Of course I had constantly questioned him which resulted in awful rows where I would end up in tears and he would walk out the door. In the end I thought that I was to blame – I was so devoid of self-worth – naive and trusting that I was completely conned.

Of course our children suffered greatly in that tense and emotionally unavailable environment. I had no idea then about how our dysfunctionality was damaging them.

My husband entered a treatment centre and for the following year we both attended an after-care pro-

gram. Life became more manageable and our situation improved.

However, in the years that followed (and our business improved), he began to invest in property and initially it seemed like a wise decision.

But as his interest in property grew his behaviour changed. The arrogant, egotistical person that I knew returned. Once again I was unable to reason with him.

He became obsessive about trying to accumulate more and more wealth. Of course this obsession was aided by an Irish economy that was in a 'boom' phase and banks were lending huge amounts of money. Unfortunately when the crash came – so did my husbands'.

He had once again gambled our security away.

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He entered a psychiatric hospital and was treated for severe depression. Soon afterwards, encouraged by a wonderful therapist, I started attending Gam-Anon meetings.

I feel privileged to say I belong there now. My husband has also embraced the GA fellowship in a whole-hearted way and will be ten years free this September (2018).

We have wonderful friends in both fellowships. Life is good, relationships are treasured – joy is embraced.

Most importantly there is freedom from addiction and its' dire consequences. For this I am truly grateful.

**Some people
feel the rain.
Others just
get wet!**

Part Of A Story ...

I was 26 years old when I walked into the rooms. I thought I had hit my rock bottom - I had myself convinced that I was walking into recovery with Grace, Humility and Action - that somehow it would be easy and that I would be cured from one meeting a fortnight while arriving late and leaving early and all I had to do was sit at the back of the room and listen and watch other's get well.

In 2000 their was a hundred reason's why I gambled, but all I really knew was that it progressed - regards where I gambled and the things I gambled on - and the money and time spent gambling and that I couldn't stop.

A lot of the time I overlooked my gambling repressed in my head somewhere. To this day, I can't remember a great deal of my story without doubt as I arrived into the rooms for the first time.

However, now aged 43 I can still remember my deterioration and the destruction I had caused others and to self.

Nevertheless, I had another moment of clarity in

May 2008 but this time it seemed different the only way I can explain it is *"it wasn't that heaven opened it's gates and let me in - it was when hell opened it's gates and let me out"*

Yes I've been back gambling again... it has taken me eight and a half years to get my 90 days but I don't see that as a regret it was simply my journey.

Today I **TRY** and walk into the recovery room with grace, humility and action and the gratitude knowing that I celebrated my 10th birthday in GA in May 2018.

I am privileged to walk alongside others as they reclaim their lives and restore their relationships with self and others.

Finally, I get to encourage others to love and to be loved and welcome others into the peace of mind I share most days at my meetings. But also outside of the meetings through honesty, open-mindedness and the willingness to change.

Today there is only one reason why I can't gamble, I can't gamble safely.

Who is the man on the stairs?

One night, I hear a noise downstairs, I am wide awake – I think it's nothing – then I hear it again- the creak on the stairs, the slow careful step – but the creak is there – from the bottom up step 1, step 2, I know there are 12 steps – who is it? What do they want? How did they get into our home.

My heart pounds – I am scared but I must protect my family, my wife, my 3 small kids fast asleep. I jump up, I take a piece of wood from under my bed –

I am now really angry, I will do anything to protect my family.

I move to the landing – I can see him – he has 3 steps to go - I look at him – he is not afraid, I am not afraid, he is wearing a balaclava. I can see his eyes - he has green piercing eye.

How can this man enter my home and put my family at risk – I will do anything to protect my family. I attack him and knock him down the stairs. We fight - I pull off his balaclava – I look

into his eyes - it is *me*.

I wake up in bed and realise this was a really bad dream. I think about what just happened and now I understand.

As a compulsive gambler I am the one who is most likely to be the man on the stairs in my home. I know I must do whatever I need to -do to keep that man away.

Today I attend regular GA meetings. With the help of GA I am free from gambling for many years. GA has changed my life – it keeps me safe – it keeps my wife and my kids safe – it keeps my stairs from creaking at night.

My gambling started in 1972, the year I got married. It was fun at first but it got serious very quickly. At first I gambled my own money. Then I borrowed from the Credit Union and anyone I got money from to feed my addiction. I was soon out of control and in a lot of debt.

My 'big day' was Saturday. This would begin at 11am for the dogs and if I still had money I would stay in the betting shop 'til closing

time – in the summer this would be 9:00 p.m.

I went to GA in 1980 but I only stayed for a short time. I spent the next thirty years in and out of GA

I Decided I Had Enough!

I got into a lot of serious debt thinking of nothing but where I could get money for my next bet.

In 2010 on the 10th of July I decided I had enough. I came clean with my partner

Cathy, told her everything, gave her control of my bank card and I haven't look back since that day.

GA is a huge part of my life. I go to three meetings every week and do phone service once a week on Wednesdays. I have lots of real friends in GA

In the past I went because I wanted to keep people off my back. The difference today is, *I want GA*

Stay Out Of My Life

You took ten years of my life and for that I can forgive
But now I need you out of my life and just let me live

What I hate about you most is I can't do anything right when you're there –
not even a simple task

And I constantly walk around feeling as though I'm wearing a mask

You not only hurt me but you hurt all my family, not one you don't spare
With you in my life I'm always thinking: "*life is just not fair!*"

The pain you cause everyone – my mother, my sister and even my brother
And when I'm done with you, you can always find another

You get me from 6ft - down to feeling 4ft tall
And when I'm with you I feel nothing at all

You love having me alone and having my thoughts dark
Believe me – you have left your mark

But now I'm happy I'm away and I'm starting to think clear
I can even hear them birds whistle in the air

And slowly but surely coming back to myself
no longer feeling like a bad old book being left on a shelf

I'm now feeling happy with my family, kids and future wife
You no longer control my life

I wrote you this poem to let you know I have moved on
I feel like a pro-footballer in his prime

But I always remember how to keep you away
One day at a time

In September 1968, Dr. Jack Rose came to Dublin and introduced Gamblers Anonymous to Ireland through the *Late Late Show* on **RTE** Television.

Eight days later a public meeting was held in the **Great Northern Hotel** and some weeks after, the first closed GA meeting was held in 42 Eccles St., Dublin 3.

For three years, there was only one meeting in Ireland and members travelled long journeys to attend; 4 hours drive from Cork and 3 hours from Limerick, Galway, Sligo & Belfast respectively.

(There were no motorways at this point)

Some of the early members were Docker Joe, Football Dick, Harry The Green Jumper, John G, Limerick Joe, Cork Bernard, Lesly D, Donegal Donal & Dublin Rita from Gam-Anon. These members made huge efforts to travel to Dublin for their meeting and they laid a great foundation for the Fellowship that we have today.

New meetings opened in Limerick in 1971 followed by Cork in 1974, and gradually Gamblers Anonymous grew with meetings now all over the country.

Today there are over 100 GA meetings in Ireland.