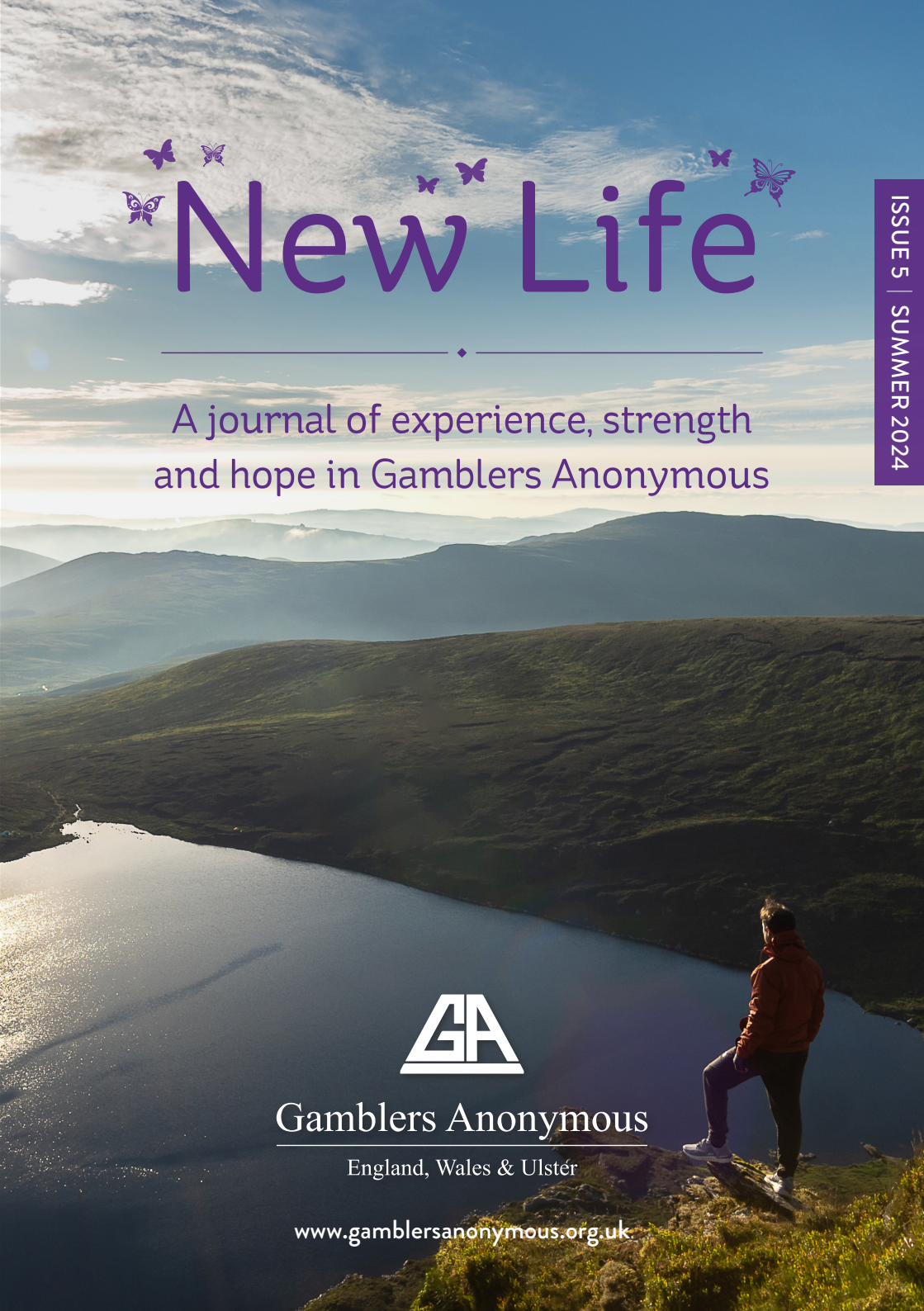




New Life

A journal of experience, strength
and hope in Gamblers Anonymous



Gamblers Anonymous

England, Wales & Ulster

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

ISSUE 5 | SUMMER 2024

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who have joined together to do something about their own gambling problem and to help other compulsive gamblers to do the same.

This journal comprises contributions from compulsive gamblers who want to share their experience, strength and hope. The opinions expressed may not be those of the Fellowship.

National Committee Contacts	
Secretary	nat.sec@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Female Liaison	nat.female.liaison@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Information	info@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Let's Talk	lets.talk@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Literature	nat.literature@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
New Life	newlife@gamblersanonymous.org.uk 07787 177 903
Prison Liaison	nat.plo@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Public Relations	nat.pro@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Telephone Co-ordinator	nat.phone@gamblersanonymous.org.uk dep.nat.phone@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Treasurer	nat.treasurer@gamblersanonymous.org.uk
Webmaster	webmaster@gamblersanonymous.org.uk



New Life

A journal of experience, strength
and hope in Gamblers Anonymous



Gamblers Anonymous

England, Wales & Ulster

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk



A note from the Editor

As we move ever forward toward the digital age it has been decided to reduce the number of copies per GA meeting to two copies. Hard copies will continue to be distributed to all registered GA groups. Many members have access to the digital version, which is always added to the Literature section of the GA website.

If I have one personal comment to make about some of the contributions in this Issue it is one of both surprise and disappointment. Compulsive gambling is not only a killer, but is clearly recognised as a mental health issue/illness by the World Health Organisation. To hear of it being 'downgraded' by some is hardly surprising, but at the same time concerning.

Some of these stories/poems have been laid in my 'Issue 5 contributions' file for over a year as I strove to find sufficient material to justify the next issue. I am hoping to continue as editor (unless of course someone with the zeal to take up the post comes along) and I am quite happy to transcribe audio contributions and type them up for inclusion. Anyone wishing to contribute in this way can contact me via the New Life editor email link and I will then pass on my personal WhatsApp number; this is the easiest way for me to pick up your contributions. However, the structure and integrity of poetry is best sent in written form.

On a bitter/sweet note the fellowship had to say goodbye to a young man who passed away tragically at a young age, leaving behind a grieving family. Bitter? The loss will always leave a gap that can never be filled for his family. Sweet? Well hearing of his passing many of us in the fellowship are all too familiar with the ultimate price paid for compulsive gambling,



but this person was strong in recovery and actively seeking to set up a local GA group. I met this young man before Covid-19 and was glad to hear of his recovery, but shocked at his early passing. Recovery is a wonderful thing and needs to be celebrated, even if it is a day, which is still a lifetime.

Graham F

Editor, New Life and compulsive gambler



07787 177 903



newlife@gamblersanonymous.org.uk



www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help,
I want the hand of GA always to be there,
And for that,
I am responsible

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk



Contents

Note from the Editor	4
----------------------------	---

GA Recovery Stories

Anonymous, Harlow	8
Martin	10
Brian	14
Where do I Begin	16
The wheel of Uncertainty	21
New ILfe	26
Dave	30
Thomas	31

Poetry Corner

Higher Power	33
Just for Today	34
Lucky	35



My Story

Anonymous, Harlow

In January of this year I was taken into hospital, not knowing for sure if I would be coming home again, I was very ill, I signed a paper to say I didn't want resuscitating if my heart stopped. I was not afraid of dying, if it wasn't for recovery, I would have been dead years ago, not necessarily by natural causes, and I would have been as terrified of dying, as I was of living.

My life was a living nightmare, because of a gambling addiction that had controlled my life for over 40 years, apart from destroying my life, it was like an epidemic, it destroyed everything and everyone I came in contact with. It destroyed friendships, my marriages and my work suffered, I was not trusted, nor believed, I had no pride or confidence, just the mention of my name, made everyone turn away, and not answer a door, or phone call from me.

It even ended with being disowned by my own mother. I was a black sheep without even a mother to run to. Thank God for the unconditional love given to me by my children, and friendship shown me by my ex-wife, and a couple of friends I had made at the local church.

Then on Tuesday 21st July 2009, a miracle happened. A friend I had made when attending Gamblers Anonymous on and off for over 36 years, when I enjoyed periods of abstinence from gambling many times, but always returning, as I thought I could control it. How is it possible to control the uncontrollable?

Well, that friend took me back to the rooms of GA, where I was welcomed, and the members didn't judge me.

It is now nearly 14 years since that night, and I haven't gambled in any shape or form, I don't mind gambling, but, I don't test myself, nor mix



with those that gamble, and talk about it, and I don't go in or near gaming establishments, and remember there is no such thing as a FREE bet.

What did I do differently that led to this recovery. I simply accepted what I was and always will be, I will never be cured as the 'pilot light' is always on, but I can live in recovery "One Day at a Time." Using the tools GA has given me, I don't get complacent, and perhaps as important as anything, however a strong-willed person I am, I accept I will never stop gambling through willpower alone. So I did as Step 2 of the Recovery Programme told me to do, came to believe that a power greater than myself, can restore me to a normal way of thinking and living.

Recovery is simple, not rocket science. Have a great day everyone. and remember the most important things in life, in no particular order. FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, FAMILY, and FRIENDS.

If I don't go to meetings, I don't hear what happens to members.



Martin

My name is Martin and I'm a compulsive gambler.

I'm currently in prison serving a five year term for fraud. My last bet was February 17th, 2022.

I started gambling when I was 15 years old. I suppose I was escaping a difficult family life; I started bunking off school and started hanging around amusement arcades. For the next 37 years fruit machines consumed my life, I've never had any other bet, not horses, or sports, just fruit machines. They cost me my job, my marriage, my freedom, and my dignity. They almost cost me my life.

February 15th, 2022, was the day I was arrested, it was the day my partner found out about all the lies, and there were lots, and when I was bailed all my assets were frozen as they had largely been gained by fraud, so I had no more money to gamble with. My partner left me on February 16th and what little cash I could get hold of, went into a machine at Ladbrokes.

I had little money left, no marriage, and was facing a custodial sentence. My life had totally fallen apart.

Being alone that night, hardly any money left and as I walked through our small village one of our neighbours drove past in their van, they were a builders and friends, and as they approached me threw a glass bottle out of the window at me whilst shouting at me to 'fuck off and die' I was not in good shape, and my usual escape – a fruit machine, was not possible.

That night I wanted to die, I started thinking about taking my own life and started thinking about walking out in front of a big lorry or a bus, just to end it all quickly. I had let down and hurt so many that I said I loved and had nothing left to look forward to. I couldn't cope.



I searched online for help with gambling addiction and all Google gave me was adverts for gambling companies. I was at the end of my tether, enough was enough. I can't remember how, but somehow, I found the website for Gamblers Anonymous in Scotland and began having a 'live chat' with somebody on their insight. (I was living in Scotland) having moved there from London in 2019.

It was the first time in my life I had talked about my need to play slot machines, and not told any lies. I said I couldn't cope and was suicidal. I was told to come to a meeting, and that message kept coming – get yourself to a meeting!

The person I was chatting with asked where I was and told me where the nearest meeting was. I didn't know what to do, to get to the nearest meeting would take three hours and two buses each way and I would have to leave early to get the last bus back. But still the message came – get to a meeting. I was even told the time of the buses and which bus stop to go to, and as I would arrive early it was arranged that a chap called Jim would meet me at the bus station when I arrived so I wouldn't get lost.

At the end of the day I went to the meeting, I think looking back I didn't go because I felt I needed help, but rather because I didn't want to let Jim down. I had let so many people down I just didn't want to let someone else down. Getting to that meeting undoubtedly saved my life,

I met people face-to-face who understood me and who I could relate to, I totally broke down at that meeting, and that was the start of my recovery, meetings once or twice a week, total honesty and that was hard as I had told so many lies,



but honesty and openness are essential to sustaining my recovery. Shame does get to me and 'how could I?' is a constant thought but as long as I stay honest, I will get through, albeit one day at a time, and more often I say it's one hour at a time but that's ok.

I was sent to prison on the 19th December 2022, my sentence was fair although I recognise the harm, I caused to those I love is something that no court could punish. Being in prison is tough as a compulsive gambler, although there are no fruit machines there is constant betting on sports results, poker schools during association and although the stakes might only be a tin of mackerel stakes can get a lot bigger and you can imagine the challenges that brings, added to that we watch a lot of TV and that means constant bombardment of adverts, you never escape it. To be frank I sometimes find myself worrying about how I will cope on release.

I tried to attend a GA meeting in my prison and went along to when meetings were advertised but nobody was ever there. I went to addiction services to get help and was told gambling isn't a real addiction and they can't help. I was trying to get help and stay in recovery, but no help came.

I eventually wrote to GA in Scotland asking if they could help get a meeting going somehow. Luckily, they passed my letter to the prison liaison in England, who was already coming into my prison!! But officers weren't passing it on so no one attended. He sought me out and we now meet regularly. We get 4-6 people, but demand is there, it would help if officialdom was more supportive of those seeking help – but to quote one addiction charity that works in prison, we don't get paid enough for gambling just drugs and drink, let's hope that attitude changes.



But let me tell you how important meetings are when you are in prison it's a lifeline, someone you can be open with, who will understand you and your journey. I hope when I am released, I can find some way of supporting gamblers who are in prison, it can be tough and lonely.

By the way, the reason I wrote to GA in Scotland is they have a published postal address on their literature, GA in England only don't, they only have a website, and you can't access that in prison! Food for thought.

So, as I write this it's almost two years without a bet, but it really is one day at a time, sometimes an hour at a time.

I'm so grateful to and for the fellowship, it's been a lifesaver, literally!

I am happy to receive letters in prison not sure if it would work but I'm Martin, prison number A3011EX at HMP High Down.

One day at a time.



Bryan

In Before coming to GA I would never accept compromise in my life. It was my way or no way and when I arrived in the fellowship. I had no intention of changing that opinion.

My ego ruled my gambling life but even after I stopped betting my ego was still in charge. I decided at my first meeting that I was different from the other six members attending. I certainly had no intention of going to meetings for years and years or even months and months, I worked out that in six weeks I would be cured. I silently rejected the help being offered because I was confident, I could sort it out on my own and therefore be able to take full credit for my successes, no need for me to be thankful or grateful to anyone. No need to share that with the others in the room either!

I had entered the rooms feeling hopeless, helpless and suicidal but was sure that I could convince those outside the rooms that I would fix the problems that led me to end up in this state. No compromise I was always right, even when I was wrong. My ego was running riot and took over the controls of my life once I stopped gambling. Events conspired against me meaning that I did not resolve all of my problems and/or find a cure in my estimated 6 week and so decided to stay a bit longer in GA. Some 35 years later and I am still in GA, having never left, and miraculously still abstinent.

What changed? My attitude, that's what. I became open-minded and found the willingness to listen thoughtfully to other recovering members. One suggested that I should attend a Step meeting in addition to my therapy ones, so I did. My introduction to the Recovery Programme allowed



me to open up to be able to admit that my life was unmanageable despite being a year off a bet. It also helped me to deal with my ego problem, my fears and my feelings of guilt. Before I found GA I believed that gambling was the solution to all my problems but leaned through the 12 Steps that the program gives me the tools to deal with reality rather than to bet trying to avoid it.

Today I am grateful to everyone whom I have ever met in GA and acknowledge that my life would have been totally different had I continued to try doing this all on my own. Things changed when someone told me that if I dragged my body to enough meetings eventually my mind would follow and they were so right.



Where Do I Begin?

The pain and destruction I have caused my wife, my family and my friends is too big to even to begin to measure but somehow and somehow even though I do not deserve it they have all stood by me and still do so today.

I will always be a compulsive gambler for the rest of my life, but I will be in control of my life not it in control of me. I spent so many, many years gambling in secret where it be racetracks, dog tracks, bookies, casino or online.

I have gambled amounts of money that would be the equivalent to one person's annual salary in a matter of minutes. You see with addiction (and I can only talk about gambling addiction) is that it's an illness but has no visible symptoms. It was unrecognisable to me or anyone else, but once it sank its teeth into you, it would never let go until it destroyed had everything that I had ever worked for, cared for or loved.

Telling lies to my loved ones becomes a perfectly natural thing to do, but I didn't see it as lying you see it as a diversion from the truth and reality and because I thought I had become expert at it nobody was any the wiser.

I lied about paying bills, about secret credit cards. Loans I had taken out, bonuses to be paid, how much I would get paid. Lies that I didn't think people would believe, but I chanced my arm and told them, but because they believed them, I kept going. I didn't know when to stop either lying or gambling, as one fed the other. Let me be very clear, the blame lies with me. Nobody else just me, and I am not here to generalise and condemn all betting outlets because the large majority of them are good decent human beings who are doing a job or running their own small business.



I need to move on with my life. I need to be a much better person in life generally. I accept and acknowledge that I will be a compulsive gambler for the rest of my life. I will never be cured of gambling. For me it is simple not to have money. My wages get paid into my wife's account and I get "pocket money" every week for my own day-to-day expenditure but once its gone its gone and I don't get any more until the next week. Childish? Humiliating, maybe. Is it effective? Absolutely yes!

As a gambler I had no respect for money and therefore I had to re-educate my brain and to accept my own self-worth to respect money again.

When I admitted to my wife and family what I had done. I lost their respect but more importantly I lost their trust. I was a husband, son, stepfather who had been wasting money on a daily basis. I had done the one thing I had vowed never to do and that was let them down. I have two of the most wonderful, beautiful granddaughters I want them to look up to me not look at my past thinking what a waste of space. The money is the least important thing. It was the loss of trust that was by far the most important. Money can be replaced, but trust takes a long time and it is a trust that will never be completely restored.

For the record the amounts of money that I lost are eye-watering. Huge amounts over a period of time. The amount of money was significant, of that there is no doubt, but the damage psychologically I did had by far a greater impact.

For some reason wife she stood by me. She could have easily told me to pack my bags and leave I fully accepted that. Was she angry, was she hurt of course, but when the dust settled, she looked me in the



eye and told me that we would get through this together. It was also made clear to me that there were going to be rules, and these were her rules, no negotiations involved. It was one of the best decisions that I have ever made.

In mid-2019 I was beaten completely trying to cope with everything. I simply could not cope any more so I decided to take my own life. It was a calculated decision one that I took a long time over before coming to my conclusion – my wife, family, friends and work colleagues did not need this it would be better for all concerned if I just slipped away.

Letters were written to my wife, my family, my friends, my work colleagues – all individually labelled and left on our dining room table. I knew someone would eventually find them after they had broken the door down, but also knowing that my timing meant it would be a couple of days before I was found.

I went to bed and said my goodbyes to all those I loved and cared for, held the ashes of my precious boys Willow, Casper and Spike (my cats who had died) and closed my eyes. I am not prepared to state what I did as I do not want to cause distress to anyone bothering to read this. I was devastated to wake the following day. I couldn't even get this right I was still alive, violently sick and very unwell but breathing, even gambling would not let me die. Why wouldn't it just leave me alone? It wanted my life I had given it.

As you can see, I am still here. I have mental health issues I am now not ashamed to share that and I am fortunate to have access to the mental health team after a very long wait on the list. It really is okay to not be okay. There is help out there. Gambling addiction does not recognise a gender of any type, nor religion, nor skin colour, nor personal circumstance. What gambling addiction did was to take hold of my heart, my mind and finally it ripped me to pieces.



There are many ways to access help, but the biggest help to me was Gamblers Anonymous. The support I got from my wife and members of my family, my closest dearest friends was unrelenting, but I understand the hurt that I have caused. My wife decided to sell our beautiful bungalow that we have lived in for twenty two years together and that hurt. I realised that the hurt I had done to her was immeasurable.

I know that there will be people reading this and saying either out loud or in their head "I would have got rid of you instantly and divorced you" and they would be right. I understand that and I do not disagree with it, but she didn't she stood by me despite my enormous failings. It will be hard work but I have support of my wife, family friends and work colleagues and I am grateful to them all each and every one of them.

I want to help anybody who is struggling with gambling who wants to talk with someone who understands them, won't judge them and will help them steer themselves into a better life.

I am no longer prepared to carry this burden, this secret. It affected my work which I love, my family and friends who I love, my health enormously as well as my relationships with my work colleagues.

I am no longer prepared to keep looking over my shoulder. I still go to GA every Friday. I need to go for me, for the members, for any new members. I go because it helps me understand me and to listen to other members all at different stages of their journeys and battles. We all help each other and if you need us we can help you to.

My journey is a very long one and I am barely past the start. But I have belief and courage installed in me by all those I have mentioned and day by day I will put one foot in front of the other and hold my head up high.



.....

I am not a bad person I know that I just made bad choices and bad decisions.

“Just for today, I will not gamble” this day all the previous days and all the days ahead of me that I am alive for.

My name is Stewart and I am a compulsive gambler.



The Wheel of Uncertainty

People say I'm crazy, doing what I'm doing.
Well, they give me all kinds of warnings to save me from ruin.
When I say that I'm ok, well they look at me kinda strange.
"Surely you're not happy now, you no longer play the game?"

I'm just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round
I really love to watch them roll.
No longer riding on the merry-go-round.
I just had to let it go."

John Lennon

I grasp the chips and run my fingers up and down the barrel of the stack.
Somebody's banging on the face of the slot machine in the corner. Either
their money is all gone, or they use this 'magical trick' to seduce the winnings
out of the machine...

"Place your bets please". The continental croupier puts his right hand into
the belly of the wheel and spins the little white ball that has been sitting on
number 15 for the past five minutes. The ball travels in the opposite direction
to the slow spinning wheel. I've just arrived. Is the game as predictable
according to the operator as we would like to think? Yet, in Sharm El Sheikh,
Egypt, I had one croupier suggest to me there, "please don't play, you seem
like such a nice young woman."

The waitress parks a Peroni on the table next to me and I promise to
tip her handsomely later if I 'win'. There are a lot of people standing around
watching. Later in the evening, there will be a few subtle scuffles as people



try to get the best ‘seat’ at the table. Standing room only I’m afraid for the most part. The man opposite me with the distinctly Hawaiian-looking shirt on, cheers. He and his friend were betting and has doubled his investment.

The little Chinese woman who looks like she has been sitting at the table most of her life, scoops up her meagre winnings, but they are winnings after all. She says something that none of us can understand, wags her finger at the croupier and then proceeds to bet again.

I am alone, no one in this place knows me really. My ‘transgressions’ are mainly observed by those who fully understand what is happening. Here, there is little or no guilt and shame, for we are all eating of the ‘forbidden’ fruits. There are plenty of people here just for a bit of fun, with a small budget. They stare in amazement at those of us who are driven by something beyond pleasure. A lust that has long since ‘closed the door’ on moderate, safe, heathy, fun.

We are the regulars. The ‘dependables’. For us, that white ball is representative of the uncertainty that has become life with every bet placed. In that moment, there is only me and the precipice. Will I stand on the cliff edge with my hands raised in victory? Or will I fall into an abyss of depression and despair as I journey home that evening?

A couple are on the phone to their bank asking why their withdrawals have been stopped. They’ve been playing since I got here, large amounts. Two people at the next table are having a dispute over who placed what where, and the croupier must now refer to CCTV. They can’t even remember what bets they have placed. They have a thing called ‘Spread Betting’ in Trading. Well, I think some of these folks have taken ‘spread’ to another level.



Nothing or no one matters outside of that moment. Not even self. I wish I could sharpen my focus like this for other aspects of life. There is something dark and discerning about all of this but with every dopamine hit, there is 'light'. The dopamine hits oscillate between the intoxicating and the catastrophic. Even as I win 'some' it is not enough; I want that win. I wake up seeing 37 numbers and their exact location on the 'wheel of fortune'. I go to sleep seeing the same 37 numbers.

Now and then, I'll sit for hours on the slot machines. At least the heartbreak is slower coming than the roulette wheel. I could tell you all about the 'wins' but in winning, I was losing. I was losing time with loved ones, time with life. **I was losing my mind.** The alcohol lubricated the will to keep going. The cigarettes steadied me when I needed a breather. The three went hand in hand, who knew I was so good at multi-tasking?

Dr Anna Lembke talks about the pause to avoid impulsivity. Eckhart Tolle talks about breathing with meditation. I didn't have those buttons back then. Whilst writing this, I remove my glasses and look around for a moment, take a breath, enjoy that pause. I can do this now. I feel a wave of nausea wash over me, sadness, as I consider the human mind and our collective challenges. I must share the journey, for the one person that needs to know, no one has to live like this.

I remember waking up once and feeling at my lowest. What was the point of going on? The River Thames awaited. No one would miss me. But I just couldn't submit entirely to this 'monster'. How dare 'it' think that 'it' could claim another life? Those days, the unconsciousness seemed permanent. I don't know what it is like to be drunk all day and every day, but I do know what it is like to be addicted to gambling all day and every day. That's the saddest part of it all, is the inability to find interest in anything or anyone else.



“What’s your choice of drug?” Those words keep me focused these days. For it isn’t just one type of compulsivity which is threatening humanity. I look around me, it could be the phone (with an app which links you directly to betting). It could be a person. It could be substance. It could even be a certain state of being, like misery. Could I go into a casino and have a little play and come out? “No.” Could I go online and place a horsey bet? “No”. Can I now walk past a casino and or gambling establishment and not go in? ‘Yes’. Can I abstain from gambling on or offline even if I’m going through some challenges? ‘Yes’, I recovery has proved that.

I have learnt over the years that company I kept was still very much aligned with compulsive behaviour that is not good for me, so I walk alone a lot of the time for now. I’m ok with that. I stood for years at the roulette table. I was surrounded by like-minded people, but I was lonely and empty of joy. I’m happy to walk alone these days and know that “I got me”. I’m alone, but I’m at peace with that and I seem to attract the right kind of people as a result.

Seeing other people’s challenges has steeled my resolve to be the difference that others need to see and believe. This was one of the hardest challenges for me to overcome and I know it wasn’t about rewards out there, it was just being ok, ‘in here’. So, when I offer to help, it is because I have danced ‘in hell’ and now, I dance a lot ‘in heaven’. I want this for all of us... I must be careful of environments which appear to give much pleasure. They can rattle cages housing the old skeletons, and worst still, they can create new thirsts.



I'm just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round
I really love to watch them roll.
No longer riding on the merry-go-round.
I just had to let it go..
I just had to let it go..
I just had to let it go..



New Life

My name is Shaun and I am a recovering compulsive gambler. I am 52, married with two kids.

None of this would be possible without GA. I wouldn't be married; I wouldn't see my kids and I probably wouldn't have made it to 52.

For twenty years I lived a lie, I lived the life of a compulsive gambler – scamming, ducking and diving, moving money around, manipulating and controlling people and as my old boss used to say, generally being a waste of a good skin.

I robbed from my mother, my wife and my kids. I then lied about robbing from my mother, my wife and my kids. I even swore on my kid's lives that I hadn't gambled or stolen money to gamble,

WHAT A SHIT!

My arrogance, ignorance and ego tricked me into thinking this was normal, I could stop if I wanted to, that tomorrow would be my day and the big win was around the corner. It never happened.

ABSOLUTE BOLLOCKS!

The amount of times I lost the lot and said never again was ridiculous, I couldn't stop, the power of addiction was all consuming and it was safe to say I was absolutely powerless over gambling and that my life was completely unmanageable.

At my peak I was a gambler who was prepared to risk the lot in reckless desperation and sod the consequences.

After 20 years of pain, misery and heartache enough was enough. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. However, having said that I didn't have the courage to confess, I was a coward, I got caught – again!!



That day was Saturday 13.8.04, the worst day of my life by a country mile, the day my wife had her life turned upside down because she found out that she was married to a compulsive gambler and that we were in the shit. I remember the detail of that night like it was yesterday, and I keep the memory of it locked away in my head and use it as a deterrent if I ever fancy another bet.

That night I realised I had hit my rock bottom! What next?

I was expecting hell and fury and finally to be kicked into the gutter where I belonged. That didn't happen, instead my wife was stunned – she looked at me like she didn't know me, like I was an impostor who had lived a double life. Initially she wasn't angry she was disappointed and by the look on her face I knew it and I realised this was my last chance.

How could we recover from this, as well as being a compulsive gambler, I was also a compulsive liar and it was the lying that really hurt my wife, without trust in any relationship, what is there?

After the day from hell, there followed lots of screaming, shouting, crying and a realisation of our current plight. Although I was the problem, my gambling was clearly affecting everyone around me, especially my loved ones. At this moment my life was in the hands of my wife, the one person I had hurt the most – the person I had crushed mentally and emotionally and damaged spiritually.

From nowhere my wife made the momentous decision to give me one last, last, last chance if I got help, but what help. This was to be a turning point not only in my life but in all our lives. How she found the mental strength and courage is beyond me, but she deserves a medal as big as a bin lid. All she wanted was the old me back, problem was I didn't know who I was anymore, addiction had defined my character and behaviour for so long.



The answer although I didn't know it at time was Gamblers Anonymous and probably more importantly the 12 Step Recovery Programme.

I rang the helpline and was dragged to my first meeting on Tuesday 16.8.04, a date that was to prove a turning point in my life and the day I left my old life and the old me behind. Here was an opportunity to start a new life if I had a desire to stop gambling which I did!

After leaving my first meeting I had hope! I knew this is where I needed to be. I was not judged, preached to or told what to do, instead I was offered empathy, understanding and patience. I quickly accepted I couldn't gamble again, I had to come to meetings forever, I had to change and all that was initially required of me was to spend a couple of hours a week at my local meeting sharing openly and honestly.

To help me abstain from gambling I needed as much support as I could get inside and outside of the meeting rooms but more importantly I had to change. The early stages were about survival and doing everything I was told, don't have access to money, don't go near the bookies and keep busy.

After two years of abstinence I needed something different and that was recovery, I had to change me because I accepted, I was the problem. Thanks to a couple of members from AA coming to our meeting we were introduced to the recovery programme.

Slowly but surely, I began to realise what this programme could give me – serenity! and an ability to deal with life on my terms. Over time I understood and recognised the importance of a higher power in my life and the knowledge that if I was struggling all I had to do was recite the serenity prayer and get the clarity I needed to do the right thing.



Today to say I am an honest man would be a lie in itself, however I do not lie about the big things , money , where I've been and what's going on in my head. If it's who took the last hob nob then I may tell the odd pork pie. Slowly but surely trust has been regained, however I accept it can never possibly be the same again – ever!

However today with the fellowship behind me, the support of a strong woman and the belief in a higher power I feel stronger mentally, emotionally and spiritually and I also realise I must do my step twelve work and share my experience, strength and hope with others who are struggling.

Acceptance is key for me, I must accept I am a compulsive gambler forever, I must attend meetings forever and I must practice recovery every day of my life.

Today it would be hard for me to compare the new me with the old me, moreover it doesn't really matter. Today I am spending time creating new memories in my new life.

That may be as simple as walking the dog , going to the pictures with my daughter , strolling along the beach with my wife or just living my life on my terms . Just for today I will enjoy what is beautiful.

GA works if you work it!

In Unity
Shaun



Dave

I received my 24 year pin last week and have reflected on where I am now from where I was. When I came through the door I was 54 years old and emotionally beaten.

Financially I was able to deal quite easy but learning about myself was hard, as my ego had took over I had to listen and learn how to change from inside to give myself a new life through being honest, open minded and willing.

My new life started to happen a day at a time, I started giving back to the fellowship and became Secretary and National Rep, and it gave me a feeling of achievement that enhanced my recovery. Now it's still a day at a time for me because I know that if I drop my guard I could return to my old ways.

God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change...
Give me the Courage to change the things I can...
and the Wisdom to know the difference

Dave

**A compulsive gambler in recovery
Dundee, Thursday**



Thomas

I had thought about writing this as an overview of my journey, insofar as how gambling took over my life and robbed me of so much. Financially, emotionally and spiritually until finally I had no choice and came clean.

I attended GA meetings for over a year and a half. I listened to others sharing their stories. I realised that there were some variations, but there were also many similarities. I was very much the same as everyone else. I needed help and like them I had reached out to GA.

I attended my first meeting in July 2022. In all honesty, I was expecting to be met with a room full of misfits, dour miserable, ignorant individuals; the very dregs of society. At the time I would have done anything to avoid coming to GA, but I had made a promise to my wife, so that was that.

I was determined as I walked through the door to keep my head down, say as little as possible and never come back. I planned to pretend to my wife that I was going to a GA meeting and go for a drink or a game of pool instead. Simply so she thought I was going to a meeting.

Then at my first meeting as soon as people began to speak when called upon. I was still so wrapped up in my personal shame and discomfort that I didn't listen to them speak. I just wanted the meeting to end. Then slowly their words began to filter through. I can't say I hung on every word, but the honesty and openness made me sit up and listen. They spoke about the harm and distress they'd caused to family, friends and loved ones; their struggles, and the overwhelming sense of isolation that permeated their every waking moment because they had no one to turn to really struck me.

Not a single person in the room made any attempt to blame anyone or anything for their circumstances. I found that everyone in the group, including me understood what the other person was saying in regard to



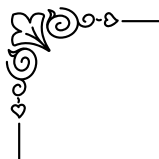
their gambling addiction. To be with others who knew intrinsically what my addiction was all about struck home to me. I felt terrified and comforted at the same time.

On that first night I was told there would be no need to speak unless I wanted to. I did share and said things I had never said to anyone else and whilst I felt a bit uncomfortable some even nodded at certain points as I shared my story.

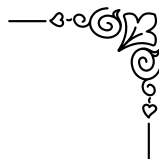
Since that first meeting I have continued attend as many meetings as possible and each time I gain something. It's not all doom and gloom and there's a certain 'gallows humour' that provides support in a different way. The support is genuine.

GA gave me back a life I thought was gone. It gave me hope when all hope seemed gone. GA helped me change the way I think and has made me a different person. Someone who had regained a measure of self-control. I have been told my addiction is a mental illness, an emotional illness, which I can neither confirm or deny, but what I can say is that GA has helped me fight this addiction and I hope it continues to do so, both for me and for others if only they are willing to seek help.

I am Thomas
Compulsive Gambler



Poetry Corner



Higher Power

It could be the wise words spoken

Or

The spirit of arms wide open

It could be the advice that's given out so soundly

Or

The way at times the blunt truths hit so profoundly

It could be anything that we believe will guide us

Or

Someone from somewhere above

It could be the things we now do for our own mental health

Or

It could be room itself

It could be something we can't see with the naked eye

Or

The strength we have found in bidding our old habits goodbye

It could be us drawing a line from what we did wrong in the past

Or

In the 'just for today' and not taking it too fast

It could be how there's always someone there to chair

Or

In the serenity prayer

It could be in hearing how others' lives have changed from before

Or

In all of these things and lots more

Jess, Doncaster



Just for Today

Just for today, I will meet people where they are and not move them around they are not chess pieces.

Just for today I will detach from peoples opinions of me and let them float by like clouds. Who needs a thunderstorm.

Just for today, I will realise when life's challenges come, something's got to change and its me.

Just for today, I will live in the now, it's the only time zone that exists.

Just for today, I will choose my attitude it's a freedom that's so precious.

Just for today, I will feel the gratitude recovery brings and not let it into a sand of gloom.

Just for today, I will unwrap the gift of serenity and know it's not a one use package.

Just for today, I will be the me I was born to be, everyone else is taken.

Just for today, I will step forward not back.

Just for today I will not gamble.

Anne



Lucky

I wasn't always lucky when I gambled,
I'd lose more than I would win.
I cannot express how grateful
I am for this fellowship welcoming me in.

Bookies and betting had taken over my life,
But I'd keep going back for more
No matter the trouble or strife.

A thought of a bet here, a bet there
Whilst doing this I'd be spreading misery everywhere.

After the all the loses, saying why always me
But deep down thinking all I want is to be gambling free.

Day by day building abstinence
Finally getting a grip on my finance.

Being part of this fellowship
I feel the real winner
I can be thankful for finding it
Whilst surrounded by loved ones for Christmas dinner.



The Twelve Steps of Recovery

When compulsive gamblers apply The Twelve Steps of Recovery in their lives, disintegration stops, and unification begins. These steps are basically spiritual in their concept and their practice can be highly rewarding. These are the steps which are suggested as a programme of recovery:

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



-
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God (as we understand him), praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
 12. Having made an effort to practise these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

No one claims these steps are in any way original to GA. They reflect practical experience and application of spiritual insights, as recorded by thoughtful people in many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work.

They enable us and thousands of others to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which our society has been built.

They were given to us freely, for which we are grateful.

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.



Contact Details



Call our National Information Line on
0330 094 0322

There are Regional Information Lines for members in the north of England and in Ulster:

North West **07974 668 999**

North East **07457 404 636**

Ulster **(028) 7135 1329**

Meeting Details

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

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Visitors to Scotland can find meeting details at: **www.gascotland.org**

Visitors to Ireland can find meeting details at: **www.gamblersanonymous.ie**