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City, State: **Morgantown, WV**

Age: **N/A**

Occupation: **Mother**

Her Story: **Mother of two enters living nightmare when she finds her husband's body and discovers his gambling addiction**



AMY'S FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF HER STORY

I'm a happy person in general, but sometimes I can't believe that this is where I am in life. Widowed at age 40, with two children, was not in my plan - but we all know about plans. Hopes and dreams that change without warning.

I knew what I was going to find when I got home. Have you ever had that feeling of impending doom? My husband was carrying a burden of secrets that had crushed him into a severe depression. A financial catastrophe was on the horizon. I had a two month warning. Things were very wrong. My family and I questioned gambling and he was deteriorating rapidly. These were the darkest days of my life. I spent two months trying to save him, trying to protect my children, and shield my family from something that was still unknown to me.

He was a wonderful man who loved us very much. Extremely intelligent, he was a hospital administrator and a dedicated friend. It was common for him to go above and beyond to help anyone. Even those he didn't know. He could no longer live with the secrets, shame, and pain he was causing us all. He loved us so much, that he covered himself up with a blanket, so I wouldn't see what the gun did to him. A self-inflicted wound to the head. He was careful to ensure the kids wouldn't be there - he was the one who picked the up after school. He knew that I would find him. He left a good note.

This is where my story of grief and healing begins. I knew what he was going to do. When I say I knew, I didn't of course, KNOW. But I was concerned. I discussed my fears with him. He denied he was that depressed,

but it took two months for me to get him to agree to therapy. He saw a counselor two days before he died.

Two months I lived in dread of the unknown.

What was causing this depression?

What was he doing with our money?

How did we almost lose the house?

Why was all of this a secret?

There was little I could do. So much of this was in his hands.

It all began to unravel on the evening of his death. I discovered that he owed his parents a large sum of money. Bill collectors were calling non-stop. The mail was full of late notices and threatening letters. He had intercepted everything. I discovered a hidden gambling addiction. The strange thing, is that he was always home, or at work.

Peace came quickly after his death. His suffering was over, and there were no more secrets. It would take a long time to discover everything, but no more harm would be done. Gambling was very clear with the evidence that was found.....five 30-gallon trash bags full losing lottery tickets and parlay cards when it was all said and done.

I was left to contend with an overwhelming number of logistical issues. I could not look at the whole picture. I had over twenty liens on my property, personal loans from physicians, forged home equity loans, unauthorized withdraw of my retirement, and other judgments. I could not afford to let myself to look at the whole situation. I forced myself to focus on one issue at a time. I made a lot of lists. When my mind did try to "go there", I redirected my focus back to the systematic ordering of the financial chaos that had become my world.

My children and I began counseling at once. I'm not a secretive person. I was upfront with them from the beginning, or at least the next day, about the cause of their Dad's death. I guess it's natural for me to tackle things head on. My nine year old daughter struggled some, but her relationship with her counselor was established, so things went easier for her.

My eleven year old son began a rapid spiral downward. It turns out that my husband had shared a lot with him. He needed more than I was able to give him. I was pressed into making the hardest decision of my life. Sending him to a therapeutic boarding school, for a period of time, provided the necessary support for all of us. Our state did not offer the type of support that we needed.

My greatest wish is for my children go grow up happy, healthy, and independent. A difficult hope to nurture, at times, under the shadow of gambling addiction and suicide.

Between dealing with the kids, and all of the legal and financial issues, I was close to being overwhelmed. Yet I remained committed to my course, as I marked off each item that had been systematically resolved.

My grief counselor has been a gift from God. Interesting, because grief counseling and gambling addiction were not her exact specialty, but she was right for me. She was nurturing, kind, and loving. I do not suffer from the guilt that is so common to survivors of suicide. I knew that I did all I could for him, and that I could not have stopped him. I felt guilty for not feeling guilt. I wondered if I was abnormal.

My touchstone was focus - one minute task at a time. I was dedicated to making sure that my children and I got the emotional help we needed. Three have passed and I have whittled the list down to one \$50,000 lien - and anticipate its timely resolution. I am recovering well from the identity theft that my husband resorted to. I have filed countless lawsuits. Every one of them has been settled in my favor. My retirement has been reinstated from several different locations. My home equity loans are forgiven. The fact that notaries signed off on my forged signatures was my biggest weapon, when it came to having my claims settled in the legal system. The one area which I have made no headway are all my children's savings bonds which were cashed....

The number of people who have been victimized by my husband's gambling addiction is so far reaching, that it breaks my heart. My children, my family, his family, our friends, my employer, his employer, and all the businesses that he had drawn into his clutches.

By far, the greatest victim of addiction, guilt, and shame, was my husband, himself. All I can do at this point, is hope that my sharing our story will help other families that are facing the unknown fate of gambling.

Disclaimer: the above story appears in its original form and has not been edited for content. The above story does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of The National Council on Problem Gambling.