

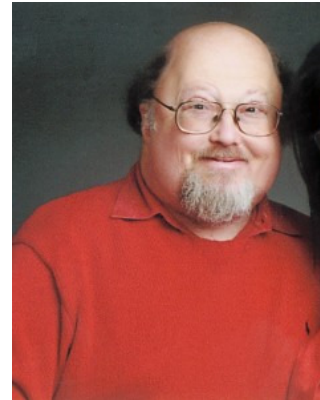
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His Story: **Former "high roller" exposes the real secrets behind the glamour of gambling**



JEFF'S FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF HIS STORY

The Gamblers Anonymous Combo book asks whether knowing why we gambled is important and responds perhaps, but that many people have stopped gambling without the benefit of the knowledge of why they gambled. My tendency is to be introspective so I have thought about the origins of my gambling problems, and see 4 specific factors that led to my gambling.

I was taught at a young age by my best friends' father that whatever you did should be based on a reward. We would shoot baskets for ice cream sodas, we would play miniature golf for bagels. I learned that the intrinsic reward of doing the best I could was not enough, that external rewards were necessary. I believe that greatly influenced future gambling behaviors.

Second, I was not an athlete, and for male adolescents athletics was a key to status and respect. I compensated for that by developing an almost encyclopedic knowledge of sports. This led me to believe I knew more than the next guy and was of particular importance when it came to sports betting, which I saw as a challenge of personal skill.

A third factor in my development of a gambling problem was my great facility with numbers. I would go to the supermarket and double check the cash registers. When I discovered the racetrack I thought it was a panacea, a chance to use my mathematical wizardry for my own benefit.

It took me many years to understand the fourth factor that led to my gambling addiction. The DesJardins model of addiction talks about addiction resulting from unmet needs, namely need for power and control, need for security and need for sensation. The need for security was the relevant one

for me, not financial security but a sense of belonging and fitting in. I think I turned to drugs and gambling as a way to define myself, to identify with others of like interests. Anything was better than being in the abyss, in the darkness, alone. I remember well people coming up to me at my 10th, 20th and 30th high school reunions and saying Jeff Beck, I remember you, drugs and gambling. I always felt that was better than not being remembered.

My gambling began with weekend card games. It was a way to get out of my house, to bond with others and to be competitive. I got a sense of exhilaration when I won and true despondency when I lost. The amounts did not matter, whether pennies or dollars, I needed to be respected as a good card player and as a winning gambler.

At 14 I made my first excursion to the racetrack and I fell in love. The whole environment enthralled me. I vividly remember the first time I went to the track and bet \$5 to win and got back \$17. I had my utopia, a world where I could thrive. I loved the excitement, the characters at the track, the flashing ever changing odds board. I attempted to use my mathematical adeptness to calculate the most efficient way to bet. Throughout my high school years I went to the track at least twice a week and often cut school to attend the races. I felt alive there, my natural shyness disappeared as I felt I could talk to anyone with a racing form.

I went away to college to Washington University in Saint Louis. I remember my college interview, I was asked if I had any questions. I responded yes, are there any racetracks nearby and was told it was illegal in Missouri but there were two tracks across the river in Illinois. That made up my mind. My freshman year at college my gambling got out of control. I had a very fixed schedule, school did not fit in at all. 2 PM to 4 PM was playing gin(for money of course) . 4 PM to 6 PM was backgammon. At six we would leave for the track and return around 11:30. At midnight the poker game would begin and would only stop when some of the players had to go to morning classes. I would then go to sleep, wake up around 2 and start all over again. I came very close to flunking out my freshman year, I liked to say I was majoring in gambling.

I somehow made it through college and into law school. It was at this time that I began betting on football games. My story is the representation of what is referred to as progression. I originally bet only pro football games, two a week, those that were on television for a small stake. By the fourth week of the season I was betting 4 games a week, by the 8th week I was wagering on six games a week. By week ten I had three bookies instead of one, not in order to shop for best lines but because I was a little embarrassed about how much I was betting, and felt by spreading it around no one would be too critical of me. The bets kept getting bigger and bigger,

far beyond my means. But I was betting with credit, and when I bet 14 games I figure on a really bad week I would go 6 and 8. By the second year I included Saturday college football in my betting and the numbers became staggering. But it was not real to me, only numbers on a piece of paper. It reminded me of when I was in London at a casino I would bet pounds as if they were dollars, it was the action, not the amount. Fortunately, or unfortunately as one might choose to believe I had wealthy and generous parents so whenever I got into financial problems with my gambling they would bail me out.

Through my 18 year career as a lawyer I continued to gamble with frequency and urgency. The casinos became a part of my life, to accompany daily excursions to the tracks and weekend sports betting. I had 2 vacations every year. Every August I would go with friends to Saratoga for 3 days. I actually started a Saratoga fund whereby I would put away \$100 a week for the trip. I loved the elegance of Saratoga, the class of the people, the dress and style. I would stay at hotels that were \$90 a night 11 months a year and \$350 a night in August. I would take limos from the hotel to the track. I felt it was the best place on earth. I could feel comfortable as a degenerate and could actually attain respectability and even big shot status

My second vacation was in October to Vegas. I would go every year with 4 friends who I had gone to Kindergarten with. I loved the lights of Vegas, the excitement. I could not bring enough money for the four day excursion, whatever I had I would race through in hours and have to get more. I kidded myself in thinking it was just friends getting together, it was the gambling that drew me to Vegas and kept me returning.

The gambling was about money, but it was really about much more. It was the excitement, and the adrenaline. It was also a cure for boredom. Gambling was my mistress so there was no room for anyone else in my life. I tended to be a loner but when I was gambling I felt I was with many other people and thus saw it in part as a social activity. It was an intellectual challenge, testing my ability against others. It was an emotional release, a freedom, a chance to throw away the law books and focus on what was inside me. It was a physical sensation, when I went three days without the track I felt a loss, an emptiness. Gambling made me feel alive and real.

I have a history of addiction. I was a three pack a day smoker for 12 years and decided in law school that it was time to quit. I went through a program called Smokenders, a behavior modification program. I learned to change brands, take hot baths to drain off nicotine, wait for increasing periods to smoke after eating and other tactics to help stop. It was a 5 week program and I have not had a cigarette since February 23, 1979. I remember at the

conclusion of the 5 week course we were told to celebrate giving up cigarettes, so I went to Atlantic City for the weekend.

I had a serious problem with marijuana and cocaine. I smoked pot every day for 22 years and developed a cocaine habit that lasted 10 years. I was arrested for possession of marijuana in 1991 and decided it was time to deal with the issue. I entered an intensive outpatient program, 6 PM to 10 PM 4 nights a week for 6 months, 2 nights a week for 4 months and once a week for 2 months. The program was a combination of 12 step, group therapy, creative therapy and education. I have not had a drug or drink since February 23, 1991. The program, expressed concern about my gambling but I was not ready or willing to address same.

My gambling continued at a frenetic pace. I had a nice condominium, a good law job and I saw my gambling as a distraction. It was of course more of an obsession It was what kept me going day to day, the source of my joy and energy. Friends and family expressed concern about my gambling but I laughed it off.

By 1996 I had lost my passion for the law and decided to make a career change. I considered several options and chose to pursue a career in counseling. I felt I had great knowledge of addiction, that others had helped me and that I could repay that debt by helping others. I enrolled in a program called Recovery Assistance Training Program, to get the necessary educational hours to get certified as an alcohol and drug counselor. On January 3, 1997 I attended a 6 hour presentation, on compulsive gambling. I heard myself described to a tea and it hit home. If I wanted to help others didn't I have to help myself? I wrote a letter to Ed Looney, who had given the lecture, Ed is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Compulsive Gambling. He invited me to dinner and on January 12, 1997 he took me to my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting. I have not made a bet since that day.

When I stopped cigarettes and drugs I changed my behavior. When I stopped gambling I began to change me. The benefits of GA have been overwhelming for me. I got the confidence to return to school and get a Masters in Addiction Counseling and then complete all course work for a Ph.D .in Social work. I began to work on my character defects, the things that had haunted me through my life. I addressed my procrastination, my self pity, my stubbornness. I got married in 1998, and though that did not workout I am in a wonderful relationship today. I am now a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Certified Compulsive Gambling Counselor and a Certified Anger Management Therapist. I counsel clients with gambling, addiction and mental health issues. I frequently lecture on compulsive gambling to the public, to students and to counselors.

Gamblers Anonymous saved my life. I attend a meeting every Saturday morning, it is a wonderful way to start my week, it is my sanctuary. I have developed wonderful friendships through GA. I now understand that I am not alone, that others have gambling problems and that help is available. Two years ago I had a big 50th birthday celebration and two tables were filled by GA friends. I have learned a new self respect. I know that I can never gamble "normally again". I do things to excess, moderation is not possible for me. I know if I went to the track and made a two dollar bet I would be off to the races. I have learned to respect my illness, that I am a compulsive gambler and will always be one. I have managed to put that illness into remission but I know it can come back to bite me so I am very protective. I now am the Vice President of the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Council on Compulsive Gambling and the New Jersey representative to the National Council on Problem gambling. I try to follow the 12th step of GA, carry the message to others still suffering. It took me abstinence to understand how unmanageable my life was and how powerless I am over gambling. God willing I will celebrate 10 years abstinence from gambling in January, 2007. GA has been the greatest blessing my life. It has allowed me to heal previously damaged relationships and to make new exciting ones. I have gotten to meet and befriend wonderful people. My life was once controlled by a need to gamble, it is now controlled by a need to not gamble. That is a 360 degree turn and I am so much the better for it.

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.