

Name: **Warren Biller**

City, State: **N/A, West Virginia**

Age: **N/A**

Occupation: **Consultant and trainer for Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia**

His Story: **Cornell Graduate Learns the Real Odds of Gambling the Hard Way**



WARREN'S FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF HIS STORY

I entered the world into a good family, had a fairly stable childhood and then entered a world of gambling, deception, greed and insanity. Today I am again blessed with a good life. The years between ages 20 and 50 were a journey through the dark side. ... (Y)ou have probably heard many stories of lost money, lost families and careers, illegal activity and thoughts of suicide. I think it is important for me to pass along my interpretation of what happened in my life. Telling stories has always been one of the most helpful interventions for those who are still struggling with an addiction.

Born in 1943 with a working mom waiting at home for a husband who was fighting in the Pacific Theater of WWII. I met my dad for the first time when I was 3 years old. I was resentful for his intrusion into my relationship with mom and I think I subconsciously carried that resentment all the way to his grave last year. Dad was a hard working fairly smart guy who was kind and giving. He did have a close set of acquaintances (not friends) and then everyone else. You could become his best buddy very quickly and just as quickly be ostracized and rejected completely from his life. Dad did not deal well with criticism and he would not associate with people who tried to take advantage of the less fortunate. My relationship with dad was based on my performance. If I did well, he heaped on praise and bragged to his friends. If I did poorly, I was ignored. I became very good at creating illusions of doing well and blaming others for problems.

I was good in school and did not have to work hard for grades. I also excelled at sports. I worked as a kid with a paper route and later as a salesman in my dad's furniture company. My dad and I began to gamble at golf and cards. He belonged to a country club and we were usually partners and usually won. Our weekend format was golf during the day and cards at

night in the clubhouse. At age 14 I often drove home in the early morning hours because dad and his friends had been drinking. Dad thought he was better than most people. Following his role modeling, I adopted the same attitude. It took many years of recovery for me to understand and begin to correct this form of erroneous thinking. After High School, my parents thought it would be good for me to go to an Ivy League school. I was interested in Veterinary Medicine and so Cornell became a logical choice. I changed majors and graduated in four years with a BS in Economics (accounting major). Math was easy and I could figure the odds quicker than most. As I have learned, math skills and logical insight are not perfect defenses against irrational gambling behavior. My acquired thinking allowed me to believe that I was smart enough to overcome the mathematical odds.

I don't believe I had any significant genetic pre-disposition to gambling. I did, however, tend toward activities that created excitement and, of course, gambling was an ideal venue.

My problem gambling was identified in 1972 (my first intervention and GA meeting) and ended on February 1, 1993 (my last bet). 21 years of attempting to understand and stop my irrational gambling behavior. I attended GA regularly for most of the 21 years. I currently attend one meeting each week and more when I need them. I had five periods of relapse and recovery. Each relapse caused more severe symptoms, financial crisis and lost relationships. My marriage of 24 years ended in 1989. My behavior had destroyed the relationship.

The periods of recovery were longer each time, but I could not find the serenity to maintain a good life without satisfying my craving for action. I sought professional help in 1972 and continued in therapy for a year. Addictions were a fairly new field for professionals and gambling was not even identified as an addiction. The professionals had little to offer. At the time GA was marginally helpful. The homogenous narcissistic members were boastful, arrogant and rarely followed the principles of the program. It took another 20 years before GA began to mature and incorporate the spiritual principles originally introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Professional counseling is still in its infancy. West Virginia is one of the few places in the world that have recorded outcome data over a 5 year period. The increase in counselor proficiency that has been recorded is quite remarkable. A good number of counselors have over 75% of their clients stop gambling. Most other countries and states create the illusion of a program of treatment. They don't collect data and thus have nothing to defend. Each year more states are copying and implementing the proven techniques being used in the West Virginia program.

For me, recovery is a dynamic daily adventure. I made a decision 10 years ago to try to help improve the quality of both “self-help programs” and professional programs for gamblers and their families. These efforts have taken me into many states and even a few foreign countries and have been a significant part of my recovery. I don’t consider myself an expert in either venue. I only try to do my part to help where it seems appropriate. I have found that my narcissism is best controlled by my staying under the radar as best I can. For a few years I did the TV, radio and news circuits for gambling treatment issues. I decided it was not for me. I will still tell my story to counselors or people trying to understand their own problem gambling situations. I have even done a few TV clips for our ads in West Virginia.

Planting the seeds of GA really produces an abundance of support venues. It has taken a few years and some effort but the GA groups are growing in West Virginia. The growth is seen in quality and in the number of groups. There are some very strong people who are now active in GA in West Virginia. From my experience both the professionals and the GA groups are among the best I have seen.

I, like most of my fellow GA members, need to structure our own recoveries. Our personal programs must be constructed to deal with the challenges that enter our lives each day. There are ample resources in West Virginia for every problem gambler and every family member to get help.

The most important recovery event for me was the awakening. I realized that with the proper help I could stop my irrational gambling behavior and develop a good life. I also realized that I could not do this by myself.

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.