

PERSONAL GAMBLING ADDICTION: ANN'S STORY

The first time I gambled was at Mystic Lake [Casino] with friends. It was simply a “let’s go out and do something fun” kind of thing. In fact, for many years I was a mere social gambler and assumed it would be like that for my entire life. I could go to Las Vegas to meet relatives and not even care if I gambled or not.

But then I had a personal life crisis and gambling became a way to forget everything that was going on. I realized that when I gambled, I didn’t have to be responsible to anyone. It became a way to escape my life’s problems and the rest of the world.

Before I knew it, I was going out to gamble every night. Then I started to have financial problems. And then I realized I couldn’t stop... nor did I want to stop. Every time I left the casino, I’d tell myself I was going to quit. Then when I got home I’d find more money to go back with.

Once I became hooked, it became my life. Gambling became my main source of entertainment. It was the only thing that I cared about. I’d cheat, steal and otherwise do whatever it took to get money.

But it was never about the money. I didn’t want to win money... it was a just a means to an ends. Money allowed me to hit more buttons so that I didn’t have to think about how screwed up my life was.

I engaged in unhealthy gambling for about three years. I spiraled downhill quickly. I lost my home, my cars, everything. I embezzled from my employer and was caught. That should have been the end of my gambling.

However, I continued to gamble from money I earned with a part-time job. I even remember gambling the night before I went to jail. That was when I finally stopped.

Part of my sentence required that I seek help, such as with a group like GA (Gambler’s Anonymous). I went to my very first gambling meeting. I remember being so embarrassed to be there. But I got through it.

Getting through the first meeting was the hardest. Even though it’s a meeting for those with gambling problems, nobody thinks that anyone has done anything worse than they have. You think you’re the absolute worst person.

When I think back on my recovery and my experience, I have learned a lot. For one, I realized that recovery is a choice. For the longest time, I didn’t think it was. I thought it was a matter of willpower.

Most people don’t understand the insatiable urge you have when you have an addiction. It almost feels like it’s an instinct to keep at an addiction.

I've learned that you can get over the shame and guilt. Guilt is feeling bad about what you've done while shame is feeling bad about who you are.

I've learned a few other things. One is that you can't beat yourself over the head to convince others as to why you're addicted. People in my family have been so supportive of me but they still don't understand how this can become an addiction. There comes a point when you just accept yourself and others.

You also realize that to conquer addiction you really need to put yourself first. That can be hard to do, particularly when you feel like you need to make amends to others, but you have to make peace with yourself before thinking about being in a full relationship with friends, families and an employer.

There is nothing more encouraging than listening to other peoples' stories and their recoveries. As you hear them share their story, you learn that you're not really a horrible person with no hope of recovery. You learn that you can fix yourself and become a whole person again... that this addiction doesn't have to define you.

Source: N.a. (n.d.). Ann's Story. Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance. <https://www.northstarg.org/find-help/success-stories/anns-story/>