

My marriage ended in 1996. I was married for 13 years. I gambled before but it got worse in 1995 when the pokies came into pubs. I never noticed it until it was too late when I lost my husband and almost lost my children. Even then after I realised this I could not stop what had obviously taken over my life. At that time nothing meant more to me than going out and pushing the buttons I had longed for all day and night. The urge was so great that nothing could or would stop me from going.

It all started with just bingo tickets and progressed from there. I only bought five dollars worth here and there. My gambling escalated from there. Then it went to buying lottery tickets, scratchies and keno. After a while that was not good enough as it became very boring to me. I then went to the pub with a friend and found the poker machines fascinating. I started only using twenty dollars at a time but that didn't last long at all. So my problem really started in 1995.

I started going on a monthly basis to the pokies, as then I was not addicted as such. Well I didn't believe so anyway. After a while that was not enough and I felt the need to return a lot sooner than that. I did this for quite some time and always felt good after the visit. The next day is when I realised that I should not have gone but that feeling soon left and then all was good again. Till the next time that was.

For the whole four years I was gambling on pokies not once did I ever think of anyone else but myself. I was only out to make myself feel better and not worry about the chaos that I was causing and leaving behind. Back then I didn't even realise what I

was doing to my family. Also at the time I really didn't care and lost touch with reality I guess. Reality to me was getting up, taking the boys to school and waiting till ten in the morning when the pub opened. Once they had opened I was there with the money I had and I stayed either till it ran out or it was time to pick up the boys again.

After a while I started to take money from our bank accounts without my husband's knowledge. If he asked why I just told him I paid a bill or gave some other excuse. He accepted the excuses I gave and if he didn't I would argue that he didn't trust me and made it his entire fault. At the time of this happening I never felt guilty as I always got what I thought I needed and that was money for gambling. I also told him that I had lost money in the shopping centres but never did. That is one thing I had become and that was a liar and I never lied before and I hate liars. So I had become what I hated most. That still didn't stop me though. At this stage my marriage was crumbling.

Then another thing was Cash Converters. They are a gamblers dream come true. I had used them so often that I couldn't keep count. I even put my boy's favourite things into there and lost them. At the time of doing this I didn't care what I lost I just needed money to support what I had become. I had even lost all things close to which was all the jewellery my husband had given me. That at the time didn't even stop me from getting money that I believed I needed.

When there was no money to spend I was becoming one of the hardest people to live with. I never had decent food in the house for my boys to eat. When my marriage ended so did the cooked meals as my husband cooked all the time. For two years my

children would average one cooked meal per week. I never cooked meals for the boys it was either Breakfast cereal or sandwiches for tea. When the boys got home from school there was never anything for them to eat. So the lies got worse after we separated as he was not there to cook tea anymore. They had to wear the same clothes as they never had new clothes. I became a liar to my children and I have always tried to teach them how bad it was to lie, as they would be found out eventually anyway. I also became very angry most days and didn't listen to what was wrong with my boys. I always blamed anyone else but myself for them not having food and clothes. I could never tell them the truth, as I wasn't ready to admit it myself. Admitting the truth would be admitting I was a gambler and that at the time to me was not true.

At this stage I had basically lost total control of my boys. They would never listen to what I asked of them and they got ill a lot. They fought constantly with each other and me. We all turned into the family from hell.

Due to my gambling I also lost a lot of very close friends through all the lies. At that time once again I didn't care. I wanted to spend time with machines more so than with family and friends. They had become my life now. To me it was the only way to make myself feel better when I was down and these days everything got me depressed.

I believe it was a combination of things that had got me so depressed that gambling was my only sanity. I felt better at the time of sitting in front of the machines. They seem to give me a release of some kind. It is very hard to say what type of relief but it seemed to work. I tried not going but something always made me go. I was feeling better until I walked out and then felt worse. Remembering that feeling however never stopped me going back.

If I had no money in my bank account I would borrow it or get it other ways. That is one of the reasons I lost some friends. I never was able to pay back what I had borrowed. They asked and once again I made up some story which for the time being got me off paying my debt. This is something I never had done before.

When friends left me I used to think that I didn't need them anyway but I was wrong. There were others I could borrow from so I didn't care. I borrowed from family members and when they asked for it back I would always say "some family you are". I always blamed others and did so for many many years. I had become someone I loathed and that was a compulsive liar. I was a very unreliable mother and friend to all concerned.

Now to begin on the long road back. This is one of the hardest things for me to do, as the pokies were my life. It all began when I ran from all my troubles and decided to stay with my sister for a while. I left everything behind and didn't even care who it hurt. I didn't tell my boys where I was going.

She accepted me and then decided to once again inform me of the Break-Even Service at Relationships Australia (SA). I said that if she wanted me to go there she had to ring, as I was too embarrassed to do so. She rang within seconds and was talking to Helen but was unable to make the appointment for me.

While sitting there listening to them talking about me as if I wasn't there was very frustrating. I had to take the phone and make that first step. I have not looked backed since that day. My first visit with Helen I was very nervous and embarrassed. I didn't

like the idea of admitting that I had a gambling problem. Once I had done this then everything has got better from there.

Since I started seeing Helen in March I have not gambled at all as I could not do that to my boys again. I kept Chris home from school if I was feel down just so I was unable to go to the pokies. I also went and visited my sister Tina to get the thoughts out of my head. Beating this problem has been hard work from the start. I have been seeing a psychiatrist for severe anxiety and depression and am taken medication. Chris is also seeing a psychologist every fortnight for help with his anger. We also spent many a day at the doctor's office for stomach problems. We have all visited with Helen to help with family problems. Since we started seeing Helen the problems have decreased but there is still a lot of unsolved problems to be dealt with. We are waiting on help from the Family Care Team.

The people that have been affected the most with all this are my boys, my family and friends and also my marriage. As I realised how my gambling had affected the people I loved most it was time to do something about the problem.

The costs that have occurred with the gambling problem are very high. For myself there are recurring visits to my GP, on going psychiatrist appointments, on going visits to Helen Carrig at Relationships Australia Break-Even. Then there are Christopher's appointments with his GP, his psychologist, CAMHS appointment and also appointments with Helen. Daniel and Nicholas also see Helen. I am now on a Sole Parenting payment and living in supported accommodation as I was unable to afford to buy another home.

The gambling problem I had nearly killed my boys. They had no choice but to live with what was happening to them. They couldn't stop it or prevent it from happening to them. Due to that they now have to suffer the consequences of what has happened. For example they have lost their Father, friends and their home. They also lost their Mum for those years too. Now we are trying to rebuild what we had before minus their Dad. That is my main goal with this.

I no longer feel like I am a failure. I am able to admit that I am an ex-gambler now. The thoughts are still in my head to go to the pokies but I have not gambled since March. For the past six months I have been seeing Helen and that has helped me tremendously.

I am getting on with my life and dealing with the consequences of what I had done. It has been a long road back to reality but it was all worth the effort that we have all put into it even though we have a long way to go. I have since sent Chris back to his father, as I am unable to cope with all the problems that have occurred. I am hoping in the very near future that he will be able to come home and be happy again as a family.

Our lives have changed for the better since I began seeing Helen. We have had many major changes to deal with but have come through well so far. During the years that I was gambling I lost total control and discipline of the boys and now I have to regain that. I am finding this very difficult, as I have not made them do as I ask for many years and now they don't understand why they are being asked to do this now.