

I am a woman
I am a Mother
I am a daughter
I am a Christian
I am a neighbor
I am a nurse
I am a friend
I am a sister
I was a wife
And I am a thief, liar, cheat and a compulsive gambler

To say that this predatory beast of an addiction of compulsive gambling did not absolutely and totally pulverize, ravage and destroy me would be allowing it a muted, soft significance it does not deserve. On the contrary, it nearly buried me, in the absolute and literal sense.

I was a very happy, healthy and accomplished woman. I enjoyed a relatively contented marriage, had three great children and had worked my way up from staff nurse to an administrative position at the hospital where I worked for 27 years. I played tennis two or three days a week, enjoyed vacations and drove a new car. I had friends galore, loyal friends, close family- a life of envy really.

Then along came a spider, and it spun its web on a big tree right in my back yard. Gambling excursions were no longer limited to Joliet, over an hour away, for special occasions, perhaps a birthday or with a group of friends. There was now a casino on a boat ten minutes away in Elgin, and 20 minutes away in Aurora. In the beginning it was a virtual 30 mile radius of candy slot machines, all pretty and delicious. And I could taste them anytime, anytime I wanted to call in sick to work, anytime I would ask another parent to pick my child up from a practice or school, anytime my husband was out of town or I was off at midnight knowing everyone would be asleep.

I was truly, in every sense-powerless, and could not cease any more than I could halt the tides of the ocean. I was literally sickened by my utter defeat to this addiction, and I would ultimately lose what was a solid and good in my life...the losses are profound and staggering, the collateral damage far reaching. The financial loss is yet a small part, the rest of the fallout is excruciating on a daily basis... relationships lost, job lost, respect and dignity, all but evaporated.

This disease is terminal, yet insidious in nature. In the blink of an eye it becomes metastatic, pillaging and shattering totality of lives, lives once productive and content. Please do not confuse casual choices for pleasure or entertainment made by the healthy with those of the compulsive gambler. Because in reality, with gaming establishments and casinos on every corner, there are no choices for the person with this disease or those merely with the propensity to gamble, more venues and places to fail. And for the compulsive gambler, failure often equals death, or at least the of any life as we know it.

Like any disease, compulsive gambling does not discriminate, it lives to thrive. However it is not a sexy addiction, and help is either sought out too late, or in some cases not at all. Expanding gambling will only increase the ranks of the defenseless, desperate and destitute. There are no problems to be solved here, only created.

Gambling was my house of cards and if I know one thing to be true it is that I did not seek out this affliction, it found me. And it will find thousands of others at first perhaps a 'chance meeting', and then ultimately wreck their lives, as it did mine. I am just now, a year out from my lowest point of attempted suicide, finding recovery, purpose and a voice. Consider me a microcosm of those now, and generations to come who would benefit and perhaps even be saved by restraint and cautiousness when considering expanding gambling in Illinois.