

## Gamblers Anonymous

Saturday, May 1, 2004

Last night I went to my first meeting of Gamblers Anonymous here after referred to as GA.

Stunned is my first reaction.

I cannot believe I am, or was, this way. Me, a compulsive gambler? Never. Not me. And yet my past patterns, thoughts, and behavior fit the written GA profile.

I am, evidently, at the edge of a new self-definition, a deeper and certainly different aspect of my personality. I cannot today, believe what I am doing, thinking, and seeing. And yet, I am doing, thinking, and seeing it.

Disbelief is my reaction. Yet, the reactions of a compulsive gambler are right in front of me.

Why do I hate this term? And deny it?

Gambling is not so bad. Actually, I see my whole entrepreneurial life style as a gamble.

What about being a gambler? Well, that is worse. There's an evil, immoral tinge to the word. What about compulsive gambler: that's a total disease.

I rebel at the thought that my beautiful mind is diseased, that my wild thoughts, fantasies, and dreams of risk, freedom, and adventure are sick. No, I prefer to believe I'm in control, I choose to live the artist's life which means taking chances, and embracing the heroic thrills of a daring life on the edge.

I am also amazed that this cycle of personal change has lasted twenty-five years.

But evidently, it has. . . and is a basic truth of cycles.

Does my stock market activity comprise "compulsive gambling?" If it's compulsive, I'd consider it a disease.

But is it compulsive?

And what is a disease illness?

Why do I hate these words so much?

I don't know. But I do. . . at least for today.

It has something to do with control. I want to be my own hero. Heroes like to

feel they're in control, and this, even when they take chances. "Somehow. I'll use my inner resources and figure this out. I'll make it. The artist and intuitive wizard within me will know what to do."

If deep down, I did not believe this, have the confidence, I wouldn't be taking chances. If I thought that somehow (even magically), I would not succeed, I wouldn't try it. On that basis, only a fool would.

The different between a fool and a hero is: the hero believes (and sometimes he is right) he can handle the situation, that on some level, he's in control. The fool is not in control. . . but does it anyway.

Was I a hero or a fool? Could I settle for a little of both? Or is that merely another softening of the blow?

Is that why I hate the words "illness," "sickness," and "disease," especially when they relate to mental states? They signify a lack of control.

I like to be in charge. That's why I hate these words.

But why do I hate being out of control?

Because of the fear. . . which often turns to terror. . . and leads to panic.

It is absolutely terrifying to be out of control.

This whole thing started with my fears about money. They have haunted me all my married life, and they are the fundamental reason I got into debt, and the stock market. I'll even add my unrealistically high tour hopes of high registrations, although the mistakes I made in the tours could be attributed to business naivete; but of course, so can my dabblings in the stock market..

Naivete certainly exists. And it may be a "valid" reason at the beginning of a new venture. But if it is incorrect, and it usually is, that only lasts until the downfall.

It is just amazing how long it takes to uncover the infinite layers of self.

I think most people hate to admit how little control over our life we really have.

If this is true, and we admit it, then who or what is ultimately in control?

It can only be the Higher Power.

These realizations tire me out and make me breathless.

As of today, I cannot define myself as a compulsive gambler. Is that part of my problem? Am I really "different?" Or am I onto something new?

If not a compulsive gambler, what would I call myself? How would I define me? The word are important, very important, to me.

Seeing, admitting, realizing one is a compulsive gambler is the first step to recovery. I however, still do not see that. Nevertheless. I feel I've taken the first step.

Am I fooling myself?

I don't think so.

What does that mean in terms of recovery, renaissance, moving ahead?

I've come to the end of a road. I hit bottom, crashed, and am now at turning a corner.

But I'm using a different vocabulary in the process.

Maybe that's it. I'm going through the same GA realizations; only, since I'm a word person, I need my own personalized vocabulary to process them.

### Bottoming Out, Picking Up the Pieces, Cleaning Up

#### Beginnings of Reconstruction

Yes, I hit bottom and am on the way up. I can't fall any further. All the destruction has been done. The city has been totally leveled, bulldozed, bombed out, destroyed. Now the first step in turning the corner, in the construction of a new city, is to pick up the pieces at the bottom. Technically this means selling all my stocks, closing out the account completely, and probably never looking at stocks again.

The old road has been destroyed.

Inability and unwillingness to accept reality.

I had the ability but I was certainly unwilling. I needed to finish my life project of becoming an artist and gain confidence in myself as one. The money was really an annoying sideline. Don't bother me with those financial details. The stock market was my dream road of hope to lift those annoyances. It failed. But although my venture in trading stocks failed, my quest for artistic confidence succeeded.

One good, one bad. . . or certainly less good. But the latter was absolutely necessary for that stage of my life. Now that stage is over.

And I am absolutely ready!

Does it really matter if I understand why I went through the twisted and torturous routes of my past, if I know why the leaf fell from the tree? Maybe. Or maybe not.

It's an interesting question.

But the fallen leaf will shed no light on future leaves.

God, I can't believe I have so little self-knowledge. I fit all the descriptions of a compulsive gambler, yet I cannot believe I am one. Is this really a form of mental denial?

A few days later, the final blow came when I looked at my debt. I was sure I'd added it up right – but no, I came up \$6,000 short. Thus instead of \$39,000 (plus \$18,000) I had \$45,000 plus \$18,000. Equaling a grand total of \$63,000! That is mucho and serious money. But the big question is, How could I have missed that extra \$6,000?

Was it mere sloppiness? Or was it sloppiness due to denial? Or both?

This morning I am facing this denial thing – if it exists, and I think it does. I look at it in amazement, mixed with some disgust and rage. The amazement comes at the fact that I could fool myself for so long although I also know the many reasons why I “had to” do it during that period of my life.

But my self disgust and anger is because I'm living in such a financial mess.

I hate a mess!

I can't stand disorganization and a helter-skelter life.

So why did I live one so long in the financial world? Partly because I didn't think I was. I thought it was partly exciting and that ultimately, I had control of the situation. But obviously, because of the numbers mistakes I kept making, I didn't.

Also, secretly, I didn't really want control of it. I secretly enjoyed “flying free in space,” getting whatever I wanted, taking a joy ride. And also part of me didn't want to look at money at all. “Don't bother me about it,” I'd say. “Leave me alone. I want to be an artist.”

Well, at the time, these were valid personal reasons, even life and death ones. I

wanted to be an artist so badly that I was willing to die in the process.

And financially, I did. But I didn't care. Being, and becoming, and having confidence in myself as an artist was the most important thing in the world. I wouldn't have let anything get in my way.

But, as I say, now my goals have been activated. I am ready to look at the financial destruction I caused along the way. And, I am ready to fix up the mess. It may, and probably will, take years.

So, where do I go from here?

First, I suppose, is to admit to myself that I am and was an (ugh) compulsive gambler. A stock market gambler.

Perhaps that had nothing to do with becoming an artist.

Wow, is that true?

Maybe. It was more about the machismo of handling money, being a businessman, an entrepreneur, an executive and president of my company. It was about many things, many of which I don't, and am not ready to, understand at the moment.

But keep looking.

### I Could Be Wrong

This is rather devastating for my personality. Who am I, after all? If I could have been so wrong on money matters, what else could I be wrong on?

Yes, I have learned to love myself by having confidence in my artistic vision, but can I trust myself?

And I must also ask: Is there an arrogance in that confidence? I doubt it. . .but again, I could be wrong.

Is it naivete, denial, lack of vision, all three, or more? I also screwed up in my vision of the tour business. A big money maker, so I thought. Like the stock market, I thought it would make me rich; instead it helped drive me into debt and financial destruction. A pre-cursor to the stock market. Well, they went in tandem.

And perhaps the tour business and stock market are not in themselves bad. But my vision of them certainly was: Naivete, denial, and impaired vision filled both of them. Should I call it stupidity? How about illness, sickness, a disease? I hate those

words. They say somehow I was not responsible for my decisions. But I believe I was. So those words are out, at least for now. Still you never know: I could be wrong.