

Hi, my name is Mary and I'm a compulsive gambler. I started gambling probably around 1990. Started out very innocently. My mom used to play BINGO with some of her friends. I used to joke that the only time I could see my mom was to go to BINGO and play with her. My father had passed away in 1989 so it was something for her to do, and get together with her friends. I would spend very little then, just on my BINGO cards. Did that for some time. My mom and her friends would buy pull tabs along with BINGO cards and soon I would start doing the same. Again, I didn't spend much at first. I would also take my mom and a couple of her friends to the casino. I would only stay for a few hours and wouldn't spend that much. It didn't take long before I got bored with the nickel machines and went up to the quarter machines. Would win sometimes, thought that was pretty neat. My mom passed away in 1995 and I continued gambling. Progressively it got worse and I would go more often to BINGO, play the pull tabs and go to the casino more. Eventually I would play fifty cents, then one dollar on the machines. Would bet all three lines so that would add up fast. At first I was playing with my money but that soon got out of control. I worked at a school in accounts payable and found ways to take money from the district. I would write checks out to myself and would use school credit cards to take money from the ATM. The first time I did it, I was scared to death. But I was so out of control!!! It got easier to take money and I hated myself every time I did it though and said "this is the last time". But it never was.

My husband and I would take little trips to area casinos. He wasn't a gambler, so would drop me off and go for walks or a bike ride. Sometimes we would stay overnight. He would drop me off and he would do his thing. I would do my thing....sitting for hours in front of a machine. He would come back and if we were staying overnight we would have dinner in the casino. He would then go to the room and I would go back to the machines for long hours. So many of our trips were focused on what casino to go to. He was just happy to do a little weekend trip. Everybody, including my family, thought I was so lucky because I would always win. I would want to go back and if I said I lost so much it wouldn't have worked out. I was lying to them and to myself. One of the many things I have learned in my recovery is that with hard work you can make up the money that was lost but the time lost can never be regained.

The last day I gambled was on about Sept 26, 2012. I was booked in jail on Oct. 3, 2012. The school had their annual audit and it was discovered that I was taking money. I was never so scared in my life spending that night in jail. My family and friends never had any idea and were all shocked. It was in the local paper and on the local news. I was so ashamed that I put my family through that. They were troopers though along with all my friends and they stood by me. I remember telling my husband just to leave me. He said that we were in this marriage for good and bad and right now was the bad but we would get through it. I was so blessed to have so many good people in my life.

The investigation went on for some time and I made several court appearances. I was sentenced to one year in jail on May 5, 2013 but went in on my own on April 5. That way I could get out for Christmas. The one year sentence was actually 8 months, with good behavior. I worked in the kitchen at the jail to earn time off and was able to get out after seven months. November 5, 2013 was a very happy day getting out. It was so difficult being away from my family. I would get out once a week to go to my Gambler Anonymous meetings and twice a month to my counselor. Those times out were very precious to me. The old saying you don't know what you have until you lose it is definitely true.

It has been a long tough road for me but I am stronger for what happened. I am paying restitution to the school district and am on probation for a minimum of five years. It is important to me to pay them back; it's part of my healing process. It was a relief to me getting caught. It was over!!! I no longer had to lie to myself and everyone else. I am getting on with my life, one day at a time. Gambling is not a priority in my life anymore. There are so many more good things in life and I want to experience them.