

A Train Wreck

I grew up as a middle child of a lower middle class family. My parents divorced while I was in second grade and my mom re-married six months later. My step-father was very rigid and our personalities clashed a lot. It seemed like I couldn't do anything good enough even with a B average in school. To make matters worse, my brother, the youngest and only boy, was an A student, athletic, and excellent at everything. My older sister was a rebel. I grew up walking the line between doing well in school, yet pushing the boundaries at home. No one seemed to pay much attention to me so I tried to get attention elsewhere.

I began smoking cigarettes at a young age. As I grew up, I learned about sex and the power it had over boys. This phase lasted only about a year and I began to feel used. It was at this time I met my ex-husband, Kevin. Kevin was wild and his lifestyle seemed exciting. I was hooked. He smoked marijuana and after I tried it once I saw no thrill in it. I finished high school and we had our first child. We would go on to marry, have another child, and divorce in a span of five years.

After my divorce, I was determined to get my life together. I enrolled in Technical College and found part-time work at a friend's tavern. As a way to get me to socialize again, my sister and her boyfriend offered to take me on a trip to Las Vegas. They said they would pay for everything. All I needed was gambling money. I was able to save up \$80.00. When we landed, I felt invigorated. All the lights and sounds were thrilling and after we got settled, we set out for the casinos. Our first stop was Slots of Fun Casino where we played for awhile, and then moved on to Circus Circus Casino. My sister and I sat down at the poker machines. After playing for a few hours, I hit a royal flush and won a thousand dollars! I was amazed, excited, and more. I believe that moment was a catalyst that began a search for the same adrenalin rush that I would never find again.

After I returned home, I began dabbling in illegal pull tabs. I graduated from Technical College with honors and began work on my Bachelors Degree. I was beginning to feel a sense of self-worth and accomplishment, but after a year and a half, I dropped out of college and began my accounting career. I met my second husband during my last year at college.

After two years at my job, Al and I decided to marry. Life seemed to be O.K. Yeah, we had our ups and downs and the kids weren't perfect but it was a life. Three months into our marriage, I found out that I was pregnant. By this time, my youngest child was ten years old so we were in for quite an adjustment.

Four months after my daughter was born, I lost my job. A month later my husband lost his. I was out of work for three or four weeks. I was then hired, first as an independent accountant and then by the company directly. I was placed in a supervisory accounting position with a ten year mess to straighten out. I was constantly feeling pressure, but felt that if I said anything I would be let go. I continued to allow more and more work to be assigned to me.

My first year I was given a large bonus and an all expense paid trip over the Labor Day weekend. The "free" money got my adrenalin going, and I felt like that was the "good" life. When the money was gone and things settled down, I began seeking that adrenaline rush again.

At times when I had spent too much on gambling, I would “puff up” my paychecks to compensate so no one would know. Eventually, I decided it may be discovered so I stopped falsely increasing my paychecks. Unfortunately, I did not stop gambling.

By this time, I was in full swing and would find every opportunity to visit my sister and go to the taverns to play poker machines or any other type of machine to gamble. When the credit cards were maxed out and I was in fear of being “caught”, I found another way to pay the credit cards off. I began writing company checks directly to myself. I opened a money market account in which to hide the money so my husband would not find out and ask questions. When I couldn’t get to a place where there was a gambling machine, I would go to the mini-mart and buy scratch-off lottery tickets. I would buy a hundred dollars worth at a time, and I scratched them off in the car. This madness lasted just over three years and then it crashed.

I was confronted on the payroll numbers and when I began to speak it all just came out. I was like a tea kettle letting off steam. I look back now and still cannot fathom the amount of money, just over \$500,000 that I went through. The damage that I’ve done to the company, society, my friends and family is beyond a dollar amount. I am approaching the end of an eight year prison sentence for my actions, but it cannot undo the harm I’ve done. It all began so innocently and snow-balled into a train wreck.

I have been attending Gamblers Anonymous (GA) groups in prison since 2005. These meetings have helped me come to a better understanding of my addiction. They have also given me tools to utilize in my recovery. The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling has been a major support to the G.A. group and a valuable resource. God’s grace, mercy and unconditional love have filled a void and given me a sense of self-worth and acceptance. I understand that I will never really recover, but by God’s grace and with the support of my G.A. family I will be continually on the road to recovery. My name is LeAnne, and I am a compulsive gambler.