FRONT COVER

I am responsible...
When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help,
I want the hand of GA
always to be there.
And for that
I am responsible.

ANOTHER CHANCE

Fellow gambler, take my hand;
I'm your friend, I understand.
I've known your guilt, your shame, remorse;
I've borne the burden of your cross.
I found a friend who offered ease;
He suffered, too, with this disease.
Although he had no magic cure,
He showed how we could endure.
We walked together side by side;
We spoke of things we had to hide.
We told of sleepless nights and debts,
Of broken homes and lies and threats.
And so my weary gambler friend,
Please take this hand that I extend.
Take one more chance on something new,
Another gambler helping you.

FOREWORD

In coming to Gamblers Anonymous and genuinely seeking help, you have probably taken the most important step of your life up to this point.

This booklet is designed to help you through your early days in the fellowship. In the pages following, you will find practical advicethat has been tried and tested down through the years by many compulsive gamblers.

All we ask of you is that you keep an open mind when you read through the pages of this booklet. Up to this point, you life (if you are like us) has been unmanageable, directed by your uncontrollable urge to gamble. The pattern your life has been following can only have the following outcome: misery, sickness and financial dram for you, and those closest to you.

The Gamblers Anonymous way of life will obviously be very different to you. It may even frighten you. But we can assure you, the Gamblers Anonymous way of life will result in happiness, peace of mind and self-respect.

All that is required is an open mind and a genuine desire to stay away from you next bet, one day at a time.

We welcome you to Gamblers Anonymous and please, please, if there is anything you don't understand, ask someone to explain.

You are no longer alone.
Accept the hand of friendship.

WE LEARNED TO LISTEN

When we first arrived at Gamblers Anonymous, we believed that our main problem was the financial mess we were in. We knew that it was cause by our gambling and we also knew that money, or lack of it, was causing problems in other departments of our lives. Because of this thinking, we too believed that if we could clear up the financial mess, everything would be alright again. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Though it helped to get our finances in order, this often proved to be the easiest problem to deal with, provided we were honest with ourselves and our creditors.

Our experience has shown that, by the time we came to Gamblers Anonymous, we had picked up a number of character defects. It was virtually impossible to gamble compulsively without "lying, stealing, avoiding reality and escaping into a dream world, or sometimes indulging in all three". We have found that stopping gambling did not automatically rid us of these defects.

Then we listened to learn how to rid ourselves of these defects. First, we must be aware of them and acknowledge them. This requires: Honesty with ourselves and in the meetings we attend. This is not an easy task and can be painful, but with the help of our meetings and sponsor, it can be achieved in time. We need to keep an open mind when we listen to advice, even if it is directed at another member. Finally, we must be willing to apply and act on the advice, and make the changes that will be asked of us.

By learning to listen, to know other compulsive gamblers have coped with problems on their road to recovery, we can learn to cope with the problems we will undoubtedly face on our road to recovery.

UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE 12 STEP RECOVERY PROGRAM

When compulsive gamblers read the 12 steps of recovery for the first time, their reactions can vary: (a) "It's an impossible task", (b) "I don't need to do all these things", (c) Most common, some are just so sick they don't understand what is being asked of them so they put it aside. Whatever the reaction, do not panic. When the higher power gives to the 12 steps, he also gave us plenty of time and better still, he gave all of us the same time - the rest of our lives.

We believe that Step 1 - "We admitted we were powerless over gambling, that our lives had become unmanageable" - is virtually a precondition for all the rest. Unless we can admit and accept that gambling has us licked, that there is no way we can win, we will struggle.

The acceptance of Step 1 can keep people free of gambling on its own but, as has been said so often, stopping gambling is not enough. So our predecessors, in their wisdom, laid down the other 11 steps of recovery which will enable us to live normal, decent lives and play our part in the society within which we live.

Most meetings will, as often as possible, have discussions on various parts of the Gamblers Anonymous Handbook, all of which will relate to a particular step or steps. Try to keep an open mind during these discussions. There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom in Gamblers Anonymous rooms. It is not only available to all, it is given freely and unconditionally.

If there is something you don't understand, or a step you don't know how to apply in your life, ask any member who has been around for a while. They will be happy to help you. Trying to apply the 12 steps of recovery to your life can be a beautiful thing and the rewards are many. It will enable you to know yourself better. It will set you at peace with yourself and fellow human beings. It will bring you serenity and allow you to manage your life with some dignity, self-respect and the love of your fellow man.

STAY AWAY FROM THE FIRST BET - ONE DAY AT A TIME

Stopping gambling was quite simple - do not place a bet. Simple, yes, but not easy for a compulsive gambler.

When suffering gamblers arrive at Gamblers Anonymous, the thought of never ever placing another bet is unthinkable to them. Until now, their hopes and dreams have been dependent on "the big win". Now these hopes and dreams are being taken away.

Gamblers Anonymous teaches us that we should try to live our lives "one day at a time". So it follows that we're only required to stay away from the first bet "one day at a time". We should not worry unduly about tomorrow, next week or next year. We can only live in the present. Today is all we have. We have to realize that we can do nothing about yesterday or tomorrow, but if we have a good today, we will be a little stronger tomorrow.

As the days free from gambling string together and we try to apply the 12 steps of recovery in our lives, the urge to gamble will lessen. Nevertheless, we should always be on our guard and try to be aware of any backsliding into old habits, any signs of complacency, any thoughts that may come into our heads that "gambling wasn't all that bad", that "maybe we are cured" or "maybe we were not compulsive at all - just unlucky". These thoughts are all symptoms of this illness and can lead us back to the misery we have raised so hard to put behind us. These thoughts are not dangerous only to new members, they are just as deadly to any member, no matter how long they have been gambling-free.

Remember, the distance to our last bet may get longer and longer, but the distance to our next bet always remains the same - we are one bet away from disaster.

If we don't make the first bet, we won't make the second.

So, in the morning, if we say, "I will not place a bet today" and make it a good day, there is every chance we will be able to say it again tomorrow.

STOP LIVING IN THE PAST

Many compulsive gamblers struggle in the early days of their recovery, through looking back to their past life, burdening themselves with guilt, remorse, money they have lost, opportunities they have missed, or lack of progress at work. Our experience has shown that if we are to recover, these things must be left in the past and we must move on. Guilt and remorse can cripple us. They are very close to self-pity. We must strive to replace them with the acceptance of responsibility, and make amends where we can.

Money lost - We must accept that this money is gone. We have already spent considerable time and money trying to get it back, with no success. All we have achieved is more misery and more pain.

Opportunities missed - If we come to accept a safe, and more prudent way of life, we will have more opportunities, and if we are free from gambling and living a useful life, we will be able to take advantage of them when they occur. The old ones are gone, look forward to the new ones.

Lack of progress at work - What can be done in that field depends a lot on the age and abilities of the member. However, irrespective of age or ability, any member can become a better worker. Probably for the first time in years, we are able to concentrate on what our job requires us to do. We can channel the energy we needed for gambling into our daily tasks, then leave the rest to our own higher power.

To sum up, our experience has shown us that if we care to embark on a new life, free from gambling and all the problems and misery that gambling generates, then we must close the book on the life we are leaving behind.

FILL THE VOID

We are a few days or weeks free from gambling. Life has stopped getting worse. We are filled with hope and gratitude. Suddenly we find a huge hole in our lives - what do we do with the time that once was taken up by our gambling obsession? It is not an easy task, but one which must be faced.

In the early days, few compulsive gamblers have a clear picture of how much of their time was spent on gambling. Most relate mainly to the time spent in casinos, card rooms, at the racetrack, or in front of a one-armed bandit. In actual fact this usually represents on a part of their gambling life. There is also the time spent in pursuit of money to feed the gambling, the sleepless nights trying to invent lies either to get money or to explain about money that has now gone. Lies to our employer as to why we were missing or why a job wasn't completed. Lies to our partners as to our whereabouts. In fact, gambling dominated almost all of our waking lives.

Now we must fill this void. Each member should try to find a way which suits him or her best, but it is essential that they do find a way. Some take up long-forgotten hobbies. Some return to sports they once had an interest in. Some resume education (this is something that can be done at any age). We would also suggest that some time is allocated to rebuilding family life or relationships with friends and relatives who may have suffered due to our gambling. There are just a few suggestions. We hope each member will make his or her own efforts to fill the void, and in doing so, will sustain and enhance their recovery.

ENJOY IT

Recovery from compulsive gambling is a wonderful miracle and every member's recovery is a unique and personal experience. The surest way to have a good and lasting recovery is to learn to enjoy it. This may seem like stating the obvious, but there are obstacles which, if we are not aware of them, can prevent us from enjoying our miracle.

One is guilt. When life starts to improve for us, we sometimes let our minds wander to past misdeeds, and if we allow ourselves to dwell on these too long, we begin to think that we do not deserve to recover and these thoughts, if not spoken about, can have tragic results.

Another is resentment. When we first come to Gamblers Anonymous, it is suggested that we make some very radical changes in our behavior. Some we think are - impossible - unnecessary - or we just don't want to make them. However, in the early days we try them and it works (we know it does) and we get some time free of gambling. The euphoria of being gambling-free fades, and if we have not learned to enjoy our recovery, we start to ask questions of ourselves, e.g. "Why can't I carry money if I want to?" - "Why can't I buy a raffle ticket?" - "Why can't I watch a big race on TV?"

We begin to think that the price of recovery is too high, and again this type of thinking can lead to tragedy.

If we are to sustain recovery, instead of resenting the disciplines we must impose on ourselves, we should be rejoicing in many rewards that our ours - self-respect, peace of mind, happy family, etc.

So, enjoy your recovery. If you feel guilty, kick it out and replace it with responsibility.

If you feel resentful, think about all the people who have forgiven you and be thankful that you were picked to be part of the miracle that was the Gamblers Anonymous recovery program - go on, enjoy it.

ACCEPT THE ILLNESS FOR WHAT IT IS

Compulsive gambling is an emotional illness which can never be cured but can be arrested "one day at a time."

The compulsive gambler is a person who is dominated by an irresistible urge to gamble. Coupled with this is the obsessive idea that a way will be found, not only to control the gambling but to make it pay and enjoy it.

We compulsive gamblers often express a desire to stop forever, but inevitably we find ourselves back in action. For most of us there are days, weeks or even months when we are certain that we have gained control. These intervals invariably are followed by long periods of all-out uncontrolled gambling during which progressive deterioration in almost every department of our lives becomes evident. This deterioration is most acute in the relationships with our wives and husbands, friends, relatives and employers.

Therefore, acceptance of the progressive nature of our illness is vital in enabling us to recover and return to a normal, productive and enjoyable life.

ATTEND AS MANY MEETINGS AS POSSIBLE

There is a saying in Gamblers Anonymous, "Meetings make it" You may ask yourself - make what? Recovery. Meetings make it easier, stronger and better. The foundations of the fellowship are in its meetings. Through sharing our experience, strength and hope, we believe we find the inner strength necessary to arrest our gambling on a daily basis. We suggest that in your first 90 days, you get as many meetings in as possible. Not because you need them more than we do, but because the quicker you come to terms with this illness, the better it will be for yourself.

Also on entering Gamblers Anonymous, you will see evidence of a lifestyle that is obviously very different from the one you have been living. The more you see and begin to understand, this new way of living will be of benefit to you and your family. After their first 90 days, members usually settle down to a routine. This routine differs from member to member. Some will go to several meetings per week, others only go to one. The choice is yours, but we have found that most members go to more than one meeting. Each to his or her own and you will find a level that you are comfortable with. But remember, "meetings make it".

ONLY CARRY MONEY THAT YOU REALLY NEED

This suggestion you may find hard to accept at this moment but, believe us, there is a very good reason for it. In your first 90 days you are still finding your way, still trying to come to terms with this illness and beginning to realize that money has uses other than gambling. During this period we are very vulnerable. We have been made aware of the financial position we/our families are in, and it is so easy to fall into the old trap of believing once more that gambling will solve our financial problems quickly. This dream is so much easier to believe if we have excess money in our pockets. In our minds our $10 becomes $100 very quickly and our $100 becomes $1000 even quicker and, before we know where we are, we are back on the old merry-go-round once again.

We have learned through experience not to put ourselves through this temptation and use the basic suggestions of Gamblers Anonymous and only carry money that we really need for that day.

This suggestion serves another purpose for us. Many of us have put our families through really rough times. If our families can see that we are really making an effort and taking the basic advice, it puts their minds at ease and things in the home begin to improve. Again, through experience we have found that with the support of our families and of our Gamblers Anonymous meetings, these early stages in our recovery can be very pleasant and rewarding times.

IF IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE, ASK GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS FOR A "PRESSURE RELIEF GROUP PAMPHLET"

In most cases, it was financial pressures that finally lead us to seek help within Gamblers Anonymous. Many years of borrowing from banks, financial companies, friends, relatives etc. create seemingly insurmountable problems.

Initially upon entering Gamblers Anonymous, it is necessary to establish a sound financial budget which allows you to pay off debts at a rate you can afford. Gamblers Anonymous members can be invaluable in helping you to work out a budget, as many of them have experienced the same problems. They can advise you on how much you can afford to repay. Trying to settle debts too quickly, causing further financial pressures, can lead us back to gambling.

It is often surprising how quickly financial problems can be solved, allowing us to concentrate on the more difficult task of changing ourselves.

TELL YOUR PARTNER EVERYTHING

Another piece of advice we are given early in our Gamblers Anonymous life is to "wipe the slate clean", i.e. tell our partner everything. This can seem a horrendous task to the new member but, painful though it may be, it is essential that we take this advice and apply it if we are to recover. It is truly amazing how this illness can control us and warp our judgment. Many members have told us of how, when their gambling bubble burst and they were pouring out the terrible things they had done and the debts they had incurred due to gambling, they would hold on to one debt. The excuses vary from embarrassment, shame, forgetfulness or "I thought I could manage to put it myself".

We believe it is the illness keeping a hold on its victim. As long as a compulsive gambler has a secret debt, he or she is keeping a ready-made excuse to gamble. Our experience shows this to be true.

Another reason for telling our partner everything is that, in the early days of our recovery we need someone to handle our finances. We will probably have a couple of members of our group to help work out a budget which, again, our partner will be expected to manage. But how can a realistic budget be planned or managed if all the outgoing money is not accounted for. Also, if the gambler is intending to pay off a hidden debt, then the income will have to be manipulated to provide the cash. It is very unlikely that this can be done without lies being told, and without honesty we cannot recover.

MAKE FRIENDS WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

Most members, by the time they arrive at Gamblers Anonymous, have suffered badly from the effects of their gambling. These effects can be many and varied, but one of the most common is a terrible feeling of loneliness.

Through years of gambling we have put barriers around ourselves, isolating us from family and friends. We have come to believe that nobody could like us, let alone love us, and this feeling rests us deeper and deeper into our dream world.

After a short time in the fellowship - if we are following the advice we are given - a bit of order comes back into our lives and our minds begin to clear. We come face to face with ourselves and we don't always like what we see. It is at this time that we need friends within the fellowship.

People who have faced similar problems and hardships, people who know what you are going through, people with whom you can feel relaxed and comfortable, and nothing you say is likely to shock or embarrass them.

When we stop gambling there is usually a great void in our lives. Friends in Gamblers Anonymous can help us fill that void.

They can help us to rebuild our social life again and in the early days it makes it easier if we socialize in non-gambling company. Making friends in Gamblers Anonymous can help you recover. It also carries the bonus that you can help another member to recover just by being a friend.

IF YOU GAMBLE, GET TO A MEETING OR USE THE PHONE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Because our fellowship is made up of compulsive gamblers, it is inevitable that some will go back to gambling. Unfortunately, there have been occasions in the past when members have found themselves in this position and have never returned to the fellowship. Whether they felt ashamed or had a feeling that they had let someone down or some other reason, it is obvious that something kept them from returning. Don't let this happen to you. If you slip and go back to gambling (and we sincerely hope you don't), get to a meeting or phone another member as quickly as possible. No one will look upon you as a failure. No one will say, you have let me down. We are there to help, not judge. It is a fact that Gamblers Anonymous meetings are full of members who, at some time, have gone back to gambling. They are the fortunate ones. Most of them are living happy, contented lives, free from gambling and the horrors that go with it. The unfortunate ones are still out there, gambling and suffering. So, if you return to gambling (and we don't apologize for repeating this), don't hesitate to get to a meeting or use the phone as quickly as possible.

TELL YOUR PARTNER ABOUT GAMANON...IT CAN HELP THEM

Compulsive gamblers come from all walks of life. They come in both sexes and they come in all ages.

We have no doubt that you, as a compulsive gambler, will have someone close to you who is suffering as a result of your gambling. With this in mind, we would like to give you a little information on the fellowship called Gam-Anon.

Gam-Anon, although separate from Gamblers Anonymous, has very close links with Gamblers Anonymous inasmuch as its membership is made up of the wives, husbands, sweethearts, parents or just close friends of compulsive gamblers.

Their suffering is quite different from that of the gambler. They have no control over our gambling whatsoever. In listening to Gam-Anon members speak, we have found that, in most cases, their evenings depended on the outcome of their gambler's day and in fact, in a lot of cases, they become an extension of the gambler and sadly, in some cases where there once was love, there remains only hate and bitterness. Add to all this, confusion and a feeling of hopelessness, and you can see why they also need help.

Gam-Anon won't stop you gambling but we have found, in our experience, that it has been of help to have our partners recover and share in our recovery. When we attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings and our partner attends Gam-Anon, we find better understanding and communication as we work our programs and share in our recovery.