

I would like to first thank everyone involved in this process. The National Impact on Gambling Committee could never realize just how important this is to me and all other compulsive gamblers.

My name is Donna Louise Morgan Kelly, I'm a 34-year old mother of two, married 7 years to Col. Don Kelly of the Baton Rouge Police Department. The details of events that have taken place in my life seem almost unbelievable, in fact they sound as if they were taken right out of a motion picture, horror of course.

I don't know the exact date that I realized I had a gambling problem, but I know the date that it almost cost me my life. That date was Tuesday, November 25, 1997. I had been trying for several months to stop, but I never could. Every time I gambled, the amount I lost would grow. I believe the total amount that I have lost since my addiction took over is somewhere between \$ 75, to \$ 100,000.00. You may wonder where someone like me would get that kind of money. First you go through the money that you have on hand; then what your spouse and children have, yes even the coins from my 7 year old sons bank. I borrowed money from my other family members, and even had to get money from my in-laws to cover my debt from my husband. Once those avenues were exhausted, I borrowed from banks, I had several loans at several different banks. Then I went to individual loan companies. Within hours I would lose hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars. That still wasn't enough, the credit card debt was starting to add up. I had 7 credit cards, all charged over the maximum limit. Once everything was gone, I started kiting money from one bank to another, I was warned by the Bank president that this was illegal and could be arrested, I closed my account and went to another bank. After kiting there for several months, I went to my friend who was the President, and asked him not to pay anymore of my checks that I did not have the money to cover. He made sure that this was what I wanted and I assured him it was.

That's when the consequences of my gambling addiction started. I was at work when I received the phone call, it was the phone call that would change my life forever. George Remmeter the co-owner of Chelsea's Cafe in Denham Springs had gone to the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office and filed a warrant for my arrest for issuing 13 worthless checks in the amount \$ 1,040.00 (13 checks @ \$ 80.00 each). These were checks that I had cashed in Chelsea's to play Video Poker. That was not the first time my checks had been returned there, it was there first time I didn't have any way to cover them. Since my husband is a public person, the pressure was more than I could stand. I left from work to go to the psychiatrist but never made it. On the way there I decide that I had been trying for several months going to therapy, taking medications all to stop gambling but nothing seem to work. I stopped at a local sports bar and started drinking, I knew that taking 100 milligrams of Prozac and mixing it with alcohol would be deadly or at least I hoped it would be. Unable to drive home, I drove about 1 mile to a local hotel, checked in got to my room and became sick, I called home because I wanted to let everyone know that I Loved them and how sorry I was for everything I put them through, My husband had no idea what I was talking about. When I woke the next morning I was at home, I walked into the kitchen and by the look on my husbands face, I knew things had changed. He told me that if I didn't check myself into the hospital that we were done. Later that day I voluntarily entered into Meadowwood Hospital for the addiction of gambling. I was put on suicide watch for the first several days, no shoelaces, no sharp objects, the humiliation was unacceptable. As I looked around the room, I saw these

people who had all sorts of problems, alcohol, drugs, sexual and the list goes on. I felt that there has been a mistake made, I wasn't crazy and I was not staying in this hospital. My hospital stay is a story in itself so I won't go into details, but before I left their facility I was sexually attacked by another patient, a doctor was called to make sure there was no serious damage done to me. The mental issues from that will be with me forever. I continued to go to out patient therapy 3 nights a week as required, and I also attended Gamblers Anonymous meetings. Things were looking better for the first time in a long time.

Then on Friday December 19, 1997, (the night of my office Christmas Party) I was booked into Livingston Parish Prison for 24 counts of felony theft. I was certain that my life was over, I had reached the end. My husband and my children would be lost to me forever. Everybody has a limit of how much they can take, this was it for me. They treated me as if I was a criminal, someone who was no good, someone with no morals or respect for others. When in reality I am no different from anyone else. This indeed was the lowest point in my life. Death was certain. After being bonded out by my husband who signed a property bond using our family home for security, I felt that I owed it to my boss and other employees to show up for the Christmas Party at my boss' home since he and his wife had gone through all the trouble of planning something nice for us. It was kind of funny because I was about 2 hours late and when he opened up the door, he took one look at me and said you look like Hell. Hell doesn't begin to describe where I had been or how I was feeling at that point. I never told anyone that night where I had been or what happened. As a matter of fact, I kept it a secret until I realized that the charges were not gonna go away. On March 13, 1998 I left my job. A job that I have had for 2½ years being a personal secretary for one of the Parishes most influential men. I never told my boss why I left until I had been gone for a month. He was the Parish Engineer and had several state and parish contracts for surveying and engineering work worth millions of dollars. I didn't want to take the chance of him losing any jobs or any bad publicity for employing someone who was charged with 24 counts of felony theft so I quit.

I was very lucky in that someone was willing to give me a chance, I started a new job and I have been there for nearly 6 months.