

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Robin?

2 ROBIN: First, let me say I'm glad to be here because
3 a good friend, Dr. Rick Beden, asked me to do this.
4 Unfortunately, he passed away about two and a half weeks ago. So
5 I hope that in some way my testimony will honor his memory. He
6 was a wonderful physician on the Gulf Coast and a wonderful man
7 as well.

8 Long before your commission was established or had
9 its first meeting, my family and I were experiencing the effects
10 of living with a compulsive gambler. Since the beginning of
11 1995, I had answered yes to all 20 of the quote, are you living
12 with a compulsive gambler questions.

13 My compulsive gambler is my husband, a former attorney on the
14 Mississippi Gulf Coast.

15 Unfortunately, not only is he plagued with his
16 gambling addictions, but it is compounded by his addiction to
17 alcohol. The final results of these two addictions have been a
18 break-up of our family unit, relationships damaged between a
19 father and three lovely daughters, financial devastation and
20 extreme emotional distress between all family members.

21 These destructive results and the story which I am
22 about to relay to you are things that have happened to either
23 myself or my family members as a direct result from my husband's
24 gambling. I feel certain, however, that there are many more
25 relationships that have been severed, either personally or
26 professionally, as a result of his addictions.

27 My husband and I were married in February 1969. He
28 went to a treatment center for alcoholism in the summer of 1982,
29 a very big miracle in my life, and then began to spend the next

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1 12 years as a recovering alcoholic. He and I both went back to
2 college shortly after his release from the treatment center,
3 while at the same time managing three small daughters.

4 He obtained his law degree and I received a teacher's
5 certificate in the State of Mississippi. We began to rebuild our
6 lives together and for the next several years we had a life
7 filled with wonderful support from friends and family.

8 We attended a wonderful Episcopal church in Gulfport,
9 Mississippi where he became an extremely active member of the
10 congregation. He achieved the status of lay eucharistic
11 minister, and through this, was able to share his commitment to
12 God with others.

13 Because he had begun to practice law in 1986, by 1990
14 we were leading a fairly secure life financially. We were able
15 to provide a good home for not only ourselves but our three
16 daughters as well.

17 His relapse, to the best of my knowledge, occurred in
18 1994. By 1995, we knew that he was not only drinking heavily but
19 had begun gambling compulsively as well. All of his credit card
20 statements indicated that he had reached, if not exceeded, his
21 credit limits. Paying bills became increasingly difficult.

22 Looking back, I wish at this time I had sought help
23 through Gam-Anon. Al-Anon had been a wonderful organization and
24 really helpful to me before he went to treatment for alcoholism
25 in 1982 and then even after. I'm not sure actually, though, at
26 that particular time in '95 that we actually had a Gam-Anon
27 meeting on the coast. GA was certainly here at that time.

28 By the summer of 1996, he had really stopped
29 practicing law and seemed to be completely consumed by the

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1 gambling. I went so far as to withdraw my teacher retirement
2 fund, which had accumulated for about ten years, so that he could
3 cover payments to some of the people that he had taken money
4 from.

5 I would later find out that he had taken much larger
6 sums of money than that teacher retirement fund, which was about
7 a little over \$12,000. To this day, almost none of these funds
8 have ever been returned.

9 He was severely depressed and suicidal by the fall of
10 1996. The one joy in our life at this time was the birth of our
11 first granddaughter in October, but by the end of November of
12 that year, I did an involuntary commitment of my husband to the
13 state hospital in Whitfield, Mississippi with the help of a dear
14 doctor friend and a dear attorney friend. We felt that he would
15 certainly harm himself if he did not take those steps to
16 intervene.

17 Unfortunately, this treatment only focused on
18 alcoholism. He was released at the end of January 1997 and
19 within two weeks had begun gambling and drinking again. As hard
20 as it is for many people, including myself, to believe, I
21 continued to remain in this horrible situation until May 1998.

22 At that time, I sold my home, separated from my
23 husband and was able to buy a smaller home for my youngest
24 daughter and myself. My husband and I are in the process of
25 getting a divorce at this time. This was never what I wanted. I
26 wanted him to get into recovery and be well again.

27 Unfortunately, family members cannot make this
28 happen. At this time, he is still gambling and still drinking.

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1 He has not worked since the fall of 1996 and no longer holds a
2 license to practice law in the State of Mississippi.

3 My girls and I are doing okay considering what we've
4 been through but I know there will always be long-lasting
5 effects. For example, one of my daughter has also had a gambling
6 problem. Although she is currently recovering from this
7 addiction, she has certainly suffered major devastating
8 consequences.

9 She followed a path very similar to that of her
10 father, the only difference being that the amount of financial
11 damage was not nearly as great because she simply did not have
12 the means. She stole money from her loved ones and an employer,
13 resulting in an arrest and criminal charges brought against her
14 by the DA's office.

15 Because she is a first-time offender, she will
16 probably, or hopefully be accepted into a diversion program, and
17 as long as she continues in recovery and makes restitution, she
18 will be able to clear her own name.

19 Fortunately for her, she has, at this point in time,
20 stopped heading down the path of destruction that her father
21 chose. I only hope and pray that she has truly learned her
22 lesson and the urge to gamble does not overcome her once again at
23 a later time or place.

24 Fortunately for my daughters as well as myself, I did
25 take some steps in order to give us financial protection. In the
26 beginning of 1996, I had my husband deed our home to me. I set
27 up separate bank accounts and began filing separate tax returns
28 in 1995.

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1 Now looking back, I am so thankful that I had the
2 foresight to do these things because they afforded me the ability
3 to own my own home today and I still have my teaching career.

4 I'm only one person with only one family. It saddens
5 me to think of all the people and families who have been
6 traumatized by similar experiences. People like my husband who
7 have addictive personalities will have addiction problems. I
8 have chosen not to live with his addiction any longer. It is
9 just too painful.

10 If there is anything that I feel absolutely certain
11 about, it is this: if there were no casinos and no legalized
12 gambling, our family would not have been so severely financially
13 devastated. I have been inside a casino four to six times in my
14 life and I will choose not to go again.

15 Thank you for this opportunity to present this
16 testimony. I have a strong belief that in educating people we
17 might be able to unlock some doors.

18 I will not argue the fact that the gaming industry on
19 the Mississippi Gulf Coast has strengthened our economy, but what
20 it has also done is help to play a role in weakening and
21 destroying personal lives, families and relationships. That is a
22 sad thing and it's especially sad when that family belongs to
23 you. Thank you.

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