

Recovery,
Renewal and
Growth

The Phoenix Spirit

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Betting Without Boundaries Has a High Cost

by Pat Samples



Bray Ash had a good family, a good life, and a good future. When online gambling took over his mind, he could have lost it all. Fortunately, he got help, but not before a small fortune — even his student loan money — was lost to him through betting.

STARTING YOUNG

During childhood visits to seaside resorts in his native England, Bray Ash looked forward to playing the slot machines offered there for kids. In primary school, he recalls playing blackjack in class and casino games on his Game-boy. In his early teens, he was going to football and soccer matches and betting on those.

Bray didn't wait until the legal age of 18 to gamble at the betting shops (common in England) near his home. A friend helped him get a fake ID so he could go drinking. "Then we walked past the betting shop," says Bray, "and he said, 'Let's see if our ID is working there,' and

I went in and I put a pound on a horse.

"When I was 18, I opened my first online account and started going to casinos and going to the betting shop during school hours or after school with friends," he says. Once Ash got to the university, he was feeling lost with all the free time on his hands outside of classes. That time was soon consumed by online sports betting. He was betting on horse and dog racing, American football, basketball, and more.

Ash had been active in playing sports in the boarding school he had attended before going to the university.

"I played a lot of football, though I didn't quite make it to professional," says Ash.

SENSELESS OBSESSION

"I was quite knowledgeable about certain sports," he says, and he figured that would give him an advantage when

BETTING WITHOUT BOUNDARIES to pg 5

FROM MINNESOTA ALLIANCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

Peer Support Specialists Play Vital Role in Recovery

by Bill Stein

There is great power in learning from someone who has "been there before." People with similar lived experience may be able to listen and provide hope and guidance in a way that is uniquely received.

So-called "mental health peer support" has existed for decades. Since the 1990s, the concept of "consumers as providers" has become a larger component in mental health service settings.

Perhaps there is no more powerful example of the power of peer support than when a recovering compulsive

gambler shares their story with someone still in the throes of addiction. Indeed, programs such as Gamblers Anonymous are built largely on the idea that others with similar challenges can lead the way to recovery.

Peer support specialists are people who have been successful in the recovery process and can help others experiencing similar situations. Peer support specialists have a proven place as a key component of integrated care for recovery.

PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS to pg 10

JOHN H. DRIGGS, LICSW

The Invisible Trauma of Emotional Neglect in Childhood: What You Can't See Can Hurt You

Whoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god.

— FRANCIS BACON

Solitude is not the same thing as loneliness. All of us need times when we are just alone with ourselves. Perhaps we use that time to reflect on ourselves or just get away from the noise of the world. We aren't able to enjoy relationships without alone time. However, there can be a dark side to solitude. Some of us have been traumatized by emotional neglect in our childhood. We use our alone time today to perpetually hide from the world and hide from ourselves. We conceal the emptiness within ourselves and have little ability to accurately see who we really are. Arthur Erickson, a famous Canadian architect, once said "Illusion is needed to hide from the emptiness within." We hide because we are lost in life. We are scared because we don't know how to find our way. We expect to be rejected because we don't feel worthy of human love. We live without the benefit of other people's love or the knowledge of how to find it. Our illusions are the best that we can do sometimes.

Solitude and isolation are painful things and beyond human endurance.

— JULES VERNE

Some people live as extreme individualists set apart from human relationships. They may be social but cannot connect with others. They may do well in school and have career success but they do not allow themselves to depend on others, mostly because they are scared of relying on others and lack the social skills to know others more personally. These are people who have grown up with parents who gave them all the basics—food, clothing, and shelter—but were raised by people who were uninvolved with their emotional lives. They were raised to raise themselves. Can you imagine having parents that raised you and tended to

EMOTIONAL NEGLECT to pg 8



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Hidden Truth

by Louise Elowen



“Three things cannot be long hidden: The sun, the moon, and the truth.”
BUDDHA

When you talk about gambling, you probably don’t put it in the same category of addiction as say, for example, drugs. After all, as we say in England, where is the harm in a flutter on the horses, dogs, or slot machines?

I grew up in northern England, surrounded by the everyday occurrence of betting on sports, from boxing to horse racing, to an evening at the dog track. It was (and is) part of the culture, as much as “grabbing a pint” in the local pub.

I’ve bet on the horses, at a day out at the races with friends; the dogs, at a work night out; and been dazzled by the bright lights of Vegas on vacation, before moving to the United States. It’s very easy to get caught up in the excitement of placing a bet, and then seeing your money multiply in a win, cheered on by your friends and co-workers. *Why not place another bet? And perhaps win more?* Unfortunately, as I learned in college when studying statistics and the law of probability, at some point your “lucky winning streak” is going to run out. Big time. And suddenly that initial dollar bet has escalated into hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in debt.

Gambling is often dressed up in razzle and dazzle, luring in the unsuspecting gambler. Take Las Vegas for example. Or any one of the other “gambling” destina-

tions in the US. Fancy hotels, fancy buffets (pre COVID-19), and fancy drinks, all heavily subsidized by the gambling industry, are designed to entice bachelorettes, destination wedding guests, and corporate team-building events for a few days of fun. *After all, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas, right?*

But unfortunately, this is most often not the case. Gambling follows you home, debt accumulates, and then the beginning of a slide into a “hidden addiction.” The truth glorified by the likes of, not just one company, but whole cities devoted to gambling.

These days you don’t even have to leave home to slide into gambling addiction. The internet provides many avenues of exploration for gamblers. Just compounding the problem and hiding the truth from a society which seems more interested in the worship of money than that of good health.

In this issue of *The Phoenix Spirit*, we discuss the issues surrounding gambling. Most importantly, you don’t have to struggle on alone. Reach out for help. And help expose the hidden truth of gambling.

With blessings for a healthy solution,

Louise



The Phoenix Spirit

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find and face holds within it
the seeds of
healing, health, wisdom,
growth and prosperity.
We hope you find a
seed in every issue.

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The Phoenix Spirit is a bi-monthly publication for people actively working on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are committed to providing articles, advertising, and information about recovery, renewal, and personal growth to help people experience life in a balanced, meaningful way.

The opinions and facts presented in this publication are intended to be diverse and represent those of the writers and/or contributors, and are not necessarily those of *The Phoenix Spirit*. We seek writers and interview subjects who are willing to gift you with their honestly held convictions and insights. We seek to attract advertisers who offer products and services of integrity. But we urge our readers to research, and trust their instincts.

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Brianna's Story

by **Brianna M.**

You're never quite right again after feeling the life exit a person's body, especially when it's your younger sister. That's when the road to disfunction and addiction began in my life. Being a young girl of only nine years old, the loss of my sister Debba Jean was crippling for me emotionally, mentally, even physically, not to mention the breakdown of my parents on the same level. They didn't know how to cope and blamed me. Not only did I lose my sister that day in April, but I also lost my parents. I had night terrors and slept on a couch at the end of my parent's bed for months. I just couldn't figure out how to take all this pain. Yes, my parents provided for me after her death. In the sense that I never went hungry, I always had clothes to wear, and a warm house to live in. They took me to therapy in which I wouldn't participate in because I couldn't talk to my parents, the only people in the world that were always supposed to love and protect me, but who ended up inflaming my pain and suffering. Nothing I did could get her out of my head. We lived in the same house, I went to the same school, looked at the same people but none of them were her.

By the time that I was twelve years old I was drinking, and smoking weed on a regular basis. It was the only thing that numbed the pain of her death. Over time I taught myself just to shut my emotions off all together. It was so much easier not to feel anything rather than feeling everything. By the time I was thirteen years old, I had been introduced to meth and instantly fell in love. I went from not ever hearing of it to loving it. BOOM! Just like that it was the answer to all my pain, and I was hell on wheels from that point on. I was suffering so much that every single human being who encountered me was going to suffer too. I wreaked havoc all over the country, my parents never had any idea where I was, really, and they didn't even care because they were so wrapped up in their own addiction and loss. I was invisible. I was selling drugs, skipping school, and stealing cars and I gave no f*** what could, would or should happen to me and that's how I liked it.

By the time I turned eighteen, I was federally indicted for grand larceny, operating a chop shop, and sentenced to five years in Greenville, Illinois federal prison. I was so wrapped up in drugs and car theft that I went to prison before I had even had sex. I was released after two years for good behavior and ended up pregnant with my only child two months after being released from prison. I was again so into my addiction that my mom had to take time off work just to take care of me while I detoxed. I stayed sober throughout my whole pregnancy, even though it was a rough pregnancy.

When my son Brian Anthony came into the world, I promised him and myself that I would stay sober and out of jail or prison. Now I knew what unconditional love was. Never in my life did I think that I could love someone, especially as much as I loved this little baby boy who I'd made. He was part of me.

Love alone kept me sober for almost three years, then I started to date this guy who I thought was the bee's knees. We were going to spend our lives together even after he started beating me regularly. I still stayed off the meth, but I was a reg-



ular drinker and weed smoker. We would get drunk and start fighting and I would have to call my mother to come and pick my son up because I didn't want him to see Jay (the guy I was with) beat me. This man would cheat on me then get drunk, accuse me of cheating on him and beat me. Next, he would send me to jail. Finally I reached a point that I would know when he was going to snap, so I started beating the crap out of him first. It was so toxic and sick, but we thought that it was love. One night I arrived home from work to a house full of drunk people and decided: Well, if you can't beat them join them. I proceeded to devour a 1.75-liter bottle of 100 proof Southern Comfort. That night when Jay decided it was time to turn the living room into a boxing match, I beat him bloody. When the police arrived, I said I was in fear for my life. That night after he went to jail, I took my son, my dog and a duffel bag and fled to my mom's. It only took me eight years to get up the courage to do that. He would come there every night after work and cry and beg for me to come back but I held my ground and refused.

However, now I was back in my old stomping grounds. It started a twelve-year stint of being in and out of jail and prison for drugs. I always loved my son but was too busy getting high and being a thug to be a mother.

Then one day sitting in Sherburne County jail a lady from Pilot Outreach (a Christian jail ministry) looked at me and said: "When are you going to figure out that you're not really the one doing the time? It's your son sitting out there. He's wondering why he is not enough for you to stay out of toxic relationships, to set down the needle, to stay out of prison. Why isn't he enough?" This broke my heart into a million pieces. I always preached about how I would be a better parent than my parents were and that I would always make sure my son knew I loved him, and I would die for him. That was my moment. That moment of clarity where you're like: "OH MY GOD! I can't believe I've been so stupid. That I wasted so much of my life being a thug and addict and a dead-beat parent." I missed so much because of my addiction that I can never get back.

Today I have almost six months sober, attending school to become a licensed alcohol and drug counselor, I am off parole, and planning a wedding. Today I am living for my son who now struggles with his own addictions because of the things he went through because of my addiction. Every single night I pray to my Father: "God, help him find faith and the restoration that I've found in recovery." Now I am trying to lead by example and show him that there is hope and that anyone can change. If this pistol packing, IV-using, convict can change her life, anyone can, by the grace of God.

Please send your 1st Person story to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. If we decide to publish the article, we will send a note of acceptance. Thank you.

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Eating Disorders

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Substance Use Disorders

Minnesota Teen Challenge

If you or a loved one is struggling with drugs or alcohol, we're here to help. In addition to our effective and affordable residential Licensed Treatment, faith-based Long-Term Recovery and convenient Outpatient program, we have extensive prevention and transitional/aftercare services. Freedom from addiction starts here. 612-FREEDOM or mntc.org

Workaholics Anonymous Meeting

Burning out? Workaholics Anonymous provides steps and tools to break free from non-stop work and activity — or work avoidance. Meeting is currently online via Zoom. Call Pat for link to the meeting or questions: 763-560-5199. www.workaholics-anonymous.org.

To place a Resource Directory listing call David at 612-298-5405 or email at david@thephoenixspirit.com

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betting. “Sensible people,” he says, “will stop after a nice win, but as for me, that wasn’t possible. I just kept going and going and going.”

Online betting became his obsession. Alone. In his room.

“Pretty much nonstop I would say. If I wasn’t betting at that second, I would have a bet on, so I’d probably be watching the match or checking the score. I don’t think there was much break from it. It was pretty much 24/7 that it was on my mind.”

Where did the money come from for all this gambling? Ash’s parents were paying for his general living expenses, and he also worked at odd jobs at times. He relied on student loans for his tuition, money that was sent to him three times a year. One January he quickly spent the entire loan amount on gambling. “I got the money on the 4th of January for the term after Christmas, and by the beginning of the 6th of January it was all gone,” says Ash.

“I just gambled it all online and then obviously had no money when I went back to school, so my parents had to give me money.”

Fully absorbed in gambling, Ash had little time for fun and friendships – even for his own self-care.

“My routine was terrible,” he says. “I didn’t have structure, so I wasn’t eating the right meals or eating enough. I wasn’t physically being active playing sports like I loved doing – and obviously missing out on the social side that comes with that.”

ISOLATION TO AVOID LYING

When there were social gatherings of his family and friends, Ash didn’t want to go.

“People would say, ‘How are things going?’ and I couldn’t stand there and lie to those people anymore and pretend that my life was all going well. Their sons were doing well and got good jobs, and then I’d just lost another job because of my gambling. So, it turned me into someone who wanted to just hide away and isolate because I didn’t want people to know the truth.”

Ash had entered the university with all the advantages a young man could want. He had been able to attend a prestigious school that was hard to get into, and he liked it a lot.



Photos courtesy of Bray Ash

“I’d gone from that to someone who wasn’t even going out of his room at university,” he says. “I was just feeling very low and depressed, and I was getting anxious about stuff. I felt like my life was on a massive downward trajectory. I thought I was going to end up in prison, to be honest.”

UNWANTED FUTURE

At the same time, Ash reports thinking to himself that “I didn’t want to never own a house or not be able to go on nice holidays or have a nice car.”

“I said to myself, ‘Hey, do you want that future for yourself, or do you want to carry on with what you’re doing?’

“That was the big turning point.”

Ash also recognized that he had wasted a lot of good opportunities while holed away in his room gambling. “I never did an internship,” he says. “I never did any placements. I never really made good contacts. I didn’t make the most of the resources the university had to give me.”

Ash had previously tried getting some help from a gambling day treatment program, but he now saw that more drastic action was needed. He entered a 14-week residential program in February of 2018.

LIVING THE LIFE HE WANTS

“Looking back to the period of when I was about 17 to 25, the 14 weeks I spent there was probably the happiest time,” says Ash, “because I wasn’t gambling, and I was kind of living the life that I want. I had more energy. I was eating properly.

When you're gambling, you don't plan for the future because you don't really think you have a future. You kind of live day by day — getting the money for the day.

“When I was growing up as a teenager and started gambling so early on, I didn’t really develop a routine structure. Now I had a true structure that I never had before, and I valued money for the first time.”

After going through treatment, Ash continued meeting with other gambling addicts to get support for his recovery. He also became a peer aid, offering support to others in recovery.

Ash likes the way he feels now.

“I’ve been able to like play sports again and I’ve got energy,” he says. “Before I went into rehab, one of my friends wanted to meet up with me for a walk around Hyde Park and I said I didn’t even have the energy to walk round Hyde Park. Now I’ve got a full football match today and I’ve got a full match tomorrow. That gives me structure – routine, and I’m happier now. I’ve got focus.

“When you’re gambling, you don’t plan for the future because you don’t really think you have a future,” says Ash. “You kind of live day by day – getting the money for the day.”

Now Ash no longer runs out of money.

“I’ve got savings,” he says. “I’m planning ahead every month. I just feel like I’m kind of a normal human being. I do what normal humans do you know. I was in New York last week and on holiday. That’s something that I would never been able to do before, but now I’ve got money to do that.

“I feel like I’m in control as well. I never had control before. My life was dictated around gambling.”

IS IT WORTH IT?

Ash wants others with gambling addiction to have that same kind of freedom to live a normal life. He readily talks to others about his addiction and all that he has learned from it.

He offers these questions for those who wonder if they’re spending too much time and money on gambling: “Is it worth you sitting there having a bet on a match and you’re watching it and you’re anxious and you’re up and down? Is it worth putting yourself through that stress and anxiety to make no money at all?”

“I think the answer to that is no,” he says. “No one would do that to themselves if they knew that there was going to be nothing there.”

In the meantime, he continues to connect with other recovering addicts to keep himself on a healthy track. “I feel like just having those chats with people is a kind of release and kind of reminder as well,” says Ash. It helps keep him feeling normal and free.

Pat Samples is a Twin Cities writer, writing coach, and champion of creative aging. Her website is patsamples.com.

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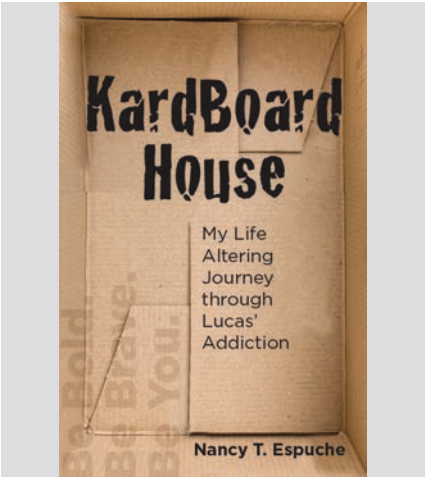
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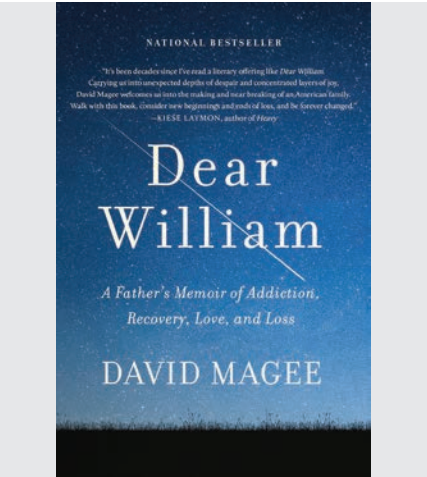


Books



KardBoard House
My Life Altering Journey Through Lucas' Addiction
By Nancy T. Espuche
SELF-PUBLISHED

Espuche wrote *KardBoard House* following the death of her son Lucas on December 19, 2016. As she encountered the lack of education and understanding in the workforce, enduring the growing stigma and shame, she became keenly aware of the limited availability of guidance, resources, and support in the professional world.



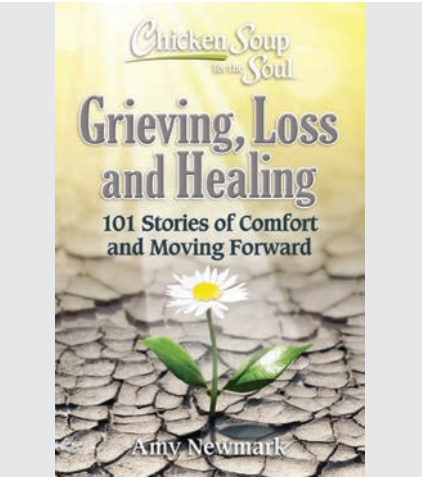
Dear William
A Father's Memoir of Addiction, Recovery, Love and Loss
By David Magee
MATT HOLT BOOKS

Award-winning columnist and author David Magee addresses his poignant story to all those who will benefit from better understanding substance misuse so that his hard-earned wisdom can save others from the fate of his late son, William.



Leave No One Behind
Daily Meditations for Military Service Members and Veterans in Recovery
By Anonymous
HAZELDEN PUBLISHING
JULY 2022 RELEASE

In this new meditation book, service members who are in recovery share their words of healing and hope in daily meditations. These people are in a class of their own—they know what they experienced, they know how their recovery has been affected by their service, they know how to help themselves . . . and they know how to help each other.



Chicken Soup for the Soul
Grieving, Loss and Healing
By Amy Newmark
CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL

Losing a loved one, whether a child, a spouse, a parent or grandparent, a sibling, a friend, a pet... it's a process you have to work through. The same goes for losing the future you thought you had due to chronic illness. And with these 101 stories you'll find people just like you sharing what worked for them and helped them continue living, loving, and even laughing.

If you have a book you'd like featured or have an old favorite you'd like to share with others, please contact us at phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.



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Curious about how your gambling compares to other Minnesotans? Take the survey to find out.





Nicki Zeidner MEd, RDN, LD

Nicki is a Registered and Licensed Dietitian with a Master's degree in Health Promotion and Education from Vanderbilt University. As the Dietitian/Nutritionist at Elite Recovery, Nicki leads a weekly nutrition group and sees male and female clients for individual nutrition consults. Prior to joining the Elite Recovery team in April 2021, Nicki was the Business Development and Community Relations Specialist for Melrose Center. Utilizing her past experience as a dietitian for treatment programs, she supported the Melrose Eating Disorders and Substance Use Disorder (EDSUD) specialty program by providing nutrition education presentations for clients and trainings for staff at several local treatment programs.

Nicki skillfully helps individuals and groups translate the complex science of nutrition into understandable and relatable terms. With Nicki's help, eating to support recovery is realistic and enjoyable!

Q What is nutrition, and why is it important in recovery?

Food and beverages provide the body with energy and nutrients (carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, and water) that support growth, healing and major body functions and systems. Drug and alcohol use negatively impact food choices and/or intake and impairs how the body absorbs and processes nutrients, harming both physical and mental well-being. Good nutrition and hydration are important all the time, but especially important in recovery to promote healing of both body and mind.

Q How can a substance use disorder and/or a mental health disorder affect someone's relationship with food?

Anxiety, depression, disordered eating behaviors, and abuse of substances often co-occur and result in nutrient deficiencies that further complicate one's relationship with food. Altered appetite (increased or decreased), enhanced cravings, lack of motivation for eating or physical activity, and/or budgetary restraints can all contribute to poor dietary choices. Without the intervention of consistent and balanced meals providing necessary nutrients, mental and physical health can continue to decline.

BETTER NUTRITION IN RECOVERY

Ask the Expert

We feature an expert in the mental health and/or substance use disorder fields to answer questions

Q If someone often gets cravings for foods that aren't the healthiest, what can they do to stop them? Why do they get cravings?

Sugar and caffeine are common substance substitutions that provide quick energy and a mood boost, but in excess leave us wanting more. Some believe that abstinence from sugar and/or caffeine is the answer. Restriction of sugar and/or caffeine may work for a limited few, but for most it results in even more bingeing on sweets and a horrible headache from caffeine withdrawal. Sugar naturally occurs in fruit and dairy products; it's all the added sugar in processed foods that can add up to be too much. Caffeine in doses below 400mg/day has been shown to have some health benefits. Consistently eating a variety of foods that provide a balance of all nutrients in moderation provides the energy the body and brain need to help dampen cravings for sugar and caffeine.

Q Can you suggest some nutritious meals and snacks that are easy to prepare?

To provide adequate fuel and nutrients for the body, aim for three meals/day spaced out every 3-5 hours. Also, be selective with snacks. A balanced meal includes foods rich in carbohydrates, protein, and fat – yes, we need all three for our body and brain to function well. Carbohydrate rich foods include fruits and vegetables, grains like whole grain bread, cereal, pasta, rice, quinoa, and beans. Protein can come from animal sources like dairy products, beef, pork, poultry, fish, and eggs as well as plant-based foods such as soy, nuts, beans, and quinoa. Added healthy sources of fats include olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds.

Smoothies made with a variety of fruit and leafy greens, Greek yogurt/kefir, and even white beans make a quick and complete meal in a cup.

Bowls layered with whole grains (quinoa, brown rice), protein (beef, chicken, beans, or eggs), and a variety of veggies, sprinkled with nuts, seeds, avocado, or grated cheese are an easy and filling meal.

Mixed nuts and seeds, medjool dates or dried cranberries are examples of a few snack foods that are easy to carry with you and curb low energy dips or sugar cravings.

Q What are some tips for accessing affordable and healthy food on any budget?

Whether you eat out or at home, the cost of food is rapidly rising. Making a PLAN for more home-cooked meals will help with your food budget. As you make your plan for the week, take advantage of sales and stock up on items you routinely use.

Flipp.com is a useful site for checking prices as you make your plan for the week.

Seek assistance from Hunger Solutions at www.hungersolutions.org/programs/mn-food-helpline to determine if you qualify for SNAP benefits and learn the location of nearby food shelves, meal programs and farmer's markets.

Q March is National Nutrition Month®. What are some resources that people can access to support healthful eating for recovery?

Visit EatRight.org (www.eatright.org/food/resources/national-nutrition-month/toolkit) for tip sheets and handout, like: Eat Right with MyPlate, Eating Right on a Budget, Eating Right with Less Added Sugars, Smart Tips for Successful Meals. Also: www.myplate.gov.

Access to a RDN: www.eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert

For help with Eating Disorders: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

If you have a question for the experts, or you are an expert interested in being featured, please email phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. Experts have not been compensated for their advice.

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The Invisible Trauma of Emotional Neglect in Childhood

you in practical ways yet were unable to delight in your existence or get interested in your feelings and who you were as an emerging person? Most of us would rather not imagine.

✧

I remember waking up in a dark room in the hospital when I was eight. My parents said there would be ice cream after the anesthesia wore off. I looked around in the dark for the ice cream and there was none. I didn't even wonder where my parents were.

✧

Consequently, such people were left with a traumatic belief that they are unworthy of human attention and have deep fears of being rejected. Often, they do not know that they missed anything in childhood since they never knew what they missed. They may even idealize their parents. What is missing is often invisible to them and they feel stuck with not knowing how to change their lives today for the better. After all, we can't change what we can't see and we can't see what we've never seen. This syndrome is known as developmental trauma of neglect. This disorder is not just another way to blame parents or another way to use the word "trauma" as a cliché. It is a very serious, common pattern in our often impersonal and over busy world.

It is painful beyond belief and often results in depression, unexplained chronic anxiety, numbness and addictive behaviors and an inability to make lasting friends or have a life mate. People with this disorder are terrified by their own feelings and often lack language to put their emotional states into words. Most, but not all, addicts have this trauma at their core. People with this disorder are perpetual avoiders. They run away from people who could love them. If you ever met a person who seems like a very good person but is impossible to get close to, you know exactly what I mean.

The sad part of all of this is that it is not the traumatized person's fault that he or she is like this. After all the most important human need is the need to emotionally attach to others.

Who would choose to be aloof from human love and blame themselves constantly for how other people shun them? Alan Watts, a famous philosopher, said "I owe my solitude to other people." The good news is that there is hope for perpetual avoiders. If people can see their solitude and allow others to help them and have patience, they can change their brain wiring and eventually learn to accept themselves and change. This is not something that can be done on their own. We avoiders need one trustworthy person to see us and other caring people to support and save us. We all need each other a lot more than we realize.

✧

You know I am kind of an odd person. I never really fit in. I like to watch other people in social gatherings and stay on the edge. I've never figured out what's wrong with me. People talk about this pandemic like it is a curse. For me it's just normal—like how I have led my whole life—not getting close to people

or letting others know me. It's like I've been in a perpetual quarantine my whole life. I have to laugh when other say they miss seeing their friends. I don't even know what it is like missing a friend. But I can solve my own problems. I take satisfaction in not needing anybody. Sometimes it gets lonely. Sometimes I get agitated. Then I just retreat into myself. I wouldn't call this living, but it is the best that I can do.

✧

HOW DO PEOPLE GET EMOTIONALLY NEGLECTED IN CHILDHOOD?

Some people lose their parents at an early age due to tragic loss and never get needed nurturance. Others are children of narcissistic parents who reared their children to enhance their own self-image and were oblivious to the emerging identities of their own children. Some people were raised in families with abject deprivation and survival stress that precluded emotional connections. Some of us were raised in well-off households that over-emphasized career and financial success to the exclusion of personal relationships. Some parents project overconfidence on their children and see no reason why their own children need any guidance. They expect kids to raise themselves. Other parents use their children as success objects and involve them in sports or academic activities, prizing achievement over personal closeness. These are parents that have to win. Some parents are simply not home, perhaps having a drug problem or mood disorder and their children are psychologically home alone. Finally, there are parents who have a "no talk" rule about anything that makes them uncomfortable. These are parents who like to pretend and live in a fantasy world or give their children the silent treatment when there is trouble at home. Many of these patterns occur in a society that is materialistic, obsessed with success and lacking any practice of looking at the bigger picture, meaning of life or doing good for others. Basically, when parents run on empty, their children do too and are severely and often unintentionally neglected.

WHY ARE EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS SO IMPORTANT IN CHILDHOOD?

If you have to ask this question, chances are that you have been affected by emotional neglect. But out of fairness, let's try to answer this question. A famous study was done on emotional attachment patterns between parent and child during the 1970's ("The Still Face Experiment" by the Developmental Psychologist Erick Tronick). It poignantly captures what happens when a parent ignores the powerful charm of their child and gives their usually well-loved child the still face for an extended period of time. It is very painful to watch. One can only imagine what a child goes through when they routinely see the still face of their parent and how that might affect their development. A partial glimpse of



this experience can be seen when parents continually check their cell phones and ignore their toddler's cries for attention. In your own adult life just recall a time when you were supposed to meet up with a group of friends and nobody showed up or left a message for you. Perhaps you felt confused, worried, unloved, and unlovable until you found out what happened. This is what it is like for people with developmental trauma of neglect. Except they have no explanation for their abandonment.

So why are emotional relationships between parents and their children so important? Our emotional life with our parents is a major factor in our entire brain development—it allows us to feel worthy, to trust in human relationships, and to regulate our own emotional states, to be smart in relating to others and accurately understand other people's emotions, and ultimately to have our own unique identity separate from others. On top of that, our feeling relationship with our parents turns on our cognitive development, our physical and moral growth, and our creativity. It is the whole nine yards of our identity. A good resource to understand this precious relationship is found in *The General Theory of Love* by Dr. Thomas Lewis et alia, (Double Day Publishers, 2007). Children need the emotional relationship with their parents until their brains reach full adult development at about age 25, and of course beyond that age.

HOW DOES SHAME KEEP PEOPLE STUCK?

Shame is the internal experience of feeling unworthy of human love. It is often learned in early childhood when parents show little interest in you or else compare you unfavorably to others. Because children cannot see that they are being targeted for failures in their parents and not in themselves, they internalize these beliefs as their own failings. Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic book, *The Scarlet Letter*, the story of a Puritan woman vilified by her community for having a child out of wedlock, typifies this dynamic. Certainly, shame keeps

people from realizing their potential and cuts them off from social support. It is a silent mortal wound some people carry.

Often, I tell a story to people who feel chronically ashamed and lost in life. It goes like this: You're on a walk alone with a group of friends in the woods. As you proceed you notice that you are getting lost and that other friends are getting through the woods better than you are. If they get lost, they find their way again and are back on their way. You seem hopelessly stuck in the woods and are left behind by your pals. You feel like a failure when you compare yourself to others and worry about not reaching your goal of getting through the woods. You are alone, lost, have no sense of direction, and make a lot of bad turns. Eventually, you get through the woods much later than others and then find out that everyone on the trek had been given a map at the very beginning of the walk. You wonder why you were never given a map but understand for the first time why it was so hard to get through the woods all on your own.

You are amazed that you got through the whole ordeal at all and that your failure is more about not being given the map like everybody else. It's not your failure alone. It's other people's failure. Today you have the option to draw your own map with the help from a caring guide and friends who see and love you. With their help you can do it. You need not be stuck without a map.

GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH

This whole subject is a lot like trying to play a musical instrument. It is generally not something we can do all on our own, but effort and patience are required once we find a good music teacher. The relationship you have with your music teacher is what makes all the difference. In this area, getting a professional helper who is well-versed in attachment theory, the study of how humans learn to connect with others, and trauma recovery are essential. Otherwise, the help you

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get will not go to the depth you need to overcome your avoidance problem. Professional societies have web pages (like *Psychology Today* website or *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy* website) which can be valuable resources. Someone who does psychodynamic/psychoanalytic work, who is trained in attachment theory and emphasizes strength-building is best. Clearly you can call me in a pinch.

I can recommend a good movie and some books on this topic: *A Bird of the Air* (on Tubi website), the story of a lost young man who gets found by a tropical parrot and a caring girlfriend. This movie is based on the book by Joe Coomer, *The Loop* (Scribner Press, 2002). A good book on this topic is *Running on Empty: Overcoming Emotional*

Neglect by Jonice Webb (Morgan James publisher, 2012).

Don't fret if you can't recall your childhood or you aren't in touch with your feelings today. As you thaw out emotionally with a helper, the necessary memories and feelings will come to you when you are ready for them. Don't assume that you know how others feel about you since your perceptions may be quite skewed by troubling life experiences. Often you are a lot more lovable than you ever imagined and are not good at reading people. It will be a slow experience of letting other people care about you, but it will be very sweet to let that happen. You will have a river of tears for what was missing in your life. You will rise higher in your river of tears. Con-

gratulations on reading a tough article on this topic.

HOW WE CAN ALL HELP

The problem of social avoidance is something we all have a part in, not just the person with this disorder. All of us can be more welcoming, less judgmental, and open to people who are socially awkward. The more rejecting that we are with people who are different, the more alienated such people become. We also don't need to save these people. Socially avoidant people can find their own way through life that is likely different than your own. They can also become great writers, artists, and musicians. Let us instead look for the unique strengths such people offer all of us. We will likely be

blown away! If you have any doubts, read about Emily Dickinson, Vincent Van Gogh, Chuck Berry, Michael Jordan and Billy Joel. Or, you can reach out to your reclusive next door neighbor.

John H. Driggs, LICSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of Intimacy Between Men (Penguin Books, 1990). He can be reached at 651-699-4573.

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WHAT IS A PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST?

A peer support specialist is someone with lived experience who is able to share that perspective with another person who has not yet achieved recovery from addiction. They provide a link between clinical services and “outside” supports and can help someone navigate the behavioral health system and find appropriate community resources. A peer provides an example of empowerment and success and can be a trusted role model. It’s often easier for a person seeking to begin recovery to talk with a peer support specialist than it is to talk to a counselor or attend a Gamblers Anonymous meeting. Peer support specialists can also foster trust in a health-care system that has often disenfranchised many of those whom it serves.

The value of lived experience is helpful throughout the time a peer support specialist spends with a client but can be particularly helpful when the gambler is vulnerable to relapsing. Some peers are available 24/7 so that a gambler in distress can reach them at any time.

BENEFITS OF GAMBLING PEER RECOVERY SUPPORT

Recovery from any addiction is a long process. Most people need support at various points throughout the difficult journey. While everyone’s struggle to achieve recovery is different, what each person has in common is the need to receive support in one form or another. Although the faces of addiction are many, all persons on the road to recovery need the support of others, who need to be familiar with what it means to be an addict.

There are four key elements to the support provided by the peer support specialists:

1. Emotional support. The peer support specialist provides emotional support by encouraging the individual through empathy, concern or caring, and helping to strengthen confidence and self-esteem.
2. Information source. The peer support specialist shares their knowledge about resources available to guide individuals to success, including access to treatment, which is often available at no cost.
3. Instrumental. At a practical level, a peer support specialist can help people complete tasks necessary for successful recovery, such as helping with transportation and housing.
4. Connecting. A peer support specialist helps individuals gain a sense of belonging and being with others.

Peer support specialists may get involved in a range of activities, including:

- Being a voice in individual, family, and group counseling.
- Providing support to family members of problem gamblers.
- Helping someone through financial counseling.
- Being available by phone (including after hours).
- Giving presentations, teaching, and providing training.
- Being the voice of recovery providing input into program planning.
- Serving as a connection to the “recovery community.”
- Providing support in negotiations with the criminal justice system.

MANY PEOPLE WHO WORK IN RECOVERY ARE IN RECOVERY THEMSELVES

Many people believe that individuals without shared experience cannot help those with addictions or fully understand what they’ve gone through. Studies provide considerable support for this contention. A review of existing studies found that the percentage of substance use disorder treatment providers who were in recovery was 33-50 percent. Those in recovery who are involved in client care have an ability to introduce their clients and patients to 12-step and other self-help supports in ways that those not in recovery are unable to do.

PROVIDER BENEFITS

Peer support specialists that work within a treatment delivery system can provide an important benefit to providers. They can offer assistance with resources for those identified with a gambling problem and/or their family members.

TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

While specifics vary by state, there is a formal process for becoming certified as a peer support specialist. In Minnesota, peer specialists must have 30 hours of continuing education every two years in areas of mental health recovery, mental health rehabilitative services and peer support.

THE NEED FOR GAMBLING PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS IN MINNESOTA

Unfortunately, peer support specialists are not currently approved as part of gambling treatment programs in Minnesota. However, a number of other states, including Maryland and Connecticut, recognize them as vital parts of treatment and recovery. In each of these state programs, gambling peer support specialists engage

with an individual as soon as they call the state gambling helpline. While not everyone seeking help may be ready to sit down with a counselor, they may be receptive to having a conversation, or a series of conversations, with a trained peer before seeking formal counseling. In fact, each of these states have seen an increase in those seeking treatment since the inclusion of the peer support specialist, crediting the importance of those early conversations.

In Connecticut and Maryland, the gambling peer support specialist is an integral component to an individual’s recovery treatment plan, working in conjunction with the counselor as added support. Peer support specialists are also available post-treatment, maintaining connections as the person in their early recovery begins to negotiate their new way of being.

The Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling is working with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to bring peer support professionals into the treatment mix given their clear value in helping those with gambling addiction in their recovery journeys.

This article includes information presented by Stephen Matos, recovery support specialist with the Midwestern Connecticut Council on Alcoholism, at the Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling in November 2021. If you are interested in receiving a referral for a certified problem gambling counselor, please call 1-800-333-4673 (HOPE). Treatment is typically at no cost. It’s available to families too. Telehealth sessions remain available at least through June 2022. More info on problem gambling, visit mnappg.org.

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FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

As Sports Betting Goes Mainstream, So Must Problem Gambling Awareness

by Gertrude Matemba-Mutasae



If you watched football this past season, you're likely aware of the growing presence of sports betting culture. Pre-game segments where the hosts give gambling tips. Point spreads displayed next to the score. Advertisements for online sportsbooks during every commercial break.

Three years after the Supreme Court ruled that states could allow legal sports betting, the amount of money annually wagered on sports quadrupled in the U.S., according to USA Today.

For some, betting on sports is an occasional, fun activity. For others, it's an addiction that leads to feelings of despair, isolation and hopelessness. Problem gambling impacts individuals, families and communities through unemployment, loss of housing, and more. And the effects of a gambling disorder are not only economic – it can lead to damaged relationships and high rates of substance abuse, depression and suicide.

Sports betting is not legal in Minnesota, but that may change. And even if it remains illegal, that doesn't make us immune to the cultural impact of sports betting. We need to be prepared.

First, we must increase awareness of the consequences of problem gambling – and we need to start this education at a young age. As sports betting becomes more mainstream, the behavior becomes normalized for millions of children who are at home watching sports. Young adults are already at higher risk of developing a gambling disorder, and we know that they are a target demographic for sports betting. We must do more to ensure that they can recognize signs of problem gambling. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has a youth-focused website, justaskmn.org, that helps teach young people about problem gambling.

Also, we must increase our capacity to serve people with gambling disorders. Quite simply, Minnesota will need more providers who offer gambling disorder treatment and recovery services in the years ahead. In Minnesota, there are currently 16 providers offering gambling treatment throughout the state. Right now, DHS is offering scholarship reimbursements for training of qualified clinicians who wish to become a problem gambling treatment service provider. Scholarships cover up to \$1,197 of training costs.

Perhaps most importantly in the short-term, we need people to know where to go for help. If you or someone you know is struggling with a sports betting problem – or with problem gambling in any form – you can call a free, confidential helpline at 1-800-333-HOPE, or text HOPE to 61222. DHS funds this 24/7 helpline, which guides individuals to available problem gambling support and resources in their community. People can also visit GetGamblingHelp.com, which includes resources and a link to state-approved treatment providers.

People can and do recover from gambling disorders. We will continue to work with partners to ensure Minnesota has the capacity and resources to treat everyone in need. Together, we can reduce the impacts of problem gambling and help families heal.

Gertrude Matemba-Mutasae is assistant commissioner of the Community Supports Administration and acting director of the Behavioral Health Division at the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month

According to a 2019 study by Wilder Research:

- 1.3% of adults in Minnesota are problem gamblers
- 3.8% of adults in Minnesota are at-risk gamblers
- 22% of Minnesotans, regardless of their own participation in gambling, have been negatively affected by the gambling behaviors of others.

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Minding the Mind

by Mary Lou Logsdon



"Mindfulness allows you to live deeply every moment that is given to you to live."
— THICH NHAT HANH

Zen Buddhist master, teacher, and writer Thich Nhat Hanh died in January of this year at the age of 95. He introduced many Westerners to the practice of mindfulness and the discipline of mindful meditation.

Mindfulness is the simple practice of staying in the present. Meditation is a way to practice mindfulness. When I meditate, I focus on my breath. As a thought arises, I return to my breath, let go without judgment. I observe where my mind has traveled as I return to my breath. I notice how I feel—afraid, angry, weary, joyful, serene. I return to my breath. My meditation practice prepares me to be mindful as I walk through my day.

Staying in the now I let go of fears and defenses. I rest from worries. When I focus on the past, I live in regret, loss, and grief. If I move into the future I hover in anxiety, foreboding, and fear. In the present I am safe and fully alive.

Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing." As I create the spaciousness of mindfulness, I observe my own ego engage in its powerful defense strategies.

We are all wounded—none of us escapes loss, hurt, grief. When I am rude, resentful, or passive aggressive I know something is going on with me that needs attending. As I notice how I think and what I feel, I dare to risk changing the pattern. I heal the hurts and wounds I carry.

We needn't become Buddhist monks to draw upon their rich spiritual heritage. Here are ways of mindfulness I find helpful:

Walking mindfully. Walking to the rhythm of my breath—breathing in with one, two, three steps, breathing out at the same pace. Once I have the rhythm, I attend to my senses. My senses draw me out of my head and into my body. As I increase my awareness I notice new sounds—the caw of the crow, the laughter of children, the squeak of cold snow.

I notice scents. I lived in Berkley, California, in the late 70s where I walked regularly in the freedom of beautiful weather. I remember a November outing when I caught the aroma of meatloaf wafting from an open window. It felt out of place, smells I associate with cold weather as I walked in a t-shirt. I was immediately transported to Minnesota and the warmth of an oven meal on a cold autumn day. The smell lifted me from warm California and dropped me into cold Minnesota.

A mindful walk frees me to take in the sights—noticing the first daffodil in a neighbor's yard, ash stumps where trees lined the street just days ago, bursting buds that forecast spring. I am not lost in the thoughts and fears of the political circus or worries about those I love. I am engaged in the gift of this present moment.

Eating mindfully. Thich Nhat Hanh describes eating a tangerine attentively—seeing it, smelling it, appreciating each bite. How often I eat something without really noticing what it is I am eating, without enjoying or savoring it. When I

attend to eating mindfully, I appreciate the food and relish the experience. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the world earth revolves – slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future; live the actual moment. Only this moment is life."

Single tasking. An enemy of mindfully staying in the present is multi-tasking. I worked in information technology for 30 years when computers were huge, and data was punched on cards. I remember upgrading to a computer that could do two operations at once—"dual job stream" we called it. We celebrated the great improvement and noted how fast it was. We are not machines and though we claim to effectively multi-task, nothing is done well. While not all my activities deserve full concentration, I deserve to be present to whatever it is I am doing. Thich Nhat Hanh speaks to this, "Don't do any task in order to get it over with. Resolve to do each job in a relaxed way, with all your attention. Enjoy and be one with your work."

Mindfulness in Sanskrit means "attend and stay." When I notice a feeling arise, I stay with it. I allow it to come to the fore. Where is this feeling in my body? What is it trying to tell me? What memory does it hold? I allow it to be. I might even appreciate it, give it some space, inquire of it. This is my mind tending to my mind. I observe what happens, how it operates in my body, how it feels.

Staying in the present is a lifelong journey. Of late, I am noticing how I put things off, procrastinate. What is under that? Am I afraid? Do I not know how to deal with it? Or do I simply not want to do it? I check-in with myself, I investigate how I feel. Once understood I choose an approach. If I am afraid, I look at my fear to see if it is real or false evidence appearing real. Then I address the fear and determine a way through. I don't just ignore it and pretend I am not afraid. If I find myself not knowing how to tackle this, I consult someone who does. I check the internet or call a friend to help. If I am putting it off because I am low on energy, I schedule it for a time when I am more energetic. All this is possible when I recognize what is going on within me. I notice. I am the observer of me, a loving witness. In that loving space I choose my response.

Our human species' evolution gives us a complex brain and a fine mind. By attending to how that mind works we live more deeply each moment we are given.

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live." Live well!

Mary Lou Logsdon provides Spiritual Direction in the Twin Cities. She is an instructor in The Sacred Ground Spiritual Direction Formation Program. She can be reached at logsdon.marylou@gmail.com.