



Senior Contributor Bob K., Tucson AZ: Confession time! I was an addicted senior! I take an occasional drink. I don't smoke. However, after I retired some 10 years ago and we moved from the cold, cold East to the hot, hot Arizona, I discovered the wonderful world of blackjack and video poker.

Because of laws that allowed gambling on Native American tribal lands that went into effect about 30 years ago, dozens of casinos have sprung up across America from Connecticut to California. In my retirement city alone, there are four Native American-owned casinos all within a 35-minute drive from my house. Additionally, with cheap airfare and low-priced hotel packages, I am a one-hour flight away from the senior citizen's paradise of Las Vegas, Nevada.

Before I retired, I had some experience with casinos. When Atlantic City started legal gambling in the '70s, for my company's employees, I set up several bus trips annually and joined in on the fun. Earlier, in the 50s, when I had just completed active Navy service in the Korean War, I had my first visit to Las Vegas. A hotel exec there was a college classmate, and he treated me to a free week at the then-new Sands Hotel.

However, I never had a gambling problem until just after I retired, moved to Arizona and found the Indian casinos waiting for me. At first, I started with \$2 bets at the blackjack tables, and five- and twenty-five cent poker machines. Then, it was \$5 table blackjack and dollar slot machines.

From once a month, my casino visits increased to once a week. Although the results were lost money on almost all casino sessions, I bragged that I won every time. Gambling had become an obsession, soon to spin into addiction.

My wife, who grew tired of the inevitable losses, phony glitz and smelly tobacco air of the

casinos, stopped going with me. In addition to flights, I took the free casino buses. The buses were not only free, but each gambler was handed a \$10 bill before going into the casino. Of course, the money was gone in the first few seconds, fueling the urge to raise the stakes as losses mounted. I became so obsessed and blind to the truth, I was losing a hundred dollars a visit, then two hundred, three hundred and more. And more, and more.

My spouse, a retired medical professional with a background in geriatrics and psychology, was very patient at first. It was just a matter of time when intervention would be needed. I lived in denial. My lame joking was that gambling was fun and I wasn't spending my money on booze and other women.

I also declared it was money I had earned after a lifetime of working, and I deserved to do whatever I chose with it. In spite of the bragging, I began to realize I was in deep trouble, and falling deeper with each casino visit.

It was time for spousal intervention, a sit-down discussion and some tough talk. Although, at first I was in denial, I finally agreed to start a sort of two-person gambler's anonymous. As with alcohol and tobacco, a cold-turkey, sudden quit of all gambling may work on some addicts. However, in my case, sane thinking and gradual tapering off seems to have done the job.

I cut back on visits to local casinos to once every other month, and budget \$100 for each. When that was gone, I quit and went home. I soon realized the simple fact every gambler should accept. All the glitz, glamor and bright lights of the casinos, especially the posh resorts of Las Vegas, are built and maintained on the losses of the suckers who patronize them.

I eventually quit visiting local casinos, and go to Las Vegas only three or four times annually. It has worked so far for five years, although the basic urge is still there. I rationalize that by confining my gambling to Sin City, I can actually enjoy all of its non-gambling glitz vacation sites.

We take advantage of all the reasonable costs of hotel room, pool, spa, dining and entertainment. We set daily gambling limits, and prefer to spend our money for more pleasant activities. I can't promise I'm cured of my gambling addiction. But, you can bet I'll keep trying.