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first person account

Transforming addiction with psychosynthesis— one woman's journey

By SBP

My transformative journey through pokies* addiction began during the early 1990s. My ex and our children were happy with life as we lived it then. I on the other hand was not. For 16 years I had worked as a registered nurse and enjoyed what I did, but the face of nursing was changing—moving in a direction towards academic professionalism and technical proficiency that left little room for passive, people-pleasing, non-academically-minded, hospital-trained nurses like me. More and more, I thought of quitting, but our three children were growing rapidly and my husband's serviceman's wages barely covered the necessities.

My 12-year marriage had become jaded and predictable. I was tired of the constant moving that my husband's work involved—I'd moved constantly as a child and, by the end of 1992, I was living in the 33rd house I'd moved into. I was bored and restless and weary of life as I lived it. Raising the issue of my unhappiness with my husband never occurred to me then—the cause of my angst was existential and couldn't easily be put into words.

I told myself often that the way I felt would pass if I just kept focusing on the positives as I'd always done. I told myself that my doubts and uncertainties were normal. "No one can expect to be happy all the time," I'd remind myself often.

The second child of primary school teachers, and from a family torn apart by their divorce, I knew first-hand what damage separation and divorce could cause our children. "Don't upset everyone's life just because you aren't satisfied," I'd chide myself. "Your expectations are too high—ALL people go through stages where they hate their job and all relationships go through times like these. This too shall pass." I'd reassure myself, but in the end,

my feelings—the call of my soul to live a meaningful and authentic existence—could not, would not, be ignored.

Stuckness fuelled my addiction. Ambivalence—defined as the simultaneous existence of two opposing attitudes, desires or emotions—is one of the most damaging creators of psycho-emotional stress in humans. Ambivalence can paralyse our ability to make decisions, especially where the taking up of one life-affirming option means the loss of something that's an equal contributor to our sense of well-being. When forced by life circumstances to choose one or the other, psycho-emotional collapse is inevitable. So it was with me.

Ambivalence—I wanted to leave the marriage but felt I couldn't. It would hurt too many people: our children, my husband and perhaps even me. I wanted to stay and work on the relationship, but the thought of staying in the marriage for another 40 years was almost as unbearable as the thought of leaving. I wanted to leave, but I wasn't sure I would survive on my own. I wanted to stay but felt stifled in the relationship and totally responsible for maintaining it. I wanted to leave, and yet I was afraid of leaving in case I found out it wasn't the marriage that was the cause of my angst.

I no longer found my work fulfilling; perhaps this was the cause of my unhappiness. But whenever I thought about changing career, I faced yet another dilemma. I didn't know what else I wanted to do—I also didn't know what I might be good at, or what I might be suited to.

There was that ambivalence again. I had been nursing for 18 years by then. I was good at what I did, but it was also all I knew and it earned me a wage and status I'd gotten used to. To earn the equivalent income, I needed a university degree. Constant moving with my husband's career meant that university wasn't an option until his time in the service was up—five long years away. By then, I reasoned, I'd be 46 and too old to start studying. By the time I completed my studies, I would be ready to retire.

If I branched out on my own, the time and effort it would take to study part time, work full time and take care of my children would have been too much to cope with alone—I needed to stay in the marriage if I was to retrain.

That was where I was when we moved to New South Wales, where poker machines were everywhere. I was stuck in my present situation—in a job I no longer wanted to be in that I felt unable to leave, in a marriage that I no longer wanted to be in that I felt unable to leave. The family needed my wages and, no matter

what I did, we never seemed to get far enough ahead for me to quit work. I was uncertain of what I wanted to do work-wise and uncertain that changing career was worth the effort because of my age.

Within weeks of beginning to play the machines I was hooked. After my sister died at age 42, I spent hours and hours sitting in front of a poker machine waiting for something—anything—to happen that would get me moving. I waited for a sign or an inspiration that would shake me out of the pit of ambivalence I seemed to have dug myself into—and, in gambling, I added to my dilemmas. Now I had a habit to feed that needed my husband's income and mine. I had a habit that made changing careers even more risky.

When I was gambling, my day used to look like this:

5pm—get up out of bed (I worked night duty). Force my face into a smile and stagger out to the kitchen. Say a brief hello to the kids on my way through the lounge. Pour myself a coke and drink it while staring at the near-empty fridge, wondering if there was enough food to make a meal. I'd beat up on myself internally for having spent money at the pokies that morning instead of buying food. Resolve to buy groceries tomorrow after dropping the kids off at school. "No more playing the pokies," I'd declare to myself.

At 5.30pm, I'd greet my hubby with a false smile and coffee as he walked in the door. I'd spend 15 minutes hearing about his day (I didn't tell him about my day and he rarely asked—I didn't know whether to be grateful for this or not).

6pm—yell at kids to start their showers and prepare tea.

7pm—eat tea while half asleep in front of the television—don't speak to anyone in case they ask me what I did today. Begin thinking about whether to go to the club before I do the shopping or after. Reason that I'd better do the shopping first and then go to the club.

Note—I never challenged the thought of going—I'd just debate with myself about what time to go.

"It's going to be hot tomorrow," I'd think, "better go before I do the shopping—if I don't the food will spoil from being left in the car." How easy it was then to justify my actions *and* ensure I had enough money to gamble with.

8pm—send the kids to bed—give them a perfunctory kiss while wondering how much money to take out of the bank account in

the morning.

8.30pm—head off to work and start reasoning that it would be better to stay home tomorrow after dropping the kids off. "There is so much housework to be done—if I have some energy left, I'll do some cleaning and then go to bed—God, I'm so tired of this."

Driving down the freeway I'd think how easy it would be to just let the car drift off to the left and into the pylons....**BANG!** No more money worries. No more pokies. No more me! But I couldn't do it—how would my husband and children survive without my income or my meagre winnings?

I'd get to work at 9pm, put on a cheery face and pretend an optimism I didn't feel as I ministered to my patients' needs, administering medicines that eased their suffering. Somehow I managed to leave them feeling better than I found them, but the energy it took to cheer them up took its toll on me.

Around 1am, I'd catch an hour's sleep while on my break. Desperately wishing my break could be longer, I'd struggle to stay awake until 6am when the morning work would begin and there was too much to do to think about how tired I was.

By the end of an eight-hour shift, I wanted nothing more than to escape from people—to go somewhere where I wouldn't hear of another person's pain or suffering. I wanted to go somewhere where I could be alone and where no one wanted anything of me—and guess where that was?

I'd drive home from work struggling to stay awake at the wheel. By 8am when I got home, my second or third wind would kick in. I'd wake the kids, yelling at them to "hurry" and "get ready for school." More often than not, I'd be irritated with them for not being organized or fast enough. I'd drop them at school and drive to the club.

A club may be dark, noisy, and smoky, but the people inside it—from the patrons to the staff—are too busy with the machines to talk for long or ask anyone for help. Blessed peace at last. Put some coins in the slot. Push the button and disappear into a world of mental, physical, and emotional silence where nothing mattered. There was just me and the spinning reels and the 2.3 seconds they took until it was time to push a button again.

How well I understand the junkie. This nothingness was my addiction. Not the money, not the thrill or excitement of the win, not even the momentary relief of getting back some of what I'd already spent. My addiction was to the mental and emotional

stillness that came in the seemingly endless moments between one button push and the next. No questions, no demands, no doubts or self-criticism—just me and a machine and.....silence.....until I'd run out of money and had to leave. Then I would start to hate myself.

I'd stay at the club until 2.40pm—or until my money was gone. At the end of almost six hours, I would drive home hating myself, berating myself with words I wouldn't have used to describe my worst enemy. Without the machine and spinning reels to focus my attention on, my attention would turn inwards and focus once again on my inner critic. I would drive home desperately and recklessly, wanting to put as much distance as possible, as quickly as possible, between myself and those demon machines. "Stupid, stupid, stupid woman. You should have stayed home and gone to bed. You should have done the shopping first. You should have left at ten / when you won that \$100 / \$200 / \$1500...what is wrong with you? When are you going to stop this bull@#\$%? Tomorrow you can't go. That's it—it has to stop. RIGHT NOW! It's crazy what you are doing to yourself. After you drop the kids off tomorrow, you'll HAVE to do some food shopping. Tomorrow is Thursday—his pay day. Let's see, \$100 to play the pokies—that should be enough. If I pay half the phone bill and only spend \$75 on food, I might win enough to get Grace those new shoes she needs and pay the rest of the dentist bill..."

When I got home, I'd check the mail, hide the overdue bills, and crawl into bed, where blessed sleep would overtake me and stop the horrible self-talk and thoughts of suicide that seemed an all-too-reasonable solution to the craziness. The kids would arrive home, find me asleep and assume I'd been there all day. I'd sleep till the alarm would sound at 5pm. Then I'd groan, get up, force a smile on my face and start the routine all over again.

Five days a week, for three-and-a-half years between late 1995 and early 1999, this was my life. When my husband was home on the weekend, my routine varied slightly. I'd shop on the way home from work—I never stopped at the club on the weekend. Once home, I'd put the washing on, pay what bills I could over the phone, do a quick tidy-up around the house, hang the washing out and then crawl into bed as hubby got out....and I'd sleep...and sleep....and sleep. Around 7pm, I'd get up in time to eat tea and go to work, longing for it to be Monday so I could be alone again and safe from the threat that someone would ask me how I spent my time...and yet, I'd be dreading Monday, knowing that all the craziness would start up once again.

I hated me back then. I hated my life. I wanted the world to stop so I could get off. I wanted something, anything, to happen so I could stop the endless nightmare I was trapped in. Life while I was

gambling was not worth living.

While still in New South Wales, I decided to make a concerted effort to stop gambling. I enlisted my husband's support by telling him in September 1997 that I'd been spending my days playing the pokies and couldn't seem to stop playing them. Together we decided that the kids and I would move back to Adelaide. I reasoned at the time that the move was a good one. I had good friends I could stay with until my husband was due to take up his posting in Adelaide in December and, since I only gambled in the one venue, it seemed reasonable that distancing myself from it would make the quitting easier.

For the next eight months I didn't go near a poker machine—in fact, I had no urge to do so. I experienced no difficulty quitting and had no doubts about the wisdom of quitting. I became once again the accepting friend, good mother, and passive wife. I started work and did all the right and proper things expected of a registered nurse.

Then in May 1998 I went back to the machines. To this day I don't know what triggered the return—perhaps it was a return of the existential angst, perhaps the anniversary of my sister's death and the realization that life is all too short to waste time and energy doing things that make us unhappy. Whatever the cause, within weeks I had exceeded my previous daily spending on the machines and I was gambling any time I could—I even managed to gamble on the weekends while supposedly out shopping.

In February 1999, I finally hit bottom. Not the financial bottom of many problem gamblers—I still had financial resources—but I hit a bottom nonetheless. It came when a pawnbroker offered me just \$75 for my rings, valued at \$2000 for insurance purposes just three weeks before. Just for a moment, I actually considered taking the \$75 and going to the pokies with it even though there was no food in the house. In that moment, I realized just how distorted my thinking had become and how irrational my beliefs around the pokies and gambling were. I went home and phoned the problem gambling help line, made an appointment to see a counsellor and began my recovery journey.

During my eight weeks with the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund support service, I learnt of the low odds of winning on the pokies and I learnt of the change in society's attitudes towards gambling that preceded the rise in the number of problem gamblers. I also learnt that most women gamble to escape from the rigors of abusive relationships. I might have learnt more, but I had a spiritual awakening—a calling to help people in crisis. The counsellor and I discussed everything except my gambling after that, so I didn't find out from him why I gambled, nor what I had to

do to quit.

Spiritual awakenings, according to Roberto Assagioli, the father of psychosynthesis, are often preceded by a crisis of duality or a traumatic event. The ultimate goal of most twelve-step programs—the insights, intuitions, and inspirations that come with awakenings—can lead to rapid resolution of an individual's problems, along with dramatic changes in personality and life style. For a time after the awakening, this happened for me—life was good.

But spiritual awakenings can also cause confusion, identity crises, loss of a sense of purpose and meaning, deep depression, high anxiety, and psychosis in individuals who have not developed a strong sense of self. As awareness expands, boundaries between self and other tend to disappear into unitive states. For me, this happened some ten weeks into the recovery process. A period of deep depression and intense anxiety—a dark night of the soul—descended upon me.

Unable to understand the cause of the dramatic change in mood, but certain that the cause had something to do with my gambling, I retreated into myself, spending long hours alone searching my soul for answers. My husband, not understanding what was happening, became afraid I was leaving him as his mother had left him in his infancy. In his anxiety, he sought constant reassurance from me—a reassurance I was too introspective and uncertain to give. Frustrated by his neediness, seeing it as selfish and uncaring, I ended the marriage and blamed myself for my family's pain and suffering. Unable to help ease my family's pain, I began to doubt the validity of my calling as well as my ability to help people in crisis. I also began to doubt the value of counselling as a tool for helping people, seeing it as a way of keeping people focused on their dysfunction and problems.

I left counselling and began searching for the answers to my questions on my own. Initially, I sought the answer to just two questions: "Why did I do what I did?" and "What do I need to do to stop?"

I voraciously read everything I could find on problem gambling and poker machines. I read all of the scientific studies and psychological reports, newspaper items, and articles in magazines that I could find, searching for information. In the beginning, there were few items and only one book on problem gambling in my local library—it was printed in 1956. Gradually I found more and more places where information on problem gambling was sequestered, and I absorbed that.

However, nothing in what I read in the research told me what I needed to do to stop gambling, and much of it implied that "the problem" lay within the individual—that people who gambled were abused as children, and/or were psychologically disturbed individuals who sought to medicate away their pain through excessive gambling. The prognosis for overcoming gambling addiction was considered poor. The medical model held sway in treatment programs, and the "impulse-disordered" gambler often impulsively left treatment too soon.

Public opinion implied problem gamblers were weak of character, immature, impulsive, irresponsible, or just plain stupid to have gambled as excessively as they had.

Reading such things often confused me and heightened my anxiety. I had not experienced a physically abusive childhood, and had only one episode of abuse as an adult. I also had no prior history of psychological disturbance.

Contrary to what I read about excessive gamblers, my psychological imbalance had happened after I quit gambling. IF I had so many personality/character defects, how had I seemed to manage before coming into contact with poker machines?

Were the writers correct? Could it possibly be that I was addicted to the pokies and the symptoms I experienced were part of withdrawal? If so, what did that say about my psychological health and about my future? Where did the spiritual awakening fit into the picture? Were the insights, inspirations, and psychic gifts that came with it magical thinking—as conventional psychology suggested—or heightened perceptions of psychically sensitive individuals? I struggled to understand.

I went to spiritual healers for help—I learnt to meditate, contact my spirit guides, and be guided by their wisdom. I learnt to heal others by laying my hands on them and allowing God's healing energies to work through me, but I didn't learn why I had done what I did, nor what I needed to do to stop gambling. I saw a hypnotherapist and a couple of psychologists. One asked me to explain to him why his parents gambled on poker machines—I explained what I knew and furthered his understanding, but failed to apply my teachings to my experience.

I wrote to (and spoke with) problem gambling experts and authors who wrote books about gambling and learnt that I too wanted to write a book about gambling, but I didn't find out what to do stop gambling or why I had become addicted. I got a computer, searched the Internet and found a place where gamblers from all over the world shared their stories, and I shared some of mine. No

one there could tell me why I did what I did, but it was here, amongst a group of people who labelled themselves compulsive gamblers, that I finally found a measure of acceptance and began to understand that, one, I had been asking the wrong questions. And two, the answers I needed could not be found out in the world—they could only be found inside me. I still experienced great anxiety over accepting the desire to escape from problems as a reason for excessive gambling, and even greater difficulty with working out what my "character defects" were.

Despite involvement in the New Age Movement, I was for the most part still highly introspective and withdrawn. I still judged myself to be wanting—a failure in 'most everything I tried. Other people, friends and strangers, often had trouble following my conversations.

It was early in 2000 that I discovered psychosynthesis and began my journey back from the brink of insanity. Reading the works of Roberto Assagioli and Pierro Ferrucci felt like coming home. Their descriptions of the awakening process—its causes and effects—resonated with my experience and I began to feel hope that my experiences could be worked through and understood.

Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli first coined the term psychosynthesis in 1911. Strongly influenced by Freud's theory of the unconscious, Assagioli is credited with bringing psychoanalysis to Italy. Like Carl Jung, he believed that Freud's theory of the unconscious gave too little weight to man's essential spiritual nature, so he developed maps of human consciousness and psychological processes, which incorporate our spiritual essence. By 1965 Assagioli had developed techniques such as the disidentification exercise and guided imagery that allowed individuals to consciously experience their spiritual essence.

Considered by its proponents to be a wholistic, transpersonal psychology, psychosynthesis is both a philosophy for living and a dynamic, open-ended approach to personal growth and development. Like most transpersonal psychologies, psychosynthesis helps people answer the existential questions, "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose in life?"

Psychosynthesis techniques and methods are informed by a blend of Western psychological theories and traditional Eastern spiritual wisdom. Unlike Freud's psychoanalytical theory, in which neuroses and psychopathologies are considered to result from an individual's failure to differentiate from a primary parent, psychosynthesis holds the understanding that humans are born with awareness of their separateness and uniqueness, and seek throughout life to establish an empathic mirroring connection with others that affirms their identity. When others fail to see us as we

are, we split off from our essential Self and adopt various unconscious behaviours or sub-personalities that help us survive psychologically and avoid the deep wounding of non-being.

Maturity, according to this theory, is reached as we become able to connect empathically with the Self—what you may know as your Higher Power, or the God or Goddess within. Once so connected, we develop an ability to affirm our own identity and unique place in the world independent of what is mirrored to us.

More than a collection of techniques or a methodology to be used to "fix" a disturbed client, psychosynthesis is a therapeutic process in which any one of a number of appropriate methods and techniques may be employed by both individuals and therapists to allow the authentic personality to unfold and evolve. In the foreground of the therapeutic process is the unique person of the client and the empathic I -Thou relationship that develops between therapist and client. The therapist's empathic, mirroring presence is essential to the process, as it allows the client to develop an internal empathic relationship with the Self. It was fortunate for me that one of the few psychosynthesis therapists in Australia lived and practiced in the state I chose to call home. I made an appointment and began my journey back to health.

During my time in therapy, I needed first and foremost to learn that it was okay to take care of myself, and let others take care of themselves for a while. Sleep-deprived from my years of working at night and playing the pokies during the day, I had to get in touch with my body, relearn the signs and symptoms of tiredness, and then respond to these by going to bed. No more fighting to stay awake as had become my habitual response.

Emotionally shut down, I had to reconnect with my emotions and give them names. Having become absorbed in the conversations in my head, I had lost touch with my bodily sensations and had to reconnect with them and relearn what hunger felt like. Following this work, I had to remind myself of the importance of eating good food on a regular basis and find again the courage to express what I felt. Homework at this stage of my recovery process involved mirror work. While gazing deep into my eyes in a mirror I'd affirm my self-worth, set daily goals, and, later in the day, praise my achievements. So beneficial did I find this practice, I continue it to this very day.

Through the guiding work of my psychosynthesis therapist, I discovered how my addiction developed, why I did what I did, and what I can do to change. Initially exhibiting all the signs and symptoms of schizoaffective disorder, I have learnt to disidentify from—and observe without judgment—my thoughts, actions, and emotions. I learnt to notice my habitual responses and to choose

my mode of expression in response to others and the world. I also discovered, after creating a living sculpture of my family dynamics during group work, that what I had thought to be a picture-perfect upbringing and marriage was in fact far from perfect.

Through a combination of guided imagery meditations and voice dialogue sessions, it became obvious to me that I had internalised the voice of my perfectionist mother. Seeking her attention and approval, I had become a people-pleaser/rescuer nurse—one who put her own physical and emotional needs far beneath those of the people she cared for.

As an adult, I had married not someone like my father, as many women do, but someone just like my mother. My former husband had high expectations of the people he worked with, yet he was strangely gentle and forgiving of my foibles, fearing that I might leave him if he demanded anything of me. Likewise, my mother had high expectations of her children, yet she tended to overlook my father's foibles out of the fear that he might leave her if she expected too much of him. As my husband was dependent on me for his emotional wellbeing, my mother had been dependent on my father for hers.

Never able to live up to the stringent demands of my inner critic to do more for others and be less selfish, I nonetheless tried for many years to become the perfect, kind, caring, compassionate, and considerate nurse, wife, friend, and mother. I pushed myself hard, and harder still, until deep within my psyche a rebel arose telling me, "It's time to take a break now...just for an hour or two... it's only fifty dollars—go on, you deserve a little time to yourself." As my father had done many years before, worn out from constant caring for others and feeling responsible for their happiness and well-being, I distanced myself emotionally from my spouse and family, retreating into outward passivity and sullen, rebellious inner silence. My father chose fishing and an extramarital affair as his escape from my mother's clinging neediness. I chose a poker machine.

Having completed a diploma of psychosynthesis, I've learnt that true growth rarely comes without struggle and striving, and often the journey to inner peace and happiness involves delving into deeply painful memories, challenging and changing the false beliefs we've come to hold about our own worth and value. Having opened my mind to all possibilities, I've come to understand that much in life happens for a reason—even poker machine addiction and psychotic breakdowns can be positive events in our lives, for they are often followed by beneficial consequences. Without my addiction, without my psychotic breakdown and subsequent divorce having been part of my life, I wouldn't be where I am today, doing more of the things I enjoy, and helping others in a

very real way. I certainly would not have had the courage to speak out against the judgmental treatment many of my fellow pokies-addicts suffer.

I've found having someone explain my spiritual experiences using Assagioli's maps of human consciousness, and both validate and normalize my lived experiences, has been incredibly healing. Here was someone who saw me not as special, gifted, defective, or crazy for having done, felt, and thought what I did. In my psychosynthesis therapist I found someone who saw me just as I was and did not feel compelled to change me. Accurately and empathically mirrored, I began to trust that I could once again be strong, normal, capable; all that was needed was some work on my part.

Slowly, over a period of four years, I have learnt to balance my needs against the needs of others and to continue working towards deeper and greater understanding of how my past has impacted the person I became and have become. These days, I find I no longer need to go to a machine to sit in silence. Now I do this by consciously choosing to meditate every day, or spending time writing to friends and people of like mind around the world on my computer. Free of the guilt, shame, and negative financial consequences of playing the pokies, I thoroughly enjoy my inner silence time, and am able to pick it up or put it down at will. Meditating and sitting in front of a computer is far less expensive than playing a poker machine.

My pokies addiction, underpinned by my ambivalence....my psychotic breakdown and subsequent search for answers...has been a transformative journey in the true sense of the word. I no longer qualify for the label of "problem gambler" (I seldom gamble anymore—and never on poker machines). I cannot be described as passive or people-pleasing anymore, and I am far from being the shutdown, schizoid mess I once was.

I am still passionately involved with the pokies—these days as a politically active member of the anti-gaming-machine movement. Rather than sitting silently in front of a computer-driven machine for hours on end, these days I am more likely to be found on my soapbox or on a computer keyboard, speaking of what I have learnt about the problem gambling issue. Some people might say this has become my new addiction—again, it is far cheaper and potentially more beneficial than playing the pokies for hours on end.

Six years ago, when I first entered recovery, I had a marriage of 19 years with a husband I cared about but didn't love. I had children who were (mostly) emotionally secure and a family life that (for the most part) nurtured those children. I lived in rented

accommodation and I worked part-time night duty to help pay the bills. I had plenty of leisure time in which to do nothing much but relax, "our" debts totalled \$30,000, and I had many friends and acquaintances who dropped by to say hello. We had plans aplenty for our future and were slowly working towards achieving them. According to all the best psychological tests and lifestyle assessments I read back then, we lived the good life and I should have been happy. But I was not.

Today I have no marriage, no lover or significant other to love or be loved by. I have no family life to speak of, as my children and I live in a separate state from extended family. I live in a heavily mortgaged property, my good friends number just three, and I work full-time night duty as a nurse just to pay my bills. My leisure time is taken up by counselling, study, and political and social activism. My debts total \$180,000, and I have half the income I had at my disposal before. By most people's opinion of what a successful life looks like, I should be unhappy and stressed out to the max—but I am not.

When comparing then and now, it doesn't sound like I've made any progress for all the therapy and soul-searching, does it? The "successful, healthy lifestyle" balance sheet seems to come down firmly in favour of my life six years ago.

But, there is one HUGE difference between now and then—then, I was gambling, and I had learnt to hate my work, my life, the pokies, and myself. Now, I no longer gamble, I like my own company, enjoy my work, and love my life. I eat well, sleep well, and have not one but two new careers that add purpose and meaning to my days (though I continue to earn my living primarily as a nurse).

From the outside my situation today looks bleak—in many ways busier and more stressful than what I had six years ago. But that is because it's on the inside (where only I tend to notice the difference) that the greatest progress has been made. Inside I know peace and joy, love, self-acceptance, and forgiveness. I now have faith and hope in my future to turn out well in accordance with God's plans. My life is not without difficulties (as no life ever is), but because of psychosynthesis I now have the tools, the self-awareness, the inner strength and the will that allows me to actively choose how I respond to any difficulties that arise in my life.

My name is SBP—I was once a pokies-addict—this has been part of my life journey. I thank you for reading.

*** **

The names of individuals have been changed.

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* For puzzled readers, "pokies" is a term used in Australia and New Zealand for electronic gaming machines. –ed.

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