



ROBERT PEARCE

My dad was a drinker and gambler. He used to take me to the trots at Rocklea from when I was 12. There are races on every minute of the day now – from all over Australia, Hong Kong, England, America. You can bet all day and night. They've taken it to the point of insanity. Anyone with a problem like me, they're just abusing people's weakness.

I was 22 when I got married and we had 4 kids in 10 years. She took it real good for a long time and we were very compatible. But I used to come home broke of a pay night and the kids would have nothing to eat, there would be no money for her.

Gambling cost me my missus and kids. That's a big loss in your life, bigger loss than your money. It depresses you when you haven't got your kids, when you love them so much and don't see them anymore. You have no idea how that affects you, you're so full of guilt.

Gambling is everything to the gambler. Relationships are nice but they're not affordable. It's one of the reasons I like being on my own. I know I'm not going to hurt anyone else, only me.

I've analysed myself over the years and still can't think of a good reason why I want to destroy myself. It's not for the money you gamble, it's for the thrill of it. Because no matter how much you win you just keep going till it's all gone. If not, you put it through the next day.

I gave it away for 12 months once. I remember how comfortable I felt. It takes a lot of stress out of you. But boredom and that nagging in your head, that need to gamble, it bought me back. You're addicted to your own adrenalin they tell me.

I ended up on the streets 3 years ago. I couldn't pay my rent as I kept blowing my pension check. I slept alone under gazebos in parks, like Picnic Island down at Southbank. I had a push bike and kept everything I had tied to it in those green bags.

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Micah found me in Dutton Park Cemetery when they were looking out for homeless people to help. They said they could get me a place. Noel must have been taking the piss when he told me they're not very flash. I said hey mate, you gotta try live in the cemetery for 18 months. What's important is staying dry and feeling safe. I couldn't possibly have foreseen this flat. It's way out of anybody's imagination. I wasn't expecting anything brand spanking new.

Rent comes out every week from Centrelink so I can't touch the money. I can't get thrown out for not paying the rent. Micah visit regularly. They have literally bent over backward to help everybody here. I've got my privacy, my security. I wouldn't have got off the street without this, without Micah.

Micah have furnished the place and I'm going to grow some veges to eat. I'd rather do that than give my money to Woolies and Coles. They're not short of a quid. I saw in the paper the other day they earn billions. And that they own 42% of the pokies. There's a lot of pokies here in Queensland, many thousands.

My last punt was 16 days ago. I know it's just a start though. I've got a lot of experience with this problem, been fighting it all my life. Although I've never been aware of it as I am now. I'm trying to turn my life around. I'm almost 70 but it's never too late. I just want the peace of not being broke all the time and that stressful feeling you get.

You've got to want to. It all boils down to your own will. I'm going to make it this time, I swear. Because I can't see the point in putting all my money in those stupid machines or betting on the TAB. You just can't win. And if I walk out with anything I just lose it the next day. It's just shitting in your own nest.

Being in this flat helps no end. Being out on the street you have got a lot of dead time on your hands. Here I can watch the TV, listen to the radio, chat to people and catch up with Micah when they visit. I've been here 6 months now and am 100% certain of staying. When I leave it will be feet first.

I'm doing a day at a time but I've got a lot going for me. When you're on the street the future don't look good, but here there's a bit of hope. This beautiful apartment is just too good to be true. That in itself helps you. This sort of thing just doesn't happen. What Micah has done has helped a lot of people. I'm only one.

Writer: Ben Pennings, May 2011.