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Your Family is Never in the Past

by Miriam Silver

Reluctantly I prise my eyes open only to see I am sharing a room with three other guys. I'd better make a move even though there's another purposeless day ahead of me, at least, here, I can shower, get some porridge for breakfast and make a getaway before the social workers corner me.

Looks wet outside. I'll go to a supermarket, try to look as if I'm looking for something. Hope the library is open. Must look for a hostel, won't leave it too late, can't sleep rough, too cold. There's always the Sally, good for a roll. Amazing how I've become used to all this. Lost all right to expectations.

This has been my routine or really way of life now for the past two, maybe three years. Once upon a time I was a busy successful upmarket man, doing work every day that I enjoyed, loving home life with a wife and children, all of whom I was devoted to, being the most important things in my life.

My downward slope began with ambition, not a bad thing to have, usually, except in my case it led to gambling. Must have worn blinkers not to have seen where it would lead. Not just an odd pound or so, but big time, the lot, betting shops, machines, casinos. When I won I put it all straight back, sure it would double my winnings. I never learnt. Didn't appreciate there are no poor casinos or betting shops. I was hooked.

I could say as an excuse, I wanted to make it big time for the benefit of my wife and family. From our simple beginnings we, or rather I, was lured into excessive home improvements, double-glazing, ritzy furniture, enormous television, house extension and remortgaging. Then I had to show it all off to friends at dinner parties. I felt invulnerable, I could have it all.

Regretfully, all this need to impress, not only to my colleagues but friends too led me to further extravagances. The car, the holidays, the second home in France and children's expensive activities all needing money that was well beyond my income. Pity I listened to that guy in the wine bar, full of his success he was, said he owed it all to the casino. Never did learn his name. How naive can you be?

Initially I used my in-laws who were very helpful with the mortgage, believing me when I said I would repay them,

"Don't worry, anything for our daughter," they said kindly, not once but at the third time they did appear a bit worried.

Eventually my debts encroached on our daily life. Bailiffs and shark loans threatened. My wife believed my promises. I would work seven days a week to clear them, never gamble again. I was deceiving her, I still hoped I'd make that one off win.

Eventually my accountancy knowledge came to my rescue. At no time did my partners suspect that my fraudulent paper work was facilitating my addiction, I must call it that now. I was able to skim off thousands of their pounds keep up my successful appearance without them suspecting anything.

I continued gambling, fooling my wife and family, duping myself, double dealing, cheating my own business, sure I'd never be discovered, while enjoying my family, the only life I wanted.

They are all I ever thought about in jail, constantly regretting my useless deceptive ways. I ruined their lives, now realising your family's never in your past. You carry it around with you everywhere. I see and hear them, awake and asleep.

Moreover they have rejected me, not that I blame them, I caused their comfortable life to terminate abruptly. They want nothing to do with a jailbird father. I see, from various sources that they are all making their way in the world in spite of this useless parent who regrets his misguided past and sincerely wishes he hadn't taken the path that led him to this rootless, empty life.

