

My “conference story” begins in 1981, when I joined the Jellinek organization. Jellinek is the largest institute specializing in addiction in the Netherlands, with particular focus on alcohol, illicit drugs, medicine, tobacco, and gambling. In 1988, we established a pioneering training project for the slot machine hall industry, which had become aware of the need to do something about the problem gambling issue. Because of this background, some people would call me a veteran in the area of responsible gaming – and some of these people are particularly good at making one feel particularly old.

From the beginning, I wanted to travel. And when I received this brochure with beautiful pictures of Lake Tahoe, boasting a major academic gambling conference, I knew what I wanted. The only problem was financial: for me, the trip would cost a fortune. I somehow managed to convince my boss at Jellinek that he should send me there, given the growing importance of an international field. And so I did, taking a plane to San Francisco, renting a car, and then taking the leisurely drive to Lake Tahoe on an early Saturday afternoon.

This was the first time that I met Bill Eadington. And of course, there was also Judy Cornelius alongside Bill, ably organizing the events with a smile. I enjoyed the experience immensely, and best of all: I learned a lot.

I continued to serve as one of Bill’s eager students. One of my proudest achievements to this day is that I was a member of the very first class of the University of Nevada, Reno’s Executive Development Program, in 1991. Even better, a couple of years later I was given the opportunity to play a different role, and took part in the faculty of the EDP.

Bill and I have been in close contact ever since, as our European Association for the Study of Gambling (EASG) conference has become the European equivalent of his effort. At the time, we divided the world in three parts, so that we would have no competition between our academic conferences – with each conference held every three years. Thankfully, this also meant that during all of those years I never missed one of Bill and Judy’s conferences, and Bill was always present at ours in Europe.

In mid-September of 2012, we hosted the 9th European Conference in Europe, and for the very first time Bill was not present. The void was palpable, as it has always been a must for us to have him in the program. The reasons are known to all who have heard Bill present: such a tremendous amount of knowledge, such a uniquely interesting way of presenting this knowledge, a gift for always bringing light to the darkness.

Since then, I have taken on many other international duties in this growing field -- but still not nearly as many as Bill has. I still learn from my EDP professor, who has contributed so much to a very beautiful, interesting part of my working life.

Pieter Remmers
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I am not sure who first described the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking as a “five ring circus,” but this has always seemed the most appropriate description. However, the more formal (but unofficial) name participants have always used in referring to the conference captures it too: “Eadington’s Conference.” It was Bill’s experiment, after all, his gift, to put all of us - casino operators, card counters, compulsive gamblers and those who treat compulsive gamblers, researchers and academics, gamblers and those in recovery, students of gambling, and those opposed to all gambling - under the same tent. His intention was for us to listen and learn from one another.

From such proximity came some of our earliest attempts at collaboration. It also provided this neophyte with some memorable experiences. One of the highlights of those early conferences was an instructional session on how to cheat at cards; I recall that it featured an FBI agent, a magician, and an actual card cheat. I also remember hearing Ed Thorpe’s presentation, then seeing the author of “Beat the Dealer” in the casino, standing in front of the wheel of fortune; he was writing down the outcome of each spin, while I watched, and wondered what the heck he was doing. I also remember a wild dinner with Ken Uston; my first meeting with Sue Fisher, Iain Brown, and Bob Custer; the wonderful hospitality of Gordon and Jess Moody.

The conference provided many opportunities to meet informally, and friendships started then have been extremely important. The conference was held in cities that were destination gambling venues, but it wasn’t until 1990, when it was held in London, that it became truly international.

I presented my first gambling paper at the 1984 conference. It was in Atlantic City, at the first of the conferences to be held outside of Nevada. Other presenters that year included Alex Blaszczynski, Iain Brown, Bob Custer, Susan Darvas, Joanna Franklyn, Mary Heineman, Dewey Jacobs, Henry Lesieur, Chuck Maurer, and Marvin Steinberg. I can be reasonably certain about that, not because my memory is so terrific, but because the proceedings were published, as I believe they have been for each conference going back to the very first one in 1974.

The history of the conference is the history of our field, and as the number of gambling conferences has proliferated, and our ring of researchers and clinicians has grown larger, the significance of Eadington’s conference becomes more apparent. It was the first, and the biggest, and the most exciting; the only one that can somewhat accurately be compared to a circus.

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