

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 9<sup>th</sup> 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.

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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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The International Conference on Risk Taking and Gambling is a powerful moniker. It just resounds of importance, status, and prestige. I was very much of the opinion that the target market for such a lofty event was certainly not a graduate student whose main association with both risk taking and gambling was explained by a need to deal blackjack and dice during the late night to finance his college education. No, something with a title like this was designed for the very smart, the very special, and the very select. Or so I thought.

I met Bill Eadington in 1969. I was 18 years of age and a sophomore at the University of Nevada, Reno. I took the first class he ever taught at UNR, a class on statistics. I found the man most interesting, and took many more classes from him over the next few years. So many, in fact, that when I looked at my transcripts I opted to major in economics because I had taken so many of his classes that this was the path of least resistance to graduation.

It was also the case that as I was dealing at Harrah's Club in Reno on the 9:00 PM to 5:00 AM shift that I would see Dr. Eadington occasionally wandering through the casino, looking about, and when I would spot him he would either give me a wave, or if the game was dead, he would come over and visit. He always had lots of questions, and no sooner would I answer one that he would come with another.

It was somewhat surreal, I suspect, to have my professor come up to my game and start peppering me with questions. The man was certainly curious, and certainly curious about all things gambling.

I doubt that I could properly record my amazement when this man came to me and told me about the Conference, and then said he would like me to write and present a paper for it, and if I couldn't write a paper, I could at least come, and possibly referee a panel. He also told me that I didn't need to worry about the money, just get there, he suggested. To say the least, I was astounded. I mean, after all, I was a graduate student and a casino dealer, and at the time both roles seemed rather low on the importance scale of things in the world. Yet here was this man that wanted me to be there. He made me feel important, he made me feel that I mattered; he made me feel that I had something to contribute.

Well, since meeting Bill Eadington in 1969, I have been to a number of the Conferences, and I even pay my own way now. I have presented papers, sat on panels, refereed panels, and done whatever else I could do to contribute. At every Conference I have attended I have noticed something, and that is a student or two who was participating in one way or another, and I would smile

because I knew how they got there. And not only were there a few of Bill's students hanging around, but there were other types as well. They may be professional gamblers, they may be advantage players, they may be people that worked in casinos, or they may even be people who had or were suffering the ravages of problem or pathological gambling. They, like me, were made to feel important, as if they had something to contribute, and they were made to feel this way by Bill Eadington.

There are certain institutions in life that are difficult to separate from the personalities

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behind them, an example being the Model A and the personality of Henry Ford. So too it is with the International Conference on Risk Taking and Gambling and the name William Eadington. This is Bill's baby, and it was born and nurtured through his efforts. More importantly, the Conference has a personality, and this too was given to it by Professor Eadington. This personality is one of inclusion, not exclusion. This is a personality that suggests that when the story of gambling is told, it will be told by a diverse and complex tapestry of people from a wide variety of vantage points... even lowly graduate students who deal cards and dice during the night to finance their education.

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