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The International Conference on Gambling and Risk-Taking and I go back a long way—for me, at least. For the conference, I’m still a relative newcomer. That’s not surprising, since the ICGRT is, in many ways, the bedrock of the contemporary gambling/gaming studies scene, and really the single indispensable outlet for presentation that anyone studying gambling, regardless of discipline, needs.

My introduction to the ICGRT came in early 1997; I was in that curious phase of graduate school (U.S. History, UCLA) in between completing most of my required coursework and starting my dissertation in earnest. I had a hunch that I wanted to write about casinos’ history and had already started preliminary research.

That semester, I was in a seminar taught by Professor Eric Monkkonen, an eminent urban historian. He issued a challenge to the class: if we could get our paper published in an academic journal or make a presentation at a conference, we would get an automatic A for the class. In grad school, where grades usually run the gamut from A to A- and GPA’s almost entirely irrelevant, that’s not much of an incentive, but the challenge itself piqued my interest. I don’t know exactly how I found out about the ICGRT, which was held in Montreal that year, but remember how excited I was when I told Dr. Monkkonen that I’d be presenting a paper there—and how excited he was for me.

This was my first academic conference, and it was a great introduction: I met many scholars there who have since become mentors, colleagues, and friends. Bill Eadington, naturally, is at the top of that list: I recall approaching him a bit awestruck, still not quite believing that the colossus who stood astride most of the writing about gambling that I’d read over the previous months was standing in front of me with a friendly smile.

Seeing the work that Bill and a legion of other scholars presented at the conference proved to me that I wasn’t so off-base in writing a dissertation about the development of casinos in Las Vegas (in Westwood, this was not the most obvious or the most universally applauded choice).

By the time the next conference had rolled around (at the MGM Grand, 2000), I had gotten my Ph.D. (Dr. Monkkonen became my committee chair) and was working in the surveillance department of an Atlantic City casino – not the typical post-doc, but this isn’t a typical field. I somehow convinced my director to sign off on my attending the conference, and while I was in Las Vegas I found out that UNLV had a vacancy for a job that I started a few months later.

Without the conference, I still would have had a career, but it would have been much, much different. I wouldn’t have dreamed of making gambling my primary academic focus, and I certainly wouldn’t have been able to accomplish much at the Center for Gaming Research without the solid foundation laid by Bill at UNR’s Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming. So to say I feel a profound personal gratitude to both Bill and the conference is an understatement. By the same token, it’s difficult to overstate the importance of the conference and Bill to the academic study of gambling: both have done so much to build it over the past forty years that it’s difficult to even attempt to quantify their impact.

I won't try to do that, then, but I will say that I'm proud to be one of the many scholars who has had the honor of taking part in the conference, and that Bill continues to inspire me just as much as when I was a graduate student.

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