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The first International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking took place in 1974 in an environment of modest North American gambling activity. Nevada casinos were distancing themselves from organized crime influence as they became publicly traded companies, several state lotteries were operating, off-track betting was legal in New York City, Atlantic City casinos were on the horizon and the Canadian legal gambling scene was materializing. The attendees at the first conference consisted mainly of offbeat academics from diverse scholarly backgrounds and avid gamblers hoping to learn about systems to beat blackjack, sports betting or horse racing. The growth of

the conference in terms of numbers and types of delegates (more international representation of gambling studies scholars, a greater buy-in from gambling industry officials and government policy makers, and increased interest from health care professionals), coincided with gambling becoming a powerful economic, political and cultural force worldwide.

My own curiosity about gambling was piqued by the abrupt changes to Alberta's gambling landscape. Up until the late 1960s, horse racing was the primary legal gambling format, but only available during the summer months. There were also occasional church basement bingos and certain gambling activities allowed on the summer fair midway, but outlawed the rest of the year.

Following a landmark Criminal Code of Canada amendment in 1969, gambling promptly grew to encompass charity casinos, regular bingos and major lotteries. Now, forty years hence, legal gambling in Alberta operates on a scale that was unimaginable then. Presently, Alberta is the most gambling saturated province as 26% of Canada's annual gross gambling revenue is generated from only 11% of the nation's population.

This rapid and radical change in the nature and scope of gambling caused me to entertain such fundamental questions as; how did an activity that had generally been viewed as dangerous and tainted suddenly become an innocuous amusement? Why had this once stigmatized pastime been outlawed for centuries and now was being vigorously promoted by government? And, how was this profusion of legal gambling opportunities impacting citizens' quality of life, for better or worse? In considering these ideas, I became interested in examining the phenomenon with the goal of trying to inform sensible and humane public policy. Given the scarcity of literature on gambling and the fact that few other scholars were actively engaged in investigating gambling issues, this was no easy task.

My first exposure to the conference was through reading some of the papers delivered at the 1981 Lake Tahoe gathering--a friend had brought back a few presenter handouts. Given the dearth of information about gambling issues, it was heartening to learn that a group of enthusiasts was meeting periodically to discuss their ideas. Perusing these papers inspired me to attend the next conference in Atlantic City held in early December, 1984 – the only time, to my knowledge, that it took place during a winter month. It was there that I first encountered Bill Eadington and other gambling studies experts such as Vicki Abt, James Smith, and Eugene Christiansen, who collaborated on the seminal book *The Business of Risk: Commercial Gambling in Mainstream*

America (1985) and Gabrielle Brenner, who with her husband Reuven, produced the influential *Gambling and Speculation: A Theory, a History, and a Future of Some Human Decisions* (1990). Nowadays all serious gambling studies scholars know about the conference and most are regular participants.

The Atlantic City experience convinced me the conference was a “can’t miss” event for anyone interested in the societal effects of gambling. A conference highlight for me was always Bill Eadington’s ‘state of the union’ address. This is where Bill synthesizes the global gambling proceedings since the previous conference. Though trained as an economist, Bill has an encyclopedic grasp of all aspects of gambling studies. His overviews typically touch on economic trends, key gambling research findings and methodologies, advanced gaming technology, public policy concerns, and responsible gambling insights. He concludes with a spot-on forecast of where gambling and gambling studies may be headed in the next few years.

Bill’s conferences straddle both the academic domain and the realm of commercialized gambling. Though not always in agreement on key issues, the joining of these two worlds at the conferences has gradually helped permeate traditional ideological barriers and foster better appreciation for each other’s perspective.

In 2003, at the Vancouver conference, it was an honor to accept Bill’s invitation to be a luncheon speaker. This is an intimidating assignment, not only because you’re addressing the entire conference crowd, also because this role has traditionally been assumed by gambling industry bigwigs or academic heavyweights whose accomplishments far exceeded my meager efforts. To top it off, previous speakers tended to be dynamic presenters who delivered a consequential message. Whether out of pity, or perhaps because I’m Canadian and the conference was at a Canadian venue, I got the call. I spoke on the edgy topic of “The Gap Between Policy Promises and Routine Practices in the Gambling Industry.” Since I didn’t get tarred and feathered I assumed it went OK. In any event, I’m eternally grateful to Bill for the opportunity.

Over the years conference topics have changed; for instance, social responsibility, Internet gambling, racinos, and neuro-biology did not register at earlier conferences. Likewise, important issues back in the day such as riverboat gambling, the SOGS, the gravity model of casino growth, and bingo, dog and horse racing operations are seldom mentioned now.

When the international conference started, the study of gambling was a decidedly low-profile academic undertaking. Now gambling studies is a widely accepted academic sub-field. There is no doubt that Bill Eadington’s conferences played an influential role in the emergence of gambling studies. There is a powerful link between the fourteen UNR sponsored conferences and the existence of a critical mass of knowledge about gambling issues and an international community of dedicated scholars who study the subject. The present day gambling-related academic journals, gambling research centers/institutes and conferences are indebted to Bill Eadington, who understood the significance of gambling’s effects on society long before the rest of us figured it out.

Garry Smith, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta