

Karla Erdman
9/25/11
Narrative Piece
Writing Course

Financing the Gown

It was during the last year of the Reagan Administration--May 23, 1988 to be exact. At the time, I was engaged for five months to Don, the man who has been my husband for the last twenty-two years.

We decided to take a trip to Las Vegas, our first as a pre-married couple. But the real event was the celebration of my twenty-first birthday. I was in my own private hell when going out with my finacé and his friends because they were all of drinking age, and I would have to either sit and order a soda, or most humiliating was not be admitted at all into the places where the "legals" went.

Thus, Don and I decided that we would celebrate my coming of age in style by going to Las Vegas. My birthday was May 24, but we had to leave the day before. We landed in Las Vegas, and I was flabbergasted to see slot machines in the airport. I thought, "*Boy, they really take their gambling serious.*"

We took the shuttle to the Imperial Palace where we were to stay for four nights. The hotel was located close to the Flamingo Hilton where Don had stayed on his first trip to Las Vegas a few years before.

Like most tourists, we checked in, drug our bags to our room, and flew back out the door to see the town. Little did I know that the highlight of the vacation would come so soon.

Our first stop was the Flamingo Hotel and Casino, Don's prior stomping ground. My hands were trembling in anticipation at the thought of the first pull of a slot machine lever. Yet, my fluttering heart was also a reminder that I was not twenty-one years old yet; I was still only twenty--my birthday was the next day.

Don and I changed our bucks for quarters. The slots today take the bills right at the machines and no coins are disbursed, but that's not how it used to be. I inserted five quarters and pulled the lever. This happened over and over, as my fingers turned from gray to black with dirt from the coins. I would hit a meager amount, and a few quarters would trickle into the tray. My gargantuan smile was proof that I was having fun, but the butterflies inside me continued fluttering.

What if I got carded? Would I get in trouble? Worse yet, would I get arrested? Yet, it was that little bit of mischief that kept me playing, even though I knew I might get into

trouble.

As I put money my dwindling supply of money into the machine, I suddenly couldn't pull the lever. A moment of terror struck me; I thought I broke the machine.

"Don, come over here," I whispered.

"What's wrong?" he said, as he slid his eyes over at me.

"I think I broke the machine," I said in a nervous stutter.

Don quickly jumped out of his chair and looked at the machine. He said, "I think you won something big."

We continued to discuss our dilemma in hushed tones. With trepidation, we called a slot attendant to see if I won; all the while fearing that I would be caught for underage gambling. The attendant confirmed, "Yes, you won."

The attendant had to go in the back to get my money because the amount I won would not be disbursed from the machine in quarters. Needless to say, Don and I were shocked. At this point, Don and I still didn't know how much I had won. We were trying to play it cool because I was underage.

The attendant came back and handed me \$750 in cash. Wow! It was a landfall for me. The gods were smiling on us as I took the cash; since it wasn't a check, we might make a clean get-a-way. We both wore huge smiles, but we calmly said thank you and promptly left the casino. Don grabbed my hand as we rushed back to our hotel. I thought, "*An angel must have landed on the attendant in order to make him forget to check my identification.*"

Once back in our room, Don and I couldn't contain our jubilation. I thought, "*This is how people must feel when they win the lottery.*" We felt like we had really gotten away with something, and we had--\$750! While we were excited that we had the money, but we didn't just want to dump it back into the slot machines. Don said too many people do that and end up with nothing. We decided that we had to be smart about our new found wealth, so we devised a plan.

The thought of this windfall made me flashback to a month before our trip. At that time, I had said "yes to the dress." It was a beautiful wedding gown with off-the-shoulder cap sleeves, a beaded bodice with a heart-shaped neckline, and a fabulously long train with bows down the back. I saw it in a bridal magazine, and I had never thought that I would be able to find a dress in Stroudsburg that was in a magazine, but I did. The gown's price was originally \$1,000, but it was the previous year's design, so I was going

to be able to purchase it for half price! While I had been thrilled with my find, I was a bit apprehensive because I also knew that it was going to be a struggle because I had to pay for the dress on my own. While it was still a year till the wedding, I was going to make monthly payments because my father was footing the bill for the reception at Shawnee Inn. Thus, I was on my own for the cost of the gown.

Within moments of Don and I getting a grip on our exhilaration, we remembered about the gorgeous gown that I wanted for our wedding. So, we decided to put away \$500 in our luggage to pay for my gown. My relief of being able to purchase the dress was staggering. The pressure of not having to pay monthly payments was lifted from my shoulders. We then settled on keeping \$100 in which we'd use to gamble, and the remaining money was used for food and tacky souvenirs. We resolved that if there was any money left, that we'd take home.

Compared to the first hours in Las Vegas, the remainder of our trip was somewhat uneventful. We celebrated my twenty-first birthday with a romantic dinner. The remainder of the days included sleeping in late, attending discounted shows, eating at many buffets (Don could really put it away then, but not now), shopping at the numerous boutiques, and gambling at the surrounding casinos. During our first outing to the pool, I also realized that my new bathing suit was translucent when wet. Even that awareness was negligible compared to my "ill-gotten" funds on the first day.

As with all vacations, our trip slowly came to an end. Ultimately, we found ourselves with a couple of hours to kill before taking the shuttle to the airport. Thus, we decided to do some last minute gambling with the little money we had reserved.

As is always the case with "gambling newbies," the novelty ran out quickly, and so did our cash. But we still had to wait for our ride to arrive. The casinos frown upon loitering, but we attempted to be covert. However, during the last twenty minutes of waiting, we were calmly approached by security.

"Miss, may I see your identification?"
Don and I giggled as I said, "Sure."