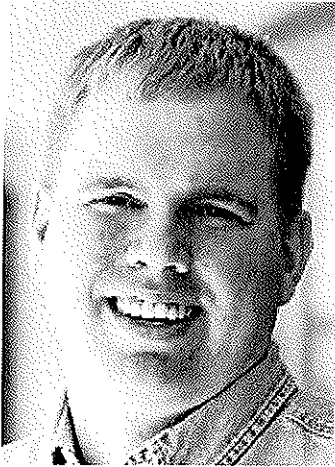


HIS VIEW: Stories of money lost in Las Vegas

Daily News

Posted on: Tuesday, February 15, 2011



Johnston

Last weekend I went with a group of friends to see one of Cher's final performances at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

Cher is, regardless of what one may think of her music, an amazing performer. The production values of her concert were the best I'd ever seen and, at least according to the people sitting next to us, "true to Las Vegas style."

Something else true to Vegas style is those "one-arm bandits" known as slot machines.

See, when we went to see Cher on Friday night, I put a buck in one of the slot machines near the entrance to the auditorium. The machine paid back \$50 on my first pull and I promptly printed my voucher and headed for my seats. At the end of the show, I headed again for a machine and was able to ratchet up my winnings by another \$30 and promptly cashed out.

If I'd stopped there, I would have been better off but wouldn't have a great Vegas story to share.

As we were touring the town Saturday I spent a few bucks of my winnings on slot machines here and there and, in the famous last words of gamblers everywhere, "I won some and lost some." If you've never been to Vegas, let me point out how easy it is to sit down at a machine and lose track of exactly how much money you're playing per pull until it's too late.

After subsidizing a few of Vegas' local drinking establishments, we headed back for our hotel where I promptly situated myself in front of a machine and dropped in the remaining \$40 of my gambling allowance. I started at a quarter per pull and got some small payouts, but that prompted me to start increasing my bets, nearly betting \$12 per pull - on a quarter machine mind you.

After almost busting out, I pulled a big winner and landed a \$750 payout on multiple wins. Lights, sirens, the fake clinking of quarters in a no longer existent tray - the whole nine yards accompanied this win.

Winning a big payout like that is quite the exhilarating experience.

After my win, I briefly contemplated continuing my play. I said to myself "Self, if you walk away now, you'll be able to pay off a huge part of this trip and still come out ahead."

And then the guy in the suit came over.

"Sir, we're quite impressed with your winnings. On behalf of the Riviera, we'd like to offer you a complimentary cocktail and, if you wish, a pack of your choice of cigarettes."

It was at that point that I forgot all logic, shared my name with the man in the suit and said "give me a margarita in one of those big Randy Quaid glasses." No sooner did I receive said cocktail did the man in the suit come back with another message.

"Mr. Johnston, I just spoke with our operations manager and he's authorized an invitation for you to access our high stakes slot lounge. If you'd please follow me ..."

This is the part of my story where all my friends say "Did you seriously fall for that?"

Sadly, the answer is yes.

I printed a ticket from the winning machine, followed the man in the suit to the high stakes lounge and, at a machine that required a minimum of \$20 per line, promptly lost all but \$40 of my total cash winnings. At the end I cashed out, finished my cocktail and slipped out of the lounge quietly, letting the house keep all but my original bet.

Except the original bet was again lost in a machine sporting a Wizard of Oz motif because, well, it looked like a winner.

So, as I look back I guess the old saying of "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" is true, including my money.

Henry D. Johnston lives in Moscow. He may be reached via e-mail at moscowmoderate@gmail.com.