

CHEATING AT BLACKJACK 2015

Twenty-one years ago (1994), I wrote the original *Cheating at Blackjack*. Bill Clinton was president, cell phones only made calls, and 9/11 was seven years away. A lot has changed since then. All that time passing has allowed me to reflect on what I did and why I did it.

No, I'm not going to repent, grab a shovel, and dig up the winnings (\$87.20) I buried high in Red Rock Canyon (or was it Mt. Charleston?), and return them to the casinos. It simply enables me to look back on a unique way of life and remember why I was successful at cheating the game of blackjack. Yes, I am, or at least I once was, a successful blackjack cheat. I think two criteria define a successful cheat. First, did he get the money? Yes, I got the money. I was involved in hundreds of plays and I won every time. No exceptions. You see, I wasn't gambling with my money; I was gambling with my freedom. There was no way I'd risk my freedom with an edge that won only some of the time.

The second criterion of a successful cheat is: Did he get away? Yes. I was never caught. How did I get away with it? I followed certain principles that guaranteed success, not just at this particular game, but in any endeavor. As I recount my story in this book, I explain these principles and how I applied them. So welcome to the curious and uncommon world of the professional "crossroader" (a specialist at cheating casinos). This is a captivating and thought-provoking story, I promise. In this book, you'll read not only about cheating techniques and a crossroader's lifestyle and philosophy, but also about psychology and a life story told to a select few individuals.

IN THE BEGINNING

I started learning and practicing card magic when I was seven years old. I remember the first time my dad took me to see a magician, who must have been in his late sixties. At first he looked feeble, but as soon as he picked up a deck of cards, he became young again and the cards took on a life of their own, doing things that were clearly impossible. It looked like *real* magic to me and I was hooked from that moment! I had found one of my passions!

And it led to one of my principles: If you find your passion, it will carry you through the tough times. From that day on, I had a feeling that magic and cards would play an important part in my life.

A second event that shaped my life also occurred at age seven. My parents took a trip to Las Vegas and returned with lots of gambling souvenirs for me. I thought Vegas was the coolest city on the planet and I knew one day I would make

Las Vegas my home.

For the next 15 years, I practiced card magic. It was tougher in those days. There was no Internet, not even videos. Books and other magicians were the only options for learning.

When I graduated college, a number of new books on card magic appeared on the market. Most of the authors lived in Las Vegas. I decided that, if I wanted to become an expert at manipulating cards, I had to seek out these teachers. And here I employed another principle that guarantees success if followed: Find the experts. Success is achieved by listening to and associating with real specialists.

How do you distinguish between experts and *poseurs*? Do your research. With today's tools, the least you can do is google the names (or pseudonyms). If the names have a few entries in the search results, they're probably not true experts.

In the summer of 1983, I packed my bags and moved to Las Vegas. I knew exactly no one. I had no job and a grand total of \$2,100 in my pockets. But I learned from the magic books that the Las Vegas magicians met every Wednesday at midnight. Now all I had to do was find out where. This wasn't easy. The meeting was somewhat secretive and open only to magicians. Again, there was no Google. It took me about six weeks to learn the secret location. And then one autumn night, on a Wednesday just before midnight, I walked into the meeting.

There, sitting at a table, was the legendary Jimmy Grippo from Caesars Palace, along with Michael Skinner (a favorite magician of Johnny Carson), Allan Ackerman, Paul Harris, and the list goes on and on. Eight weeks earlier, I was in the Midwest reading their books, and now I was sitting with them!

Of course, these guys were magicians; they *weren't* card cheats. Still, many of them befriended me and my knowledge and skill level skyrocketed. This takes us back to the second principle: Find the experts.

A background in magic is a great advantage for crossroaders. Not only are their hands in shape from the moves learned doing magic tricks, but they can't help but learn a certain psychology, along with misdirection skills, that's perfect for the casino environment. Many of the moves and deceptions used by crossroaders have been borrowed from the magic fraternity. Naturally, I couldn't live in Vegas for long without becoming interested in gambling. When I first sat down at a blackjack table, I had no idea how to play the game, but I quickly figured out that to win, I'd have to find a way to take control of the odds. After watching the casinos systematically beat the players by managing the odds, the morality of taking control of them didn't bother me at all, but I didn't know how to do it. Then I heard about, and started to research, card counting. Card counting is

a legal technique that involves keeping track of the cards, thus allowing the counter to identify favorable betting situations and increase playing efficiency. However, counting is a long hard way to beat blackjack and it requires enormous discipline and patience. I knew there must be a better way—and that led me straight to cheating.

I thought that somewhere in Las Vegas, there had to be people who knew how to beat the games and I wanted to find them and learn from them.

Finding professional criminals wasn't easy. I couldn't exactly put a classified in the paper advertising for cheaters, or look them up in the Yellow Pages. (Today, you might find candidates online, though I'd bet you wouldn't want to do business with most of them.) But I understood human nature and figured that some of the people I sought might have a place where they safely got together. I didn't expect them to have strategy meetings like a group of politicians, but I figured they probably gathered informally where they could leave word that they were looking for someone or something.

Not knowing the language, I was well aware that I'd look and sound like a square. My first challenge was to learn about taking off the casinos before trying to cut into the crossroaders. Then as today, the best and safest way to learn about cheating is to read everything you can get your hands on. I was lucky. In Vegas, there was a bookstore, the Gambler's Book Club, or GBC. It operated out of an old, unassuming, brick building originally on Charleston and 11th Street that catered to game players around the world, and had more than a thousand books on everything about, or related to, gambling. I was especially interested in the books on blackjack and the how-to books and videotapes used by casinos to train staff against cheating. I bought every book in the store concerning casino protection and blackjack. I returned frequently and talked to different customers about blackjack and cheating techniques. I learned a little about the subject, but didn't meet anyone who cheated the casinos (or would admit to it).

A lot of people had opinions as to just who was the best in town with a deck of cards. Of the many names that came up, most were magicians I'd met through the local magic club, but one name was new to me: Crunch. People said Crunch could do things with cards that were impossible and, best of all, most of his tricks were gambling moves. I also heard that he worked at a casino in downtown Vegas.

I went to the casino where he was supposed to work. I asked a pit boss if Crunch was working and I was told that he had quit and moved back East.

Next, I employed a principle that I didn't fully understand

until 25 years later: When your attitude is right, the facts don't matter.

Yes, you read that right. The principle is powerful and here's why. Many times the so-called facts are incorrect! Have you ever flown on a plane? The Wright brothers were told hundreds of times that it was impossible for something that big and heavy to fly through the air.