

“Breaking up is hard to do... especially when you're in a relationship with an eating disorder.”

BReAking

uP WITH



Written by
Raija Begall

“Breaking up is hard to do...”



Meet ED. He slowly seduces you with thoughts of perfection and happiness. You are not aware of his intentions at first. But soon, you need him in order to feel a sense of purpose, even though he controls you and makes you feel worthless. He becomes your entire world, your only focus, your greatest obsession. Yet, you are his target, his vulnerable culprit who he consumes and confines in his world.

You are lost without him, yet you have completely lost any sense of self by being with him. You'd do anything for him, yet nothing is ever good enough. You love him, yet he is silently and slowly killing you.

Meet ED. He is my Eating Disorder and my past. Here is a story of our relationship - of the pain, hurt and betrayal endured... and the process of breaking free of his grasp and learning how to LIVE again - without him.

Raja



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**“And just when the caterpillar
thought the world was coming to an end...
she turned into a butterfly.”**

- Unknown





To you the reader...

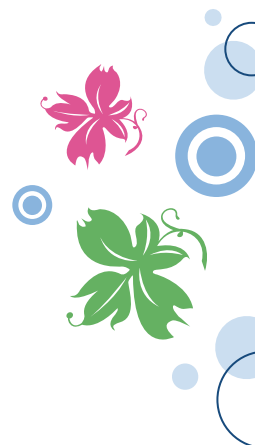
To this day I am surprised and frustrated at how little people understand eating disorders - the mind games, thought processes, the life battle. I want people to realize that eating disorders are exactly like being consumed in an obsessive relationship. It's like having someone control your every move, thought and behaviour. You lose yourself falling in love with perfection, obsession and unreality and you completely lose your sense of self.

That is why I wanted to tell my story. I want to dedicate this book to YOU-the reader-to give you an inside look at the illness that takes over so many individuals in society. It's not just about "not eating"...it's about losing yourself in a world that feels inescapable. That is ED, and that is the mental illness that people need to understand.

More specifically though, this book is dedicated to all of you who have ever been in, or are in your own ED relationship. I hope that this book can serve as a reminder to never give up. It is possible to overcome ED, because I am living proof that you CAN do this. Keep on breaking up with ED!

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* All poems written by Raija Begall





Raija Begall was born and raised in Thunder Bay. She attended Algonquin Public school, spent Grade 9 at Port Arthur Collegiate Institute, and then her next three years, Grades 10 through 12, at Hammarskjold High School. Throughout high school, Raija was a member of the cheerleading team and always LOVED performing, but always disliked the skirts! Raija just finished her first of four years at Lakehead University in the Nursing Program and has hopes of eventually one day specializing in paediatric/youth mental health.

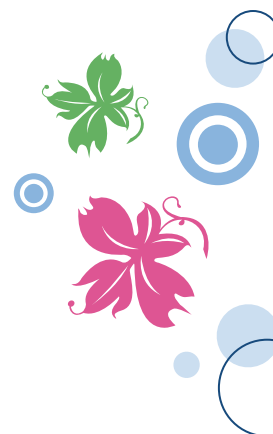
For the last five years, Raija had a dream to travel to Africa and last March 2007, this dream came true. At 17, Raija travelled with a group of ten to Rwanda to help build a school as part of Nu-Vision Ministry in Thunder Bay. After that single experience, she knew that Africa is somewhere she hopes to return to work in an orphanage.

Aside from Africa, Raija's other passions include mental illness and eating disorder awareness, which is why this book happened in the first place, helping children and meeting new people and being able to learn about where people have come from and the stories they have to tell.

When Raija wants to relax, she loves the sunshine and summertime - bring on the running, rollerblading, fishing and summers at camp, but she also loves when it rains. She imagines it's washing away all of life's problems and cares. Journal writing and music are Raija's therapy and she listens to country music, but also likes the inspirational and pump-up tunes too.

Raija has one brother who she looks up to more than any other guy she knows. Raija's parents have been divorced since she was 6, which she sees as a blessing because she's had the opportunity to become a part of TWO amazing families, and meet so many new people and supportive relatives.

Raija believes that everything happens for a reason and what's meant to be will be... but at the same time, she says we only have TODAY. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed and yesterday isn't worth dwelling over... so take all the chances you can, and make sure you're not living wondering what could've been, because hey... it still CAN BE today. Take a chance, try it, do it and find out yourself... you'll never know until you do.





“We are all similar and share experiences of fear and insecurity at some point in our lives. There is no shame in asking for help.” *Raija Begall*

Through my role as Public Education Coordinator - Mental Health for St. Joseph's Care Group, I learned that a young woman from Thunder Bay was applying to the Dare to Dream Project with the concept for a book about her experience with an eating disorder that changed her life. I immediately wanted to meet her as St. Joseph's Care Group was developing a regional anti-stigma project called 'with an OPEN mind' to reduce the myths and misconceptions surrounding mental health.

After meeting Raija, I was re-energized by her eagerness to help others. She wanted candid dialogue about her emotional struggles... a taboo topic among many for centuries. Raija's openness about her eating disorder and her drive to help others learn more about mental health became a true inspiration for the 'with an OPEN mind' project and for me.

“Breaking Up with ED” is more than a book about Anorexia. Raija's story is about hope, recovery and moving beyond an eating disorder and symbolizes success in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. As more people like Raija come forward and share their experiences, society will come closer to eliminating the fear and misunderstanding surrounding mental illness. Too often, mental illness is considered to be shameful and a personal weakness. It should be viewed like any other illness (i.e. cancer or diabetes) and people should not feel ashamed to seek treatment.

St. Joseph's Care Group is proud to sponsor Raija in her quest to help other young people talk more openly about eating disorders and mental health. I remember Raija telling me once that she would not change her encounter with ED (her eating disorder). She said it has made her who she is today and she is a truly amazing person.

Thank you Raija!

Brook Latimer
Public Education Coordinator – Mental Health
St. Joseph's Care Group Thunder Bay ON.
www.sjcg.net
www.withanopenmind.com



with an **OPEN**
m i n d

Welcome to my Struggle...

Welcome to my struggle
To this place of constant pain
This world where fear surrounds me
Where losing means I gain

Welcome to this nightmare
These thoughts I can't escape
Each breath I take gets shorter
As I chance each step I take

It's tough to try and end it
Just wish you'd understand
That my struggle never leaves me
It holds me by my hand
Keeps dragging deep and lower
Takes away my inner strength
But that strive, it keeps me going
Reaching tougher lengths

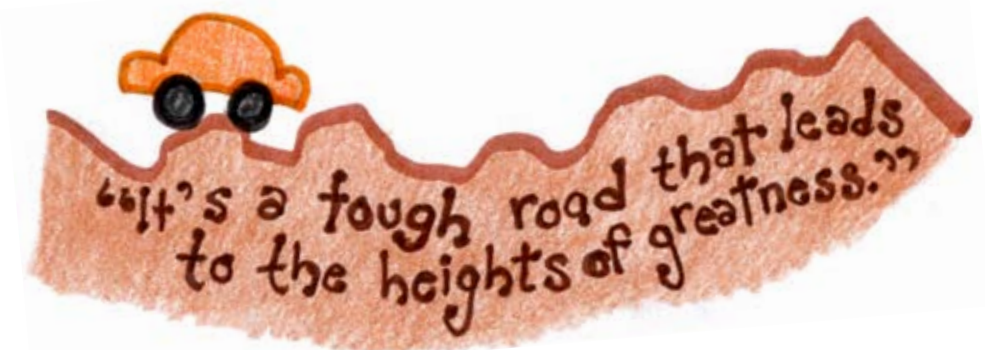
I never was a liar
I never was a fake
Never hurt so many people
Never feared the day's awake
But struggle teaches new ways
To fake and how to lie
I've learnt how to convince you
I'll fool suspicious eyes

My struggle teaches hurt
As I pain each person close
I learn to feel so hopeless
Depression at its worst
'Cause I think things that I can't change
See visions that aren't real

You don't get it though, stop preaching
Don't say how I should feel
Don't tell me that I'm pretty
Too late for words like that
Don't tell me that I'm skinny
When I see is fat

You just don't understand me
Of this struggle through my mind
You don't hear this inner thinking
Or those answers I can't find
You don't know the confusion
The frustration, loss or fear
You don't know how my mind works
Because those voices you can't hear

Please don't call me ugly
Disgusting for your eyes
I know my struggle's changed me
To a girl who's now disguised
My struggle is a game now



Rajja's Poem

And the mind it wants to play
The body wants to win
What health loses each new day
The bones they mean true beauty
More skin just screams out hate
Hello to this mental world
With such an unclear fate

'Cause here is how this game works...
You start off safe and slow
You continue to keep on playing
And you think you're in control

Your mind it keeps you going
You think that you might win
You keep on taking chances
Think, soon you'll see the end

Sure there are some obstacles
Some moves with greater fear
It the end it will be worth it
The end will soon be near

Your heart it starts to weaken
Your winning though, who cares,
One more step, one chance to take
Ignore the jealous stares

The thing that we don't realize
As we play this game so long
Is that there is no ending
That we've suffered all along
This game has no game over
Until your life is done

'Cause this game just keeps you striving
For things that can't be won
'Cause how do you reach perfection?
Acceptance of who we are?
When nothing ever seems right
When the goal just seems so far
It never will be good enough
We never will approve
Just one more time is useless
'Cause there's always one last move

My struggle is my game now
Just want to say I've won
Too bad that day can't happen
Too bad the end will never come
So welcome to my struggle
To this place with constant pain
Welcome to this mental place
To this never ending game

Dated: May 8, 2006





PROLOGUE

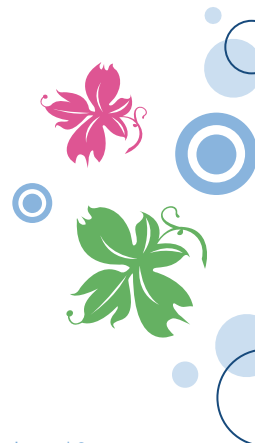
“Courage is not the absence of fear, but the moving ahead in spite of it.”

I don't even remember the exact day I met ED. To be completely honest, in the beginning, he wasn't even a huge part of my life or even part of my life at all. He was just one of those people that... you see every day, who is always there... but yet you never acknowledge them. You know those people... they're there... but you both have two completely separate lives so you rarely run into them. Your paths simply don't cross.

I'm not quite sure what it was that started my connection between me and... this stranger. Or what it was about ED that first caught my attention, and why I suddenly became so attracted to him. I do know that it didn't happen all at once. It was gradual -happened without me even realizing it. You know that feeling when you're falling for someone and suddenly that person becomes your entire life sooner than you had expected? That person becomes so much a part of your life... and so much a part of you. That was ED. He was my life. ED was a part my present and my future as far as I could see. Nothing else mattered. Any hopes, dreams, ambitions that I used to have no longer mattered. ED was everywhere. He was what mattered, and I was fine with that. I was living for someone else. Plus, ED was worth it... or so I thought.

When things started to get rough between me and ED, you'd think that would've been a warning sign to get out of the relationship while I could. But somehow... no pain was too deep, no fear was too great and no obstacle was too big to actually risk losing ED. Sure, things were getting more difficult. He became more controlling and continued to take over me and overpower me everyday. He became so sure and so confident of the hold he had on me, that the option to escape him wasn't even possible. I was trapped and soon became tired of the damaging and life threatening toll he was having on me. I started to realize how deep into this relationship I had gotten myself and how my mind, body and soul were suffering. I allowed ED to push me, just as I continued pushing simply to please him. Too bad I couldn't realize that pleasing ED wasn't a reality. ED never could be pleased... and he never will be. Nothing is ever quite good enough - ever.

I wanted out. I wanted to leave and I had realized that my life, my reality, pain, frustration, confusion and fear... that all of it was ED now. ED was the reason behind my new life and my new inescapable world. I did try... because I wanted out. But it didn't matter. I couldn't forget ED. How could I forget him when he wouldn't leave?





When he wouldn't let me forget him? He haunted me. Eventually I'd start to understand this but still... how do you leave the one person who has been the biggest influence on the person you are? I was who I was at that time because of ED. He was my safe zone. Leaving him would mean taking a chance. Taking that chance of going somewhere so foreign and leaving the only thing in my life I actually knew. ED was someone that I became comfortable with... he was my safe place. After all, I had been spending day in and day out with him for the last couple months? Year? It didn't matter how much I hurt, or how much confusion and harm my body and mind were undergoing... it just didn't matter. Because when something or someone is that familiar, and that close to you... when you know them that well and

really, they are the only life you do know... you can't "just leave" (or "just eat" in the literal meaning) to fix the problem. "Just leaving" won't get rid of the memory, the scars or the thoughts. You hear the people who have been in your life all along tell you that they love you, and that you're in danger. Mhmm... well guess what guys? It's not that easy to "just leave". To look at something and know and understand that you need to leave it, and that you want to so bad... but you can't. You can't because yeah, you're scared. Scared for your life. And everyone only watches. They only see. They don't understand my relationship with ED because they're not the ones in it.

Facing ED and deciding to leave... actually leaving ED forever... was my fear. I bet if I told all those people to go face their personal fears of bungee jumping, or spiders or the dark things that they were afraid of... they'd be a lot more reluctant. You see, the thing with ED is that although he was a big fear of mine... leaving him scared me even more.





LIFE BEFORE ED

Here's The Story...

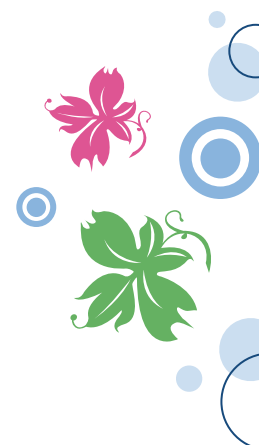
Did I ever live a normal life? Honestly, what is “normal” anyway? Personally, I don’t believe there is such a thing. I do know that my whole life hasn’t just been one long struggle with ED. It’s like any relationship - you need to meet them, hang out with them, start “seeing” them, date them, get to know them and eventually live with them.

I don’t remember the first moment I met ED. I don’t remember because I didn’t think anything of him at first. He was just another person, another voice... and I had better things to worry about than anything he said. My mind was focused elsewhere. I was in a different stage in my life and a different state of mind. I was happy, busy, and young. I didn’t worry so much about what other people said, or what other voices were talking.

Like everything in life though, things changed. I started growing up and entering a new stage. ED still didn’t play a huge role, but for some reason I did start to notice him more. Maybe not a lot, but there came a point where he became more influential to me. Up until that point, his voices were left for other people to hear. I would walk by him and not take in anything he said. But then, for one reason or another, his voices seemed to travel a little closer to my heart and I began to hear him and consider his words. Not a lot, but he wasn’t completely unknown to me anymore.

In fact, the more I saw him, the more I listened to him. I hardly knew him at all, but there was something about him that seemed to capture me. He took hold of my heart and made me want to keep searching until I found exactly what I was looking for. Eventually, I would realize that the “something” I was searching for would never come because each time you come closer to finding it? You’re pushed to find the next greatest reward. At this point though, I wasn’t aware of that. The only thing I could see was ED. I wanted to learn more about him... I wanted to be with him. He fascinated me. It’s like that silent, quiet individual that keeps to themselves - the kid at the back of the class who no one notices. He talks to a few people... but not a lot because many don’t pay any attention to him. And if they did, they don’t take him seriously enough to spend more time with him. But once you get to know them, and give them a chance, they open up and tell you more secrets and stories than you could have ever imagined.

That was ED. He was silent. He was discreet, and yet who would’ve ever thought that such a silent guy would ever have such power to capture me so tightly in his embrace. My heart felt for him... my mind was intrigued by him... and my body wanted him.



Soon, we started “seeing” each other. You know, that awkward stage where you’re more than friends but not quite close enough to be considered “going out”. There were different intervals in which I considered myself seeing ED. They were the little moments when I started thinking negatively about my body, or when I heard his voices and messages and actually took them to heart. Throughout Grade 5, during the summer of Grade 6 and then more seriously throughout my Grade 7 year, I became closer with him. I felt as if I actually heard and valued what he was saying. We’d get close, break apart, and get close again. For some moments in my life, he influenced me more... certain situations, obstacles and experiences. It was at my most vulnerable moments when that I decided to turn back to ED for comfort. But then, I’d break away and keep my distance once again. Regardless of any distance or how separate we became, one thing never changed: how silent, discreet ED seemed to always win my heart back and gain my attention once again. I never forgot about him and he was always there.

By the end of my grade 7 year and through that summer preceding grade 8... my days of seeing ED reached a new level. I couldn’t resist him any longer. We finally became close enough to consider ourselves GOING OUT. I needed him too much. I was in, and now I couldn’t turn back. It felt amazing... amazing to have someone to turn to, to rely on when everything in life seemed to be going wrong. ED became my comfort and he became my safety. When nothing else was going right... ED was there for me to hide my frustrations. Finally, I had someone.

That summer of grade 7, we became close. Without even realizing it, I was falling for him. Falling for that silent guy that at one point didn’t even have the ability to make me glance twice. Well, let me tell you... he made me look twice now! In fact, I couldn’t keep my eyes off of him. Every time he taught me something new about who he was... it only made me want to learn more. It made me want to keep going, keep falling for him and stay with him. I didn’t know him completely but I knew enough to realize I needed to have him. I would be lost without him. My time to really get to know ED would come sooner than I had even expected... and when it happened, I know I wasn’t ready. But that’s the thing with ED - he won’t wait until you’re ready. He’s too fast, too surprising and too deceiving... and I didn’t have a choice how fast I got to know him. The only thing I did know was that I was in too deep to just let go now... to walk away. I was with him and I had no concept of reality.

“I’m the only way you’ll amount to anything”

You’re WORTHLESS

“Don’t give in...one more pound...keep starving”

“You ate WAY too much”

“ When I looked in the mirror, I didn’t see reality. ED didn’t let me see reality. He created a distorted image of my appearance in my mind ”



Bronzed Perfection

I watch you powder your bronzed face,
That's the third time you'll do it today.
I watch as you perfect your appearance,
And watch everything that you say.
You say the words they want you to say,
In the tone that's so ditzzy and fake.
You walk with your confidence beaming,
With each perfect step that you take.

You're different when he is around you,
Why do you think you're the best?
You've turned into one of the 'everyone',
You look, talk and act like the rest.
Your pretending is downright perfected,
Who even are you today?

Your personalities change every minute,
With every fake word that you say.
You leave without saying goodbye now,
Your head lifted proudly so high.
Laughing and flashing your dimples,
Strutting your skirt walking by.
Your shirts all show your stomach,
You straighten your hair everyday.

Do you honestly think your convincing?
'Cause people DO see through your new ways.
So go on and powder your bronzed face,
It's the 6th time you'll do it today.
Keep on perfecting appearance,
Enjoy life being fake in all ways.

No One

Why try
When no one cares
No one see
No one notices,
Acknowledges
Why speak?
When no one listens?
Comprehends
Understands
Why am I here?
When to everyone else I'm not
When I'm always unhappy
Scared, confused, frustrated, alone
Hating yesterday
Dreading tomorrow
Fearing today
Why live? Why? Why... why...
Who knows...?
Who caress...
No one.

Dated: March 3rd 2004



ED's Timeline

Here's a brief timeline of my background before I met ED. In many ways, these early years prepared me for my meeting ED.



- I'm trying to grow out these hideous bangs. They're at that awkward length, just like I'm at that awkward fashion stage of my life. I don't know what's "in style" or what's "cool"... so I decide to take 10 hair clips to pin back my bangs. I put five on each side of my head to hold them back. At the time, I thought it looked good... until the day I was told by my baby-sitter that the clips made me look weird and different. I took in her comment, and the next day I came to school with only one pair of clips.

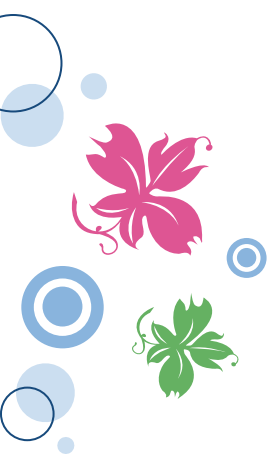
- I have been figure skating for the last 5-6 years. We perform "Ice Show" performances and this year I am a "class clown." There are two different outfits: one has baggy pants and a baggy buttoned shirt, the other is a body suit of tight spandex. No creases, no wrinkles... just skin tight spandex. I was one of those girls in the tight body suit. I hated it. Too uncomfortable... too tight... can see every inch of my body.



- My parents don't come watch my figure skating practices. They watch my brother's hockey practices though.
- I am a fast runner... one of the fastest in the class. I am outrunning boys this year.



- I am changing. Everything is changing. I need a bra, deodorant and a razor. Hmm... how do I ask mom for these things? That's embarrassing. She's the mom... it's her job to teach me, I shouldn't have to ask. Doesn't she know how awkward that is! I hear comments, "you're armpits stink," "don't you wear a bra?" I take the comments in. My wardrobe consists of three shirts - the only three that weren't completely see through. The only ones that hid the outline of my boobs at all. I need a bra... all of my friends have them. The friends that don't? They're so skinny that they don't need anything. What about a sports bra mom? Anything. Buy me something! But how do I ask? I can't. Too embarrassing. My armpits are hairy... but I don't own a razor. Plus, I wouldn't even know what to do? What do I use; soap, shaving cream, shampoo? I need to shave my legs too. I am a smelly, hairy, "blossoming" grade 5 girl... and I feel disgusting and hideous. I have no razor, no deodorant, and no bra... so embarrassed and ashamed.
- I enter Model Search Thunder Bay. I make the top 30 under 12, but that's it. I don't make it any further.





- My legs are definitely hairy now. Mom says it's blonde so no one will even notice. I don't care... just show me how to shave them! My eyebrows are dark and bushy. What do I do to them? Mom says she's never got her waxed... but her's are blonde. Pluck them? How? They make me look like a boy.
- My best friend just got her period. Uh oh. Will I get mine soon? What would I do? How do I put those... things... tampons... in me? They go inside? Weird... what if they get lost? Where exactly do they go? How do I know? I can't see down there! My other friend's mom showed her. Hmm... mom why don't YOU do that? You give me a book on puberty. A book. Great, I don't even know what half of those words are. I'm too embarrassed to ask.



- We have a tight group of friends. I guess we're "cool" because it was just us... and we hang out all the time. Where there was one of us, you can usually find the rest of us. So, if I'm not included in something... I feel alone and rejected.
- I had the reputation of being a "player". Why? Hmm... because I liked different boys? Because I changed my mind quite a bit? Funny eh? A PLAYER... in grade 6? Right. I don't even know if I had experienced my first tongue kiss yet! But you're right all you grade six peers that said I "led on" and "played" boys.... CLEARLY I AM a player. I didn't "go out" with these boys or hang out with them outside of school... no, but because I changed my mind about who I liked, I was a player. Reputations suck. Because it doesn't matter how true or untrue they are, they take so long to get rid of them... and they KILL your self-esteem.
- I'm in modelling classes this year. The mirrors make me look wider than my mirror at home. We look at professional models in magazines one day. Half of the girls aren't even attractive, just rake-thin. I ask my modelling teacher, "So basically, it doesn't matter how pretty you are or how gorgeous your face is, all that matters is your size?" "Yes," she replies. I never forget that statement.
- I believe my parents love my brother more than me. Even my grandparents. He's into all kinds of sports that they all go watch. He's good at all sports too. I'm only in modelling. At dinner, we talk about hockey and fishing. I just want to be noticed.
- I start wearing jeans this year. I had always hated them... they were too tight, too uncomfortable and you couldn't move freely in them. I like comfy clothes... but this year, I start caring more about the types of clothes I wear and what I look like.
- I bought and wore makeup everyday. I wasn't one of those "cake-face" girls that packed her face with orange liquid... but I did wear several different kinds of makeup. Mascara, eye liner, cover up, powder, sometimes eye shadow and lip gloss. I didn't like the 'natural' me.
- Summer of grade 6: BIBLE CAMP. I remember eating 3 sandwiches one day at lunch. It was the longest I had been away from home. I look at pictures now of that summer... my eyebrows are huge and bushy in them. I always hated my eyebrows.

Kid Crayons

Hello,
I don't know you...
Well, not technically... but,
I do know your thoughts,
Your dreams,
A basis of your life right now...

Considering these,
I know you pretty well...
...I know that I used to be you...
I used to think those thoughts...
Dream those dreams...
Live that life,
It's great isn't it?

Of course it is...
Your carefree... you're happy...
you're just living...
As if nothing else matters...
'Cause really, nothing else does
Not in that life
...where you don't have troubles...
Don't even know what worries are...
And problems? Hmm - is that what
happens when
Someone steals the last crayon
in the Crayola box?

Mmmmm... oh how I do wish Crayola
crayons were the biggest obstacle
we face
Or even the smallest?

But no...
Not here...
You know... I DO look up to you...
You're kind of... my idol...
I admire your innocence
Your will,
Your grace
Your freedom
Your happiness... and as I sit here
Watching you...

Smile in the endless hours of sunshine...
Colouring for endless hours with your
Crayola crayons...
I can only be reminded...
Of how one day,
You will be like me...
And it will be you here...
Watching someone else that is
carefree...

And I only hope..
And pray for you...
That during the days until that
moment to come,
That you stay strong...
Through all you WILL endure...
When your life is not so carefree...
Until then,
Enjoy your crayons...
Enjoy your sunshine...
and please, I do hope...
That you will never stop colouring
your way through life.





- I come home from Bible Camp and continued eating more than I ever had - sometimes TWO breakfasts. I see pictures of me during that summer... that ONE picture. I'm standing in my bathing suit... my tummy jets out of my two piece bathing suit... there's no space between my thighs. Mmhmm... I hate that picture. I started running this summer... not far, but still, I jogged.
- I sit at the lunch table in our cafeteria in September. "I don't understand how anyone could ever NOT eat" I had said. Ironic isn't it... considering my frame of mind just months later...



- We go to my brother's hockey tournament in Fort Frances during the winter months. I eat porridge for breakfast, but later throw it up. The walls are thin in hotel rooms, and my parents hear me. They confront me. But I'm not skinny yet... plus, my eyebrows are still bushy and hideous. I'm not pretty yet.
- I'm sitting at the picnic table outside. There's a bunch of us. One boy pipes up, "Hey Raija, I had a dream about you last night... you were a HUGE COW!" Sweet... if he had a dream that I'm a cow... it must be pretty obvious.
- I'm a perfectionist. Yeah, my marks matter... A LOT. I cry when I get two questions wrong on a math test. I freak out, "hyperventilate" you could say. When we do tests, teachers always tell the class who the highest marks belong to and usually, I was one of them. I always have been. I've always been an "ideal student". Hmm... a huge standard to continue to live up to... because nothing is ever quite good enough... ever.
- I get my period this year. It's weird and dirty. Yuck, I hate "diapers".
- I shave my legs this year. I can't stand the look of them! There's too much hair so I teach myself. I only shave sections first because I don't want to cut myself. Eventually, I'm shaving my thighs too.
- This year, I throw up salad. SALAD. I hate calories... I hate myself.
- Come March, I'm running everyday, every morning. Not for long... but I'm determined... motivated. Once I'm out there, I can do it. I don't care how cold it is.
- I weigh myself at every chance I get. After every meal, every run, every morning, afternoon and night. I needed to see if I was succeeding... and if I wasn't, I'd do anything to do so. Eventually, my parents take away the scales. Whatever-it doesn't stop me. I have friends with scales... I do it at their houses.
- My birthday arrives in April. I have a birthday dance party with everyone. I dance all night. There's Cheezies and chips and ice cream cake (these are my favourites!), but I don't touch anything... not until later anyway. I eat a whole bowl of Cheezies and three pieces of ice cream cake... all by myself.
- By the end of the school year, I'm throwing out lunches. Mom doesn't know this though. My parents think I eat them. I'm losing energy and get tired walking up the school stairway that I used to be able to run up. I'm losing my hair a bit and getting cold chills when my friends are hot. Yes. This is success though. I am doing everything right. I feel powerful knowing I can go a day without breakfast and lunch. Every meal I skip, every bit of food I resist, my power increases.

-
- I have a couple friends that think they're fat too. We trade secrets, tricks on HOW NOT to eat... HOW to throw up. They encouraged me... I want to do better than them. I needed to be the best at not eating. Perfectionist remember?
 - My best friend is TINY. She fits kid's clothes. People think we look alike - that we're sisters. We've even been asked if we were TWINS! We get this all the time. So why am I the fatter one? Are they crazy? We're not twins. I'm bigger... my clothing size even says so. If only I could be that tiny... then they really wouldn't know the difference!
 - I start eating low-fat, fat free and low calorie foods. If my family doesn't buy me skim milk, I tell them I won't drink anything. All or nothing right? I tell them I'm going vegetarian. I cut out meats completely from my diet and tell them it's because of "cruelty to animals". Really, meat just has way too much fat, and I want to be healthier. Fat free and low calorie are what the magazines say are healthy. I just want to be healthier.
 - My parents ask me if I'm on a diet. "No". Diets? I hate that word. Diets are stupid. Cutting back on calories? No... I'm just not hungry. I don't eat because I'm not hungry. I'm NOT dieting.
 - I start doing weird things with my food. I rip the crusts off my sandwiches and eat those first then rip my sandwich into pieces before I eat it, I wait until my cereal is soggy before eating it and then when I do eat it, I drink the milk first and eat the soggy cereal when all the milk is gone. I eat a carrot muffin every morning at snack time (it's a safe food for me), and rip it into a hundred little pieces before I eat it. I smell everything, but I won't eat it. The smell is enough. It fills me up so I don't have to eat.
 - I gain this fascination and obsession with food. I always want to make new recipes and cook, but I'll never try it. I read recipe magazines and watch cooking shows and have a new ambition to be a chef. I dream about what I'll eat the next day and plan out my meals. I think about food all the time.
 - The school year ends and it's summer. Bathing suit season. I'm running... sometimes twice a day. Well, I run when I have enough energy. I'm so tired lately... but yet I never sleep. Plus, I'm weak... get tired walking through the mall.
 - I'm constantly jumping, bouncing, tapping and moving in any way possible just to burn calories. I chew gum because it burns more calories without gaining any weight. I do sit ups whenever I can especially when no one can see me. I'll go into the washrooms when I'm at my friends houses just so I can sit on the floor and do crunches.
 - It's August Long weekend. We go camping every summer. I'm freezing this summer. I wear sweaters and jeans and pants. I'm angry and bitter towards everyone. I try, I really do... to be happy. We cook fish... I love fish, but I don't eat it. I'm not hungry. People out there tell me they're worried... tell me I'm making them mad by not eating. But I can't give in. I'm not hungry. I don't need to eat. I eat one apple... all day... and I'm okay with that. I'm soooo good at not eating. I can't give in. Eating fish would be giving in... I can't do that. My pants hang off of me. I see pictures from this one day that weekend... and I look horrible. I look... sick. My legs are tiny, my eyes are dark, it's summer and my cheeks are pale. One night I start crying. I run off to the outhouse and my best friend follows. She hugs me as I stand there... crying... balling... and I say, "I don't know what's wrong with me". I'm frustrated. I dunno anything right now.



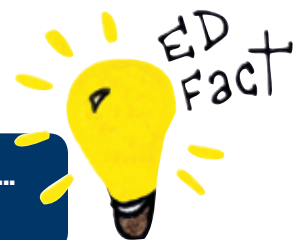
I need help. I tell her that. But how? Where is help? Did telling her help? Maybe... but she couldn't help me. She didn't understand. From then on, I felt different around her. I felt like she thought I was broken. It felt different. It wasn't her fault. She didn't know the world I was in. She did all she could do- listen, be there and stay there. That's all she could do.

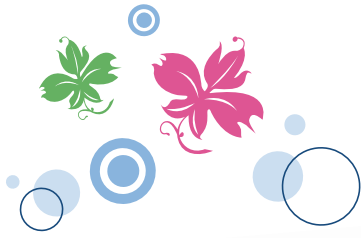
- It's my friend's birthday and as close as we are... I don't wanna go. I'm scared. Terrified that I won't be able to have fun. But I should go... so I do. I try. I try hard to have fun there... but the fake smile hurts too much. I can't laugh... so I leave... I tell them I'm sick. I am sick. I can't have fun with my own friends? What is wrong with me?
- It's the end of the summer now. My periods have stopped. My parents say I look "disgusting." I have this weird bruise on the spine of my back from all of the sit ups I do. My skin rubs against my spine I guess. I'm freezing. I have dark hair all over my back and arms. I'm weak... I get light headed when I stand up. My hands are purple and blue from being cold and having bad circulation. I cry everyday. I get nervous... really anxious. I move... all the time... fidget and tap and bounce anything to burn calories and stay warm. It hurts when I sleep on my side. My hip bones hurt if there's too much pressure on them. My hair is falling out... in clumps... everywhere. My long blonde hair... it looks greyish and dull. My eyes and cheeks are sunken in. Bones- collar bones, hip bones, back bones... everywhere, yet not enough. My stomach hurts... I'm constipated... I get diarrhea. I feel like my stomach is eating itself it's so hungry. I'm 5'3... I'm not growing anymore. I haven't grown for the last couple months. I am beautiful... these bones are beautiful... but still not beautiful enough. I see this image of bones as beauty. It's all worth it. No pain, no gain right? It's worth it all to be perfectly beautiful. But I'm not beautiful yet... not quite. Maybe one more pound? Maybe then I'll be good enough?

Nope... because I'm in 'love' with ED now. We're going out... it's official. And one more pound wasn't enough. He didn't approve. There weren't enough bones showing, there was still too much fat... keep losing. Keep not eating. You need to be beautiful. Perfect. You need to please. Keep going... be stubborn... be determined to please him.

There is only two more weeks before school starts. I sit in the doctor's office, after the blood work, weekly visits, vital signs, checkups, paperwork, questions, weigh ins, tests... what is wrong with me? Please tell me I have diabetes. Diagnose me already! I have all the symptoms... tired, weak, rapid loss of weight. My grandpa is diabetic... that must be the answer to my problems. I have diabetes... that's what's wrong with me. I sit there, and wait for the answers to my problems. The doctor says, "You have anorexia nervosa." What? Anorexia Nervosa? What is that? No, he has it wrong. I'm not hungry. People that are anorexic want to be on a diet... they choose to not eat. I'm not hungry. So I've lost a little bit of weight. Big deal. It's not my fault.

**Studies show that exposure to the "thin" ideal cause women to feel...
depressed, guilty, ashamed and stressed.**





Time to Journal...

Thoughts from Grade 7

I do not have the freckles that I've always wanted lining my nose. Not a lot of freckles, just little ones. To me, people with freckles are always pretty no matter what the rest of them looks like.

Many people say they like my smile, but at the same time they wonder why I have that small white circle, which is whiter than the rest of my tooth in the front of my mouth. I have my mom's skin-dry, crackly, dry, red, and dry, purple. I constantly have to put moisturizer on my hands 5 times a day. I envy all those whose hands are so gorgeous and pearly white. My toe nails are round and not square like everyone else's. I don't even like wearing sandals because of them. My finger nails are always chipping which makes them impossible to grow nice and long.

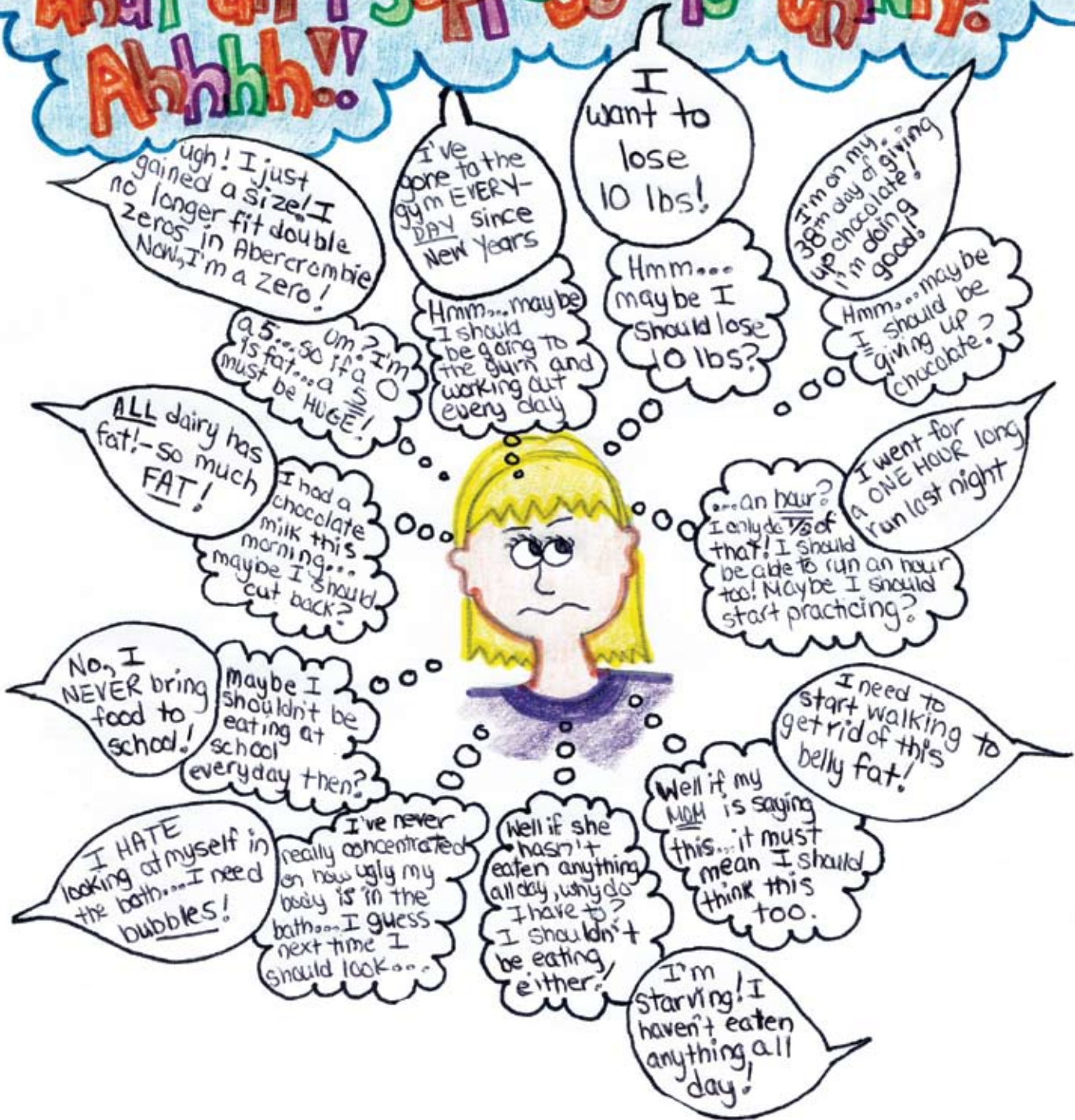
I wake up every morning with humongous dark circles under my eyes, going to school looking as if I just woke up a few minutes ago when really, I've been up for hours. My hair is short due to an unpleasant haircut. I wish I could have my long hair back again. I looked beautiful when I had it. My posture? That's a story - I can't stand up, sit down or do anything without slouching. I've tried to improve it but obviously, it hasn't worked.

“ In years from now it won't matter what shoes you wore, how your hair looked, or what jeans you bought. What will matter is what you learned and how you used it. ”



"WHAT AM I SUPPOSE TO THINK?"

Abhhhh!!



Outside voices play an influential role. These are not even the ones that are said to us. These comments are ones that we hear from our friends, mothers, coaches... anyone we look up to. Their insecurities become ours and we start to rethink our own flaws and concentrate on everything we are doing wrong.

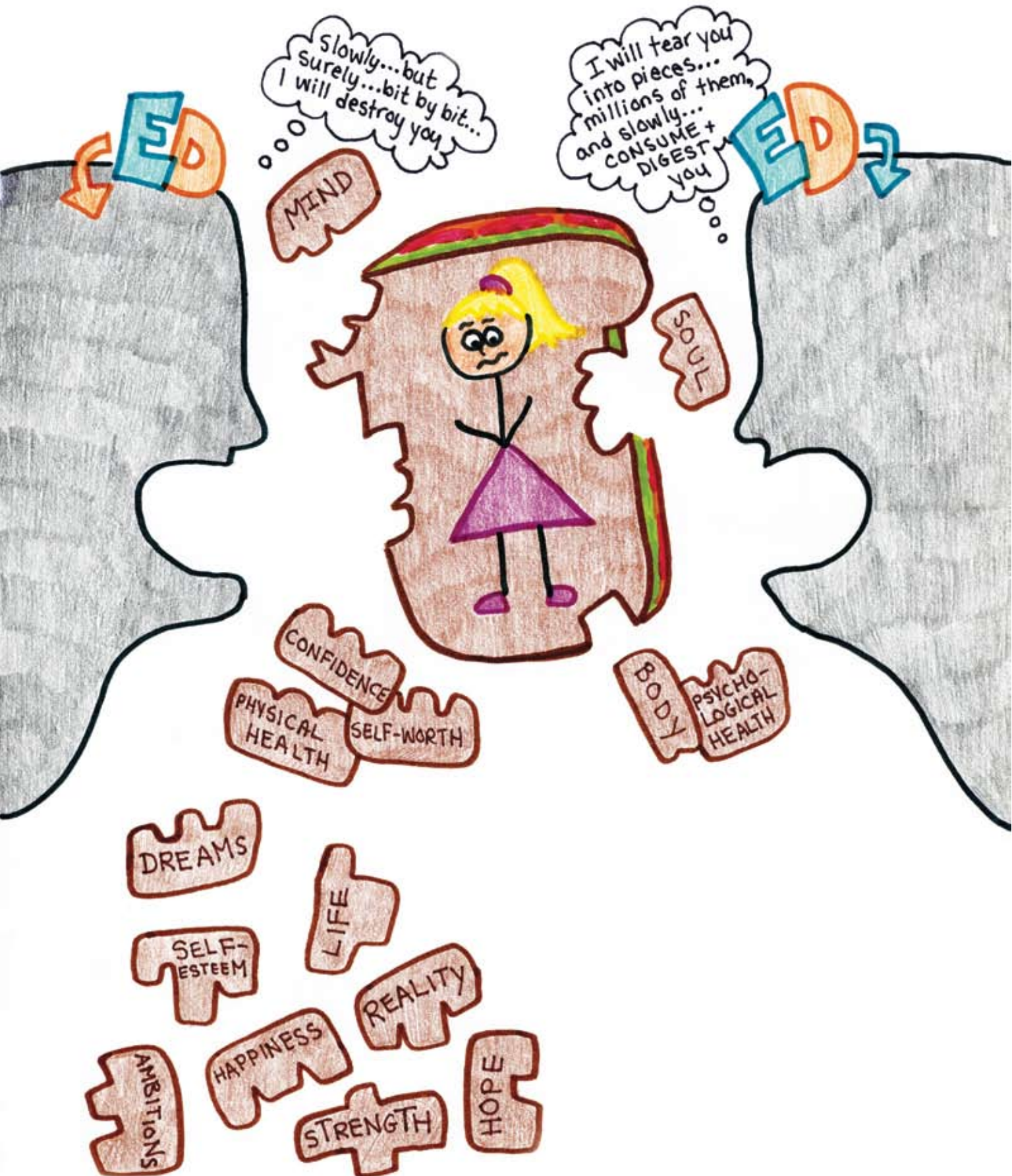


- School starts and an old teacher makes a point of telling me that he's worried about me, that I'm too skinny. I shrug it off and say once again, "I'm fine". Go away... all you people annoy me. Really though, inside... I am anything but fine. I am dying... I am killing myself. ED is killing me.
- I meet a whole team of doctors, psychiatrists, dieticians, psychologists, and psychometrists. I live in a world of sickness and spend many mornings and sessions in hospitals. I keep hearing threats, "you will end up in the hospital if you don't start eating". But I won't. Not me. Hospitals are for sick people. I'm not sick.
- My doctor gives me BOOST. He tells me I have to drink it three times a day! HA! I don't even eat three times a day! I'm not hungry and I don't need it. I'm fine. Liquid food? Please. It's gonna make me even fatter. Tons of calories. Tons of fat. I don't need it. It scares me. It's gonna BOOST up my body to fatness.
- But I keep losing weight. They threaten me... tell me that if I "lose one more pound, I'll be admitted to the hospital".
- Weigh-in time again. I wear tons of layers... partly because I'm cold... partly because I need to be as heavy as possible for these weigh-ins. I've lost one pound, but I'm not in the hospital. Clearly, they're just using it as a threat.
- My parents offer to make me anything I want. Any dinner. My 'used-to-be' favourites. But they don't get it. I can't eat it. Sometimes I want to... I do... I mean, I forget the taste.... I forget what food is even like. I want to eat it so bad, but I can't... physically I cannot. I want to... but my mind won't let me. I'll hate myself TOO MUCH. It's a weird feeling, and I can't explain it... but I just know that I've come too far to be skinny. I can't give in now.
- My next appointment is at the outpatient room at the hospital. It's a beautiful day, but my world is hell. I'm freezing. The nurse takes my temperature twice because she doesn't believe how cold I am. Weigh in time: I lost. "You remember what I said Raija. You lost weight. I told you one more pound and you'll need to stay in the hospital." Ha... noooo... I don't belong here.

But it was too late. I had too many chances. This was it. ED became my reality on this day. This was my first day of my hospital stay - my seven week stay in the hospital. ED had become too much for me to handle; I had lost control, and now I was paying for it.

Slowly, but surely he had now become so much a part of me that I was captured... enclosed within his grasp. I was deeply involved with ED... deeply controlled by his order, instruction and influence. He was killing me... and the first day in the hospital proved this reality to me. I was losing in my fight against him, and suffering to the point that I no longer had any control over myself. I belonged to ED. The hospital was our home now - mine and ED's... and it was only the beginning in really coming to understand and know him.

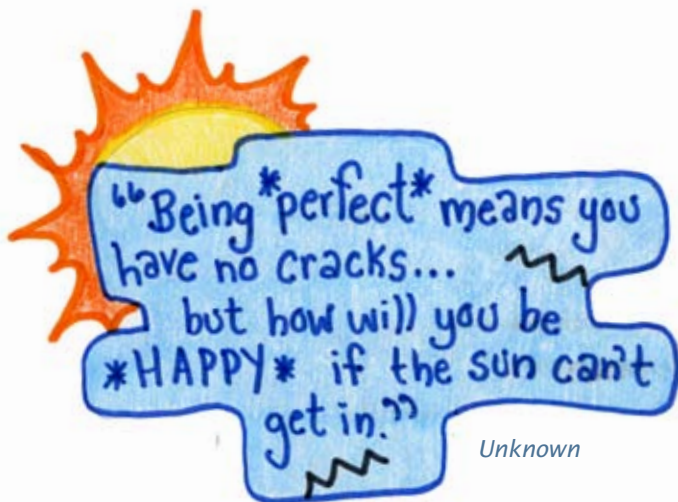




Anorexia

I look in those eyes
And all I can see
Are mixed up emotions
That want to be free
Those eyes sure are dark
And filled with great pain
Just want to be thin
Just don't want to gain
Counting the calories
Which cracker has more?
Won't eat it anyway
Just like times before
Those eyes, they look scared
They look helpless and weak
Don't want to do anything
No energy to speak
That face, it looks pale
With cheeks sunken in
But that's what is beautiful
When you're dying to be thin
Those eyes they look hurt
And I often see tears

But no pain, no gain
Is what an anorexic hears
Those eyes sure are frustrated
Get mad at the world
Then get mad at one self
For being an ugly, fat girl
I can see the confusion
When these eyes suddenly cry
Will break down and throw fits
No knowing why
Can't focus or think
People are mad
They say to start eating
And stop making them sad
If it were that easy
I'm sure it'd be done
But it's tough for anorexics
Just laughing and fun
That hair loses brightness
As it slowly falls out
The mind doesn't care
But the heart has doubt
Those eyes say they want help
But don't know what to do
Don't know what is wrong
Don't want to believe that it's true
Because I look in those eyes
And all I can see
Is that mirrored reflection
Looking back is me





“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times challenge and controversy.” *Martin Luther King Jr.*

The following excerpts are directly from the diary I kept while in the hospital from September to October 30, 2002

September 11, 2002

Well I'm officially in a hospital. I've been hospitalized. Me - Raija Elizabeth Begall. Hmmm... no matter how you put it... the word hospital proves to be somewhat unflattering and unwelcoming. I still think I'm in shock. I look just like those people on TV... that have to wear the gown (which by the way is freezing!) This gown also shows my extremely unshaven legs... eek! I want my flannel PJ's... I want my bedroom... I want my stuffies... I want school and my friends... and to be healthy... I don't like having to feel completely invalid!! I hate seeing the stupid hospital band on my wrist-it's so ugly! They just took me by wheelchair! There's absolutely nothing wrong with my legs and they take me by wheelchair because they don't want me "burning calories"! I feel so useless!! I wanna exercise, burn some calories and build my bones... but I have to stay in bed! "Bed rest" they call it. It's so annoying! They're treating me like I'm helpless and not letting me do anything alone. I hate it!

2:00 PM

My scheduled snack time. I feel so full after lunch - but... I did eat and drink everything they gave me! I wouldn't be doing all this and trying so hard if getting out of here wasn't the top priority in my life right now! There was a nurse that came in while I ate and she watched me! It was kind of freaky. I felt like I was the main exhibit for some show or something. I could feel her eyes on me as I slowly tore apart my sandwich (LOL - yup! I ripped it up and ate the crusts first - just like at home. Just 'cause I'm in a public hospital doesn't mean I'm gonna stop my ways!) As I slowly drank that yucky 2% milk, I knew she was WATCHING me!! She makes me feel self-conscious! Then they made her stay for ONE HOUR after I finished eating to make sure... oh I don't even know! Maybe to make sure I didn't throw it up? But they don't even let me go pee or into the washroom until a full hour after eating so that wouldn't even work! Oh! This is so stupid!! I'm not bulimic!! That's not why I'm in here! I'm in here because I don't eat. Why can't they just have someone supervising me while I eat?! Instead of ALL THE TIME?

2:25 PM

At the moment I have a strawberry RESOURCE sitting in front of me which tastes alright but it's a BIG glass full!! And, I only have 15 minutes to drink it. Mom just came back and told me that when she told my friends at school that I was in the hospital, they started writing letters for me!! Aww!!! Love 'em so much! UGH! I've never drank this much BOOST so fast in my life! It is good, but heck! After the first couple sips I was full! It's so filling!! I feel like an elephant. No... like a tub of lard!!! But you know what? If it means I'm gonna be outta here sooner and better... then it's worth it! I wish I could be at home where I could blast my music and dance and get stronger muscles and exercise and take a walk (someplace farther than to the washroom!) or run or do something worthwhile that will help get back my strength. The nurse has been explaining things to me and has answered all my questions so far. Then there was a lady in a pink dress that came to see me this morning and I think she was a psychologist. She asked me the same questions everyone else has! Gosh that gets annoying! I feel like I'm some study for all these doctors and nurses! There's this one nurse who checks on me every 15 minutes when it's meal time and encourages me without hounding me or pushing me to do it. When I finished, she congratulated me and told me she understood how I felt feeling bloated and all... and I believe her. She really does seem to understand and have a lot of patience. I hope she's my nurse for however long I'm in here! (Which is going to be no longer than Friday if all goes according to my plans!)

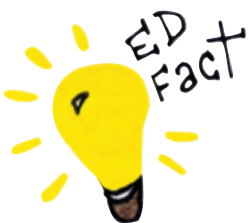
Friday September 13, 2002

9:43 AM

This is so stupid! They didn't even let me get up early this morning! I mean at least yesterday they let me get away with getting up at 6:30 am... but this morning they actually made me sleep in till 8:00! The doctor came in and told me that I DID gain weight but only 0.2! Not even a pound!

11:40 AM

What's even worse is that the doctor said that I could be in here for another 2-4 weeks! I wanna go to Hip Hop Dance and Modelling and Piano! And back to school! This is so stupid!! Plus, today they gave me a vanilla RESOURCE!! I specifically ask or strawberry and what do I get?! Vanilla?! Sometimes it feels like they purposely do what I hate! I had some visitors today and my aunt sent me a card with a bible verse on it that says, "He himself has said, I will not in any way fail you, nor give you up, nor leave you without support". It's sweet, and I've been getting lots of flowers from family and even teachers! I feel so special and loved... but at the same time I feel like I don't deserve all of these gifts... I mean it's not something that I'm proud of... I guess it feels like I'm being rewarded for being in the hospital. I know everyone means well and all, but I don't know if I like all of the attention.



90% of those who deal with eating disorders are women.

Saturday September 14, 2002

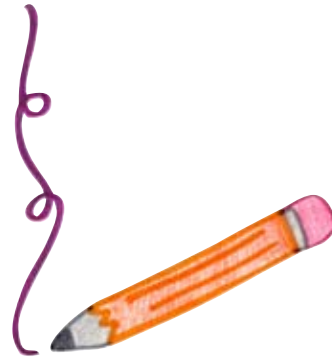
4:30 PM

Well... I'm in a new room. It's brighter and bigger and much more spacious but somehow my emotions and moods are still the same-this place is lame. I even miss my brother. As weird as it sounds... after hugging him yesterday and hearing him say he'll be thinking of me... he made me realize how cool he is. I can tell he doesn't like me being in here... I guess it must be weird to him to have to visit his sister in the hospital instead of seeing her after school and stuff.

5:33 PM

I just finished eating a peanut butter and jam sandwich - yum. Too bad the nurse watched me the whole time! And she made me cry again! I dunno what it is with her making me cry but she seems to know exactly how. And yesterday this is what she said to me, "I don't think you realize how serious this is because you keep flexing your muscles and moving your legs". MY GOSH!! Who is she to tell me that I don't realize how serious this is? I'm the one who has it! I'm the one who's not allowed to walk anywhere because they don't want me losing calories? I like it much better when nurses make conversation when I'm eating because it makes me distracted! That way I'm not thinking about it and FORCING it down. You know what else one of them said to me about my eating? "That's really hard for you isn't it?" No kidding its hard! You don't even know the half of it!

*The four pink walls surround me
And seem to squish me in so tight
The room feels small and spooky
It lacks the sun's true light
I look like I am happy
But these smiles are surely fake
I cry myself to sleep at night
But wear a mask when I'm awake*



Sunday September 15, 2002

10:27 AM

Today I ate breakfast without breaking it into little pieces! ☺ I'm getting good!! ☺ I'm kinda cold... freezing. I wish this room was warmer. I have a headache again too and I'm feeling a bit tired. It's going to be a long day... especially when I'm sitting here listening to Shakira on 105.3 - I miss my country music! Ya know what I've come to the conclusion of though - I may not be having the greatest day in the world... or the greatest week for that matter... but someone in the world is. I dunno why, but that makes me feel happy knowing that someone is having the best day of their life today.



Plus, I may be in here... but I'm happy to know that no one else I know had to go through what I am going through. I'm happy that none of my friends are in here. Watching the sun come up this morning was so beautiful... and I'm happy for them that they're allowed to get out and experience it. I think it's true what they say about how this place changes people. I knew it would suck... but this is even more awful than what I had imagined. I'm never going to take one day for granted ever again-that's a promise.

1:36 PM

I gained 0.2! 😊

Monday September 16, 2002

3:54 PM

My psychologist came to visit me again today. 😊 She gave me this book that talks about eating disorders, the process of change and how change consists of steps. Some people move forward and backward many times before reaching the final goal. Come to think of it... within the past year, I think that's been the case with me. I mean obviously, it started off with me not eating and then throwing up last year... then I overcame that, but only because Track and Field was coming. When Track was over, I think I snapped back. I mean the only reason I started being healthy again was because I wanted to place in track... and when I didn't... I think it was a bit discouraging for me. I mean, I worked so hard and gave up a life that would've eventually led me to a thin body, and I never gained anything out of that. I never won any medals, didn't place at all. One goal I do have that I hope to achieve is that I want to be able to look in the mirror and like what I see... but not because it's what's staring back at me... I want to smile at my reflection knowing that it's what's beneath the surface that I'm smiling at. Very few people are able to honestly say that they can do that and someday I hope to be one of the few. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not this year... maybe not even in the next ten years... but someday I'll be able to do that. And ya know what? I'm already on my way there. I'm getting through an eating disorder and wow, it's tough, but ya know what? I believe that overcoming the toughest obstacles will lead to the best and most deserving outcomes. I'm going to get through this and I needed help in order to do so... thankfully I'm allowing people to help me. Some people live their whole life thinking that they can conquer it on their own... and these people usually have the toughest times. While it's not good to ask for help all the time, if there's something that can't be handled alone-let someone take your hand and help guide you through it. It's these joining hands that keep our world turning. I've got so many helping hands guiding me through this... between friends and family and nurses and doctors... and I can honestly say that I know I am not alone... And from all the support, I know I'll never be alone again. Kinda reassuring, eh?



It's estimated that there is one man for every 20 women with anorexia.

The Nine Forms of Distorted Thinking

* Individuals with Mental Illness will exhibit some or all of this Distorted Thinking *



All-or-Nothing

The 'black or white' thinking pattern. (e.g. "If I'm not perfect, then I'm completely useless.")



Labelling

Giving themselves a harsh label or the label of a 'failure' when they make a mistake that realistically is insignificant. (e.g. "I can't believe I got that one question wrong! I'm so STUPID and shouldn't be in this grade!")



Over-Generalization

When the person makes a slight mistake but believes that they'll never get it right. (e.g. "I lost weight again! I'm never going to get better and healthy!")



Mental Filtering (This one happens a lot!)

The person will disregard any positive comments said about them and concentrate completely on the negative. They will insist that nothing positive was ever said and that one ever compliments them.

(e.g. A comment like, "This is the best essay you've ever written! You only had a few grammar errors!" will be interpreted as if the person is a failure because of the minor grammar errors. In an ED relationship, one will concentrate completely on the negative aspect and disregard any reference to success or accomplishment.)



Discounting the Positive

Believing that achievements are nothing out of the ordinary and that "anyone could succeed at the task". (e.g. Responding to compliments with, "it's not even good", "everyone can do this" "I didn't do anything special".)



Jumping to Conclusions

Assuming the worst based on no evidence. (e.g. "That person didn't smile at me. They must hate me. I must have done something wrong. What did I do?")



Magnification

Exaggeration of importance of problems and minor annoyances. (e.g. "I didn't exercise for the full 2 hours, so clearly it was all pointless!")



Emotional Reasoning

Confusing emotions for reality. (e.g. "I feel fat so I must BE fat!")



Personalizing the Blame (also seen A LOT in ED relationships!)

Believing that things are his/her fault when in reality they are completely out of the victim's control. (e.g. "The car accident happened because I ate breakfast today! I shouldn't have eaten because now everything is going wrong because of me!")

Help

I sit here in this quiet room
...the walls so small, so close
Silence
Discomfort and fear
You look at me
...I can tell... you're reading me...
Judging me in a way...
I hate it 'cause
...I thought I came here to escape that
...escape those thoughts
Escape the judging...
But no...
You stare...
...long and hard...
And when you finally do speak...
You question me...
Ask stupid questions...
That you have to ask...
But ones you know the answer to...
...ones that I can't even answer...
...you've heard it all
I'm no different
Each answer I do give...
You.... hear...
And judge...
Decide how you're going to interpret it...
What you'll think of me now...
And, by the way...
I just met you...
And yet... I'm supposed to...
Give you my truth?
My thoughts?
Dreams?
Fears...? To you?
...To this person...
...I don't even know...

But maybe...
It's better that way...
Because...
...you didn't know me before...
And you never did judge me...
...you never knew my faults...
My strengths... my weaknesses...
All you know...
Is what you know now...
...what I show you...
And it's scary...
Because even I...
Have no idea who that...
...person is...
But on day one...
...and through until day...
(What is it? 100 by now?)
You knew... and
...you DO know...
Because you've reminded me...
...From time to time...
Days I seem to forget...
Seem to lose sight of it...
...Thank you.
You help remind me...
That I can do it.
I can escape the...
Thoughts that judging causes
...I can believe.
You tell me that
I can also fear...
That it's understandable to fear...
Really?
That I can be confused?
Angry?
...and hurt?

And pained..?
 ...and these are normal?
 Wow.
 I'm... normal?
 ...never thought anyone
 ...could ever speak that of me...

 And suddenly... as I learn of your
 HOPE
 ...for me, and my battle.
 These walls don't seem so small.
 And suddenly I want to talk...
 ...and away goes the silence...
 There's no more quiet...
 The walls don't seem so close
 You still look at me...
 ...but in a helping way...
 In a knowledgeable, comforting way,
 And it's this that makes me see
 That maybe it's those people
 ...who least knows you...
 Really...
 Know you best?
 Because they don't continuously judge...
 ...who you were.
 How can they?
 When they only know...
 ...who you are? Today... now...
 They don't know about past mistakes...
 ...unless I tell them...
 So... they can't judge me...

 Hmmmm... if only there
 Were more of you...?
 ...more people who listened...
 Listened to the person I am...

The fight I am
 fighting...
 Why I am... so
 different.



- Unknown

But I guess that's what's so different...
 About this special room...
 ...is that...
 I'm not judged for who I was...
 I don't have to be anyone else...
 ...I don't have to speak of things...
 ...that I don't want to say...
 Or face people who...
 ...make me feel worthless...
 'Cause in here, there's no...
 Pretending...
 ...no fake...
 Just me.
 ...Just me...
 Who I am...
 ...all of me...
 The girl you and I both know today...
 ...and really...
 Isn't that what really matters?
 Isn't today the only thing that exists?
 Really... the only thing that matters?
 ...not the mistakes of yesterday...
 ...fears of tomorrow...
 Just...
 ...TRUTH and HOPE...
 ...for today...
 ...I would like to think so.
 Thank you for helping me think so.

Dated: May 10, 2006

Thursday September 19, 2002



These "Nutritional Drinks" became a regular part of my day; at every meal, every snack, 6 times a day!

7:30 AM

Ah! They let me get up early today at 7:30 instead of 8:00 (which never happens!), but I dunno if it's a good thing 'cause now I'm missing out on my secret exercising time! At like 6:30-7:00 every morning, I do crunches and bicycle rides on the bed to burn some calories. What? It's the only time I actually have privacy! Anyway, so the other day when I didn't gain weight, they increased my intake!! Toast AND jam AND margarine AND bran flakes AND milk AND grape juice! Eee! Toast AND cereal for breakfast!??? At snack time, they gave me half of a can of BOOST - yuck!! Too filling!! Then supper later was an egg salad sandwich... yum!! I had been craving that for the longest time but was too scared to have all the calories and fat and eggs! I'm so happy they fed that to me! My best friend came up to visit me today and she brought me flowers! She stayed for like one and a half hours and it was nice to just chill. LOL. Well, I was exercising and she sat and chilled. When she left, I felt a bit sad though and I think she did too. I hate being in here! And I hate it when company leaves! Everyone looks so sad to see me in here... that's been the case with everyone visiting me. The depression doctor came in today and started talking about depression and then asked more stupid questions. I got a questionnaire to fill out too! She said that it might come to the point where I need anti-depressants! What?! She said that right now it seems like a secondary thing and that the reason I'm depressed is because of the eating disorder... but do they ever think that the eating disorder is the secondary thing and that depression is what's causing me to not be hungry?! I think it's kinda funny that the thing that determines whether someone is gonna be put on drugs for depression is a piece of paper!! I mean how many people lie on those things?! I know I just did!

7:01 PM

(Sigh) Daddy just left... we had a good lil' chat-and it reminded me of just how much I love him and why I love him. I can relate to him better than any other adult. I told him some of the ways I felt and some of my reasons but obviously there's still a lot more to cover, but I mean it's a start. He only stayed for like 15 minutes but I mean, every minute counts! And every minute I spend with a visitor makes my day that much brighter!

Friday September 20, 2002

8:39 AM

My psychologist told me today that terror is a big part of this. She compared her fear of heights to mine of food - which totally makes sense. I mean, as much as I've denied it before... I think as much as I want to eat food... I'm scared to. Which really does make a lot of sense. Everyone wants to overcome their fears... but at the same time, they're scared to take the steps and do the things that it'll take to overcome them. What people don't realize is that someone who's afraid of heights or of jumping out of a plane is the SAME thing as me - someone who's terribly afraid of food and eating. If anything, maybe my fear is even a bit worse because whether I can find the courage within to get over it and whether I can find the strength, determines my life. Whether I eat or not determines



whether I live or not. Some people can go their whole life scared of spiders... and have that fear follow them until the day that they die at 100 years old! But me? My life is on the line because of something I'm scared of... because of my biggest fear. I'm so glad my psychologist made me realize that today. She's been teaching me so much and helping me so much... she's so great. 😊 Ya know what else I've realized? That this (being in here I mean) has changed me in another way. When I hear a child cry now, I think "oh, that poor child" instead of "shut up stupid thing"... 'cause I think I can relate to this poor screaming child that's stuck in here like me... this place is one big learning opportunity. 😊



Saturday September 21, 2002

9:16 AM

While watching the sun come up this morning, I made up a new quote: "The sun isn't always gonna shine on you but it's still there. Sometimes you have to fight your way through the shade in order to reach the light". Does that make sense? LOL. Well it makes sense in my head. But seriously though, sometime we have to go look and find the light and actually make an effort to overcome clouds and to step outta the shade no matter how tough it may be. The answers aren't always just gonna be there and I've learned that first hand. It's not as simple as 'just eating'. I have to eat and not feel guilty. I'm making an effort-one hell of an effort to get past this and though I may have some tough times in the shade now, I'm getting through it. Eventually my world - well at least the eating disorder part of it - will be nothing but sunlight. First it might be just a couple sun rays taking over the shade... in fact maybe I'll have to wait another year before the sun's totally shining but eventually I have confidence it will. Everyone's been saying how tough this is for me and I've never really thought much about it... but now I'm realizing how tough it is. How tough is it to keep all this food down and feel happy about it instead of fat n full... how tough not being outside is... how tough eating meat will be, how tough having nurses WATCH me eat is, how tough not being in the things I love is... how tough school is without a teacher teaching me... how tough it is to understand everything that's happening. Life is tough though. If we weren't challenged, we wouldn't learn anything. We wouldn't experience anything new... we wouldn't realize things about ourselves we never knew before... we wouldn't discover ourselves... and I think that's why God makes life tough. I'm glad he does.

Sunday September 22, 2002

9:42 AM

My cousin came up to visit me last night and OMG she's so pretty compared to me! She's so lucky that she gets to wear her makeup and blow-dry her hair and be so beautiful... so lucky to be her. She's got so much to live for. My aunt said that my hair is thinning. Sweet. So I lose the hair on my head and gain it on the back of my neck and stomach - that's not cool. Not cool at all. And I feel so fat around my thighs... ugh... they're touching and I hate it... maybe I will just go back to the way I was when I get out? Oh, and I was just running in the shower room... (Sigh)... I wanna go for a run.



- Unknown



↳ Sometimes you have to fight your way through the shade in order to reach the sunlight ↳

Tuesday September 24, 2002

9:05 AM

Yup - my life sucks... everything is definitely going all wrong at the same time!! I lost weight today... OMG! How is that even possible when they feed me so flipping flying much!? I guess I am constantly moving and I do exercise during visiting hours... and in the morning, and run in the shower and bathroom... but all of that is only to rebuild muscle! And muscle weighs more than fat so how come I ain't gaining?! This is so damn confusing. I don't even know what the doctors and family are gonna say! And now I have to increase my calories! I ran in the shower again today... and in the bathroom. As soon as I get out of here, I'm going for a run - I have to. As strange as it sounds, even jogging in the bathroom for 2-4 minutes (if that!) made me feel... better. I miss my home... and my room... and my space.... and privacy. I miss my old life.... this just feels like such a waste. I mean my mind has hardly changed at all. It's changed in the aspect that I definitely think I've become more mature and learned and realized new things... but if I were to go to Applebee's with my family... I don't think I'd be able to eat fettuccine alfredo... and that's what I learned from being in here. I thought that 3-4 weeks in here would make me see that I should and can eat the food I haven't had in so long... but so far, I've been wrong. Two weeks tomorrow, and I still don't feel better. I know I'll be healthy once I'm out and I know I'll look healthy and fat... but I wanna be able to psychologically feel that good. I look better now already. I have colour and I'm a little bit fatter. It's sad looking at the other anorexic girl. Her face is literally yellow. No joke. Was I ever like that? Do I look as sick as her? I really hope not.

6:21 PM

This is the first time I've ever felt full after supper... and I don't like it. They're increasing my food intake because I didn't gain weight today. I MUST be eating more calories than what's recommended. I'm up to 2700 calories a day! I dunno how many I'm supposed to be getting but I'm not fond of this 2700. Ugh... I feel so fat. My stomach is about to explode. Once I'm out I'll go back to being vegetarian, skim milk, drinking lots of water, exercising lots and not eat cheese, milk, two cans of juice, toast, margarine, jam, cornflakes all before school for breakfast! I dunno if I wanna go back to school... what will people say when I'm fattened up? Will anyone like me? Will they come out and say that I've gained weight? Will I be sexy? My mind says no, but I hope that's not the case. I loved myself at 105lbs... at 90lbs... I'm not going up to 110-115lbs-sorry but that's way too scary! My clothes will be super tight on me! This is so freakish... what if I look like a freak? I know I will if I gain lots. I'm so scared. I think I always will be.

Wednesday September 25, 2002

6:58 AM

I'm full but I can honesty say that I enjoyed eating all that. And... I enjoyed feeling full. I never thought I'd say that but I mean it 100%. Ya know what else I figure? I think it's



because I was able to go outside and get some physical activity today! It was... freedom. Yes! That's exactly what it felt like! FREEDOM! I feel so much better... so much healthier... and ya know what? I had a double chin today and I don't care! Why? Because I got to go out for a run! The most wonderful run I've ever experienced I think. Hmm... ya know what's frustrating though? My family only tells people what they're proud of about me... like... it's not as if they're proud of me for being who I am... and doing the things I want to do... it always feels as if they're only proud of the things that they like or that they want to be proud of or want me to be doing. What about what I want to do?? I know they love me... I just wish they could find some reason to be proud of me for the things I enjoy NOW and not what I used to like or for what once was.



9:11 AM

New quote! Love is the best medicine... so true. Love is the only thing that has gotten me through this. Food has only played a tiny part compared to the love everyone has showed for me. I feel so fat... I hate this feeling right now... I feel like a giant pork chop... it's literally hurting me. I could actually feel the food in my throat as if I was gonna throw up or something. They don't realize how much physical and psychological pain this is. My stomach feels like it has boulders in it! The other anorexic girl in here told me that she has panic attacks and that's why she spends so much time in the washroom. She's calming herself down preparing herself for the food. Do I do that? Oh! I'm allowed to walk now though... all the way from my bed to the washroom! Better than nothing! They still don't want me burning calories, but at least I'm not going by wheelchair to the washroom or showers anymore. I dunno... things are okay and I'm starting to realize that I cant change me being in here... so I might as well live with it and try enjoy living with it right...?

5:53 PM

It's tough to be anorexic.



7:27 PM

They're not here yet. No family.
My family does not love me anymore.
Don't they understand they're my escape?



9:17 PM

I feel like I just ate a million balloons and I'm going to float up and away any second!! It was really difficult for me to get that down, that last 1 ½ vanilla BOOST plus the peach slices. I think maybe more difficult than any other time so far. I really hope I gain 0.2 lbs tomorrow. I mean I think I deserve it.

10:09 PM

Okay, no more thinking pessimistically. I can't change what has happened... wait... yeah, I can. I can change it for the better. Maybe not exercise as much? Then maybe I'll get my periods back? I bet the doctor's not gonna let me outta here until I do... so I hope I get my period soon! (never thought I'd be saying that). I LOVE signs that indicate I'm getting better. Everyone's been saying I look better and honestly, I really do feel better. I just wish that I could start eating normal meals again. I doubt I'll be able to eat normally once I'm out either. They're gonna want me on BOOST when I go home. I'm gonna feel like such a freak when I get out of here. School will be different, friends will be different, food will be different... my life will be different. I'll still be attending therapy - somehow I don't think I'll ever be able to escape being a freak. This has changed me - physically and psychologically, my perspective, my goals, my future, my outlook... my life... hopefully in this case, change doesn't have to be a bad thing.... hopefully.



Friday, September 27, 2002

7:00 PM

*I cry my tears when nobody sees
Hide from the world what is real
Can't let them know how scared I am
Can't let them know the pain I feel*

*I smile and laugh and hide my real frowns
They think I'm still happy and bright
But this teeth smile is nothing but fake
As the darkness takes over sunlight*

*I usually feel confused and alone
And people keep saying I'm strong
That's because I put on my mask
Not removing it until they are gone*

*There are so many challenging changes
And I need to adjust to new things
Nobody realizes the fear
That learning these new things brings*

*I'm doing things never done before
And I'm scared of the next coming day*

*"He Himself has said,
I will not in any way fail
you nor give up nor leave
you without support"*

Hebrews 13:5



I pray that God holds my hand
And guides me through each passing day

I know I can't do this alone
And I need all the help I can get
Though I can't stand what I'm going through
None of it I'll ever regret

Because to me, it's a learning experience
A chance to learn about tons of new things
I'm learning how to accept it
Accepting what each day may bring

Nothing can change what has happened
So there's no point to feel and get mad
So I bottle it all up inside
And don't let people see when I'm sad

It's tough to live as a teen
In a way that seems so unfair
I try to live life to the fullest
And adjust to whoever's there

Hopefully soon, this will end
And be nothing more than the past
I hope I won't have to fake soon
And that this feel of depression will pass

Anorexia takes out the best in you
A struggle that's made me depressed
On the outside I am happy and bubbly
The truth is forever deep in the chest

I await my family to visit
As I feel so very alone
They come later each day that passes
And hate coming to see me so long



*When it rains, it
pours... but after
every rain shower
there's a rainbow.*

- Unknown



Have You Ever...

Have you ever been scared to open your eyes...
For fear of what you would see?
Have you ever been forced to listen...
To the voices screaming who you should be?

Have you ever been forced to stand tall...
Or defend what you know is right?
Ever put aside your own happiness...
To cower in another's delights?

Have you ever been scared to move on...
In fear of what you would leave?
Ever heard so many fake lies?
Have no clue who to believe?

Have you ever actually understood,
That life will never be fair?
How we try so hard to please the world...
Yet no one seems to care.

Have you ever felt so hopeless...
That you feel you can't go on?
Have you ever wished for that
one last chance...
To have that moment that's now gone?

Have you ever thought of all your mistakes...
Remembered choices you now regret?
Have you learned some tough life lessons?
Met some friends who've got up and left?

Have you ever been rejected?
Passed up for something else?
Have you ever lacked importance?
Or not known your sense of self?

Have you ever been scared to open your mouth...
In fear of what you might say?
That you might actually make someone consider...
About the hurt they cause you each day?

Have you ever felt such failure?
Or push for just success?
Have you ever held back what's honest?
Or hide what should be confessed?

Have you ever been so scared to give...
Your mind, your heart, your soul?
Have you ever thought you'd be shut down?
If you chose to be brave and bold?

Have you ever felt that urge to cry,
At times when nothing's wrong?
Have you ever known you've needed help?
Don't know how you'll stay strong?

Have you ever given into pain?
To pressure, peers or life?
Have you ever had a choice to make...
But were unsure of which way to go?

Have you ever questioned your so called "friends"...
Who moved apart as all you grow?
Has someone ever left you...
When you're desperate for their love to show?

Have you ever thought that the tears
you cry...
Are the ones that make you strong?
Have you noticed all those people?
Who have been there all along?

Have you ever been the target...
Of threatening words of hate?
Why can't the world accept us?
Will they realize when it's too late?

Have you ever been scared to open your eyes...
For fear of what you would see?
Maybe it's all part of life's plan...
Learning to live life's reality.

Saturday, September 28, 2002

9:19 AM

Ya know what's funny? Me and that other girl with anorexia must look like a bunch of spazzes now - she's bouncing her legs and I'm bouncing my feet. LOL... the bond between anorexics, eh? My whole family was saying how they want me out because they don't like having to visit me in here... but hello! They're the ones that stuck me in here! I didn't call the doctor... I didn't drive myself here... I didn't contact all the eating disorder shrinks... I just sat in the passengers side taking whatever came my way. I'm up to 99.7 lbs now... which means, maybe in a week, I'll be out!

8:35 PM

Ya know what else I think? I've experienced so much these past two weeks and been through so much... I've grown as a person. When I return... maybe others will only notice my physical changes-but deep down I'll always know the kind of person spending more than 14 nights in a hospital bed has made me. OMG... look what I just wrote... I basically just said I don't care what others see... because it's what I know and see within that matters and if they can't do the same, it's not gonna bother me. Seriously Raija? Does that mean I'm getting better? Maybe all this crappy therapy is working?? The feeling of getting better feels almost as good as running - LOL. I think that everyone should spend one week on bed rest in their life-they'd have a whole new perspective on their life - on everything! Going back to school, I know I'm going to be more knowledgeable about life and everything else that goes along with it-friends, family, support, and help... love. Why? Because I've experienced it first hand and in that sense I'm lucky. No way will anyone be able to fully understand what I've been through here-unless they go through it themselves. Things that never mattered before - now matter. I've learned to be thankful for everything.

Sunday, September 29, 2002

1:05 PM

Ugh! I think I'm gonna shoot myself once I'm outta here! 😊 Yup - hey! Then I can tell that depression doctor that I've attempted suicide! This sucks in here. It's so completely annoying, unfair, confusing and frustrating!! I wanna cry... but I can't... why? Because the stupid nurse is always watching me 24/7! People definitely don't know the meaning of tough until they're in here!

8:55 PM

So depressed today. I went to the washroom downstairs and started balling. I can't stand this anymore. I kept picturing my mom holding me as I cried... but instead all I have is the bathroom stall walls around me as I cried. Can I trust anyone these days? And my best friend's phone line was just busy again! I told her I'd be calling her! Nice to know she reserves time for her anorexic hospitalized friend eh? Maybe I really am gonna be in here longer than what I had first thought.



Monday, September 30, 2002

10:08 AM

AH! It's already Sept. 30th! I've been here since the 11th! I went to see my psychologist at St. Joe's... and I started crying while I was talking to her. I've been pretty emotional lately - maybe I'm getting my period?! Wouldn't that be fun?! 😊 Then the doctor would really know that I'm getting better!

Wednesday, October 2, 2002

8:47 AM

I'm 93 lbs! I gained 10 lbs since I've been in here! I'm on a roll!

What I Had To Eat Today (*the most so far!*)

Breakfast:

Bran flakes, 125ml milk, 1 pkg. of cheese (Greasy!!), oatmeal muffin, butter

Snack:

Can of RESOURCE, applesauce

Lunch:

Tuna sandwich, ½ RESOURCE, 2 cookies, 125ml milk, fruit cocktail

Snack:

Lemon poppy seed muffin, butter, pkg. of cheese, can of RESOURCE

Supper:

Lasagne, 125ml milk, ½ RESOURCE, coconut crumble dessert, salad with Thousand Island dressing

Snack:

1/2 ENSURE PLUS!! ½ bagel with jam, ½ bagel with cream cheese

Friday, October 5, 2002

9:47 PM

Why is it that I'm always tired on Friday nights when I'm allowed to actually stay up late? Oh well, I haven't slept a full 8 hours since I don't even know when! I'm feeling really homesick at the moment. Some other friends came up today! And one of them started crying when she saw me! I don't think I've ever seen her cry before... until now. They filled me in on all the new couples... and as much as I hate to admit it, I think part of me is scared that no one will like me. Or that everyone will have a boyfriend this year. Not that the whole idea of being single is bad... it's just the concept of being the only single one that bothers me. And the two boys that I think are cute have their eyes on two of my friends! I wish I had someone to talk to about this. But who? I'll figure it out on my own I guess.



Life's Highway

I'm walking down this highway
This road of broken hope
My feet are sore, they're dragging
To a place I'll never know

This road, it feels so bumpy
It scrapes my bare feet dry
Each step just feels much weaker
As I watch the cars go by

This highway sure is lonely
I continue on my quest.
This place it feels so empty,
So lost and so distressed.

I hitchhike on the curb line,
But no one stops to care.
Instead I face ignorance,
And hate within the glares.

I start to run, I'm scared now,
Feared of what's around.
I search for light, an ending,
That can't seem to be found.

The hills, they get much steeper,
The air it makes me gasp.
My legs, they turn unsteady,
With no one else to grasp.

I cannot end defeated,
I've made it much too far
So many days spent wondering
Just exactly where we are?

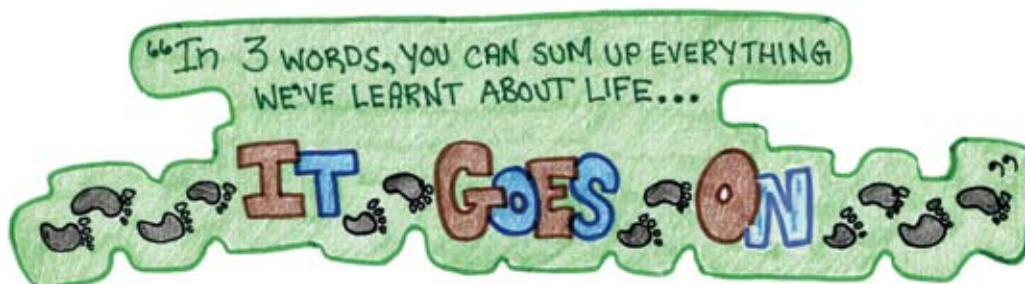
'Cause roads, they all have sharp curves
With hills we can't see past
But we must keep going, hiking,
Refuse to finish last.

'Cause God, he makes no mountains,
Too high for us to climb.
All roads - they have an ending.
Let's walk them while there's time.

Let's crush those bumps and potholes,
Kick the rocks beneath our feet,
Push those boulders sideways,
Jog with undefeat.

There will be cars that drive by,
Those who smirk and glare and frown,
Keep walking, keep your head up
Don't let the world bring you down.

'Cause life it is a highway
A trek we all can do
Just remember that this journey
Is one we always can get through.



Saturday, October 6, 2002

7:43 AM

I hope that when my dad and his girlfriend come to eat here that it goes better than when mom and step dad came last night. It went fine and all, but it didn't feel natural. It felt like they were paying more attention to me eating than having supper together for the first time in like 3 weeks as a family! Before we were even eating, my step dad was asking why I hadn't eaten anything yet! Mom and my brother hadn't even sat down yet and he was already asking! Then practically the whole time we were eating, I could feel mom's eyes on me as I ate. My brother was the only one who acted as if it were an everyday thing. Good! Someone had to! Mom kept saying, "Oh, it's so nice to see you eating" and, "I don't know the last time I have seen you eat like this". She kept talking about me EATING. I don't like being the centre of attention when it comes to eating. Plus, I still eat slowly. It felt like I was rushing down my food just to keep up with them!

4:36 PM

Everyone's been saying I look better! Last night, my aunt said I looked better than the last time she saw me. My Mummu, Mom, Dad and my step dad all did. My grandma brought roses... 13 of them... 12 red and one white. And, ya know what I think that the white rose holds so much more beauty than the red in my mind. Maybe because the white rose is like an individual, unique. There's so many red roses and they're so common... You always hear people say that individuality is better than being the same as everyone else... but after getting those roses... it made me realize how true it is. LOL - I think being in the hospital has made me think more about things I hope someone comes up to visit me today. If not, I'm gonna be so lonely especially because my room mate has visitors right now. When I go back to school I know the ones who will judge and make fun of me for being fat are the GUYS. I'm not as worried about the girls, but what 13 year old girl wouldn't care what a bunch of sweet, hot, sexy guys would think of her?



66 The white rose holds so much beauty. It's individual and unique... so unlike all the rest around it. People are like that too I guess. Beauty is being individual and unique... and not being like everyone else around us. 99

Tuesday, October 8, 2002

8:54 AM

I am soo sick! My headache feels like a balloon that's about to explode. I was sweating last night and I had chills. My temperate was 37.7... a tad high. I can't win, can I?

8:56 PM

I feel a bit better. I'm not too sure about this whole psychologist thing though. She asks way too many rhetorical questions. Too many "whys" and "I dunno, what do you think?" Those questions get sooo annoying! That's when you know you're talking to a therapist!!

Wednesday, October 9, 2002

8:46 AM

Four weeks today I've been in here. 28 days-and I'm still in here! At first I thought I was only gonna be in here for 2-3 weeks! I'm homesick... I miss everything and everyone. Inside, I'm sad and feel lonely. I just want to cry and make everything better.

8:46 PM

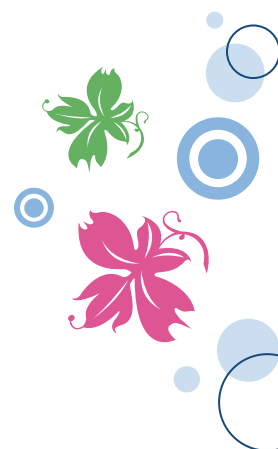
I hate family meetings! The "family psychologist" said that I HAVE to attend the "GROUP" with all the other chicks with eating disorders. I hate it! I mean, if I'm still in the hospital, I wouldn't mind going. I don't wanna miss any more school though! I'm sick of missing school! I've missed an entire month! I'm not missing any more of it because of ANOREXIA! Then mom was like, "yeah well I'm missing work too". The last thing she should be doing is complaining! First of all, she was the one that stuck me in here! Second of all, she hasn't had to miss a whole month of work! She missed a couple days yeah... not a month.

Friday, October 11, 2002

8:54 PM

One month today. It seems like longer though. It's Friday night and the people that I figured would be willing to come up here to visit are out with the guys - probably watching a movie. It seems like so much is going on with all my friends right now too. One's too busy smoking and getting high. Then there's the group of friends that are slutting it up with random guys all the time. I'm worried. Why are so many things happening when we're only 13? Tomorrow, I'm going on an outing home. I just wanna stay at home. I want to go on msn, call people, sleep on my bed, dance in my room - everything. How can I do it in just ONE outing? I'm scared of so many things once I'm out mind you. It's still much better than me being in here though! I'm scared of looking fat. I'm getting plump. My thighs touch! I betcha I'm like 105 lbs now with my clothes. I'm so sick of everything! Sick of being in here! Sick of being anorexic! Sick of not being normal! Sick of getting fat! Will I ever look normal again? I mean I look tired and big and not anorexic at all! Not fair - nothing's fair.

I hate food! I hate life! I hate me! I'm so stupid, fat and ugly! No guy will EVER love me like this! I have to lose weight. Or at least look a bit thinner! I can't see my rib bones, chest bones or hip bones or shoulder bones. I know I'm still anorexic because I still think like one. I think about the way I looked when I was thin. It was beautiful. Pure bones = pure beauty. My skinny thighs = beautiful. Never bulging tummy = beautiful. Sure, there were things I didn't like - like having no boobs, no ass, losing hair, no energy or muscle or strength to do anything. But being beautiful and THIN is what I LOVED. I want that back again. More than that, I want to eat normally. I know I'm gonna be watched once I'm out. It's gonna be up to me to keep eating though. No one can make me do anything except myself.



Dearest ED...

I met you, what feels like long ago,
In a dark, unpleasant place.
I was on a road, beginning my walk,
With a vulnerable, cautious pace.
I met you oh so secretly,
So silent, yet so fast.
You knew just how to get me,
And hold me tight within your grasp.


Things I was unsure of,
Thoughts I hurt to feel,
Soon became so frequent,
Soon became so real.
You were my every moment,
Day in, day out, my life.
You scratched and bruised my conscience,
Scarred my soul just like a knife.
'Cause at one point, you were beauty,
The idol I adored,
You were my only vision,
Of the image I craved more.
But now, your turn is over,
Move out, I'm in control.

I slowly let you kill me,
Let your wrath take such a toll.
These scars that you have caused me,
Don't worry, they're still here.

But now, it's not pain they bring,
But reminders of that overcome fear.
'Cause I look at them as blessings,
Of what I did endure.
You taught me fear and pain,
And I'm grateful I could learn.
I don't regret one moment,
One tear, one scream, one fear,
I don't regret one action,
Don't wish that sky were clear.
I believe the things that happen,
Have reason to exist.
'Cause yes, I am so thankful,
For every hit and every miss.

These hits and all these misses,
Have made me who I am.
I'm glad that I have met you,
You've forced me up to stand.
'Cause you showed me I was better,
Than your tight grasp on my soul.
My strength is now your weakness,
'Cause surprise- I'm in control.
I met you oh so long ago,
In a dark, unpleasant place,
Now I'm fine, I'm walking,
With this grateful, confident pace.

"COURAGE is not the absence of fear...
but the MOVING AHEAD in spite of it."



Monday October 14, 2002

8:37 AM

Happy Thanksgiving! This sucks... I'm in the hospital on a holiday! I got to go home for thanksgiving supper last night. It was yummy, but it wasn't fun. It felt so stupid having to MEASURE everything like in the hospital just to make sure I got enough. I don't see how that's gonna 'normalize' my eating - measuring and counting? I hate it!

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

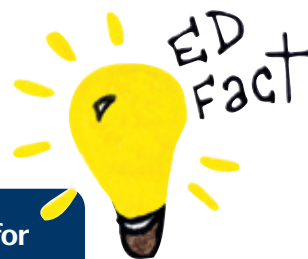
11:46 AM

The team meeting this morning sucked! My doctor wasn't even there! What's the point in having a meeting if the person who makes all the decisions isn't even there! The 'anorexia team' wanted me to go sleep at home for a night, but I told them no way. They don't know how hard that would be. They wanted me to go to school for a day at lunch and then come back too. No way! I don't want to. I can't get ready at a hospital for school! They better send me home soon. It feels like they're never gonna send me home! I know life's unfair but gosh! Why?! There never seems to be an answer for that question, but nothing is happening right! And ya know what else is wrong? I got three zits happening on my face! Everything is going wrong! I hate life!

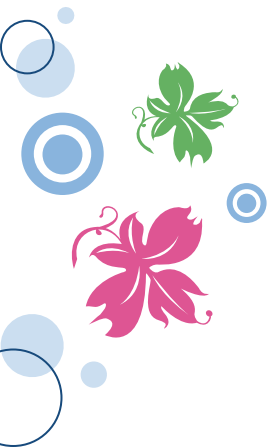
Saturday, October 21, 2002

5:06 PM

I'm back at home!! Wahoo!! I just came back from Wal-Mart!! Yesterday was completely awesome! I mean, it's the most fun I've had in weeks! First of all, I went to the school yesterday. The whole way there, I couldn't stop laughing or smiling. The rest of the afternoon I was so HAPPY. It felt so good to be back at school - even for two minutes! Then that night, I went to the movies!! Everything is just indescribable. From the moment dad picked me up from the hospital... I felt like a new person. I slept at mom's house last night too instead of going back to the hospital. Sleeping in my own bed was wonderful! So comfy!! Such a nice 'home visit'!



Because people with anorexia do not get the nutrition necessary for good health, they can damage almost every organ system or body part, including the brain, liver, kidneys, heart, GI tract, bones, teeth, skin & hair.



Sunday, October 22, 2002

8:35 AM

I'm back at home... home sweet hospital. Daddy brought me back last night after 11:00 and I did want to come back. It's not like anything went wrong during my 'home visit', but it's just that I felt like 'home' wasn't even the place where I wanted to be. I kept thinking about how warm and cozy my hospital bed would feel once I got back. Last night I went to Seattle Coffeehouse with some of my friends and I dunno, they started talking about their inside jokes and stuff. I felt like... I couldn't have fun with them anymore. And I hate that feeling! I've missed so much during the past 5 ½ weeks... how can I ever catch up? It's impossible. They've formed a new life without me. How will I ever get that back? I wanna change schools! No, maybe I don't... but there's no way that things will be the same once I'm back! I've missed a lot! Too much. ☹️ So frustrating!! How can I not have fun with my own friends?! I'm so confused that I actually WANTED to come back here too!! Ugh! I think the reason I wanted to come back is because I feel secure here... I've adapted to the environment. If I could, I think I'd like to stay here instead of going home, but I dunno why!! Maybe because here I have food put in front of me instead of me putting myself in front of food? But... ugh! I don't even know where my head is! I'm so confused! Am I depressed? Or semi-depressed? Or something? I dunno... but I don't understand why I can't have fun with the people that have always brought so much fun into my life. Like, I couldn't even smile a decent smile. I was happy on Friday with them at school, but then on Saturday, it was the total opposite. I was longing for the fun they were experiencing. *(Sigh)* It seems like I can have fun... just not for a long amount of time. For a couple hours I'll be able to have fun, but any longer and I get depressed and start thinking. I just don't know... I wanna get out... but I'm so scared that I'll snap back and also go right back to before. What is wrong with me?!!!

Tuesday, October 29, 2002

6:34 PM

I'm back in hospital and honestly I don't know whether I'm feeling happy or sad. I'm feeling... secure to be back. I mean it's been my home for the past seven weeks (exactly 7 weeks tomorrow!). I was at school yesterday and it couldn't have gone any better. 😊 Everyone seemed so happy that I was back. I feel as if I have so many more friends now too. It's kinda sad that it took me being hospitalized in order to feel as if I have more friends though. At the beginning of the school year, I had no idea how to act around the guys and I found it really hard to just let loose and be myself since I hadn't seen anyone for the whole summer. You'd think that after an additional 7 weeks, it'd be even tougher - but nope! Yesterday I felt so secure with all the guys... weird, eh? Maybe this whole ordeal boosted my self confidence? I dunno... and the other thing is that I didn't really care about how they reacted to the way I looked. I was still SUPER self conscious - I mean I wore a sweatshirt and hoodies all day because I couldn't stand looking at my stomach. I've always loved my stomach - until now. I've always loved buying bikinis and tankinis and showing off my tummy, but now... I'm humiliated by it! It's too round and feels fat and gross. I hate it! Same with my arms... they're too wide. I remember my tiny thin arms and I want them back! I want everything back. Well not everything... not the health risks or anything... but the "look" of it all. Oh and ya know what I learned? I have

osteoporosis! Apparently after starving yourself for a month, you're body begins to show signs of osteoporosis. Crappy eh? Ya know what's even scarier? When my psychologist told me that I had osteoporosis, the first thing that came to my mind was, "so what's the point in getting better now? If I'm still losing hair and now have osteoporosis-what's the point in sacrificing thinness to change?" And that's totally the eating disorder that's talking/ thinking! It's nice though because I've never had this much support behind me. Maybe it's this that has caused me to believe that I'll always have SOMEONE that will love me for who I am.

Wednesday, October 30, 2002

There was no journal entry written, but I remember every detail.

It's my day of discharge. Yup, that's right. Seven weeks later, I'm finally goin' home! Tears of both happiness and sadness to be leaving the place that had become my home, hugs for all the nurses that became my 'hospital moms' and a whole lot of packing! (I don't think I've ever packed that fast in my life!)

My hospital stay was over, but my battle with ED still had a long way to go. Hospitalization was the beginning of me actually understanding the illness and disease he had put me through but there was still so much more to overcome in our relationship. The months after presented ongoing challenges as I adjusted into my "old" routines-school, family, boys, friends and eating! Many tears, frustrations, confusion and anxiety came with the break-up and with my new life. I learned that even though I may have regained some physical health back, there was a lot more to overcoming an Eating Disorder. Family counselling, individual therapy sessions, mechanical eating, positive self-talk, 'group' therapy sessions, BOOST, limited exercise and a whole lot of pain, struggle and effort came with RECOVERY and overcoming ED. There was a lot more to it than reaching my "ideal set point body weight". Like my relationship, RECOVERY was a long process too.

ED introduced me to a whole new way of thinking - a distorted way of thinking that plays an active role in the psychological state of anyone in a relationship with him. Eventually, my whole world was viewed through ED's distorted thinking methods and nothing was interpreted realistically anymore.

“ Courage is not the absence of fear, but the moving ahead in spite of it. ”



Life's Road

Life you know, it's rough sometimes,
As we walk this road so long,
Unsure of paths, which track to take.
To find what's right and wrong.
We face some walls, we take some hits,
Smash and crumble and break.
We'll stumble through falls,
get challenged some more,
To test how much hits we can take.
Down on our knees, crying again,
These tears just won't go away,
'Cause just as soon as you start to stand up,
You're pushed back at the end of the day.
It's a struggle you know, the fear & the pain.
Not wanting to face a new dawn.
Waiting for saviour, pleading for hope,
For a soul where all faith is gone.
Just trying to smile, attempting to laugh.
Is an effort that never succeeds,
And what can u do when you're trying so hard.
To get through each day that you lead?
You fear tomorrow, hate what's gone by,
Dread the present till end.
And what can you do, when there's no one
to trust,
And you're so unsure of your friends?
The world doesn't see, can't comprehend,
People just don't understand,
Alone in a room full of people,
Coping with life's great demands.
Hands will reach out to help us,
But sometimes it's never enough,
Keep climbing and yet there's no movement.
Tears, falls and breaks make it rough.
Life will be tough, challenge us all,
It's a part of the road that we take,
Enduring those tears, hits and falls,
Determines life's road that we make.
No one understands

No one comprehends
No one even cares
About the heart I wish could mend
No one hears my voice
No one sees my face
No one dried the tears
That rolls a constant pace
No one cures my fears
Or takes away the pain
They walk away in smiles
Each day, it's all the same
I'm left alone, abandoned
Afraid of coming days
No ones there to comfort
I just get in the way
No one really knows
The pain behind this grin
Or understands the heartache
That cuts so deep within
But wait that's not ALL true
Because when I thought I was alone
You told me that you loved me
That you loved me all along
You accepted the one I am
Days I needed that good cry
You never did give up
Sometimes I wonder why
You tried to understand
You tried to comprehend
You showed you always cared
About the heart that couldn't mend
Thank you for your constant love
Your words, your trust, your ear
When 'no one' else would listen
You proved you'd be right here
As long as I will know you
Through all the years you've shown
Whatever fear I come across
I know now ill never be alone.



Voice Unheard

Voice unheard.
Face unseen.
Feeling apart,
From all other teens.
No where to go.
Nowhere to hide.

Just want to escape,
Crawl up and die.
Watching the laughter,
With such a deep pain,
Knowing I can't,
Do just the same.

They used to be friends,
That no longer care,
Are happy without me,
Glad I'm not there.

Can't understand how,
Don't realize why.
How come I'm sitting in class,
Starting to cry?
It's all too much.
I want back the past.
Where smiles and laughter,
Would forever last.

Things aren't the same,
Such a new place.
As old friends break apart,
And wear a new face.
Friends now neglect,
And ignore that I'm there.

Did I do something wrong?
Why don't you care?
So confused.
Don't know what to do.
As you start to change,
The less I know you.

No one to turn to,
Now that you've gone.
Dreading tomorrow,
Days are so long.
'Cause what do you do,
When the one that you love,
Is turning their back,
And starting to shove?

Can't explain why,
But I'll be right here.
Should you choose to confide,
Your friend will be near.

I just want some answers.
And I know life's not fair.
Just try and stay positive,
And hope that you'll care.
Until then, I'll smile,
Pretend nothing's wrong.
And hope that these days,
Soon won't seem so long.
Because voice unheard,
Face unseen.
Hating to fake,
Someone I know I can't be.

"If we don't change,
then we don't grow...
If we don't grow, then
we aren't really
LIVING..."

- Unknown



How Can We Recognize ED?

Are you or someone you know in a relationship with ED? Is he taking over your life without you even realizing it? The more you get to know ED, the less you seem to notice the harm he does. Here are some ways that may help you determine if you REALLY KNOW ED. Here's an idea of what he does to you-whether you realize it or not.

Physically

“What does ED make us look like?”



- Body weight at least 15% below normal ideal body weight
- Gradual or abrupt weight loss
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Irregular menstrual periods
- Loss of menstrual periods (amenorrhea)
- Pale complexion/ discoloured skin
- Brittle nails
- Dry/brittle hair that falls out frequently (in clumps)
- Frequently bruise/prone to injury
- Frequent dizziness/fainting spells
- Fatigued/ loss of energy

Psychologically

“What does ED make us think?”



- Needing to be a “perfectionist” - nothing is ever ‘good enough’
- Needing to please everyone/never saying “no”
- Low self-esteem/worth
- Worthlessness/helplessness after eating a particular amount of calories/ after gaining weight
- Depression, mood swings, irritability
- Loss of control in life/feeling as if the body is the one thing that can be controlled
- Scale numbers determine whether the day will be “good”/“bad”

Behaviourally

“What does ED tell us to do?”



- Isolate self
- Obsess over calories/weight/food
- Have great interest in recipes/cooking/food magazines/food TV shows/ memorize calories in foods
- Wear baggy clothes (from low body temperatures and/or to hide body)
- Purposely restrict caloric intake
- Do absurd food rituals (cut food into shapes/group into numbers/ only eat with a certain plate etc.)
- Avoid social gatherings and outings where food is involved

-
- Use laxatives/diet pills
 - Exercise compulsively
 - Sneak food for no reason
 - Check weight several times/day

Medically

When we fall in love with ED, our heart becomes more involved than we even think. It's known that the most common reason for death amongst those with anorexia is heart failure. *(For people with bulimia, it's heart failure AND rupturing in the intestinal area).* Other medical complications ED holds responsibility for are:

- Thermoregulatory problems: loss of body fat and electrolyte disturbances cause people with anorexia to feel cold all the time
- Anaemia: caused by a lack of iron and results in bruising frequently and lack of vitality *(low red blood cell count)*
- Dental erosion: due to lack of calcium in the diet. The body begins to find calcium elsewhere in the body and the teeth. For people with bulimia, purging is the cause of erosion of tooth enamel.
- Delayed gastric emptying: stomach area becomes poor and weak and therefore, can't push out the food eaten, leading to build-up of toxins inside. This results in weakened immune systems and susceptibility to other viruses.
- Diarrhea: due to delayed gastric emptying but also gastric emptying.
- Acidosis: blood becomes acidic which can lead to other illnesses.
- Osteoporosis: bones become weak and consequently make them susceptible to breaking easier.
- Bradycardia: slow/ irregular heartbeat.
- Dysrhythmia: heart out of rhythm/sudden death
- Edema: water retention imbalance causing hands and feet to swell caused by poor eating/purging
- Amenorrhea: loss of menstrual periods
- Hypocalcaemia: low blood glucose levels from low weight and malnutrition.
- Lanugo: soft, downy hair begins to grow on face, neck, arms in response to low body temperature *(trying to insulate body since there's not enough calories to produce heat)*
- Hypkalemia: potassium deficiency
- Decreased cardiac muscle: rotationally lead to cardiac arrest
- Urinary Tract Infections: caused by decreased fluid intake
- Constipation: poor bowel movement

Source - Anred © Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc.



Untitled

Take me by my freezing hand
Hold it close within your palm
Lead me from this mountain edge
To someplace I can belong

Free me from these nightmares
Please take away this constant pain
Release this inner conscience
That screams within my veins

Hold my body close to yours
Let me melt into your heart
Reconnect me with happiness
Help me make a fresh new start

Show me some place that welcomes
Don't let me drown in tears
Just let me far away from life
That shows no end to fear

To try is over rated
When effort is never seen
Just notice that I need you
To be a shoulder on which I'll lean

My head is spinning faster
Just fall right off my head
Can't be ignored or yelled at
When all I am is dead

The rope it just gets slicker
As I try to hold my place
Grasp me, hold me, and free me,
Halt these droplets on my face

My body's cold and shaking,
Numbing more to feel each day
Pick me up and carry me
Please show me which is the way

Do you know how much you mean
to me?
Love is not as strong
I can't stand your back turned at me
Your voice that says I'm wrong

Sorry I am a burden
Trapped within your busy place
I hate to see you yelling
Failure fills your face

Just take me now, I hate it
Lead me far and dark and deep
I've had it, just leave, I'm fine
I'm falling, this hill is steep

Leave me with my freezing hand
It's drifting far from your palm
I'll near this dropping mountain cliff
To the place I'm best belonged.



“YOU MAY BE DISAPPOINTED IF YOU FAIL,
BUT YOU ARE DOOMED IF YOU DON'T TRY.”



- Unknown



“There will be a time when you think everything is finished... and that will be the beginning.” *Louis L'amour*

The Break-Up

The break up wasn't a single moment or just a couple short simple phrases. My break up with ED didn't happen on a single day or at a single time... nor was there just one moment of me realizing that I didn't want to be with him anymore. No, it was nothing like that.

What was it like? How about that feeling when you know you're about to face the WORST and SCARIEST moment of your life? You know those moments when you go through every sentence... every idea... every word that you're planning to say... over and over again? You sit there, planning how you're going to do it, debating the possible consequences and gains. Your mind pulses back and forth between A or B... yes or no? Are you making the right decision? Should you really break up with him? Where do you even start? How do you begin? What will happen?...

Yep! These thoughts were there-the usual thoughts associated with any break up right? The funny thing about my break up with ED is that, four years after really knowing him, and more than four years after first meeting him... I am still in the break up stage. To be completely honest, I don't know if I'll ever completely come to terms with this break up.

I still fight the back and forth pulsating voice that echoes in my head and tells me about the benefits and consequences of staying with ED. All the thoughts and feelings associated with a break up... the FRUSTRATION, CONFUSION and FEAR still show up, and I mean, it's four years later! Thoughts creep up on me sometimes during days when I'm most vulnerable, or days when I'm stressing out about absolutely everything. Yep, it's these days that become the hardest days to break up with ED because I can still hear his voice. I can still feel his DESIRE and NEED to stay with me... his intention to remain such a huge part of my life. He'll talk to me: try to convince me of things. He'll tell me that I can't leave him, that I won't make it in this world without him. He'll convince me that I need to be with him in order to succeed... to be happy... to have purpose... to gain acceptance... to gain appreciation and acknowledgment. His voice and messages invade my head and throughout my whole body. Yeah, these days are the toughest. As much as I want to break up with him, as much as I crave to leave him... know I need to walk away... want to get out... these days I can still hear him. Leaving becomes a near impossibility. He asks me questions, “How do you plan on surviving without me? I'm the only life you know...”

He'll challenge me, "You know you're lost without me. I'm your everything. I am the reason you are who you are". ED tells me these things. He's constantly trying to get me to believe it. (And yes, he has succeeded... many times.) It's these moments in life that seem too much to handle, and when I feel like I just can't do anything right. It's the times I feel as if I can never be good enough - that NOTHING IS EVER GOOD ENOUGH. These are the times when I run back to ED, hoping to please and searching for a way out.


You see, my break up with ED... it's a little complex. Because with this relationship, I can't just have one moment to be nervous, just one moment to tell him he's not right for me, one moment to break up with him. Things don't happen once and for all with ED. He doesn't let things happen once. Not feelings, failures, struggle, insecurities... ED likes repetition. He has become an obsession.

So naturally, a break-up with ED? Not gonna happen just once. Not gonna happen just twice. It's like that feeling AFTER a break up where you're aware that the relationship is over, but there's still that possibility of a second chance. You know, where you still feel so attached to the person? Like you still know so much about them? Maybe there is a possibility that you could overcome your differences? Maybe you can hook up again?...

Well, it's exactly the same with ED. ED knew me better than anyone else. He became my life, and my whole being. It's highly unlikely I would forget about him the first day I break up with him! How could I possibly erase all of the memories, moments and the life I knew? How do I go from a life revolved around ED, to a life completely rid of him? It's not possible. No true, deep, strong relationship will allow you to move on in one day. No relationship that becomes such a huge part of who you are will let you forget about the other person - EVER. Feelings are still there, and some may never be erased or forgotten.

Since my initial break up with ED, there have been many other break ups to follow. Many times after each break up, I felt I needed to go back, and I admit, I have listened to his calling. And then, time and time again I've realized yet again - that yeah, I should break up with him... I should stay away from him. He is horrible for my life, my soul and my mind. Even though I'm aware the negative role ED plays in my life though, it doesn't mean I find it easy to stay away from him. (NO WAY! Continuing this break up has been one of the hardest things I've been faced with!) And, it's because of these continual back and forth feelings for ED that I admit I am still in the break-up process. In fact, I have a feeling that I will be here for a while... and that's okay. I just need to keep in mind that I need to continue to be strong, determined, and to continue the break ups. After all, they WILL get easier and the more they happen, the better I'll get at breaking up with ED. The easier it will be to learn to live without him.

Today, I am proud to say that the kinds of helpless and hopeless moments where I was forced to run to ED - these moments occur less now. The constant break ups have taught me a lot about what I want in a relationship, and what I need (Hmm... how 'bout LOVE, CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT, ACCEPTANCE to name a few!) Now, I'm finding other people to turn to and other methods to cope when I get into those moods. I don't always use my relationship with ED as an answer to life's problems anymore. Now, I'm beginning to understand just how many problems ED created rather than helped.



*The constant break ups
have taught me a lot
about what I want in a
relationship and what I
need*



All break ups are difficult in the initial stages, but with time, we learn we will be okay without that special person. With time we'll realize that we can get over them. Moving on ISN'T IMPOSSIBLE. Eventually, memories won't be so frequent; the desire to get back together won't be so strong. I've learned that I can be okay without ED, that I don't need him in order to know I'll be okay in life. This realization came with time and with the many break ups, the long heartache and the continual determination to keep fighting him. Keep in mind that you WILL be okay, that you DON'T need ED and that you ARE able to survive without him. If you do this, YOU too, CAN break up with the many ED's of life. Moving on isn't impossible. You just have to remember: you gotta keep moving in that direction away from ED... in order to move on without him.

Discovering a New Relationship

Okay, so eventually after a break up we learn that we CAN move on. We will meet other people and we will form new relationships.

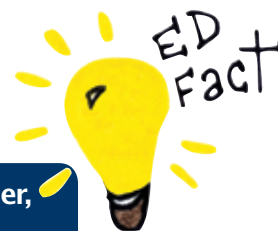
Initially, after my break-up with ED, I didn't want to move on without him. Luckily, there were other people in my life that couldn't stand the affect that ED was having on me though. They were the ones that forced me to get help and that initiated any break-up at all. Eventually, I would learn to break up with ED myself, but at first, I was so caught up in his world that I didn't want to choose to get out of it. Since that first break-up, leaving ED has been a choice that I'm in the position to make. Day after week after month, it has become a choice that I must choose to stick with. It was up to me to choose and realize that I truly did want to move on.

Moving on is easier said than done however, and I wasn't able to move on for a while. It's funny though, how meeting someone new seems to make the 'moving on' process go a little quicker... and make it a little bit easier. It's almost as if that new person is like a new hope, even a distraction from that life before. Anxiety, nerves and apprehension. Yep, those are the feelings of starting that new relationship. Don't forget the fear of leaving a relationship. The tossing and turning in your stomach, the clammy touch of your hands, the fear in your heart. (Sigh)... mmhmm... every end and every new beginning.

But even when you do meet someone new, you're not completely over the first relationship... right? I mean, there was no way I was completely over ED - not that quickly! Of course I still thought of him! Of course I wished I was still with him sometimes!

During the break up and the struggle of the healing process, I did come across someone new. I met a new individual, a new spirit and a new personality that I had been forced away from for so long. This person and this relationship were so much different than the one I knew with ED; I could tell! I knew so little about this person yet there was something that made me want to keep searching. I wanted a new person in my life. I wasn't sure how close I wanted to get at first and yeah, I was hesitant to make any fast moves. But this person - whoever they were! I needed them. I couldn't explain it and I didn't know why, but I knew I wasn't letting go. I couldn't.

The most common causes of death are complications of the disorder, such as cardiac arrest or electrolyte imbalance, and suicide.



Eyes, Mind, Body

Those eyes - they want perfection
That mind - it wants success
That body wants endurance
To be nothing but the best.

Those eyes - they hate the flaws they see
The mind - it hates to fail
The body will perspire
Follow through, don't bale.

Those eyes - they speak a tale of fear
The mind is now confused,
The body keeps on giving,
And losing is refused.

'Cause this voice just wants perfection
Approval from them all.
We choose to please all others,
And encourage our own fall.

We long for some acceptance,
To hear that someone's proud.
We long just to be noticed,
To please that watching crowd.

'Cause really, that is all they do
Day in, day out, all day,
Judge us, watch us, stare some more
As we take in all they say.

Our eyes just dream of comfort,
The mind it wants to calm,
The body lives in turmoil,
Our whole will soon be gone.

Eyes cry for an ending,
Mind searches for its rest,
The body hears death's whisper,
As it fails at every test.

These eyes they just want closure,
The mind hates constant bends,
The body hears dismissal,
As we near life's final end.

So now it's time to answer...
Earn some checkpoints on the page,
Stay focussed, keep your head up
Use that inner rage.

Open up those seeking eyes,
Say those thoughts that kill your mind,
Feed your body's hunger,
And your answers you will find.

Those eyes, they will see justice,
The mind will feel relief,
The body feels hope's whisper,
Disgrace turns to belief.

Choose now, today, the choice is yours.
Fly, rebuild those wings.
Each day brings possibility,
A choice to choke or sing.

Take your past and hold it tight,
Stare down your inner storm.
Heal eyes, mind and body well,
Know you can and will be reborn.

Dated: April 19, 2007

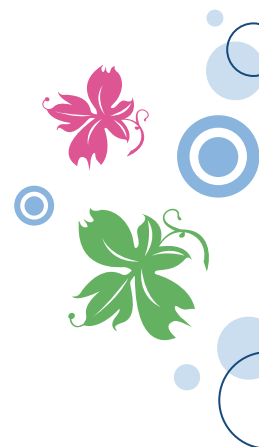


- Unknown

That's how it started: my new relationship and my first relationship apart and away from ED. It was a new start, a fresh new beginning and a new special someone to learn about. Who, you ask? Me... the person that I had lost sight of so long ago. I realized I did want to learn more about the person I really was. I wanted to learn about the girl beneath the protruding bones, pale complexion, depression and self worthlessness that ED had inflicted. Sounds weird that I didn't even know who I was eh? But it's true... when you're in a relationship with ED, you do lose yourself within his power. He steals your identity and changes you into some stranger. I found myself staring into the mirror and seeing nothing familiar about the person staring back. It wasn't me. Pain, suffering, depression and grief gave me a new face and a new identity. ED gave me a new identity, and it was one that became so natural to me that I was going to have to work and struggle to change.


The new relationship with myself fascinated me and yet, terrified me at the same time. I mean, I was hearing voices that I hadn't heard in so long. Voices telling me that maybe I really was in danger? Maybe ED really was killing me? Maybe I should walk away from him? The voices would tell me to stop and really consider the negative pull ED was having on every part of my life. So, yeah! These voices scared me! I wasn't used to them! I didn't know who I was. This terrified me. Breaking up with ED meant I would be forced to give up my anorexic self, my eating disorder... give up the life I knew so well. Deep down, behind ED's mask of bones and depression, I was still there. He had been hiding me, and the process of finding myself scared me more than anything else. I would have to eat, stop exercising excessively, get help... and worst of all, actually have to WANT to leave him.

ED had become so much a part of my life that no, I didn't know who I was anymore. I had lost my sense of self completely. Hopes, dreams, ambitions; they all seemed to vanish when ED came into the picture. ED gave me new dreams: dreaming to live for him, dreaming to be that tiny Barbie doll that was on EVERY magazine, to be that skinny friend who fits size double zero when you're shopping together, the dream to earn happiness thinking that being thin would do it; these became my new dreams when I met ED. Who I was before no longer mattered. The relationship with myself no longer mattered. I didn't care about that inner soul, and I wasn't listening to the true voice that hid within me. Had I decided to stay with ED, I would still be dreaming these dreams today. I needed to break up with him to realize that there are other relationships out there. There are other healthy relationships where I'm allowed to dream, experience happiness and feel that unconditional supportive love that can conquer any fear. Yeah, that's right... these relationships do exist. I just needed to let go of ED's hand in order for me to hold another's. I needed to break up with him to realize the relationships I was capable of experiencing.



People with anorexia experience other mental health problems such as depression, increased risk of suicide and anxiety.





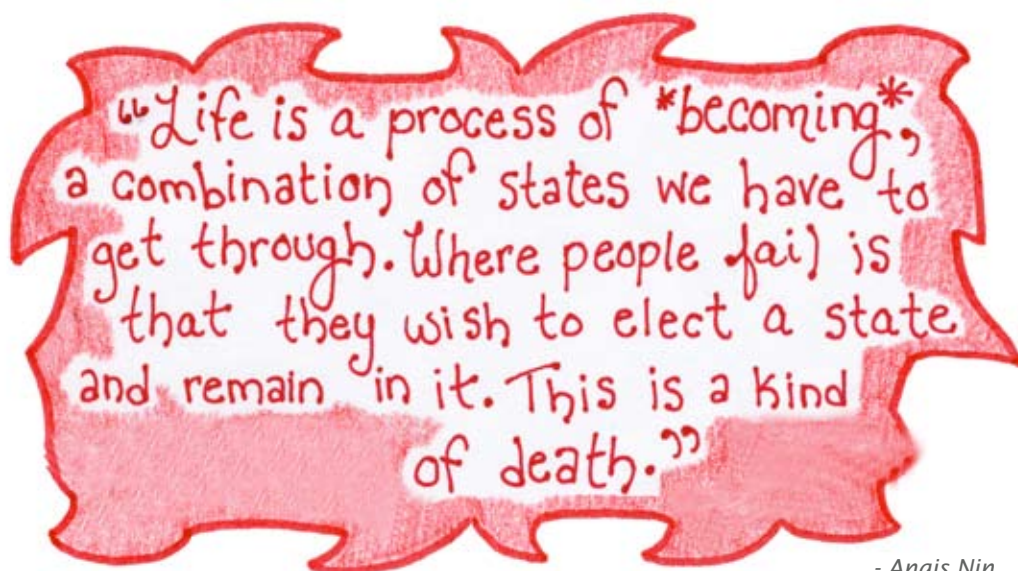
Today, I've become closer
to that person that I lost
and to finding out who I
really am.

To be completely honest, I'm still striving to get to know the person I was before ED, and to find the person I can be after ED: a person who believes, who hopes and who dreams.

Like any relationship, this one with myself creates struggles and setbacks too. Overcoming an ED relationship will always give struggle and setbacks, but at the end of the day when it comes down to it, it's a matter of choice. Do I choose to go back to ED just because I am facing a struggle? Experiencing heart ache? Becoming anxious? Or do I fight back and believe that things will get better? Believe that this new relationship is a great blessing.

I like my new relationship. Everyday I'm pushed to learn and grow more as I'm challenged deeper with getting to know myself. I've learned that this relationship has depth and that I have depth. I know this because I went deep to find myself and struggled to climb out (with help!) This relationship also has trust. Learning to trust is a huge thing, but right now, I can confidently say that the new relationship is teaching me how. I've learned to trust that even if life's not perfect, or if I'm not perfect, or if nothing at all seems to be going right... that I will be okay. I'm learning to trust that my worth isn't dependent on what I look like or what I do... but more so on the fact I am me. Challenges have allowed me to learn about that person hiding inside. The person that matters more than any appearance or relationship with ED ever will. This inner personality has been forced to hide behind ED's identity for so long and now, I am ready to find her and get to know her again. She is Me. The true me. And she's the best relationship I'll ever have.

Really, it's not that she ever left me. Deep down, she was always there, but I chose to reject her to make room for ED in my life. I refused to hear her voice and closed off all contact with her. Once, someone ask me once if I loved the new relationship; if I loved myself. I replied with, "... not yet, but I'm on my way". I can't say I love this new person. Love is a strong word and to be completely honest, I'm not sure I know her completely yet. With confidence though, I can say that I am on my way. I'm getting there, and I have no desire to break up with the true me anytime soon.



“Life is a process of *becoming*,
a combination of states we have to
get through. Where people fail is
that they wish to elect a state
and remain in it. This is a kind
of death.”

- Anais Nin

Set Backs

They ask what's wrong
And I really don't know...
I want to say everything,
But yet, I'm not so sure

In fact...
I ask myself the same thing
Everyday.

What's wrong with me?
Why am I sad?
Mad? Depressed? lonely?
I don't understand it.

I try and think of reasons...
But yet,
None of them seem good enough
I'm not good enough.
Not happy enough.
Everything's changing...
Could that be it?
I dunno.

I look in the mirror...
I'm ugly, fat, and big.
Huge nose, big stomach...
Fat legs...
Imperfect.
In every way.

Can't have fun
Maybe I don't deserve to?
The past is coming back,
Thinking bad thoughts again.

Can't ask for help though,
They'll stick me back in there...

Mental help.
With mental problems.
No, don't want to go back
Almost out...
So close...

Yet now, so far away...
Can't let them see I'm failing
Falling, sinking...
I'll be there longer then

A year?
So close...
Three months left... then 6...
Can't confess problems now

Problems.
Yup, just one huge problem
I deserve it.

Deserve the pain, the tears
Deserve to be lonely

Why?
Don't know, doesn't matter
Will keep falling
Failing...
Sinking...
Until someone cares...
Until YOU care.



- Danny Kaye

Overcoming You

You're the rocks beneath my feet,
Stepping over you below
'Cause at one time you were boulders
But now are stones I've learned to
throw.

You're the clouds that blocked
my sunshine,
You're the choke that filled my lungs,
You're the fight that kept me fighting,
In this battle I've now won.

You're the anchor pulling down on me,
Heavy weight pressed down my soul.
You're the push that kept me sliding,
Into each and every hole.

At times you've left me drowning
Sinking, unsure of how to float.
But now, please watch I'm swimming,
No water in my throat.

At times you'd shoot your bullets,
Break my wings so I can't fly,
But now, please look, I'm soaring.
I'm above you in those skies.

Those mountains that you built me,
Thanks, they've made me strong.
'Cause step by step I've made it,
And now I'm right where I belong.

These eyes they see less scared tears,
These hands they feel less fear,
This body isn't shaking,
The end is much more clear.

You're the ball that kept me chasing,
You're the fouls that paused my play,
But I'm in control, I'm running,
The game is mine today.



- Babe Ruth



Time to Journal...

November 21, 2002

Grade 8 isn't even half over yet and already I feel as if the year was the most productive yet. I have learned and endured so much already and it's not even Christmas! I think I'm definitely a better person than I used to be. I'm more aware of the things around me and am doing my best to act on my lessons. Who would've thought that seven weeks would make so much difference? I've learned that when I grow up I'm going to help people and make a difference somehow. I want to be a nurse—especially after seeing the difference that nurses can make in a child's life. I'm going to become a Pediatrics nurse and I'm gonna make a child who's having one of the most frustrating days of their life, smile. I'm going to make them happy and laugh and be all that my nurses were to me. The whole experience made such a difference in my life.

September 11, 2003

It's been one year and so much has happened. I have come so far as an individual, as a person, as a 14 year old girl and most importantly, as Raija. I'll never forget that day a year ago when I was admitted into the hospital. I even remember what I was wearing! And my frizzy hair and my weight! Scary, eh? Since then, I've gained 30 lbs. I'm no longer taking BOOST, but I am still waiting for my period... still haven't got that back. I'm in cheerleading, running and dance again, things I wouldn't have been allowed in before let alone have any energy to do them. I think... hey! I have a bum now! 😊 I am proud of how far I've come and I hope that I never lose sight of the person I am or the strength I've had to go through the things I did. I mean, my hair doesn't fall out anymore! This year has been a successful year and wow does succeeding feel amazing! I am so thankful that I've had my friends and family with me all along. They've helped me so much. I've had so many people help me this year and that turned out to be really beneficial and important. If I didn't allow help when it was offered then I wouldn't be where I am. I'm so proud of where I am and yeah, I do know that I still have a ways to go. It's been one hell of a year but in the end, I wouldn't change it at all... because finally, I'm looking like, feeling like and just being...
RAIJA 😊



The Five Recovery Principles of Overcoming Mental Illness



People CAN and DO Recover from Mental Illness

Remember that recovery is possible for all people experiencing mental illness regardless of how severe.



Recovery Is An Individual Journey

We all have a different story to tell, and a different relationship with ED based on different factors and influences. Remember, only with conscious individual effort to overcome the illness and to change habits, will it be possible to overcome mental illness.

Remember, relapse is a part of recovery. All ED relationships and mental illness journeys will experience set-backs and relapses. Don't expect the road to be straight, but remember to keep moving forward.



Recovery is Borne out of HOPE

HOPE is known as the core determinant of recovery by people affected with mental illness. Remember, "With HOPE, anything is possible." "HOPE can move mountains."



Recovery Needs A Supportive Environment To Thrive

"A common denominator of recovery is the presence of people who believe in and stand by the person in need of recovery," recovery researcher, William Anthony. Remember, there are always going to be people willing to support you through your recovery journey.



Recovery Involves Dealing With Stigma and Discrimination -Both Internalized and External:

- Stigma has been called the #1 Barrier to recovery by:
 - Ignoring the reality that mental disorders are valid treatable health conditions
 - Causing people to avoid socializing, employing, associating with individuals affected by mental illness
 - Depriving people of their dignity and interfering with full participation in society
- For many people, dealing with the stigma of mental illness is more difficult than the illness itself

Source: Dr. Thomas Nerney (2004)

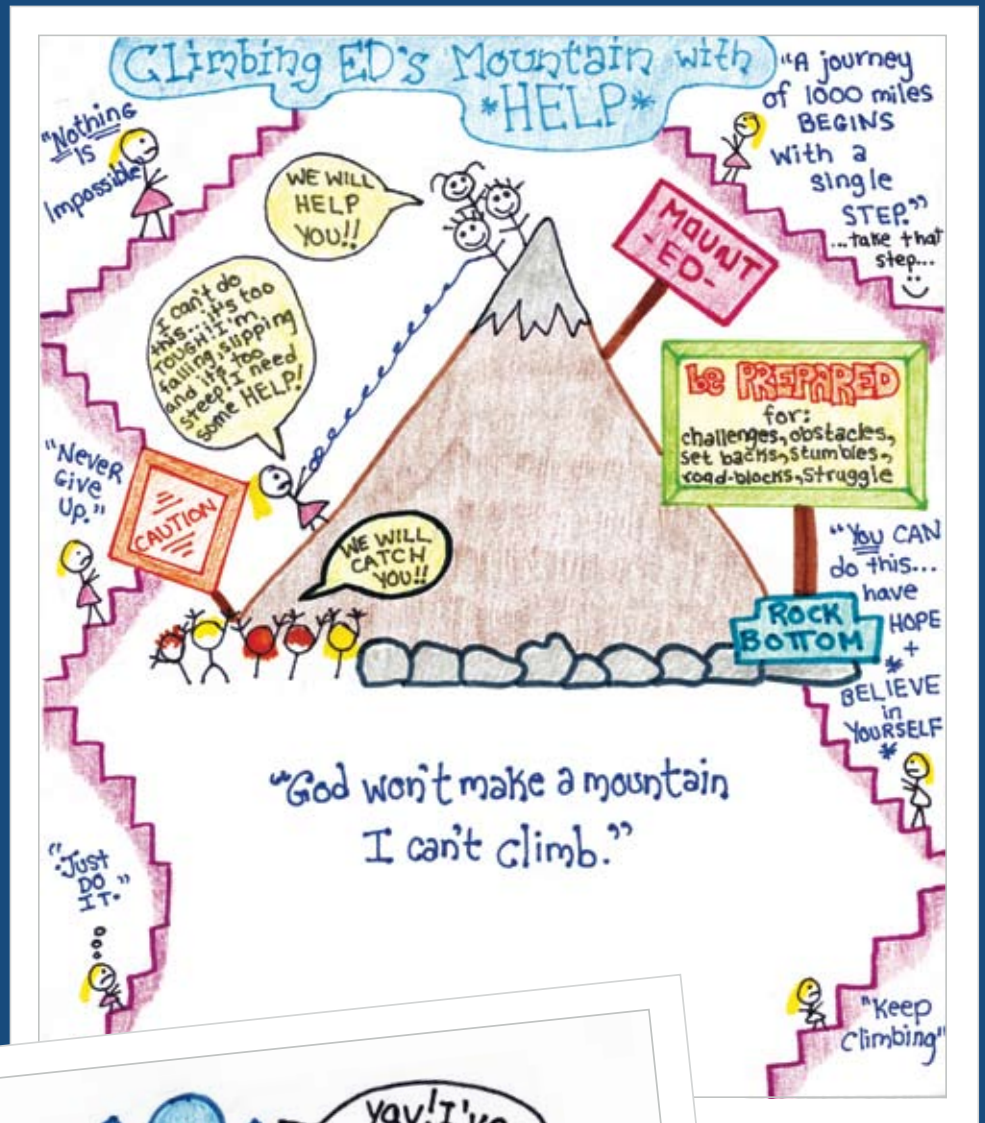
- Christopher Reeve



Some mountains are too steep to climb alone. There are plenty of people willing to help you up your mountain including therapists, doctors, family, friends, teachers and coaches. Grab on to the ropes that they throw you, grasp their hands... Allow them to help you.

Guaranteed, you will still slip, you will still fumble. In fact, you might even miss the ledge and fall right back down to where you began. But this constant falling, constant climbing and constant determination will get you up your mountain of ED... eventually.

Know and believe that these people, these ropes and this help are always there. Keep hanging on to them and you will make it closer to reaching the top of your mountain.



“ A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with bricks that others have thrown at them. Start making your foundation from all those bricks that have knocked you down. ”

Dearest ED...

You've been my struggle, my pain and my challenge. You've been my threat and have driven me to reach within for courage I hadn't even known existed. You've pushed me, weakened me and have created a new world for me to live in. A world with so much power that it captures you from the second you take one step in, and never lets you return to where you stood before. You've been my test: a test I'm still writing and trying to figure out completely. You were dishonest; an imitation of true love and beauty really is. You pretended to love me... and I fell for it. I fell into your trap as you manipulated me time and time again. Your goal? To have me suffer in attempt to be some mirrored image of unattainable perfection. You are a lie and you wanted only one thing. You wanted me all to yourself. You wanted my mind, body and soul in the palm of your hand so you could mold me into whatever new image you had. You became my life by stealing away the only life I knew. You wanted me dead. You were determined to completely consume me and become my world. Physically, you've created damage that I will never be able to completely recover from - lifelong consequences. Perhaps more critical though, you've introduced me to mental illness, this life long battle I will be fighting forever. You caused me to fail, lose, fall, drown, suffer and hurt.

Thank You.

This journey has been long and this fight has been anything but easy. Thank You. Because the failures have created lessons

- The losses have created realizations
- The falls have made me tougher and stronger
- The tests have made me wiser
- The setbacks have made me determined
- The suffering has made me HOPEFUL*

Your relationship was a race for me. A never-ending journey where I seemed to just get weaker and slower as the world passed by faster, running me over. Fall after fall, I was down on my knees wishing for an end and wanting to give in.

Thank you, because you forced me to run far... gave me endurance, stamina, power, strength and courage. Most importantly, it has made my heart stronger.

You are my blessing. You are the most destructive relationship I have ever been in, and in being that- you are my greatest blessing. I don't regret one tear drop, heart ache or fight. "No regrets-only lessons" is my motto. No, I don't wish this relationship upon anyone. In fact, if I could have it my way, you'd never touch or talk to any one ever again. But I wouldn't change my experience for anything. Overcoming you is why I am who I am. Now, you have failed your own test and I'm outsmarting you. Now, I'm challenging you.

As my blessing, a part of you will live in me forever. But, it's that part of you that will remind me of the battle I've fought, the lessons I've learned and the hope I've gained in challenging your power. Thank you for this journey and for this relationship. The challenge in breaking up with you has been one of the greatest blessings I have experienced.

*Thank You,
Raija*





“What lies behind us and what lies before us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us” *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

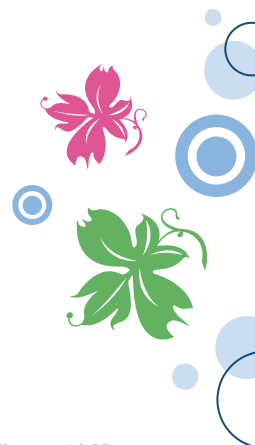
I didn't want to write this entry until the FINAL stages of the book because I wanted to give you guys the closest possible concept of exactly where I am after the long and challenging relationship with ED. ☺ On September 11th 2007, I celebrated the five year anniversary of the day I was admitted into the Adolescent Psychiatric ward at Thunder Bay's McKellar Hospital.

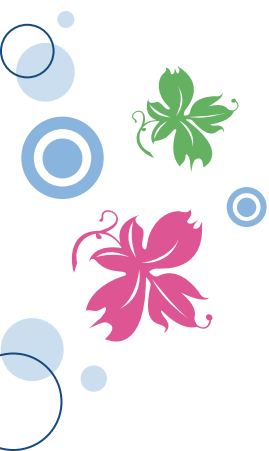
Five years and yes, I am still a member of St. Joseph Care Group's Sister Margaret Smith Centre Eating Disorder Program and DO attend regular sessions - sometimes bi-weekly, sometimes monthly. I am attending Lakehead University in my first year of Nursing and ready to follow in my former exemplar nurse's footsteps. After University, I still have hopes of specializing in Youth Mental Health because I know I want to make a difference to those struggling through the same battle with mental illness that I continue to fight.

Straight up, high school sucked for me, and no it wasn't the "time of my life" like its reputation holds. But, the thing to remember is that everyday is a new day. All bad days, bad weeks and bad years DO come to an end. My high school years have ended and I have hope in the years to come, whatever they may bring!

As for ED? Yeah, he's still a part of my life and he will be forever. However, he definitely does not have as much power over me as he used to. Today, I am learning how to live without him and that it is possible. It is possible to overcome him and come to a place where he no longer has such a tight grasp on every decision. Confidently, I can say that I am moving on and that I have found new people, things and ways to deal with problems and stresses in my life other than returning to a relationship with ED. It hasn't been easy, and even today I am faced with my difficult days, however I know I will be okay. I know that I want to LIVE, really LIVE, and with ED that wasn't possible. Today, I am LIVING, I am DREAMING and I am challenging ED's voice whenever it creeps up on me. Nothing's easy, life's not fair and to this day, I still believe that my relationship with ED was truly a blessing. I have learned some of the greatest and most challenging lessons I know I will ever learn, and ED gave me an opportunity to become stronger because of this. One of my favourite mottos is "No Regrets, Only Lessons". ED is not my regret but more-so my lesson learned after a challenging journey.

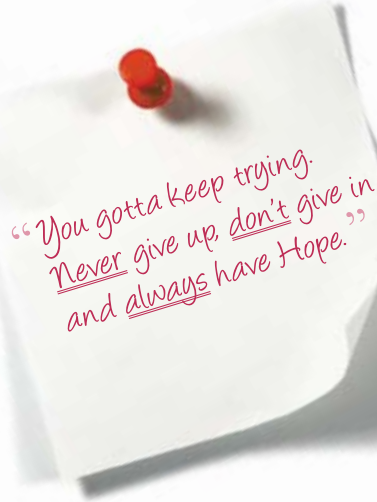
My dreams? This past year has been a huge and successful year in my personal journey towards making dreams a reality and really "DARING TO" make "DREAMS" come true.





Currently I am a member of St. Joseph's Care Group's Youth with An Open Mind group whose aim is to decrease the stigma of mental illness, raise awareness and create an understanding of youth struggle with mental illness in Thunder Bay. I am also a member of St. Joseph's Eating Disorder Advisory Group, where earlier this year we launched the "Ditch the Doll... Be Your Own Beautiful" campaign. This campaign involved spokespeople (all 19 years old and under) who have endured their own battles through an eating disorder and want to speak up about it. This book? This book IS my dream come true in itself. I dream of making a difference. Life is rough, pressures are huge and challenges are never-ending. The world is constantly trying to convince us of why we need to be more than who we are, do more than what we do. Magazines, family, peers, school... there are always tons of voices telling us that we're not good enough, why we're not good enough and that there's always something that could make us just that much better. And you know what? My dream is to get out there, SPEAK UP and try and let all you know that you don't need to be anything more than who you are. You are all beautiful... just because you are YOU. You don't need to change, and please don't.

Five years ago, if someone would have told me that I'd be writing a book about my struggle with anorexia and the journey of how I OVERCAME ED... I would have laughed in their face. I felt hopeless, lost, alone and I was dying. An ending seemed impossible, hope was no where and I was losing a battle that I had fought so hard to win. And THAT is why I wanted to write to YOU - the youth in today's society. Because, yeah, I get it... life sucks. Teenage life sucks even more. Nothing goes right, people are stupid and life seems to just bring you new struggles... and it's too much. You're lost. You want a way out - any way. THAT is why I wanted to write to YOU. Because even though I don't know your story, I may not know your battle or the journey your footsteps have walked... I do know, that you are NOT alone. There are others out there, like myself, who have gone through what you are going through right now. It feels impossible because you're so confused, frustrated and angry that you even have to deal with life at all right now. But... guess what? There is an ending. There is HOPE*. Things WILL be alright. You can win that battle that you've been fighting for so long... because I did... and I was where you are. No matter where any of you are on your journey through battles... know that you need to keep faith and have hope that you CAN make it through.



*“You gotta keep trying.
Never give up, don't give in
and always have Hope.”*

I am 18 years old... I have walked through your schools, live in your town and drive the same streets you do. I'm just another youth who's fighting their own battle... just like YOU. I made it out fine, and I wanted to show you that you WILL too. But you gotta make that choice. You gotta keep trying. Never give up, don't give in and always have hope. The sun will shine... and an ending will come. Believe it. Most importantly, believe in yourself. Believe that you CAN make it through and that you can find an ending to all the pain, frustration and fear. Seriously, nothing's impossible. But you can't wait for it. Go out and make it happen. The choices we make today will determine where we end up the future. Choose wisely. Make dreams come true. Make goals, create dreams and go get 'em. Live life... and don't let struggle hold you down. Climb up that mountain in front of you. It won't be easy... but life isn't. Reality isn't... but it is worth fighting for. Youth of Thunder Bay... I know you struggle... we all do. I also know that you CAN overcome it. Hang on, don't give in and NEVER give up. From personal experience... the sunlight once you reach it feels amazing. Dream Big and Dare to make your Dreams a reality too. 😊 Choose to make it possible 😊.

To Live For Today

To love who you are
To believe what you say
To trust in your instincts
Get bolder each day

To stand on two feet
And sometimes fall down
To hit some sharp corners
And still make it around

Smile at a stranger
Grasp someone's hand
Lead your own pathway
Stay firm where you stand

Go on an adventure
To soar with your dreams
To help your lone stranger
Lead in your team

Don't be decided
Leave room for change

Consider your options
Reach outside your range

To make a mistake
To do something wrong
To know you'll survive
When you don't always belong

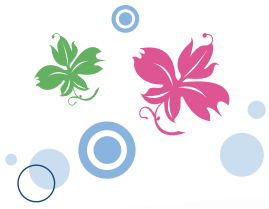
To give all you have
Put your heart on the line
To hit some hard storms
But know you'll be fine

Don't dwell on what's next
Or what's happened before
We can't change the past
But can open new doors

To love who you are
To believe what you say
To continue your race
Is to live for today

LEARN from YESTERDAY,
LIVE for TODAY,
HOPE for TOMORROW

- Albert Einstein



Time to Journal..

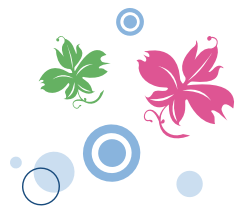
January 22, 2007

God has saved me. He saved me from my negative, depressed, "world is over" outlook. Because yeah, crap still happens... this place is tough... but that's what makes it beautiful. Yeah, I still deal with anorexic thoughts (especially when I have reminders from my coaches of how weak I am). I know I've been having such a tough time with that lately. Today I didn't eat anything until after school and all I had was some fruit. I know that what I'm doing is far from being healthy, I know that the way I'm eating isn't right, isn't "normal". But at the same time, knowing I need to be in that cheerleading uniform with our skinny cheer team, my "not strong enough" body, my growing hips and waist, hearing my best friend say how she thinks she's getting bigger, my "non cheerleader" muscle legs, having my friend go to the gym EVERYDAY... I dunno, it makes me feel like I should go too. It all makes me feel bad about myself ya know? I haven't lost any weight and I don't look any different but it's frustrating. Because I know that half of the thoughts I'm thinking, I shouldn't be thinking. I KNOW these thoughts are ED talking and I hate it. I guess I just have to keep up this positive self talk... and keep going to counselling! I always feel so much better after those meetings! I just need to keep my head up and keep recognizing when ED is trying to take over me again. I love God for getting me as far as he has and for staying with me through all of this. I know I can keep fighting this battle. I know I'll be fine.

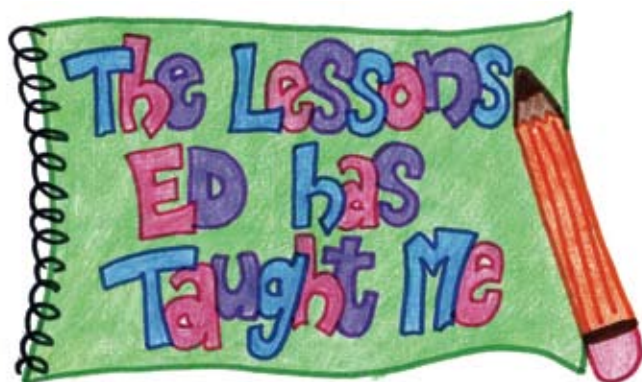


is how high you BOUNCE when you hit the bottom*

- General George Patton



5



Lesson #1 → Choice

“Life is determined not by chance, but by choice.” *Unknown*

ED taught me about choice. We often have little or no choice as to who we encounter and meet in our everyday lives. Do we have a choice? How we react and interact with them, whether we stay in touch with them, and if we even choose to get to know them at all. These are choices we make with every individual encounter, and similarly these were choices that I would eventually be forced to make with ED.

Meeting ED was not a matter of choice, after all no one chooses to suffer from an eating disorder. But, it was up to me to choose how I reacted to him, and how much I was willing to let him get to me. It's still a choice that I'm forced to make everyday. At first, I did choose to listen to ED because I didn't know any better. All I could hear was his loud, strong voice telling me to listen to him and follow his instructions. It slowly built up and eventually started screaming and invading my world. His voice was so convincing that I didn't even know anything was wrong!

Eventually, once I did realize the toll he was having on me... the rest was up to me (well, and the help of family, friends, therapists, medical care). The FIRST step however was up to me. I met ED, I fell for ED. I listened, lived, believed ED. This was my relationship, and I was going to have to be the one to break up with him. No one else. You don't get your friends to break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend of 8 months? One year? Do you? No. Because, it wasn't my mom who was obsessed with ED. Nor, was it my brother who was the one living for ED. ED was mine: he was overtaking my life, and it would be my turn and my choice whether I broke up with him.

And so there it was: do I stay with him, knowing he's destructing me and ripping me into tiny shreds (just the same way I tore my food into shreds?) Sure, if I want to let him hold me within his suffocating grasp for another moment, another day or for the rest of my life. Or... do I choose to stand up for myself, take a step forwards and make the choice to leave him - to break apart from him before he continues to break me apart.

Choosing to leave ED is something that I have to be consciously aware of everyday. Even now, four years later, the choice never leaves me. Every situation I'm in, every plate of food that sits in front of me, every struggle I endure, the choice of whether I want ED to control me is there. Do I want to let him make my decisions? Or do I want to step up, accept the challenge and choose to take some independence away from ED? There was a lot I was unsure of in life but the one thing I did know was that I didn't want to live with ED forever. I didn't want this life sentence. ED was destroying my life. Every single aspect of it, and I made the choice to end it, to stop him and to speak up against my eating disorder.

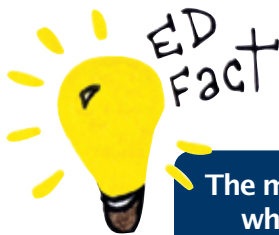


My Message to You...

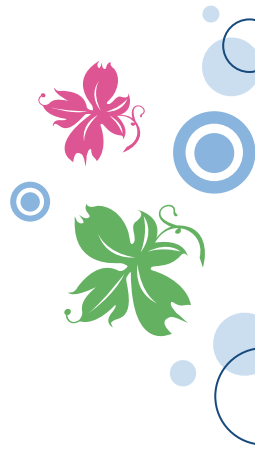
You make choices everyday. Every consequence or blessing that happens is a result of some choice. Maybe it's even in your choice of attitude.

Life constantly challenges us to make decisions and deliberate between right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy, positive and negative. Eating disorders, like any problem and struggle in life, do not have to be life sentences—not if you choose to get rid of them, not if you choose to make an effort. Realize that you have the power to choose. You have the power of choice within the palms of your hands. You hold your destiny, your future. In the end, it will be your choices and your decisions that are the determining factors of where you end up, and how quickly you're able to overcome life's greatest obstacles. No one chooses to go through an eating disorder just as no one chooses to put themselves through anguish and pain, but you can choose to recover and move through difficulty.

You need to know that you don't need ED in your life. You need to realize that you will be okay without him. You need to choose to try. The power to overcome ED is in your hands, in your choice. You can make the choice to break up with him, and choose to start your journey overcoming your struggles and obstacles.



The mortality rate of people with anorexia is estimated at 0.56% per year, which is about 12 times higher than the annual death rate due to all causes of death among females ages 15-24 in the general population.



“Teams share the burden, and divide the grief...” *Doug Smith*

ED taught me about teamwork. The reality is no one can overcome an eating disorder alone - no one. How can you be expected to, when the only voice you hear is ED's: forcing all those self destructive thoughts into your head. You need to hear the voices of doctors, of psychiatrists-of people that care about you and that know how to help you get rid of those demons in your mind. You need to hear some voices of HOPE for once, instead of voices of pressure and despair.

I know I've thought "no one understands", "they don't know what's going through my mind" "they're just teaching by what they know from books, they don't hear these voices". Believe me; I know these thoughts! How can some doctor sit there and tell me I "have to eat" when they don't understand that I feel like I physically can't? How can some psychiatrist sit across from me and act like she knows how I'm feeling? How can these people say they "understand"?! They don't deal with these thoughts, they aren't living with this disease... how can they possibly help me? Right?

Or then there are the thoughts that believe, "They're only trying to get me fat!" Believe me, I know this one! I remember refusing to let my mom make my sandwiches because I thought she would put extra mayo on it, "just to make me fat". This was ED talking. I needed to hear other voices. Outside help: that's what I needed. I needed encouragement from people that wanted me to break up with ED and overcome this struggle.

That's the advantage with outside help; doctors, dieticians, psychologists - they have dealt with many situations like this - like my own. They have dealt with many other eating disorder patients. (Maybe they've even dealt with an eating disorder personally) They know many things that you don't know yet. Their job is to help individuals overcome this illness - they've seen what works and what doesn't, so don't be too quick to underestimate their judgement. Let them help you. Let them help you learn how to eat again, how to feel again, and how to be you again. It's not easy, but know and trust that they gotta be doing something right to be dedicating their lives to helping people like you.

Asking for help isn't always easy, but sometimes the best things in life are the hardest. Sometimes asking for help might feel like we're giving in, or like we're surrendering. This couldn't be further from the truth. Giving in would be listening to ED and surrendering all happiness and life you ever knew. This would be giving in. Getting help? Asking for support? This is what it means to conquer ED, to take charge and to build your army against him.

Finding encouragement, wisdom, hope and inspiration within the help around you is one of the biggest steps in overcoming ED. But, it's also a necessary step. I couldn't have overcome my eating disorder alone (I dunno if ANYONE can). Doctors, psychiatrists, dieticians-they have taught me so much about overcoming, and becoming. I've learned skills to stay away from ED, to talk back to him, and finally... I've learned how to live again. Without these people, it wouldn't have happened. I needed to hear their support and knowledge. An eating disorder is an uphill climb, but speaking from experience, I can say that grabbing someone's hand and allowing them to help you, truly does make the mountain of ED much easier to climb.



My Message to You...

You know that feeling when someone becomes so important to you that you no longer can hear any views from anyone else? Or even any compliments from anyone else? The rest of the world remains tuned out to your entrapped mind, so you start believing the only words you do hear (ED). This feeling means you have been away from reality for so long that you're not even aware of the danger you're in. This is why you need to hear reality. You need to hear what's happening to your body and mind from someone who can actually see and know. The vision of an eating disorder sufferer is a distortion. You need to hear the voices of people who don't see distortion. You need to let these voices in, and I promise you, they will help you up your mountain.

In life, this is a lesson we should all take with us: It's okay to ask for help. It's okay to not be able to do everything by ourselves on our own. No man is an island, and no eating disorder sufferer (or any individual in general!) should be forced to suffer alone. We all need a little help at some point. There's so much that we can learn from others... but we have to let them take our hands, guide our paths, and we must let their voices in.



...FEAR...

"You must **FACE** fear to **OVERCOME** it."

ED taught me fear. He made me fear. ED was my fear. Soon food became my fear. Weight became my fear. People, eating, restaurants, calories, feelings, tomorrow, today, the future... I soon became terrified of all of these. I feared waking up, moving on and even living each day. I feared my friends, my favourite hobbies, my 'used-to-be' interests... I feared everything.

So now what? Was I supposed to keep going hoping that eventually these fears would just stop chasing me, just leave me alone? In reality, is it possible to keep a chase up if the victim you're chasing just... stops? No. It forces you to come to a halt. Dead in your tracks. The chase loses interest, loses excitement as it comes to a stop. Fears will chase you as long as you continue to run. They will continue to cause distress, panic, anxiety... even life threatening fear! But it's not until you face your fears that you can conquer those feelings and overcome even your biggest fear. Everyone has fears. We all have terrors that cause us to sweat and our heart to race. For some, we're scared of spiders, or the dark, or heights, or deep oceans... but for us eating disorder sufferer, we're terrified of the one thing that's crucial for our existence. We're terrified of food. See, that's what makes our situation so difficult for others to understand. People afraid spiders or the dark can avoid your fears. Just stay away from spiders, just keep a nightlight, and you can find comfort by not facing these things. For us, we are forced to face our fear - everyday. We are forced to face the one thing that terrifies us more than anything in the entire world. Yes, at times we would rather be dying than be forced to



eat (again!). It's tough because the one determining factor that has the potential to keep us alive, that's essential if we want to make it through another day... this is our one fear. Your life probably won't end if you're unable to face your fear of spiders today. But me? I'm a little closer to death's doorway if I'm unable to face my fear of eating.

So, go on. I challenge you. Imagine your biggest fear-right now. Picture it. Imagine a moment. Got it? Now... confront it. Pick up that tarantula. Turn out the lights. Climb up to the top of that 10 story building and look over the edge. Do it. Confront your fear. Do you think you can? Just like that? That easily? It's a lot tougher when you look at fear this way, eh? So, when you sit there and stare at me, telling me to "just eat", please remember your fear. "Just pick up the spider", it's a lot easier said than done, eh? Realize that I feel all those same menacing thoughts, get those same antsy goose bumps and experience that same pounding heartbeat that reverberates when you even think about your darkest terror.

ED has taught me fear and more importantly, he has taught me to overcome it. He has forced me to overcome it. I take this lesson in overcoming fear with me everyday - every situation. My eating disorder has forced me to endure those things that I spent years running from. Another thing ED has taught me? That the only way I would have ever been able to break up with him, to overcome my eating disorder, to rise above it... the only way would be to face it. Head on. And eventually, after you do it enough, it no longer becomes fear but remains a success that was rightfully, painfully... finally achieved.

My Message to You...

Confront fear. Stare it head on. Don't let it control you anymore, and stop allowing it to chase you. Realize that we all fear and we all struggle through achieving those things that scare us. Fears create struggle for us, but only as much as we let them. Know that each time you face your fear, each time you are able to look at fear and attempt to overcome it, attempt to see past it - you will gain confidence; you will gain success. Because, simply confronting fear is success in itself.

The more you do it, the better you will become at it, and perhaps soon you will no longer get those goose bumps or feel those clammy hands. Trust me, it's possible (Remember nothing is impossible) don't let fear stop you from achieving those successes in life that are out there waiting for you. Because yeah, it's true, fear is a huge barrier! At the same time, it's one that you can overcome. You just need to want it, to believe it; go out and face it. Stop running from it, and know that every time you can face your fear, you are one step closer to success. You are close to achieving, to learning, to knowing; to overcoming. Fear will stop you from living life-if you let it. Stop letting it chase you, stop letting fear get the best of you and your life. Start learning how to face your fears - believe that you can.



 **Lesson #4** → **failure**

“Failure is a hard teacher - it gives the test first, and the lesson after.”

ED taught me all about failure. No doubt, I probably failed more times than I succeeded for the first little while anyway. Actually, even during my “break up” with ED-my body and mind definitely experienced several downfalls during this recovery process-perhaps more than ever before! With an eating disorder, failure is constant-no matter what kind of failure it may be. At first, failure was taking that extra bite or not losing that desired five pounds... but eventually as I started to break apart from ED, failure became not gaining that one pound I needed to reach my “set point”. Failure became giving into ED-to the voices he forced into my mind. Whether it was in favour of my eating disorder, or fighting against it, my mind, body and soul all seemed to experience set backs, downfalls and challenge... over and over again.

At the same time though, these failures have been the sources of some of my most valuable lessons learned. If I didn’t know what it meant to fail, how would I know how to distinguish it from success? One must endure deep failure in order to know true success. ED has taught me success and joy in failing, and yes, there is joy in failing. Failure creates opportunity to grow, learn and strive even more... to reach even further. It teaches us about what we want, and the direction we want to take. Do we want to continue in a direction that’s only dragging us downward? Or do we want to take our falls, brush off our knees and get back up to try it again. I guess the only way to find out is to use those falls as trials and as opportunities to get back up and learn. It’s been this failure that has taught me to get back up and brush off my knees-time and time again. It’s this failure that has taught me success.



My Message to You...

Learn to love failure. Learn to accept failure. Know that failure can teach you success. Understand that you must fail, you must make mistakes, you must endure heartache, trouble, and difficulty... these are the things that shape your road to success.

In life, we all fail. We all screw up and mess up at even the simplest of tasks. We’re all guilty of this at one point or the other. That’s the idea though. You need to fail... and more importantly we all do fail - everyday. Each mistake we make, we learn a valuable lesson from. And yeah, realize that you probably will screw up - several times. Maybe hundreds of times on your journey battling ED or battling life. (I know! You’re thinking, “gee thanks for the encouragement eh!”) But know that failure never leaves us. At the same time, neither does success. The success that comes from learning from those failures is something that we are all fortunate to experience.

The key is to find your success in every single one of your failures.



Lesson #5 → patience

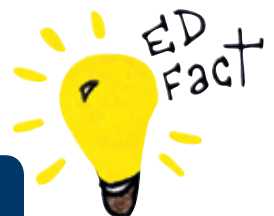
“Time heals ALL wounds.” *American proverb*

ED taught me patience. Slowly but surely, ED takes over the mind. It's going to be just as slow and most likely an even slower process to get rid of him, and to repair the damage he's done. However, one of the most valuable lessons I have learned is that recovery does take time. I will always know ED; I will always have my eating disorder. Yes, I can be treated, yes I can reach towards recovery and follow the road of treatment, but I will never be 'cured'. Anorexia is an illness that has no real cure. No painkillers to numb the emotional pain, no drugs to make me start eating, and no tube feeding that will take away the negative self esteem. Just strong will and determination-and when you live so long without either of these, learning to recover and enduring treatment won't be a quick or easy process. The process to recovery lasts years, perhaps even a lifetime-and this is a tough realization.

This is where ED taught me patience. Straight up, I'll admit that I'm an individual with very little patience. Unfortunately, little patience in a relationship with ED definitely created its downfalls. ED is one of those people, one of those relationships that require patience. Lots of it. You know those people in everyday life, that we seem to just have to constantly calm ourselves around, count to ten and breathe in order to deal with them because they cause us so much distress and havoc? Yeah, that's ED. Having to wait, enduring never ending and long lasting mental entrapment created an impatience in me that made me wish I could just give up, just stop trying, and just stop wanting to recover. "What was the point in trying when no results were taking place? They tell me if I start eating that my hair will stop falling out, I won't stunt my growth anymore, I'll get my period back. Really doctors? Then why isn't that happening! How do you expect me to believe something will happen when I'm doing what you tell me and it's still not happening?"

Eating disorders are lifelong battles. A relationship with ED includes the effort you put in to get to know him, the effort you devote to him, listening to him, learning about him, living by his rules, his orders. Naturally, after so much time spent devoted to a relationship with ED, there's going to be time needed to get away too. It's hard to hear because I remember thinking I'd be out of the hospital in just one week after my admittance. Then, surprise! 7 weeks later! Or when the Sister Margaret Smith Centre told me that their eating disorder program usually cared for patients for 2-5 years after discharge, I remember laughing. 2-5 years! Yeah... right! I had this idea in my head that I was going to be some "miracle patient" that would get through it in six months... tops! Mmmhmm, well reality check: I'm going on four and a half years and I know I still have at least a couple more years ahead of me. But... that's OKAY. I'm fine with that.

47% of girls are influenced by magazine pictures to lose weight.



Honestly, I've called and booked my own appointments sooner than my originals, just because I've needed extra help during certain situations. It's not a race to see which patient can discharge from the mental help program sooner. It's more a matter of when my mind, body and emotions can handle the outside world on its own. Anorexia holds onto one's conscience with tight grasps and if ED could have his way, he would never leave you. He will always try to drag you into his depths. Recovering from mental illness is just like recovering from physical illness. Mental thoughts, self deteriorating voices, near death body weights - NONE of these repair themselves in any short amount of time. It takes time, energy and above all... patience.



My Message to You...

Learning to recover and learning to live again is a long process. Have patience and keep reminding yourself that you need to take time. Don't expect to be able to recover in one year. Do not expect to feel continuous happiness just because you start feeding your body again. Don't expect to feel acceptance, love and beautiful just because you're receiving psychological help and treatment. These are obstacles too great to be overcome in a single day, week or even year.

But remember that they will be overcome in time. Know that you need to take time and you need to allow yourself to take time. Don't get frustrated because you don't see results, don't get angry because you hit some setbacks. These things happen and it's to be expected. You will get your results. An answer can be found... just have patience in knowing you will get there.

Your mind has gone through months, years of torment and self mutilating thoughts. Your body has gone through numerous setbacks (weight is only one factor of an eating disorder, there are many other forces). Patience isn't easy (Believe me, I understand all you impatient people out there!), but it's not impossible. Believe that you will find that long awaited light at the end of the tunnel. Take time, and let your mind have patience.



*“ When one door closes, another opens...
but we often stare so long at the
closed door that we don't realize
another one has opened for us. ”*

- Alexander Graham Bell



Lesson #6 → DIFFERENCES

“Our greatest strength is our ability to acknowledge our differences... our greatest weakness is our failure to EMBRACE them.” *Judith Henderson*

ED taught me difference. More importantly ED taught me about the never ending beauty being different holds. He taught me difference on two levels actually.

First, he taught me about interpersonal difference. You know that whole idea about how no two people are the same and we're all born with our own unique abilities and qualities? That typical message we've been sent ever since kindergarten, and yet, as cliché as it is, it holds much truth. When I met ED, he made me believe that my differences were my flaws. That little bright white dot right in the middle of my one front tooth, that appears whiter than the rest of my tooth, that dot... ED told me it was hideous and made me believe I shouldn't smile. Or how about my "big nose" or my "bushy unwaxed eyebrows" or my "flipper feet." These qualities that made me different were flaws that needed to be changed in ED's eyes. He made me hate these things that made me different... to the point where I did want to change. So for ED, I tried and I guess I thought that trying to change my body shape would do the trick. It didn't. And as I found more and more differences about me, and more and more things that weren't the same as my best friend (like her tiny nose... or her small feet... her beautifully shaped eyebrows... straight white teeth)... I found myself hating myself even more. I'd compare myself everyday, every minute, every moment. Someone always had the better posture, the better shape, and the better appearance. I was different, and I hated that. These differences were seen as hated flaws in my eyes. ED made me believe that.

I wasn't the only one who thinks these things though. We all hold criticisms about those things and characteristics that make us who we are. Differences - these are the unbelievable gifts that we are each given that gives us our definable character, and yes, we all carry them. Differences are not flaws, but blessings. Difference is beauty, and this is one of the toughest realizations. We are in a society that rates our qualities and attempts to determine the beauty of our characteristics. Constantly, we feel inadequate because we can't have the same nose as the cover girl on the magazine. Yet these differences are where beauty and uniqueness are found. Now, I see my nose as my tie to my dad. It is practically identical to his. These bushy eyebrows have still never seen a wax job (and I don't intend on making an appointment anytime soon!). This white spot on my front tooth makes my smile unlike anyone else's. As for these flipper feet? They have walked me through my endless journey of life and have gotten me to where I am now. None of these traits have failed me, because I've learned to love these differences. I no longer see them as flaws, but more so as blessings. Blessings that you too, exhibit. These differences that no one else will ever have because you were meant to have them. You were meant to live with them and to make them shine for the rest of the world to see. Some differences, you will never be able to change regardless of how hard you try. They're yours - and you are so fortunate to have them - the challenge is accepting them. Make the most of your differences and take advantage of them. Make them work for you. Be proud of them, because it's these things that make you beautiful, that make you unique that make you unlike anyone else.

The other main thing that ED taught me about difference is that: my eating disorder-ED has made me different. Since meeting ED, I am different now and forever changed and I know I will never be the same person I was before I met ED. I don't even know who that person is anymore. But, I think differently, I see things differently, my life is different than the typical teen not dealing with a mental illness, and honestly I like it that way. I'm fine with that.

Personally, I believe I am so grateful to have learned and experienced everything I have-as crappy as it might have been at times. An eating disorder does introduce you to that whole new world of negative body image, worthlessness and alienation. And, as hard as this new world is to live in, it has made me more aware of mental illness and how prevalent it actually is in society. I am different now because I cannot experience that carelessness of enjoying dinner out with friends that the "average teen" can. My mind ponders low fat options, portion size and calories. I can no longer view situations the same as before. I cannot expect to be able to count on my body to tell me when I'm hungry, or when I'm full. I cannot expect to be okay when I go only one day without eating. My illness has made me different, but I like it. I like not being the same as everyone else. Breaking up with ED has taught me to accept difference. Many of us are aware of our differences, but what they might not be aware of is the beauty that those differences hold.

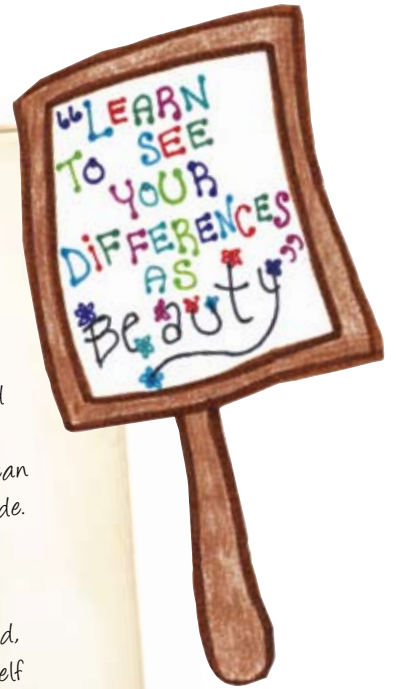


My Message to You...

Learn to see your differences as beauty and worth. Learn to realize that these unique differences are what makes you so unlike anyone else. Know that you are blessed, fortunate to have such distinct traits that help to define you as a person. You have things that no one else will ever be fortunate to have because YOU own them. These are your traits and your differences - use them to your advantage. Let yourself shine, and let these differences shine through yourself.

I challenge you; find your reason for your differences. Find the purpose in them. Make purpose for them. The world doesn't experience your differences, the world doesn't own your traits. Stand up and don't be scared to show everyone the things that make you who you are. These are the things that make you so definably unique. Show them off, be proud. These differences hold your identity. They hold your story and tell your story. Tell your story the way you want, and let your differences guide you. Don't hide this. Show the world these qualities that you deserve to show off. You were given them for a reason... you and only you were meant to hold these qualities within your grasp.

My opinion? Allow your differences to shower over everyone so that they can see all those reasons you are the way you are. Embrace your differences. Acknowledge them, and be grateful for them. Shine with them and learn to see differences as beauty. Know you are different. You are unique, and this is what makes you beautiful. This is what makes you have purpose and this is what makes you YOU. Learn to accept it. Learn to love it.



Time to Journal...

I AM DIFFERENT

I remember hating the fact that my friends wouldn't treat me the way they used to. They tiptoed around me like I was broken when I wasn't eating. They treated me different... like I wasn't normal. At the time, I couldn't understand why. I mean it's not like I was a different person on the inside, I was just skinnier on the outside. Deep down, I was still the same Raija.

It wasn't until recently though that I realize how wrong I was because I now understand that I wasn't the same on the inside either. When my body changed, it was really my inside that changed first. Along with losing weight, I had lost self esteem, confidence, happiness and gained frustration, confusion, anger and depression. I was a lot different. Undemeath all those new emotions, RAIJA was still waiting to be found... but I had become so lost and consumed by the world ED made for me, that yeah, I was different.

Now I've realized that I'm still different than my other friends. Mental illness and a battle with anorexia is a part of my everyday life. So yeah, ED has made me different. Others may never have to bring BOOST to school for snack time. I may need to have it twice at school and then again at home. Others may be able to shrug off certain insults and comments as if they meant nothing. I may internalize these insults and refuse to eat for the rest of the day because of them.

But, I'm okay with that. I'm okay with having to do things differently and think differently. It's a challenge... an everyday challenge to be the one sitting anxiously at the cafeteria table while everyone else is digging in, or to be the one who avoids shopping because of those stupid dressing room mirrors. But, I'm dealing with it. The way we view things, how we handle things, and the way we act are based on experiences we go through. So yeah, I'm going to be a lot different than my friends. I've come close to death, and have learned so much during the journey back to life that I'm okay with being a little different. Plus, who says difference is a bad thing?





“It’s not until we fall off the edge of a cliff... that we grow our wings to fly...” *Unknown*

ED taught me about life... about learning HOW to live. Not at first though. I mean, at the beginning ED treated me so negatively that it didn't even feel like I should have been alive.

At first, ED took so much time, energy and effort out of me. I was tired, I was weak, I was unhappy and I was obsessed with ED. Physically, sure, I was ALIVE... I was still breathing... but psychologically, I felt dead. I felt like someone was suffocating me and choking me so fast that each moment seemed too strenuous to even manage a breath. Making it through each day, each meal, each moment took effort-and it was all because of ED. He was the most important aspect of my life and I didn't want anything else. It's funny, how I was willing to completely give myself away to someone who was doing so much physical and mental damage to me. But that's what ED was to me-he was the one thing that kept me going and the one person that I was willing to live for. Too bad the person I was willing to live for was the one person who was killing me. Because that's exactly what ED was doing... straight up, he was killing me. I didn't realize it at the time... I didn't realize a whole lot outside of my world with him... but he was. Slowly, but surely he was killing me... as I was wasting away before his eyes... before everyone's eyes. He continued to say things like, "you're not good enough yet..." "Keep going... soon you'll be perfect". He didn't care how much I hurt or the long term physical and psychological damage he was causing me. He didn't care. In fact, he LOVED it... because it showed HE was in control. He was killing me and I was dying and ED's plan for me was going perfectly.

ED came so close to killing me that I could feel him stealing my breaths. I was so obsessed with counting calories, cooking food I wouldn't eat, reading recipes, researching ingredients and pleasing ED? This is not what it means to live. Unfortunately, I had been living under ED's influence for so long, that I no longer knew what being ALIVE even meant. You don't live, because he doesn't let you. He traps you in his world so that you can't experience a typical life with friends, family and fun. No, you won't feel alive, and often you won't even want to be alive. You come so close to dying... so close to the edge... you're falling... you're weak... you can feel every word, moment, day closer to pushing you off... you're ready for an end... you're scared, helpless, hopeless... nervous... frustrated... lost.

....so finally, you fall... and you're positive that everything is coming to an end. Then, ya know what happens? You make a choice. A choice to keep falling... or a choice to fly. This is your chance... you're falling faster than you could have ever imagine... so I challenge you... stop falling... use those wings... start flying. Yeah... FLY. Your wings are there... maybe they're still small... maybe you don't know how to use them yet. But they're there.... so why not give 'em a try. Choose to fly. Choose to survive. Choose to live.



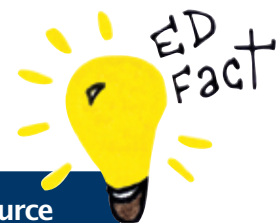
My Message to You...

We deal with many challenges that take away our sense of life and our ability to even feel alive. Often, in these circumstances, we aren't alive... not spiritually, and not emotionally. So... what can we do? We can let our struggles bring us down and rob us of living our lives to the greatest of our potential. Or, we can choose to let these struggles teach us how to FLY... we can use them as inspiration and reason to survive. Challenges will take the life out of us... but that's when we can make a choice to rise above them and know that we WILL fly. You CAN fly... it is possible. And when you do... you won't only rise above them... no, you will SOAR above them... because you will have grown wings so powerful that will be able to take you anywhere.

Learning how to live isn't easy, but it's not impossible. It's a process worth fighting for. From a voice that understands what it feels like to feel completely psychologically, emotionally dead, get trapped in a body that's physically alive... I will tell you, that it is possible to live again. It is possible to overcome these burdens that trap us in continuous states of depression. Perhaps you have days, weeks, months where the entire world feels dead. You're choking and struggling to breathe through moments that take every ounce of effort out of you. Experiences make you fall, stumble and suffer. You're left there-feeling like there is no way out and there are no answers. There is no life. You feel like you're dying too fast to be saved.

You CAN survive. You CAN live. And not just physically live... no... that's only half of the meaning of life. I mean REALLY live... psychologically, spiritually, emotionally... LIVE. Choose to live and you WILL learn to feel alive. Choose to free yourself from the hell you're caught in.

Experiences are tests of how much we can handle and of the strength we're willing to put forth to overcome them. They will push us off ledges and break our wings so that we can no longer fly. These are the times when we grow and come so close to death that we really do realize what it means to live. ED brought me so close to death, and in doing so... he taught me about choosing to live. Choose to fly... and believe that you CAN. Choose to overcome obstacles and choose to soar. Because it's these choices that will repair your wings and make them grow bigger than they've ever been. Then, you will be able to fly above that old world of despair and into a new world where you are actually able to LIVE.



According to a recent survey of adolescent girls, their main source of information about women's health issues comes from the media.



“Love unlocks doors and opens windows that weren’t even there before.” *Mignon McLaughlin*

ED taught me about love. He taught me about absence of love, self love, feeling loved and learning to love. He taught me what love is; how to find it, accomplish it and how to feel it.

ED didn’t love me. I know that because love’s not supposed to be threatening and harassing. I know that because love doesn’t judge and isn’t discriminating... and ED was all of these things. He didn’t love me... yet it was almost like he loved to test me, to challenge me, to defeat me. I guess you could say that ED loved to hate me, loved to watch me struggle and watch me suffer. At the same time, he robbed me of my own love - the love I might have had for myself, the love that others felt for me, the love for school, hanging out with friends and the life I had lived before. ED took away all of these things. Makes sense though, right? I mean he wanted me for himself. He didn’t want to have to share me with family, or share me with homework I had, or with friends on the weekends. Nope. He wanted me all for himself... and he got it.

Soon, I started believing that I didn’t deserve to be loved. I thought my friends acted different towards me and I thought it was because they didn’t care about me. Or all those boys at school who would always hit on my best friend and never pay attention to me as we walked down the halls - I thought I wasn’t capable of boys wanting me or liking me. And my family... I had some idea in my mind that they would never love me as much as they loved my brother.

These beliefs, these misconceptions... I truly did believe them, I thought that no one loved me. Of course... it was ED that made me believe this... I mean, I listened to everything he said. Soon, he made me believe that my body wasn’t even capable of loving-I WAS JUST TOO FAT. My thighs were TOO huge, my stomach TOO WIDE to be liked by anyone. Or, how I could never seem to exercise long enough and therefore didn’t deserve my family’s acceptance. These thoughts were all formed because of my obsession with ED... because of the ideas he forced into my head. It didn’t matter what people would say or how much they’d tried to do to help. I was unconvinced... no one loved me.

And no... I didn’t love myself. Straight up... I hated myself. I lost my love for the person I was and I wasn’t content with my fat stomach or huge thighs. I hated how I never could be good enough... never be thin enough... never be happy enough, smart enough, strong enough. I didn’t love my differences, my traits or my qualities... all those things that made me unique from everyone else... I down right hated them. ED made me hate them.

I think one of the hardest things in the relationship was losing the ability to have FUN and losing my love for all those things I had once enjoyed. Who would’ve ever thought that would be possible, eh? With an eating disorder, having fun takes effort. With ED in my life, my love for fun was replaced with an inability to experience laughter and happiness that I used to experience EVERYDAY with my friends before. Now, it was all forced. I could no longer have fun doing those things “the girls” used to do regularly. No



more fun pig-outs out on pizza at 3am, calling boys at 2 am, random adventures, the jokes that friendships have? My love for these things had vanished. Literally... I COULD NOT have fun... regardless of how hard I tried (and believe me, I tried - hard!) Somehow I'd still end up coming home with a face full of tears and hating that I was so different than the rest of my friends. ED robbed me of love - that feeling of unconditional support, happiness and release of freedom.

So, how did he teach me about love when all he did was take it away? He taught me love by showing me that we all need it. As much as I lost sight of it for so long, the one thing that never stopped was how much I needed love to survive and to be happy. It's crucial for our existence, survival and journey. It's what we build off of... it's what we take off from and it's what leads us.

Now I can realize that my parents and friends... it wasn't a matter of them not loving me, but because I was so consumed with ED, it was more a matter of me not believing they actually did love me. My eating disorder made me believe this, when really this was probably one of the times they felt the deepest and toughest love ever. It's difficult to think back now, because I do realize that my parents and friends all loved me from the start and they never stopped loving me. I see that now, but back then, all I saw was ED.

As for love for myself? I think that was the initial obstacle, and will remain the final obstacle to overcome. I didn't love myself and that was why I tried so hard for ED's acceptance and ED's love. I didn't love what I looked like and I had hope that ED could be my way to love these things. I mean maybe thinness meant love? That was what I had thought. I was wrong. The only thing that ED did was take away any knowledge and sense of love that I once knew. Getting it back? Yeah, it's been an uphill battle that's for sure. Learning how to believe I am loved? That took time... but it also came with realizing that people wouldn't still be here, wouldn't still be helping me, wouldn't still be such a part of my life if they didn't love me or care about me. I didn't do this alone; all of these people that have helped me get through this and that are still helping me get through this... they love me. I am loved and ED took me away from that knowledge for so long. Learning to love those activities? Or hanging out with friends? Yeah, that's getting there but still things have a different perspective now. I mean I know I LOVE going out for coffees with friends on a Friday night, and the whole idea of slumber parties has kinda lost its appeal. But I mean, the way I look at it... I am able to love something now right? Something that doesn't involve calories or exercise or thinness. I am able to find new healthy hobbies and activities that I honestly can say I do love. And being able to feel that love and enjoyment again is such an amazing and spirited feeling! Being able to say that I LOVE something is so empowering!

Do I love myself? Not yet... that's huge! But I'm on my way. I'm learning what it means to love, what love is, what it feels like... so I'm doin' good as far as I'm concerned. More importantly, I've learned that love IS possible-even after months and years of self hate, suffering and pain... even after years of feeling alone and isolated in a world where you don't feel love for anything and can not love anything. But I've learned that it IS there. LOVE IS POSSIBLE - especially at those times when we least believe it.





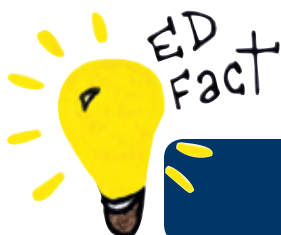
My Message to You...

Life is full of those moments and struggles that make us believe that love isn't possible for one reason or another. There are times when we feel like certain people don't love us, that our brothers and sisters are loved more or that we hate certain things about ourselves that make us unable to love ourselves. Some believe that love is depressing. But I think that the key is to find love behind every mistake, every struggle and every heart ache. It's there.

Find love. Learn to love. Learn to find love in every situation. It's there... but it's not always easy to find. I mean, how do you find love when all you've experienced for the last couple years has been isolation, depression and unhappiness?

You find it by believing. Believe that you will realize what it means to love doing something because it makes you so happy your jaws hurt from smiling, or your stomach hurts from laughing so hard. This IS possible. Love is possible. Fight for it. Also, know that you ARE loved. Yep, that's right. I don't know you, but I do know that someone out there - even if it's just one person... loves you. If you really can't think of anyone, know that God loves you. He wants you to know that - he told me.

Also, know that you deserve to be loved. There is no one in this world that doesn't deserve love. Each and every single one of us deserves to feel love and I wouldn't wish hate even on my worst enemy. Learn to love yourself. Know that you can love who you are... you can be happy with the things that you have gone through and the places you've been. Know that just because you've made some mistakes, just because you've taken some hits... doesn't make you any less lovable. If anything, this should give you more incentive to love yourself. Love yourself for being here today, for making it through every mistake and every struggle. You've proven yourself. You've overcome great obstacles... love yourself for these things. It's a huge accomplishment. .



By age 13, 80% of girls have dieted in an effort to fight the natural changes of puberty.

Lesson #9 → FIGHTING

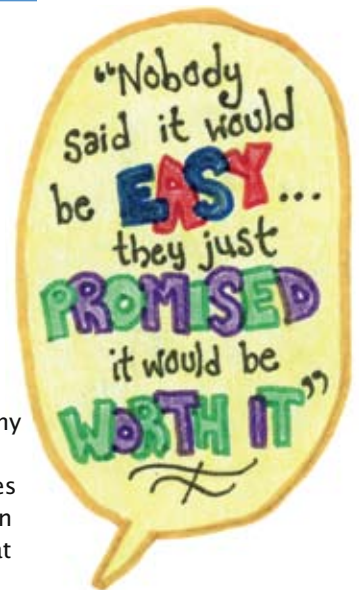
“A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with bricks that others throw at him/her.” *David Brinkley*

ED taught me how to fight. More importantly, he taught me how to fight against him. He taught me a lot about losing fights too that’s for sure! But it’s these losses that have brought me to my wins. At times it’s been a long, seemingly never-ending battle. It was me fighting for his acceptance, fighting for a way out, and fighting for my life. And the one thing that I am proud to say is that I have never stopped fighting. Usually, I HATE fighting, and I don’t believe that it solves anything... but when it comes to psychological fighting... NEVER GIVE UP. I encourage you to keep your game face on and never let down. Psychological fighting yeah, it’s a little different... it’s a battle that very well may be never-ending, but at the same time, a fight AGAINST ED, powering AGAINST that psychological Eating Disorder should be never ending too. Don’t give up.

Yes, for all you individuals in the midst of an ED relationship right now... you understand me because you are in battle. You are in one of the toughest battles that you will ever endure. You’re getting beaten, bruised and broken as ED continues to dominate you. If it seems like he’s winning... but YOU shouldn’t let him. After all, the fact that you’re still in the fight shows you aren’t completely powerless. No fight is easy, and a battle with an eating disorder is a fight against your mind, body and soul. It involves a dying and deteriorating body, a distorted, corrupted mind, and a searching, suffering soul. ED is an amazing fighter. Basically, that’s what he does best. He’s good at pushing, pulling, corrupting, abusing, demeaning and hurting. I don’t know why... but he wanted me, and he wanted to fight me. I wasn’t the one that chose this fight. Nope! ED picked this one. But now that I’m involved... now that I’ve gotten deep into it... now that I’ve taken the many hits I have... do you think I’m going to just let him get away with it? HA! That would be the day. I mean he’s done this much damage, broken me down and yet I’m still here. So what? I’m supposed to just throw that all away and let him finish me off?

No thanks. I’m a fighter. ED made me that way. And I believe that anyone who ED picks to be in a fight with him, anyone who enters that battle... they’re all fighters too. If not at first, they learn to become one. It’s funny ‘cause I’ve always been such an emotional basket case, and I’ve never considered myself strong to any degree. So that first week in the hospital when I received cards and letters saying that I’m “strong”... I remember thinking: “do these people even know who I am at all?” But eventually, I started seeing myself from a different perspective; A perspective that sees me fighting against ED. By forcing me into weakness... he created strength in me, just as he does in every individual that he chooses to fight. For all of those ED relationships out there, know that even though you feel weak and overpowered by his strength, you are strong for even fighting at all. Believe in your strength, and believe you do have strength. You are strong. Sometimes I’ve thought that the only reason I’m “strong” is because ED forced me to be. He forced me to find my strength.

So for every fight out there, every seemingly never-ending battle going on right now... remember, you’ve come too far to give up now. Keep fighting, and don’t let your opponent defeat you - don’t let ED get the best of you.





My Message to You...

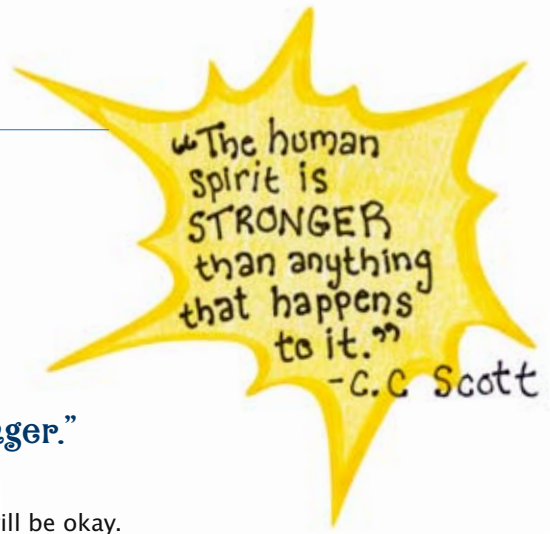
Life is a battle - it's a challenge and a constant series of mini boxing matches. Battling against friends, family, ourselves, situations, decisions... the fighting never ends. One way or another, it feels as if someone or something is always ready to pick a fight, to create a new battle.

So for all these battles... all these struggles that you will be forced into... FIGHT. Fight long, fight hard... and most importantly, never stop. Don't let your struggle defeat you, no matter what it is! 'Cause yeah, it will defeat you if you let it. You're in, and you can't back down now. Even those times that you believe you haven't succeeded at all, and you feel like you've failed more than you've accomplished... remember the fact that you're still here, still in the game, still in the match... this is success. This makes you a fighter. Life will force you into matches that tear your insides and outsides more than ever before. Those fights where it feels like you're down on your knees and keep getting knocked down every time you stand up... keep trying to stand up. Keep getting up because one of these times, you won't be knocked back down.





Survival



“What doesn't kill us will always make us stronger.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

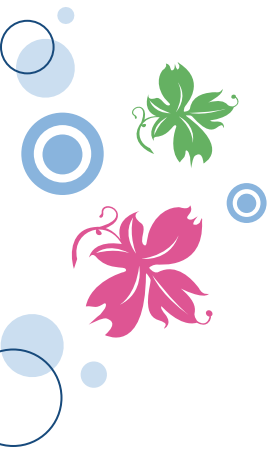
ED taught me about survival. He taught me that no matter what, I will be okay.
No matter - we will always be okay.

No doubt, life is shitty sometimes. Sometimes we have no answers to the endless questions that life demands of us. ED taught me about being in that place... being at that spot and in that moment where we can't survive the heartache, the trouble, the struggle for another minute longer. Time and time again I'd find myself losing to his challenge, deeper down than I ever could have imagined. I found myself nearing rock bottom and struggling to find a way out... that there were no more answers and that basically, I was screwed. Done, it's over. Basically, I give up. Things were too tough, too confusing... too frustrating. I didn't want it anymore... I didn't want to hurt... didn't want to be so lost. I didn't want to survive because I didn't know how (and still to this day, I'm not even quite sure I know how I made it through those times.... but I did.)

My eating disorder, the torturous depression, never - ending anxiety... it all became too much. Mental illness became too much, school was too much, having fun was too much, family, friends were too much... struggle was too much - life was simply TOO MUCH - and I wanted out.

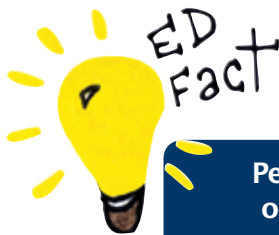
Bottom line of all of that?... I'm still here. And so are you if you're reading this. We all go through tough times in life. We all have troubles we think can't be fixed. We go through embarrassing moments, mistakes, misery, guilt... we ALL do to some degree, and we can all get through it. Struggles will never leave us and they will always be a part of our lives. I like it though, because we need them if we expect to learn anything. I always liked believing that “God won't make a mountain I can't climb”, because it's true. Keeping the attitude that there's nothing in life that I can't get through - and believe me, some things are pretty difficult.

We're all challenged-some more than others. And yeah, some mountains will be a lot bigger, rockier and darker than others. It doesn't matter though, because all mountains have a way over them. It's kinda like a storm. Storms can be massive, destructive, and blow overpowering winds over our entire lives, but there is an ending. They don't go on forever. Storms do let up... and so do struggles. Yeah, it's hard to believe, especially when you're right in the centre of that tornado spinning so fast you don't think you'll survive another minute, another second... but guess what? Tornadoes don't last forever either. Nor do hurricanes, or avalanches or little drizzles or raindrops-no degree of storm - no matter how small or large - ever go on forever. Forever is a long time, and no struggle will last that long. Mental struggle? Mmm... I believe that the effects of mental struggle, the memories, the journey to mental health can last forever, but if you're willing to put some effort in, and if you have your mind set... it won't be a struggle forever. It will be more so... an experience, a story told of the life of a brutal storm.



And yeah, there are those times that we want to believe that tomorrow will be a new day, that tomorrow maybe everything will be okay. Tomorrow, maybe the sun will shine. It's a new day right? I can speak from personal experience and think of many nights where things have been said, people have been hurt... many never-ending days that I wish I would just see a finish... where things are so bad that I feel determined to never show my face again. Or those days that I'm scared to face another moment, another hallway, and another mistake. And then... most of the time, the next day eventually comes, 'cause yeah... tomorrow will never stop coming,. Think of each new day as a new start and a new beginning. Start it fresh and not burdened by the pressure of the past.

That outlook did work for me. I made it through and things did feel okay the next day... until the day came when things weren't okay. I've only had one of those days in my life, but I can say that it was definitely one of the worst. I will never forget it; I will never forget the feeling of... NOTHING. The next morning came, a new start, a new beginning and yet, somehow for the first time in my many moments of depression, emptiness and hopelessness... things weren't okay. I didn't feel any different. I felt like this new beginning was only a new ending, again. It sucks. 'Cause I remember thinking... now what? I'm not okay. I can't do this. All of those suicidal thoughts and harmful determination was ripping me apart. I felt empty. I felt lost, and eventually it came to the point where I felt NOTHING. Not even pain anymore, nothing. I wasn't angry; I wasn't frustrated anymore... I wasn't confused. I didn't feel guilty or lonely or hated. I felt nothing. And that was the hardest morning of my life... I can't explain it... because moments like that can't be explained. It won't be the same. It's indescribable, and yet it was a morning that ED truly did teach me survival. THIS morning ended. THAT feeling ended. I forced myself to get through the day, to get up, get out... and it was THAT force that eventually led me to the end of that morning, the end of that feeling. It didn't end soon after, but eventually, it ended. Like everything... there is an end.



People who do not receive treatment may become chronically ill or even die. The longer that an eating disorder goes unnoticed or untreated, the harder it becomes to cure and overcome.

My Message to You...

You will be okay. You will get through **ANY** and **EVERY** storm you come across.
You can survive.

Every storm does have an ending. I know, it's tough to believe this especially when you're caught right in the middle of a difficult time and the storm doesn't seem to be letting up at all. The hurt, the pain, the frustration and confusion continues to break you until you feel like you have nothing left. You want to give in, and you want to get out. You're too tired from the constant fighting.

I'm a firm believer that giving up is always going to be easier than sticking it out and pushing your way to the end though. It's easy to say, "Whatever, I'm not trying anymore, it's too hard on me" and to just forget about how far you've come. Yeah, you could just stop everything-stop the trying, the determination, the courage, the perseverance and quickly put an end to the storm because you choose to give up.

Here's the thing though... giving up and giving in doesn't **STRENGTHEN** you. It doesn't teach you how to **FIGHT**, how to **PERSERVERE**, how to **HANG ON** or how to **BELIEVE**. You don't grow, you don't learn and you don't try. No doubt, storms aren't an easy thing to go through, nor are they always a fun thing to watch happen-but they're inevitable. They are going to keep happening and they are going to keep testing our strength. The key is to keep passing those tests and keep hanging on because believe me, there will be an ending. And then, once you do pass... once you stick it through until the end, you will realize how far you've come. And ya know what you gain? You gain an understanding and sense of **HOPE**. You learn what it means to have **COURAGE** and to **BELIEVE** that things **WILL** be okay. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow... but one day... things **WILL** be okay. You will understand and experience this if you continue to persevere through your storms.

Believe me, it is an amazing feeling to be able to say that you have conquered a storm. That feeling of accomplishment-because when the world was too much, you're lost and don't even know where you belong... you are able to say that you overcame it. Know that **YOU** too can feel this sense of accomplishment. You too have the ability in overcoming any storm that crosses your path.

It is easy to walk away. It's easy because you leave all of the struggles that weaken you. You walk away from the trying, the fighting and the waiting... and you give up. Anyone can do this. The hard part? The hard part is staring your hurt, pain and heartache straight in the face and saying, "I will overcome you", "You will not defeat me". The hard part is continuing that battle with a sense of determination knowing that the storm may worsen, it may go on for a lot longer and you may pay the price in the amount of pain you suffer. But remember, you **CAN** do all of that. You **CAN** overcome any length or brutality of storm there is. You **CAN** survive. But you got to be patient until it passes, and keep holding on until it does.



... my personal belief...

Giving up
doesn't let you
MOVE PAST a
tough time
because you've
stopped the process
of *FIGHTING*
+ *WORKING*
THROUGH IT.

A battle with ED? I've come to realize that this battle is going to last forever. At any time I could choose to say "that's it... I'm quitting... Eating and fighting this illness is too much for me to handle". I could have chosen that at any point during my last 6 years with ED... but then, I wouldn't be here today. Giving up doesn't let you move past the struggle because you've stopped the process of working through it-and that goes for any challenge in life.

So, your next storm... choose NOW not to give up. Maybe you are in a storm right now and you're hanging by a thread, ready to just let go and fall away from all the effort it's taking you to hang on. But remember, YOU CAN DO THIS. YOU CAN SURVIVE. Keep this attitude. Surround yourself with things that help you survive; things that help you keep your focus on your goal. Because remember, there are always going to be a million voices trying to steer you the wrong way... don't let those voices in, and know where YOU stand. And then... do just that. STAND up after all the hurt and pain and suffering you've been through. At the end of the fight, be able to stand up, knowing that you have conquered and passed one of life's toughest tests. It is a lesson of HOPE, COURAGE, STRENGTH and FAITH and that lesson is one that will continue to live in you through every day and storm in your life. I know this because it's still the best lesson I've ever learned, and the lesson that encouraged me to write this book in the first place. 😊

"All those qualities that made me unique from everyone else... I downright hated them. ED made me hate them."



Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I am grateful to many for their support and guidance. Thank you to the following people and organizations for their belief in my goal:

- **Thank you to St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG)**, for believing in this book and making it a reality. I would like to thank the following staff who were instrumental in my recovery and bringing this book to life...

Brook Latimer, Public Education Coordinator, for supporting and encouraging me to continue at times I just wanted to forget it all. Your passion for educating about mental illness inspires me to continue trying to DO SOMETHING about decreasing the stigma it holds. I am so lucky to have met and worked with you.

Kerry Bourret, Team Leader Eating Disorder Program, for helping me understand and overcome my ED relationship better than anyone else. More than that, you helped SAVE me - literally and that is something that I will never be able to thank you enough for. To this day, you help rebuild my self-esteem, confidence and perspective time and time again, after every setback I've come up against. The last five and a half years have shown me many challenges and downfalls, and you've heard ALL of them. You are the reason I am where I am now.

John Esposti, Counsellor with the Personal Development Centre, you kept my family together during a time when my ED relationship was ripping us apart. You are amazing at what you do. I do have hopes that all of those angry clients WILL thank you someday. I know I've realized how much of a blessing you have been.

Karen Steudle, Dietician Eating Disorder Program, as bitter as I was about them, thank you for all those MEAL PLANS. You taught me what "normal" eating looked like at a time when I had such a distorted interpretation of it.

- Thank you to the **"Dare to Dream Team"**, with your support (and patience during the last 2 years of this process). You made my dream of reaching out about mental illness and helping youth a reality. Thank you for MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE.
- Thank you to **Julie McKenna, Teacher Hammaraskjold High School**, not only are you the Dare to Dream mentor for this book, but you have been such a mentor in my life. You are my daily inspiration to continue fighting mental illness. Thank you for ALL of your in-class, and LIFE lessons. "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the moving ahead in spite of it" and "Mistakes are the richest sources of learning": I won't forget these words you have taught me. I admire your courage, and thank you for ALL of your in-class, and LIFE lessons.
- Thank you to the **Nurses/ Staff at McKellar Paediatrics 2002**, you were my inspiration and role models to go into Nursing! As my "hospital moms" for 7 weeks, you put up with my attitude during one of the toughest times of my life. The wheelchair rides, rock painting, warming up my blankets... and watching me eat 24/7! 😊 I will never forget you, and I only hope one day I can be just like you.
- Thank you **Dr. Bruni** for your medical wisdom!
- Thanks also to the **Eating Disorder Youth Advisory Group**, the strength that I have seen in all of you has inspired me to continue this battle. You ALL have such inspiring stories to tell, and I am so proud of all you guys for your own "ED break-ups."



- Thank you to **my Friends - Then...** Five years ago-so long... How were we supposed to understand anything we were going through back then?! To this day though, I have never forgotten the visits, the MANY cards and the amazing welcome back (that day still means so much to me knowing how accepting you were to have me back). More so than that, your strength kept me going. When I think of this ED experience, it's your faces that come to mind, and I hope you never doubt your influence in helping me recover and helping me back to life again.
- Thank you to **my Friends - Now...** Thank you for never giving up on me. You know who you are: those close friends who have watched me struggle these recent months and years, and continue to stay with me during times when ED creeps back on me. You have witnessed the ED setbacks even this past year. Your support and just "being there" has been more help than you will ever know. I am sorry for the way ED and mental illness takes over at times (and yes, I know... it's not easy for you guys to deal with and watch either)... but know that you have been the reasons I am OK. Thank you for eating with me, sharing and buying food with me and just being... PATIENT. I don't expect you to understand everything (because I can't even understand mental illness!), but know that you DO continue to SAVE ME... just by staying by me.
- Thank you to **my Family...** you never gave up on me, and you didn't let ED break us apart (Because believe me, he would have... He's good at that!). First, I am sorry for the years of hurting and frustration when my ED relationship was at its worst ...the anger, fighting, swearing, and crying. You were forced to watch your daughter try to kill herself, and those years put us all through a lot as a family. But you never gave up on me, and you didn't let ED break us apart (because believe me, he would have! He's good at that!).

Dad, thank you for your constant inspiration to NEVER GIVE UP on life. I know that comes from Opa, but your little sayings ("You only live once," and "When God made time, he made lots of it") continue to motivate me.

Mom, thank you for never missing a day to come visit... even when I acted like I didn't want to see you. Thank you for showing me that above all, you are my best friend who will be there at the end of the day drying my tears and holding me. We have been through a lot, and I DO admire your strength.

Randy, thank you for loving me as much as you do - I hope you know that you are more than a step-dad in my eyes. Thank you for those morning visits! You never did say much during the ED relationship... probably because you were scared I'd start yelling. I think, THAT was the hardest part though, that "silent hurting"... because I knew you loved me too much to watch me go through that.

Ryan (my brother), to you I was always still just your big sister - thank you! You made things feel as "normal" as they could've felt and I'm so glad you were there during those hospital visits and dinners! To this day, you are my inspiration to not care what others think and to just say "whatever". I do look up to you (weird eh? your older sister!) because you are so strong and have never been scared to just be yourself.

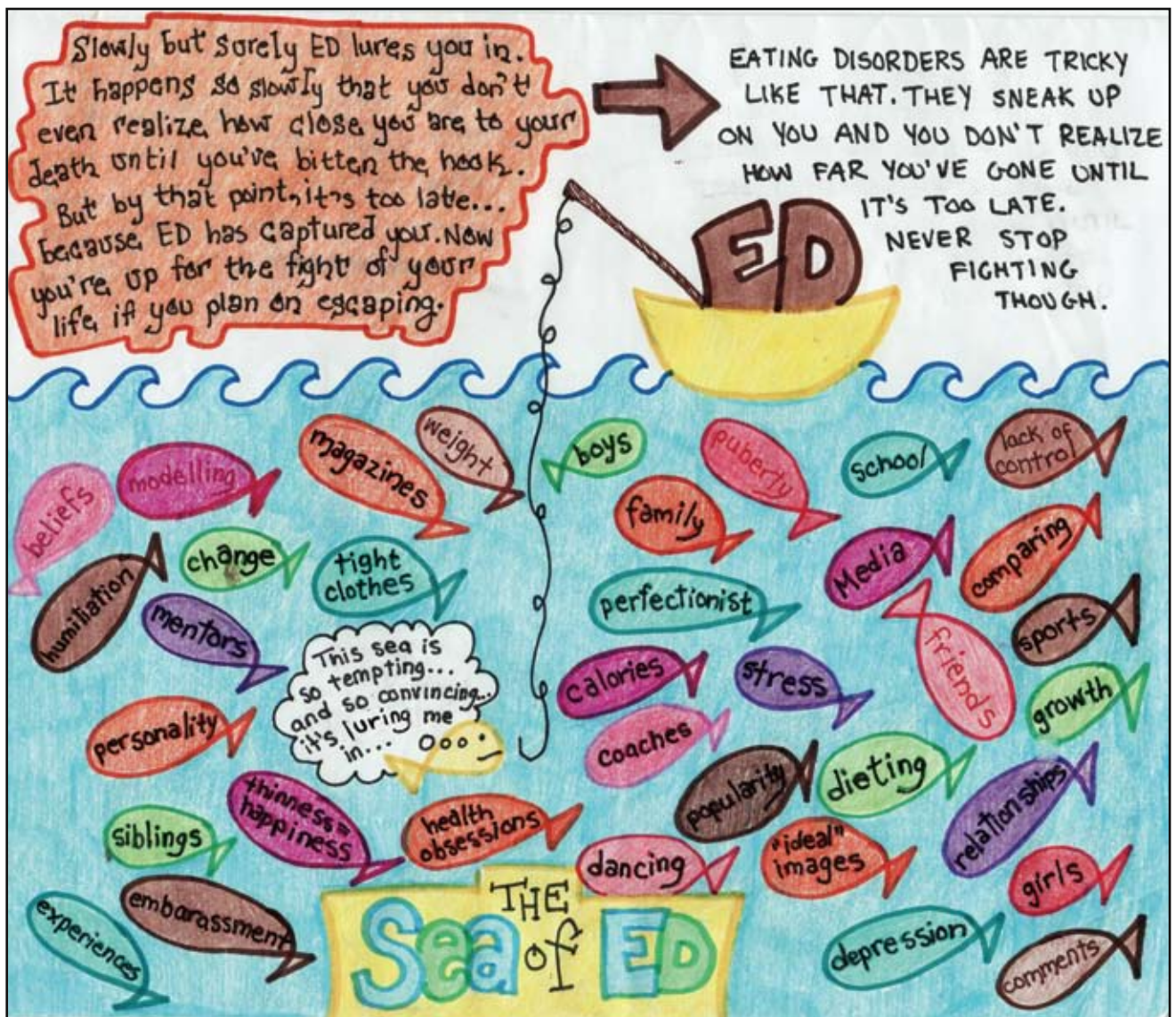
Thank you to the readers 😊... YOU are the reason I wrote this in the first place. I hope that you believe that you can make your dreams a reality too. Never give up and never stop trying, because life is worth it.

Thank you to God... for blessing me with this ED relationship. It hasn't been easy, but life isn't, and I know that this was meant to happen to me for a reason. You have taught me about who I am and what I'm capable of overcoming, about the presence of hope in every situation, and how things will always be okay. Thank you for these struggles, challenges and failures because they continue to teach me so much about what life is suppose to be. You have shown me I am capable of doing - in every setback and struggle. If there's one thing I've learnt... it's that you won't make a mountain I CAN'T climb.



“Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future.
Concentrate the mind on the present moment.”

- Hindu Prince Gautama Siddharta



“To be nobody but yourself in a world that’s doing it’s best to make you someone else is to fight the hardest battle you are ever going to fight. Never stop fighting.” *E.E. Cummings*
