

As a little girl I was best friends with my father. There was closeness with my father that was irreplaceable. After my parents got a divorce when I was six years old I developed my own way of dealing with this new reality. I escaped deep inside myself in order to accept the loss of the unconditional love. I definitely felt abandoned as a young child. Another way I dealt with this pain was to hide inside myself and daydream. While the other elementary school girls were playing, running and bonding together, I was off by myself on the swing set dreaming of Prince Charming's secret plan to rescue me. I would fantasize that I was the most beautiful girl in the whole world and that as long as I was the most beautiful girl, no man would ever want to leave me again.

It was not too long after I entered middle school that I discovered boys and had my first experience with alcohol. My new interest in boys ended abruptly though, when I was date raped at eleven years old by a family friend. Now there were two major losses in my life and the void in my heart was just beginning to widen. Due to this relentless emptiness I started to feel inside, I sought out refuge. I started my endless search for ways to fill this void and find the answer I was searching for.

My first answer ended up being alcohol and drugs. This was my outlet. I could numb my feelings of loneliness. I also started looking for men that could replace this great loss that I was feeling in my heart. One day a simple thought dawned on me. To this day I have no idea where it came from. I thought I would just use my body for the answer. With the right kind of clothes, hair style and especially physique, I might not only get the man I wanted, but keep him.

It wasn't until I was fifteen years old that I got the courage to use this newfound answer. I had developed this serious crush on a senior in my high school who of course

had no idea I was even alive. I thought if I could get perfect enough, he would ask me to the school dance. Of course, that did not happen. This was the first time I tried bingeing and purging my food as a solution. I was a bulimic from the start. At that time, I developed a rigid attitude about food, and exercise became very important. These new habits were adopted to get me what I ultimately desired: love.

This pattern continued for many years. I continued to act out, overusing alcohol and food to help keep my feelings stable. I had such a total lack of self-acceptance that I entertained thoughts of suicide on a daily basis. By the grace of God, on April 14th 1997 I hit my bottom with alcohol, and started working the 12 steps of the A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) program. This was a short term remedy because my eating disorder also went away. I was still a bit rigid about food and exercise but not to the extreme I had in the past. In 1998 I got married to an A.A. member and we started our life together.

My true EDA story starts 6 yrs later. In the 2001 the new marriage was showing signs of impending disaster. The issues started to become overwhelming to me. No matter how I would handle a situation, no solution I came up with would work anymore. These stresses led me to push myself to the point where my own body finally retaliated against itself. I began to have stomachaches and other related problems that made my life completely unmanageable. It started to threaten my sobriety, serenity, and placed me in the middle of misery. I decided in July 2002 to move out and seek a divorce. The man I was married to then did try his best to help, but he just could not understand what I was going through.

Very soon after my decision to move out I ran into a good friend at my gym. I asked him if he knew of anyone who was looking for a roommate. It turned out he was himself

and if I wanted I could room with him for a while. So, I moved in and soon thereafter I had surgery where they removed my gall bladder. My stomachaches were a result of gall stones that kept passing through my body. Unfortunately, though, the surgery did not fix all my stomach problems, and after the surgery they diagnosed me with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and I still deal with that today.

My divorce was final in December. My new roommate -- who by now had become my best friend -- and I started a new relationship. My life seemed perfect and settled for a while. My disordered eating habits were very apparent to him right away. He was and still is a very health-conscious person. He did try to influence me in many ways to try a different way of life. He gave me positive ways to think differently and act in more healthy ways, but I just was not ready to listen yet. Looking back now I can honestly say that was the first time since my childhood with my father that I felt unconditional love again. I really fell head over heels in love with this man, so much so that in March of 2003 I mustered up the courage to ask my new love to marry me. To my horror he did not feel the same way I did and turned me down flat. I was devastated.

At that point I again turned inside myself with daydreams, but this time destructive ones. I was two days later when the overwhelming anxiety hit, and I went out and bought as much junk food that I could carry home. I was trying desperately to fill that lonely, rejected void. I binged and purge again. The main thought in my mind was, "Maybe if I was just more beautiful and perfect, maybe he would change his mind." So, after the cycle was done I was stuck with a huge amount of guilt and fear. It only took a few weeks before I was back to doing a daily, day-long cycles. An all-day cycle included buying large quantities of snack items and food which enabled me to throw up the food

with greater ease. I was particular about what I would buy, too. I knew I needed a variety of everything from sweet to salty so as to experience all of the pleasure. I would do numerous cycle of eating then purging all day. My body would continue to crave, so I would continue to act out on what it wanted.

This new habit quickly changed me. My reactions and attitudes rapidly started to destroy all of my peace of mind. It was also affecting the people around me, especially at home. My bulimia did not seem to care if I loved the people I was hurting or not. I forgot things and my work life suffered from my careless errors. My body felt so fatigued that when my love would want to do something fun I never could because I knew my body would just give out. If I was to collapse I was very fearful that he would find out and leave me.

By the time June rolled around it became clear my course was aimed straight at hell. I had thoughts of suicide while the tornado was out and shredding everything in its path. On June 13th, 2003, I was going to perform the same all day cycle, but for some reason this time I did not want to anymore. All I could do was picture my love's hurt eyes. He always gazed at me in this certain concerned way after one of my mood swings or unjustified arguments. I was acting strange and he could see it. It did not stop me though. I did my deed reluctantly and then after I was done this time, I sat down on the floor and just cried. For the first time I felt powerless over this problem. Why did I do this and how could I stop? I mustered up the courage to call my sponsor and reveal my secret. She was scared for me and really did not understand the issue, but decided to help me anyway. She talked me into getting through the night and telling my love of my dilemma. I waited until my love arrived home and then I slowly let him know about my

lifelong problem with food. Once again, to my surprise this time he was very supportive. He told me he would do what I needed for me to get through this.

That would be a great ending to my story but that is not the end. The very next weekend on June 20 2003, I did another all day cycle event. When my love returned home he found me frozen on the floor next to the bed. I was absolutely powerless over my problem. The bulimia and the fear had eaten me alive, and I was not sure what to do. That was the beginning of the end of my love and I being together.

The next day I searched everywhere to see where I could find some help for myself. I was on limited funds so an expensive counselor was not going to suit my needs. By the grace of God, I accidentally stumbled upon the EDA website,

www.eatingdisorderanonymous.org. I read about how I could start my own meeting and I found some meeting listings in the locate area. The closest one was in Naples, FL, and was run by a woman who had been out of her eating disorder for two years. I called her that day and that is where my true EDA life starts. She was already involved in the program and had gone through the withdrawal process and worked the steps. I could not even imagine a day, much less two years. She assured me that if I just did not purge anymore for a little while, there would come a day when I would not want to.

I took her advice and ordered the meeting materials. This was to be my new solution or purpose to live. I started working the steps toward recovery from my eating disorder with my sponsor and I jumped into A.A. But it was too late for my love and I. The withdrawal was horrible. I had mood swings and massive disillusionment. I did not know up from down and this craziness took over and left us with nothing. He came to me and told that he had fallen out of love with me and that he was not happy anymore. So, I

made a plan to reluctantly move out. Today I still say that was one of the hardest things I have ever done in recovery. I got through it and did not drink, use drugs, or purge. It seemed this grave pain was helping me. It was giving me courage to grow and realize that in order to get better I needed to do this for no one else but myself and that I really was worth it.

My sponsor and I continued with the steps and the Tuesday night “Another Way of Life” group started on August 5, 2003. I made flyers and pamphlets and that is how I advertised at first. The A.A. women were extremely supportive to me during this time. I ended up making all kinds of new friends. Best of all God stepped in again, and allowed me to have enough courage to call my Dad after many years. We talked and I told him of my grief at the loss of our former close relationship, and about my eating disorder. To my delight he told me he would be there for me and most importantly that he never did stop loving me. Now we call each other once or twice a week. He calls work and tells me he loves me. That unconditional love was back and I could feel the void slowly starting to fill, this time with healthy things. I had a hard time with the emptiness I felt after the loss of my love. I miss and still wish for his love everyday. At first, I wanted so badly to show him how much better I was doing, but I knew I had lost his trust. So, I decided to write him a letter saying goodbye. I never sent it, of course, but it helped ease the pain. I needed to get well in order to ever have a healthy relationship with anyone.

Today, I sponsor two A.A. girls. We have about five to seven girls come to the E.D.A meeting every Tuesday, and with God’s help I am sure it will grow. I am just about finished with my EDA steps with my sponsor, and now I talk to other women about my former dilemma. I strive for balance today using spiritual tools I have learned through

both programs. I am reaching out to local therapists and half-way houses to introduce this new meeting to women and who need it. I have gone back to church and started counseling with a spiritual advisor. I don't look for Prince Charming anymore. I love me, and that to me is a pure miracle. It was of the other hard lessons I had to learn through these programs. I owe my newfound attitude to the fellowships of EDA and A.A. I am also thankful for my pain today. It helped me to grow into a better person. As my old sponsor used to say "If you don't grow, you will go," and today I want to stay.

One of the last things -- and one of the most important things -- I did was to contact a physician and get started on a regular daily eating plan. I have a vigorous willingness to get well and opened my mind to get physical with my own body. I recognize what is going on with it at all times. It takes a lot of practice, but has created numerous positive results. I did end up gaining weight at first and that was very scary for me. I just kept trusting God and exercising regularly. My body just simply adjusted and worked itself out. Today I try to think of food as fuel instead of pleasure. To me that is pure surrender: my first step away from my disease of bulimia. I hope my sharing my experience has helped you. I was given a choice, "Either you can pick up a phone or pick up the food." Which ever way you choose, just recognize that all you have to do is try your best today. Good luck to you all and God bless. Remember it works, if YOU work it!

Jen R.