

Dancing From Darkness to Daylight: My Battle with an Eating Disorder

My name is Jessica Beth, and I am a recovering Bulimexic. I've been in recovery for a little over a year and a half, after having my eating disorder for almost 10 years. My eating disorder began when I was 12 years old. I was a compulsive overeater, and at that time didn't know it. I was young, and was having a love affair with food. It was my best friend and my worst enemy. I ate as a reward, and I ate as a punishment. Despite my father's relentless teasing of the pounds adding on, I continued to torturously eat (or non-torturously as the case may have been). I had already been self mutilating since the age of 9, but at that age, I didn't know that's what it was, I just knew that what I was doing made me feel better after I did it. Little did I know that I was in a downward spiral that would last through my teen years into adulthood. I would go on diets, only to fail and beat myself up at my failure. I didn't realize that my compulsive overeating was the start of something big, bigger than me, then the food, then all of it. I was out of control and I hated it.

I don't know what happened, but one day something snapped, and I went on a diet with a friend. We decided we were going to rollerblade x miles after school every day and that we were only going to eat certain foods. I don't know what made this time different than all of the other times, but it was. I stuck to my regimen, and the pounds started dropping off of me. It was the best feeling in the world. People started complimenting me on my weight loss, and on my gaining control, and I was on top of the world. I started to realize that I could eat less than I was eating, and up my exercise, and still survive just fine, so that's what I did. As I progressively did this, my friend dropped out of our diet, realizing that she didn't need to lose any more weight. But not me. I was almost down to normal weight, and people were telling me it was time to stop dieting. Were they absolutely insane?? I was having the time of my life! For once I HAD something, I was in control, I was doing something amazing, and I felt really awesome about myself. It was powerful, exhilarating . . . I didn't listen to people when they told me to slow down my dieting, I did the complete opposite, and sped it up. I continued to cut calories and fat, I became a vegetarian, I went periods where I restricted for days, went on liquid diets, etc.. As time went on, and I lost more weight, my diet turned into something that I couldn't control any more. It became an obsession. I was exercising just as many hours a day as I was sleeping, and I was becoming worn down. Thinner wasn't ever thin enough. And people were very concerned. But I was still on a rush. I was so hungry though. One day I binged on Chinese food, and I said to myself that I was going to purge, just this once. So I tied my hair back in a rubber band, and did it. It was both the most awful thing I had ever done, and it provided such relief at the same time. But I swore I would never do it again.

The next six years of my life were filled with compulsive exercising, starving myself weeks at a time, bingeing and purging sometimes 15 times a day, abusing drugs and alcohol, self mutilation, and low self esteem. On the outside I tried to be perfect, and I lost myself in the midst of all of the things I was doing. I was a functioning anorexic/bulimic/alcoholic/addict, or so I thought. I had finished high school and went to college, but dropped out of college because it was best to (I really just couldn't admit that

I did so because I was sick and I couldn't handle it!) I was holding down a full time job, supporting myself financially and living with my boyfriend. But I was still lost in a whirlwind of addictions. I hit rock bottom at the age of 20. I had developed knee problems due to malnutrition and over-exercise which sometimes didn't allow me to even walk. I had a borderline to mild heart attack, my teeth were in horrible shape, my hair wasn't so hot either. I at times lost ability to control my bowels. I had rectal bleeding that sent me to the E/R a couple of times. Physically I was knocking on death's doorstep. At half of the weight of what I started out as, the prognosis wasn't looking great, unless I was willing to recover.

My eating disorder doctor looked me in the eye and told me I was going to die from a heart attack the next time, my vitals were all screwy which triggered the first episode. At that point I was referred to The Renfrew Center in Florida, a residential treatment facility for eating disorders and women's issues. I had already been in therapy for years prior to this, and my therapist (whom I still see once a week and I love to death) but it was time for me to get the foundation built. Therapy was only doing so much for me, therapy would do much more for me on an aftercare basis, and this I knew. I was at Renfrew for 2 months. It was hard, but it was the best thing I could have done for myself. It was there that I regained my self esteem, that I began to live. The whole process wasn't an easy one, but it was well worth it, and to be honest I would go back there in a heartbeat. I loved it there. I learned so much about myself, my feelings, that I had feelings - my eating disorder, dynamics of why I do what I do, my thought patterns. I can hardly describe everything that Renfrew taught me about myself. It was simply amazing! I highly recommend a good residential program to anyone considering it. Since I have been back from treatment, things haven't been easy. I am glad that they prepared me for that while I was in treatment. Residential was just the foundation, aftercare is the real work. Right now I am just taking things one day at a time. I go to therapy once a week, I attend 3 AA meetings a week, 1 ANAD meeting a week, and I started up an EDA meeting here in my area. For me it's about perseverance, and about realizing that I am only human. It's about honesty and willingness to grow and experience that growth. It's hard not to want to rush the process, but I have to remember to just take things one day at a time, and enjoy life, because this is a life I wouldn't have had if I didn't step onto the road of recovery. And for that I am truly grateful.

With Love & Light,
Jessica Beth