

Patricia Hansen

My Friend & Her Struggle with Anorexia

(She wishes to remain unnamed, but wants to share her story. Below are her answers to interview questions I sent her.)

When I was in the height of my anorexia all of my energy was put into restriction and losing weight. I was consumed with thoughts of food, calories, and weight loss. It became an obsession; my anorexia ate away from the experiences in my life and starved me of happiness. My relationships fell apart, and I felt completely alone. I felt abandoned by my friends when I needed them the most and rejected the help of my parents. My “success” of each day was based off how little I could eat. The variety of food I ate was scarce. My diet consisted of a small amount of low calorie fruits and vegetables. I hated myself after I ate, and saw myself as weak for giving in. I was always sure to drink lots of water hoping to trick my stomach into believing I was full. I became too used to the feeling of being hungry that I eventually forgot how to read the natural signs of my body. I became a stranger to myself and a prisoner to a condition that bound me in chains that seemed impossible to remove. Restricting food became an escape from the hardships in my life. Over time, my weight dropped from 125 pounds to under a nearly fatal 80 pounds. My hair began falling out, I stopped menstruating, my digestive system shut down, I was always cold, and my growth was stunted. My heart rate went as low as 35 beats per minute, reaching a point where each day was battle between life and death.

“You’re slowing killing yourself, you need help,” I remember hearing my mom cry. A the tone of hopelessness in her voice. I was reluctant and denied my eating was a problem, but when my dad set a plate of food in front of me to eat, it was an impossible request. In that moment, I truly believed I would rather die than eat that plate of food. Tears began to fall uncontrollably from my eyes. This is when I realized I had a serious problem.

When I was in the worst point in my anorexia I was forced to go to the clinic every other day to get my weight and vitals taken. If my weight reached under a certain amount I knew I would be sent back inpatient treatment. Although I was suppose to be gaining weight, was determined to continue losing weight. My mom spent hundreds of dollars on weight gain shakes. I always “drank” the shakes out of a coffee mug with a

cover on it so my mom wouldn't notice I dumped the shake down the drain. I would also insist on drinking my shakes alone so I could dump them out somewhere. In addition, I was suppose to be following a meal plan and eating with the family. However, at meals I would spit out my food the second my mom turned her head. In fear that the clinic would discover I was losing weight again, I began drinking a gallon of water before getting weighed. However, this was not enough because I was suppose to make it look like I was continuing to gain weight. Over time, I was eventually hiding twenty pounds worth of weights under my gown and continuing to drink a gallon of water prior to getting on the scale. It amazes me that I never got caught, but this is an example of how crazed and obsessed my disease made my train of thought.

During the next couple of years, I was sent to three different inpatient programs. Inpatient hospital was miserable. I had to get countless echocardiograms, blood tests, and was forced to gain weight as quickly as possible. The doctors told me I had permanently stunted my growth and already had osteopenia, a condition where bone mineral density is lower than normal and a precursor to osteoporosis. Nonetheless, my treatments forced me to resolve the underlying causes of my illness, leading to a deeper and more lasting recovery. The most influential and helpful people throughout my recovery were those who had suffered from anorexia or hardship earlier in their own life. One of these women was a counselor and registered dietitian who understood my unspoken language of the relationship with food. She gave me skills that changed my life, a deeper understanding of the truth behind an eating disorder, and the underlying issue that young women are unable to voice so they turn to control food. Another aspect of my treatment involved a number of classes on mindfulness, physiological disorders, nutrition, study of the female body, strengthening workouts, and occupational therapy. My struggle with an eating disorder has inspired me to go into a health related career where I can help young people who are going through similar struggles. Today my body is healthy and I am in a better place mentally than I have been in a long time. Although food does not dominate my life, it will always be a problem for me. I am self-conscious and judgmental about my figure. Everyday the eating disorder thoughts are still but I have learned to ignore them. The difference is that now I am strong enough to disregard the thoughts and look at the bigger picture of life.

