

Starving For Life and Loveliness

Popularity became important to me at a very young age. As a child, I had lots of friends and I felt good about myself. I was very close to my family. Then, when I was 11 years old, my peaceful world became confused by pain. I was abused by a distant relative, my younger brother died and our family moved to a different province. Attending a new school brought many challenges. One of which was being blamed for having told about a drug deal. This resulted in a year of abuse and loneliness as I was ostracized by my classmates.

It Started with a Passing Remark

These situations caused me to feel insecure about myself. I was afraid to talk to my parents about the abuse. I feared upsetting "peaceful" relationships, so I justified my silence—things weren't really that bad. My self-worth was wavering when I began high school, even though I was part of the "in" crowd. I asked a guy whom I knew to be a bit crude if he would honestly tell me if I needed to lose weight. He said, "just a few pounds would help."

It didn't take me very long to lose five pounds, and it made me feel really good. I figured if that made me so happy, another five pounds would be even better. As I continued to lose weight, I gained popularity, friends and boyfriends – everything I craved. I began to equate love with being thin. I became obsessed with perfection, and didn't dare have anything less than straight A's. I exercised every day, running, doing sit-ups, and going to aerobics to get rid of any calories I might have eaten.

After six months, severe dizzy spells caused me to see a doctor. When he told me I had anorexia nervosa, I thought, "How could someone who weighs 105 pounds have an eating disorder?" People who heard my diagnosis asked the same thing. So I decided I had another area to achieve in: becoming a true anorexic.

Desperation

I became desperate . . . trying to study enough, exercise enough and become thin enough. Often I ate only 100-500 calories a day. Eventually, I felt my methods of dieting needed some assistance—I began to take up to 60 laxatives a day and to force myself to throw up the meagre calories I consumed. For the next nine years I struggled, nearly dying twice. I was under medical observation and involved in therapy during a great deal of that time. Still, on the outside I worked hard to make it look like I had it all together.

I met a wonderful person, Cam, through church and knew him as a good-looking, fun-loving guy who loved God and wanted everyone to be as excited about Him as he was. We became friends and I even tried to fix him up with my sister. Fortunately, it didn't work. About two years after Cam and I met, my eating disorder was at its all-time worst. I began to black out a lot. My doctor called me at work and told me he was going to hospitalize me.

Frustrated after two weeks in hospital, I manipulated the system and was released. At home, I worked furiously at losing even more weight. I exercised more than ever, abused

laxatives, and ate very little—a cracker or two a day and some water, which I would throw up.

I was hospitalized again, this time with heart palpitations and severe dehydration. I was very close to death. To nourish my 82-pound body, I was being force-fed 3,000 calories a day through a tube to my stomach. But I drained the tube in the garbage under my bed, and exercised furiously whenever I could get away with it.

Hope

One Sunday morning while Cam and my family were at church, I was alone, and face to face with myself. I began to write out a list of lies I had come to believe, contrasted with truth I knew deep in my heart. As I wrote, I began to crave the ability to believe the truth. I wept and cried out to God for help. I asked friends to pray that I would believe the truth.

I distinctly remember one evening, when I was five years old, sitting with my mother in our living-room. We talked about how Jesus died so we could go to heaven. I remember asking Jesus to forgive my sins and come into my heart. It was a very special moment for me. Yet even though I had asked Jesus into my heart as a young child, insecurities, peer pressure and the desire to control my own life had distorted my beliefs.

I felt inadequate in relating to God because I knew I was destroying my body, and I was too afraid to give my whole self to Him. I somehow felt that God would allow me to become obese and so I tried to please Him in other ways. I was kind, I did things I thought God would want me to do, I read the Bible and yet, I was unable to give God control over my physical body.

It was in the hospital that I surrendered complete control of my life back to God. I asked for forgiveness for my self-centeredness. I asked God to help me trust Him to handle my weight.

Recovering

After four weeks in the hospital, I weighed 102 pounds and was finally released. Extensive therapy, medical help and the prayers and love of my family and Cam helped me to combat the lies with God's truth. My health improved, and seven months after I was out of the hospital, Cam and I got married. What a celebration that day was for us and all who had seen Cam's steady love nurture me!

During stressful times, I still resorted to my dieting habit. It wasn't until I became pregnant two years later and had to face the terror of gaining weight—and the reality that it actually does come off again—that I felt truly free and healed.

I enjoy the freedom I now experience in knowing true love isn't earned by having a perfect body and a perfectly organized life. While I used to think that love equals thinness, I now know that true love and security come from a relationship with God.

Today Christ fills the void in my life which I strived for so long to fill on my own. His love and acceptance meets my needs and gives me strength.

Credit – Karen Schenk