

Dealing with Eating Disorder

by Summer Eide

To me, it felt lonely. I remember wishing someone understood how I felt on the inside. Yet, the more I wanted people to understand, the more I realized no one did. Once I realized this was true, my life became very lonely.

It all began when I was about 14 or 15 years old. I had many friends, both academically and socially, and a very supportive family. Everything was going my way, and my direction in life was well set. Like most girls my age, I experienced fun, joy and heartbreak. Life seemed “normal.” However, after a year or so of living in the status quo, those circumstances changed and my life took a 180-degree turn.

When I began attending high school, several things happened: My boyfriend and I broke up; I lost some of my best friends; my sister got married and moved



away. Many of my former securities no longer existed now. Everything was changing. At first, it was not a big deal. But the more I realized how unstable my circumstances were, the more difficult it was for me to function. I felt there was nothing on which I could truly depend and no way to control the things in my life. This was an extremely insecure feeling.

As a result, I began doing anything I could to make myself feel secure and in control. The old way of life no longer provided what I needed, so I changed in hopes of finding a new stability. I thought I could control my circumstances instead of them controlling me. My main desire was to be accepted by other people, and I was willing to do whatever was necessary to achieve this, including changing my actions or looks.

Even amidst all this change in my life, I still seemed like the most secure person in the world to others. This made things even worse because I felt like I had nothing. People would continually look to me for security, but that was the very thing I needed from them.

Then I began the search to be accepted, to be stable. That led me to focus on my physical appearance. I thought that if I looked good and people were attracted to me, I would have the acceptance I needed. Like many girls, I thought if I could lose a few pounds I would be perfect. I came up with many different ways I could lose weight, including dieting, exercising, eating low fat foods and starving. However, I loved eating too much to go on a diet or starve myself, and exercising regularly took too much time and effort. Plus, I did not want it to be obvious that I was insecure about the way I looked or that I did not have control over any part of my life.

As I weighed my options, I decided the best thing to do was to throw up after eating. That way I would give the appearance that I was completely normal, and I would receive some nutritional value from the food. Then I would just throw up the excess to get rid of that which would make me less physically desirable. At first I began doing this after

dinner only. It worked so well, I began skipping breakfast and throwing up after lunch and dinner. I was so excited by how well it was working. Not only was I maintaining my weight, but I was losing weight too. Throughout this time, one very special guy began paying attention to me. He really loved the new changes I was experiencing. In fact, he would frequently compliment me on my body and completely accepted me. This was working. I had readjusted my life to gain the security and acceptance I needed.

Life was good. I would go to the bathroom after every meal, turn on the water so no one would hear, and throw up for a few minutes. It was hard at first sticking my finger down my throat to make the food come up, but gradually, I got used to it. I believed this was all worth it. Having my boyfriend's acceptance and girls telling me how attractive I was led me to believe I needed to do what I was doing. From there, it just got easier. The more I threw up,

the more I lost weight. Eventually, I was able to stop sticking my finger down my throat and would simply throw up automatically every time I ate.

THEN THINGS STARTED to change. My relationships became rocky, even with my adoring boyfriend. My parents also noticed I was different. It seemed like conflict was present in every area of my life. I wasn't receiving that security anymore. Why did I feel miserable again? Why couldn't I control what was happening to me? Even throwing up wasn't working the way I wanted. When I would eat a little snack, I would throw up whether I liked it or not. The physical process of throwing up and the

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weakness of my body were less than pleasurable. However, I couldn't stop and felt even more out of control than before. I was so lonely, had no security and had no control over the things in my life. I would cry every time I would throw up and didn't know what to do.

At this point, the things I learned in my childhood played an important role in my life. They always say what you learn as a child will come back to you later in life. That is exactly what happened to me. When I was young, I learned a lot about God from my family and church. My parents told me God loved me and wanted to know me, but because of the bad things, or sins, I had done, I could not know God or go to Heaven to be with Him. The Bible says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). My parents also told me God made a way for me to know Him through Jesus, who died on the cross to pay for my sins. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus paid for my sins and forgave everything I had done. The great thing is that God loved the world and died to forgive everyone's sins. Anyone can have a personal relationship with Jesus by asking Him to come into his or her life through accepting His gift of death on the cross.

As a child, I accepted that gift that I was forgiven. Yet, through my time of insecurity and all the pain I was experiencing, God seemed distant. The relationship I had begun with Him as a child was not as important to me. I still went to church and prayed sometimes, but I didn't think God understood my situation. I just wanted to handle things on my own.

However, handling things on my own had proven to work very poorly. I remember one night being so fed up with myself and my life that I was crying to God. I told Him how I felt, and prayed for Him to help me. I'm not sure why I turned to God at this point, but I think deep down inside I knew nothing else would work. I knew I was not strong enough to handle it anymore and that no other person could make me feel better. For two years I

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had been struggling with eating problems, insecurities and loneliness, and I had reached the end of my rope.

ONCE I TURNED to God, things gradually began to change. I still threw up every time I ate, and I still desperately wanted people to like me. Yet, I was feeling more at peace. I began reading my Bible and praying to tell God how I was feeling. As I did these things, I learned so much about God's love and acceptance. I remember reading how God loved everything He had created and how His love was greater than any love I could experience. I read in Psalm 136 that "his love endures forever" and in

Zephaniah 3, that the Lord takes "great delight in me and will quiet me with his love." That meant so much to me because I had longed for someone, anyone, to like me. I learned God not only liked me, but He loved me. He loved me more than anyone, and He loved me with the kind of love that never goes away.

He also loved me enough to take care of the things in my life. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you," (1 Peter 5:7). I did not desperately have to work everything out and be in control of everything all the time. I also learned about God's acceptance. Even though other people wanted me to look good or act a certain way, God accepted me no matter what I did. I read in

Ephesians 1 that God freely gives us His unmerited favor. I did not have to do anything to gain his favor or acceptance. Even when I was hurting myself by throwing up all the time and desperately looking for love from anyone but Him, He still accepted me. The King of the Universe accepted me and loved me!

Knowing God's unfailing love for me completely made the difference in my life. It did not make everything perfect, but it helped me take what I knew on the inside to change my actions on the



outside. I still struggled with my feelings, and I still threw up. Gradually, even these things began to change. Little by little, I got to know God better and tried daily to remember His acceptance and love. I threw up less and less, and then I stopped. After a few months of transition, I began looking to God for acceptance instead of other people, and I let Him have control of my life.

About three years have passed since I stopped throwing up. It has been a struggle fighting the thoughts that tell me I am not good enough and that tempt me to grab control. Honestly, I struggle with these thoughts every day. I have experienced times where everything seems to be going wrong, and I have felt a deep pain inside of me. During those times of weakness, I have thought about eating to gain comfort or thought if I were thinner things would be better. I know, however, I do not need to believe those lies. I need to believe and remember my complete acceptance from the One who matters most. Sometimes God still seems distant and I don't always feel prettier. But I know allowing God's love and acceptance to be real to me is the only thing that can make the difference deep down in my soul. It is still very hard, but God is there and He comforts and loves me through it all. He continually shows me His unconditional love and acceptance. My soul is no longer lonely and no longer feels misunderstood when I see things the way God sees them. I no longer see emptiness and rejection, but I see love and acceptance.

I don't know if you can relate to anything I have felt or experienced. I spent a summer in a different country, and as I talked to people there and made friends, I realized we all desire the same things. All of

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us have a need for love and acceptance that will not go away. This isn't just true for girls; it is true for all people. If you have ever felt this way or have ever struggled with life being out of your control, I want you to know there is a way to feel freedom and to truly know what love and acceptance means. If your search for approval and control has ever looked like mine did (with the desire to be thin at any cost, whether through throwing up or not eating at all), I want you to know there is a better way. To know Jesus as your friend and to have all your sins forgiven will make your life more satisfying and complete than throwing up or being thin ever will. Whether you believe it yet or

not, know that God loves you so much and accepts you freely and completely.

When you reach the end of your rope and realize you cannot do it on your own, remember Jesus and the relationship with Him that waits for you. All it takes is letting Him into your life. It really is that simple, and it really does make a difference. Jesus said: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20).

—Summer Eide

If you struggle with an eating disorder, it is wise to talk about this with someone you can trust, like a parent, counselor or pastor, so they can support and encourage you. If you would like further information on dealing with an eating disorder, you might try the following web sites:

www.remuda-ranch.com

www.anred.com

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

www.anad.org

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