



**Annabelle
Copenhay**

*It takes
time
to find
yourself*

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Special thanks to:
E.S-R for showing me my way to myself

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Introduction

On September 1, 2009, after talking to a psychiatrist, I decided to go to a psychiatric hospital in the neurotic disorders ward of my own free will. After many years of treatment, which still didn't bring the expected results, I came to the conclusion that the hospital was my last hope. I went there because I suffered from eating disorders - bulimia nervosa and anorexia. Then it turned out that it was not my only, nor the most important problem... Probably if I hadn't found out about it and then hadn't started to deal with it, I would still be ill or worse - I wouldn't be here anymore.

Today I know that if you really want to, you really believe that you can be healthy, then it's possible. Faith, the true, sincere faith works miracles. I'm not talking about curing the disease and its relapses. I am writing about understanding myself, getting back on my feet, causes of falling ill and complete, irreversible recovery, curing.

I am addressing the book to everyone. To people who consider this disease to be a whim, an invention of girls who want to get attention. To insecure women and teenagers, to parents, and especially to the same girls and adult women as me. To women who have fallen into the nightmare of this disease and are either undergoing treatment and it does not bring such effects as they wanted to, or to those who do not want to be treated, because they feel comfortable with the disease, or are ashamed to go to a psychologist/psychiatrist. Please don't lose hope, don't say "I can't stop", but finally say "I

can", although the road is long, hard and painful, it is worth going through. It is worth being at its end, because that is where the desired happiness awaits.

Chapter I

From the outside looking in, my life might seem almost perfect. A child from a wealthy, well-educated family. From an early age, my parents provided for me and cared for everything. I grew up in great conditions to play, learn, getting to know the world with holidays abroad. Many people don't understand how it's possible that children, who have everything they want, or even more, and who were never denied anything, can fall ill with such a disease. Many people say it's not real and is only borne out of boredom or on a whim, to be the centre of attention and be talked about... All the excesses are simply caused by "having too much" and being spoiled. However, I didn't like to be in the centre of attention and even when it did happen, it was never intended by me. On the contrary, in such moments, I often felt foolish and ashamed of myself.

The story of my illness started when I was 16. I had just come from a great holiday in Greece, but earlier on I had been working in a pub in my father's hometown (I was not of legal age but was allowed to work there because the establishment where the pub was belonged to my family). It was very sad for me when I had to come back home because I had made some amazing friends and had such a wonderful time living and working there. I was happy until the moment when I weighed myself and I saw that I had gained 2 kilos. I thought I was looking good; I didn't weigh myself often and all was good. I rode a bike because I knew that doing some sport is good for my health. I tried to maintain a proper weight of 55 kg

and hadn't had problems with that so far, so when I gained those 2 kilos, I decided not to worry about it, because I was tired of maintaining my correct weight, being careful about what I eat. I started to eat more, while not exercising and doing nothing but learning and going out from time to time and it happened - I put on weight. I weighed 65 kg with a height of 165 cm. I did not feel good about the new weight, but I also did not feel bad enough to do something about it. However, my dad had a problem with that, he even hit me once, when I ate a bun in my room, because he was worried that my brothers and I would grow fat and become ill, but I didn't care then. There aren't many thin people in my family, most of them, if not all of them, love to eat; my dad included but he was afraid that we would become as fat as our neighbour's children and with the obesity would come the many diseases associated with it as we got older. I could feel his eyes on me when I was eating, but it didn't bother me enough to do anything about it.

Dad was of the opinion that I must do some sport, so he signed my brother, Jurek and I up to play tennis with a friend of his. At first I didn't want to. I wasn't interested in the sport at all. My dad liked it and he still does today, but I didn't, but at his urging I started to build an interest in it. I came to like my coach very much; I could talk to him about practically everything. I didn't mind also that sometimes he said inappropriate things to me. I did mention it to my cousin, who said that my trainer was molesting me, but I didn't care about her assessment of the situation, and I did nothing about it.

A whole year passed and the holidays were coming again. I was very happy because I was supposed to go to work in the same pub as last year, but my dad said one day that if I didn't lose weight, I could not go to work. When he said that, I realised that I had only a month to lose at least 10 kilograms and get to my old weight. I

started to exercise. At the beginning I ate normally; breakfast, lunch and dinner and rode a stationary bike every day. Yet every time I climbed on a scale, the pointer stood still. I realised I was only burning what I ate, so even though I was not gaining more, I also was not losing any weight. I started to eat less; I gave up sweets. For the first three days it was hard, I was really craving them, but thanks to my willpower, I mastered the urge to eat them. Weight began to slowly decrease, unfortunately not as fast as I thought it should. I thought then, "I can't stop eating - every man eats, food is necessary." And then one day I accidentally caught part of a movie on tv where a girl would eat, then go to the toilet to throw up the meal she had just eaten. It seemed like a good way to avoid gaining weight, so I decided to use this method myself.

At first it was not easy because our bodies are not used to vomiting, especially when it is done deliberately. I made a pot of bitter tea because I heard it helps to induce vomit when you are trying to for the first time. I succeeded - I threw up.

It was at this point that the fasting started. I told my parents that I was on a diet, and because I had a few kilograms too many in my hips - no one minded. No one thought it was wrong, because many people choose to be thin. I rarely ate, and if I did, because I had to (e.g., dinner with my parents) everything eventually ended up in the toilet. I would go to the bathroom, saying that I was going to take a bath, turned on the water so that no one could hear what I was doing and vomited. When I started to feel hungry, I was happy, because I knew that I had thrown everything up and had nothing to worry about anymore. I then went on a bike and rode for two hours.

The weight was dropping faster and faster and I was feeling better and better, mentally and physically. Unfortunately, the hunger was getting stronger, sometimes even unbearable. I would very slowly look

through the cookbooks at home, “planning” what I was going to cook and in the future when I lost the weight. I found that after looking through the entire book, I felt satisfied and the hunger drained away.

However, there were times when the food simply appeared in front of me, I came home from school, and it was lying on the table prepared for me and it was tempting. One day I came back from school, was home alone, and snatched at the dinner, not thinking about what I was doing. I did not think about the fact that my stomach was contracted and so I cannot eat much, I simply ate, at a horrifyingly fast pace. While eating, I felt nauseous and felt terrible remorse that I had not restrained myself, that I was tempted and ate. After vomiting I felt good again, I felt happy. I came to the conclusion that I had to allow myself a bit of food to prevent such a gluttony. My choice was a cube of chocolate daily, because I loved chocolate and besides, I read that it contains a lot of magnesium, and it supplements the daily requirement. I let myself have that because it was only a cube - I checked precisely how many calories it has.

I still had a problem with weekend dinners, which I had to eat because I was eating them with my family. Fortunately, I was able to find a way out of this seemingly difficult situation. I realized that I should start cooking, because if I cooked, I could always tell them “I was eating when I was preparing the meal and I’m not hungry anymore”. And so it started. My mum was glad that I wanted to cook because it made her life easier. The dinners I cooked were very sophisticated; I had a collection of sorts of cookbooks and cooking magazines. When I found out that looking at and watching food being made was enough for me to, in a sense, cheat my hunger, I started buying cooking magazines with calories and other nutritional values counted. Therefore, the

meals I prepared were not calorically dense/ high in calories.

I was delighted at how the plan worked out because my family believed that I ate while cooking and that I was full. To be honest, it wasn't difficult, because many housewives know that while preparing meals it's necessary to try it and decide whether it needs seasoning. An additional advantage was that everyone in the family knew about my diet, I ate less, I was exercising, therefore my stomach contracted, and I couldn't eat too much. Sometimes I got rid of my portion of dinner in a different way - I just threw it into the rubbish bin. Occasionally, when I was cooking on weekends, I would put a little bit of food on my plate out of convenience and then I would say, "I'm not hungry now, because I was eating while cooking, so I will eat later". After the meal I cleaned the table, then threw my portion into the rubbish bin and poured the soup down the sink. I was happy because I had peace - nobody was picking on me about not eating. Neither was anyone surprised that I rode a stationary bike for three hours a day; apparently, they shared my opinion that I need to lose weight. The Football World Cup was being broadcast then, so I rode while watching matches on TV.

Cigarettes were another thing that helped me cheat the hunger while I was fasting. They killed the feeling of hunger that accompanied me and I felt better. Smoking killed the pangs which made me feel better. I had already started smoking and drinking during elementary school. No, not because others smoked and drank, I was not susceptible to influence. I started smoking later than others and only because I wanted to. At that school level, doing a prohibited activity like smoking gave us an adrenaline rush. Hiding with my friends from my teachers was exciting. It was the same with alcohol. I started drinking later than the others and because I just

wanted to, I liked this cool feeling.

I also started to steal in elementary school. I stole money from my parents, I also stole from shops. I learnt to steal from friends who had been doing it for some time and I thought that maybe I could try it too. The adrenaline, danger, and fear of getting caught made it fun. The more I stole, the better I got at it. I would take whatever I wanted from shops and was never caught. It started with food and escalated to bigger, more expensive things.

The days flew by. When I came back from school, I was alone at home. I would come and find meals prepared and left behind for me. Some days, I would throw the food away. Others, it would be harder to resist the urge, and I'd eat then make myself throw the food up. Each time, I had terrible feelings of remorse and helplessness, I felt weak. I was constantly going through a range of emotions that I could not shake. All this time, I kept up my bike riding. My weight, as I had hoped, kept dropping until I finally reached 55 kilograms which I was elated about because it meant I could go to work.

Everyone in the family noticed I lost the weight and commented on how nice I looked; I was incredibly proud of myself. Some people were surprised that I was able to lose 10 kilograms within a month, they asked me how I had done it, and I answered briefly that I gave up sweets, started eating less and exercised regularly.

I went off to work, and reconnected with all my friends from the year before. I really enjoyed working in the pub, the atmosphere and the regulars who all got along with each other. I wished I could be there all the time. Throughout this whole period, I ate and vomited, but I had stopped paying attention to it. It became routine for me and I didn't see anything wrong with it, I did not think about it. Besides, the words of others were still in the back of my mind that, "You are from a family of

doctors, and have everything you want so you don't have a right to get sick. You have it too good." I had also heard, "I'm too sane to fall into anorexia or bulimia," so I lived in that assurance that I would not fall ill. I rejected the idea that I could be sick - it absolutely was not taken into account. In fact, I didn't even have time to think about what I was doing. Everything around me was happening very quickly.