

Dorota Sawicka

# ONCE THERE WERE PEOPLE...

**short stories of people  
with mental disorders**



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# INTRODUCTION

The human psyche is both majestic and fragile. Throughout our lives, we encounter countless emotions, experiences, and challenges that shape us as individuals. However, for many people, daily life is inextricably linked with the struggle against mental disorders, which, although experienced by millions, often remain in the shadows, surrounded by stigma and ignorance.

This book is a collection of candid stories from people who have faced their own demons. Within each of these stories lie not only pain and suffering but also determination, hope, and an extraordinary capacity for survival. The protagonists of our stories share their personal struggles, moments of weakness, and triumphs, demonstrating that living with a mental disorder is not definitive, and the strength to overcome it often resides within ourselves and our relationships with others.

The aim of this book is not only to present challenging experiences that may seem unfamiliar but, above all, to build

a bridge toward understanding. Through these stories, we aim to reveal the human face of mental disorders and showcase human nature that transcends the boundaries of illness. We hope that through them, we will discover the common traits that connect us all—empathy, gratitude, and the desire for acceptance.

I invite you on a shared journey to learn not only about the stories of others but also, perhaps, to better understand yourself. Let us open our minds and hearts to receive these stories with open attention and respect. Let us try to build a world where everyone can be heard and understood, regardless of their struggles.

May this book become a small step toward greater hope and understanding.

# **DEAR DIARY...**

## **(EATING DISORDER)**

I always thought I was in control of my life. Every meal, every calorie—everything was under strict control. But one day, I realized that it wasn't me controlling the food—it was controlling me. Initially, this control gave me a sense of strength, but then it turned into an obsession. Every glance in the mirror became a validation of my worth, and the scale was my judge. This judge was relentless. With each passing day, it demanded more and more from me, and instead of rebelling, I surrendered to its verdict. Obsessive calorie counting, constant exercise, and continuous denial of food. My own weight became my prison, one from which I couldn't escape. But deep inside, I knew this wasn't the path to happiness.

I tried to seek help, but shame and fear were stronger. It was only when my strength began to leave my body and my mind cried out for help that I realized I couldn't live like this any longer. I found the courage to share my struggle with those close to me. Their support became a ray of light in the darkness that surrounded me. This book is the record of my

journey through the darkness of eating disorders toward the light of health and self-acceptance. Every day was a battle, a battle with my own demons that whispered I wasn't good enough, that I had to be thinner, better, more perfect. Eventually, I understood that my thoughts were like the sounds of a broken radio, constantly playing the same harmful melody. So, I began to seek a therapist who could help me change the station.

Therapy was not easy. Every session was another struggle with my inner critic, but gradually I began to learn new, healthy habits. I learned that food is not the enemy and that my body is not an object that I must constantly shape. I also realized that my own image in the mirror doesn't have to be defined by numbers on a scale or calories on a plate. I began to see myself as a whole—a complex, yet beautiful mosaic of experiences, emotions, and abilities.

With the help of my therapist, I learned to listen to my body, recognize its needs, and give it what it requires without guilt or shame. Every day, my determination grew, and my fear diminished. I began to experiment with food, discovering that it could be a source of joy, not just obsession. I felt relief when



I realized I could eat to live, not live to eat. The adventure with food became a journey of discovering new flavors and sensations instead of constant calculation and denial. Instead of filling the emptiness in my heart with restrictions, I began to fill it with love for myself and acceptance of my emotions. I learned that my hunger is not only a physiological need but often a hunger for feelings, contact, and self-expression.

Every page of this diary testifies to my metamorphosis. This transformation was not an overnight miracle. It was a painstaking process where every small step was important. Writing became my therapy, a way to express what was swirling inside me. Revealing words that once went unheard became a way for me to rebuild the bridge between my mind and body. I understood that every thought and every feeling have its place in my story—even the darkest ones.

Sharing my story became an act of courage. I discovered that I am not alone, that many people struggle with similar challenges. With every conversation, with every shared experience, I felt more connected to people, more human. I realized that in our vulnerability lies the strength that allows us to become more empathetic and compassionate.

This book is also an expression of gratitude to those who stood by me when I was fighting my demons alone. To family, friends, therapists, and to every person who, even for a moment, became part of my journey. In their presence, I found the safety and understanding that were the foundation of my transformation. Writing these words, I hope they will become a support for those who are still struggling. I want them to know that the path to health is possible, though bumpy and requiring many battles.

My experiences show that it is possible to regain control over one's life and enjoy it fully, with respect for one's own body and mind. Each chapter of this diary is another stage of my struggle, but also proof that change is possible. Eating disorders do not define me or my future. They were a teacher that gave me a hard lesson about the value of health, acceptance, and self-love. They taught me humility, patience, and perseverance, helping me understand that life does not have to be an eternal struggle for perfection, but can be full of understanding and compassion for oneself.

You are ready for a new chapter. Let these words be a guide for anyone who feels lost in the thicket of their own

expectations and social standards. May everyone who picks up this diary find in it the strength to begin their own journey toward health and self-understanding. Regardless of where you are, remember that every step, even the smallest one, brings you closer to your goal. This is not a story about illness. It's a tale of awakening, of finding within oneself the power to oppose what once seemed insurmountable. It's a reminder that each of us has the right to live without fear of food and our own reflection in the mirror.

My journey was not easy. There were moments of doubt and pain when it seemed the darkness would never give way to the light. But with every day, every meal, and every look in the mirror that didn't end in tears, I was building my new world. In this new world, there is no room for self-judgment or merciless comparisons. There is room for understanding that health does not have one universal size, that beauty and worth are not measured by body mass. There is room to learn that sometimes the greatest courage is allowing oneself to be vulnerable and genuine.

In a sense, my eating disorders taught me how to be more human—how to appreciate moments of weakness and draw

strength from them. They showed me how important it is to surround myself with people who understand and support me, how crucial it is to find a balance between self-discipline and self-compassion. When I look back now, I see that every obstacle that appeared on my path was a step forward in my journey toward a better self. Every moment of weakness was a moment of gathering strength to stand up stronger. I want this diary to be a reminder that each of us is the hero of our own story. We don't have to be unyielding and invincible to be strong. Our strength lies in our ability to change, to forgive ourselves, and to love ourselves as we are.

Let this diary also be a testament that healing is a process that requires time, patience, and determination. There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for overcoming eating disorders, but there are many paths that can lead to health and harmony. In these chapters, I want to share with you not only the pain and struggle but also the joy and hope that began to fill my days over time. I want to show that even in the deepest darkness, one can find a spark of light, and that everyone has within them the strength to let it shine.

# CONCLUSION

With each chapter of this book, we have explored the complexity of the lives of individuals with mental disorders. The stories of our protagonists, their struggles, triumphs, and daily challenges, have taught us that behind every statement lies a deep world of emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Each story reminds us of the importance of looking beyond the veil of stereotypes and prejudices that often limit our understanding of those suffering from mental disorders.

We have witnessed the courage, strength, and determination of those who not only battle illness but also strive to find their place in society. In the face of difficulties, many of our protagonists have found support in family, friends, and therapists, highlighting the importance of human connection.

Although each person's story is unique, they share a common desire for understanding and acceptance. The message of this book is clear—each of us, regardless of our struggles, deserves love, support, and a chance at a normal life. We have the

power to change our surroundings, break barriers, and build awareness of this phenomenon.

Let us end this journey with a reflection on the power of community. We can witness changes in the perception of mental disorders, but only if we remain open to dialogue, empathy, and support. Let these stories serve as a reminder that behind every challenge lies the potential for growth, and behind every darkness, there can be a glimmer of hope.

Each story is a step towards better understanding, and each understanding is a step towards a better world.

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