



Belinda Rose

BY BELINDA ROSE

It began with a pop tart. It was only intended to be a simple diet, a single pop tart a day and nothing else, just to help me lose a “few pounds”. No one could have known, especially me, with that first bite I’d opened the door to let a demon in, thus setting into motion a chain of events that would alter my life in unimaginable ways. In the early '70s, anorexia nervosa wasn’t a household word. In fact, it was something the average person had never heard of, and yet, here I was at twelve years old about to fall into this demon’s merciless clutches, a hapless victim of an illness that would soon become a real-life horror story in which I was the main character.

Like any great horror story there needs to be an antagonist – a heartless killer, and though not in human form, anorexia nervosa is indeed a killer. It is this relentless, vicious and demonic voice that is the heart of an eating disorder. The voice is the means by which it slowly tortures its victims, draining them of their life energy; body, mind, and soul, on a path of excruciating suffering and often death.

And suffer I did. For 38 years – over half my life – this demonic voice would hold me captive – taking over my life with totalitarian control. The voice of an eating disorder is ugly, debilitating, dis-empowering; seeking to take

down its prey from within. Sneaky, cunning and unforgiving, this presence lures you in slowly, at first appearing to be both best friend and greatest ally in your grand pursuit of perfection and the ultimate svelte body. But after those initial pounds are lost, and you're reveling in your first victory, that seemingly friendly voice in your head begins an abrupt about face. What does this "voice" say?

Like any demon, it mocks, chides, and goads you into submission with lies and illusions. "You don't need to be a fat little piggy," the voice says so reassuringly. "I can help you. Listen to me. You can be beautiful. I'll give you that body and life of your dreams. Better yet, I'll give you power and control, and you know how desperately you need to feel in control of something – anything in your life."

Once the voice has lured you in, it seeks to destroy what little self-esteem you have left, viciously whispering how undeserving, unworthy, unlovable, imperfect, and ugly you are, and will remain until you lose yet another pound – and another. And each time you look into the mirror, it convinces you of this truth. Although your ribs protrude and you can count each and every one like the rungs on a ladder, the voice with its seemingly demonic influence will find an inch of skin and convince you it's another ounce of fat that must be obliterated on the road to beauty, perfection and being lovable. Craftily, it uses that ache in your heart and soul to be loved, to be worthy, to be special, to be perfect, to feel some control over something in your life, so you grasp onto every promise. You yearn to be noticed – not feel so alone, and the voice promises to never desert you – to be the one to never betray you. To prove its "friendship",

it coerces you into believing that it will help you achieve your every goal on the path to becoming beautiful, perfect and loved by all. You need only obey its every instruction, and never let anyone know about your very private "friendship." They might not understand. They might take away your control, just when you've found a way to make your dreams a reality.

The voice soon becomes an autonomous, all-powerful entity within – it becomes your identity. Now, it requires a name. Will it be Ed, Ana, Mia, or something more personal – more creative – like "The Gobbler," as my voice was dubbed? As ridiculous a name as that may seem, it was a perfect choice for the monster that was "gobbling" me up, body, mind and soul. Once named, the deal with the devil has been signed and now its pursuit for your life begins in earnest.

The voice now has total control. You're feeling helpless against it. Go ahead, fight all you want. It's not letting go! It'll convince you to starve yourself and endure hunger that perhaps only concentration camp victims can understand. It can persuade you to run ten miles, do 200 sit-ups or 300 jumping jacks at 2:00 a.m. even though your stomach gnaws and churns with hunger or your body is weak and near fainting. You see, it tells you how strong you are, how powerful and how in control you are by your obedience to its all-knowing wisdom.

Then, when it's at its most powerful, it will tell you that there is a better way, an easier way. You don't have to starve any longer. You can have the best of both worlds! You can eat, but instead of allowing that food to enter your stomach and add an ounce of despicable fat to

your still pudgy 70-pound body, you can get rid of that food. That's right! Throw it all back up! Now you can have those pancakes slathered with syrup or that bag of cookies you've craved for so long! Go ahead! Eat the WHOLE bag and then just bend over and let it back up! It's a win-win, right? Well, that's what the voice says, and isn't it your god and savior now? Hasn't it helped you to reach all of those weight loss goals? Just keep listening because it has even bigger and better plans in the future!

"Am I genius or what!" The voice exclaims, as it lays out its next devious plan – laxative, diuretics, and, a few diet pills for added measure. And when this cocktail of death sends you to the hospital emergency room and that tiny part of you that still exists inside. – the real you – tries to speak up and shout, "Enough! I've had enough! Go away!" the voice comes back stronger than ever with even harsher demands. It coerces you up and out of that hospital bed when the nurses and doctors are gone and can't see what you are up to. Just take that potassium IV that is supporting your life along with you and go take a walk down the hall and find the stairwell. You need your exercise 'cause all that lying around in bed will make you fat. What are a few trips up and down the steps going to hurt? And so you obey because you are afraid not to. After all, you don't want to be fat or lose all that you've worked so hard for. Well, do you? You can't let "them" take the control from you. Can you?

Therapists know what I've just described as the "Anorexia voice," and to anyone that says it doesn't exist I'd have to insist otherwise. For me, the voice of Ed was the illness itself. I think many that suffer from an eating disorder

would agree that this is how the disorder takes over a highly intelligent young person's life, turning it into one of chaos and self-annihilation. But no matter how loud, controlling, demanding and abusive the voice of ED becomes, it's crucial for its victims to understand it can be silenced, and real power over your life and your own thoughts regained. Seeking out a trained and skilled therapist is the first step. Seeking spiritual guidance is also a valuable aide in recovery. Unfortunately, I'd been anorexic for a very long time before the illness was even diagnosed, and because of that I was told my recovery chances were not as good. I experienced its suffocating presence for more years of my life than I'd like to remember, and I cannot begin to tell you what a miracle it is to no longer have my life governed by this predatory presence. My mission now is to expose it for what it is: a demon, and speak up that others may understand the true horror an eating disorder can be for those who suffer in utter isolation and total silence. I hope that by bringing a little awareness to the torment that those with an Ed experience, I can also bring a little more compassion and love to each person struggling against a formidable foe. ■

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