Anorexia: a stranger in the family
Katie Metcalfe
The reason I decided to create a book in which my family could be involved was so that they had an opportunity to express in their own words, exactly how they have felt about the demon Anorexia, which became an unwanted part of our family, and how they feel it has affected them as individuals. Also, how they dealt with it, and how they think it has affected the family as a functioning unit.

By participating and printing their inner most thoughts and feelings in black and white, they are granting you, the reader, permission to view their lives — their worlds, where fear, curiosity, passion, anticipation, hatred and love live together.

I have also taken this opportunity to write about how I believe my illness has affected the lives of the family and all our friends, as well as the effect that it has had on me, as an individual.

My family as well as many others who have suffered in similar ways, feel Anorexia is a demon, and that its voice is what anorexics find themselves listening to.

Katie Metcalfe
January 2001 was the time I decided I wanted to be more fit, healthier and slimmer. Just a stupid New Year’s Resolution made at the naïve age of fourteen – a time when I should have been rebelling against my parents, the school system and the law, not against my own body, mind and soul. I had no idea that a good intention, listed alongside ‘do more to help the environment’ and ‘snog someone I fancy’, would end with me in hospital and that it would change the lives of my family and myself.

Forever.
Chapter 1

Young, Yearning For Perfection

My appearance and weight had never really been a big issue or concern to me before I turned fourteen. I mean, I did notice that I was bigger in the thigh and stomach region than most of my friends at school (or so I thought). I also noticed that I couldn’t run as fast as my friends or be as good as them at sport. I didn’t feel as attractive to the boys in the class as they were, not to mention boys out of school. I felt like the ‘tag on’, the girl who ‘wasn’t quite right’. I wasn’t pretty enough and didn’t have quite the right figure. I tried hard not to let it get to me, but sometimes it was hard, especially as I got older and the pressures to look good and to be popular increased.

I couldn’t jump the high hurdles in gym class or do perfect handstands, shoot a pot shot in basketball without it being a fluke, or run for more that half a mile without stopping for breath. I would get sniggered at because everybody else could do everything so easily. My girlfriends would talk and brag about how little they weighed and what size trousers and tops they wore, patting their tummies and saying, “Look at this fat, isn’t it horrible? No wonder I weigh so much.” I wouldn’t dare say how heavy I was; I wanted to avoid being humiliated.

I think the time I decided to do something about my weight, appearance and popularity was just after I turned fourteen, and was at a difficult time in my life anyway. The teacher I had had from the age of seven was leaving the school to go and live and teach in Germany, and all my school friends were leaving to go to other schools, a lot of them at boarding schools all over the country. I wouldn’t be able to see them often. There was still another year left at school, and I was determined to see it through. I didn’t want to change schools although I knew it wouldn’t be easy. Unfortunately for me, I didn’t get on with the three
boys that I would spend the year with. I decided there was nothing I could do, other than to make the best of a bad situation. At least I’d got what I wanted, to finish my education at Botton School, even if it meant being the only girl in a class of four.

Throughout our year, for one reason or another, we had five different teachers, which didn’t help the situation or our education. My classmates thought that it was their duty and God given right to annoy and upset me. They constantly gave me a hard, often unbearable time. They would ransack and tip over my desk, hit me for no reason, and call me obscene names such as ‘whore’, ‘slag’, ‘fat cow’ and others that I won’t repeat as I cringe to think of them. They tried to make my life at school. A living hell every single day and I used to wake up in the morning and dread getting up to face another day with them. My parents said I should leave school and take up my education elsewhere, but I didn’t want to and felt that if I did the boys would have won. I also believe the thought of starting at another school scared me more than being with the boys. I figured that if there were three boys who could make me feel terrible inside as a person, how many would there be at a school of hundreds, possibly even thousands, who would be the same and possibly worse?

Over a time, I became increasingly paranoid, and I always tried to make everything I did in life perfect. I thought that if I lost a bit of weight, got fitter and slimmer, then maybe the boys would be more pleasant to me, and not so horrible. But that didn’t happen. The situation got no better. To tell the truth, changing my appearance made it much worse.

On the 1st January, I weighed myself, and I weighed eight and a half stone, and my height was 1.65m (5ft 5in). To me, that was far too heavy for my height and age. I made the decision that it would be wise to start cutting certain things out of my diet. I decided to construct some sort of a meal plan, which dictated the things I could and could not have. This would help me to lose the weight, which I figured was making my life a misery.
The first food I cut out was bread. I’d watched lots of brainwashing television programmes and read many magazine articles about how cutting carbohydrates out of your diet can help you to lose weight. I also had it in my head that bread contained masses of calories and fats and was an ultimate no-no if I wanted to diet. Cutting out bread was quite a hard thing to do, as it meant no toast, sandwiches or pizza: three things that I loved and enjoyed to eat. I replaced the bread with low fat, low calorie crackers, such as Ryvita and rice cakes.

After a short time, my family noticed that I was refusing to eat cheese on toast, fried egg sandwiches, and my favourite food of all – pizza, as well as various other things that I enjoyed. They started to question me. I would answer by saying that it was a New Year’s Resolution, and I wanted to see how long I could last (which was sort of true, in a way). They decided to leave it at that. I guess that my parents didn’t think I would last very long and that I’d be eating normally within days.

Soon after I cut bread out of my diet, I also cut out sweets, all fried foods, chocolate, crisps and, gradually over time, simple things like butter, sugar, whole milk and normal cheeses. I refused to have a pudding after a meal and snacks after school became a thing of the past. It was hard at first not to eat these, but it did make it easier when each time I weighed myself, I found I was losing weight. I started adding more exercise to my daily plan and in January, began going for long walks, from three to sometimes six miles, two or three times a week, and playing basketball in break-time at school. I ignored the sarcastic comments from the boys and other students. I was determined to stay focused and lose the weight and horrible appearance that was keeping me from being accepted and liked.

After a few weeks, I made progress with my exercise, going jogging with my Mum regularly, playing football after school for a few hours, as well as basketball. I admit that I became totally obsessed with exercise and burning calories; a sensible, one or two days a week of physical activity ended as being an obsessive seven. After a while of jogging with my Mum, I decided to stop, because I got terrible stinging pains in my
knees, as though pins were being jammed into the bone. I also thought people passing by in cars might laugh at my flabby bum, wobbling thighs, sweaty face and my feeble attempts to do justice to the word ‘jog’. So I took up going on bike rides instead, by myself.

It became a regime that I couldn’t break. If I missed out a day of my routine, I’d add it to my next day’s exercise, doubling the amount. I would exercise in any weather too. Sometimes it would be raining so hard I’d be soaked to the skin within minutes of stepping out of the house, but I didn’t care, as long as my exercise was done. I even rode my bike when there was six inches of snow on the pathway, and my hands were so cold, beneath two pairs of gloves, that I struggled to grip the handlebars. My body would regularly scream at me to stop, my legs aching in protest and my eyes streaming from the pain that jolted through my chest as I pushed myself further and further along unknown pathways and deserted roads, bumpy forest tracks and grassy slopes.

As time went by, I used knowledge acquired from science lessons at school to my advantage concerning weight loss. I would wear thin clothing, aware that the less clothing you wore when out in the cold, the more calories you burned. Naturally, this act of stupidity took a toll on my health and I started to suffer from terrible coughs and colds, which of course would be denied. I had more important things to be thinking about than a dripping nose and throbbing head.

Life at school was no better, and to make things worse our house in Margrove Park was up for sale. I didn’t want to move from the beautiful, peaceful countryside, which I loved, to the town. Although I had no friends where we lived, I loved the place, I loved the quiet, I loved our house, and I really didn’t want to leave.

A few months had passed since I had started my new ‘routine’ and ‘meal plan’, and my Dad was starting to get more and more suspicious of me because I was refusing to eat things like curry, chips, pasta and rice or anything I thought had butter on it, or had been fried in oil. He began asking question about why I’d stopped eating the things that I’d been happily eating a few months before. I just told him to forget it and to
leave me alone. I knew what I was doing, and I didn’t want him to interfere with my new daily life plan.
Chapter 2

The Friend Inside My Head

By March, I had become totally obsessed with food. Food, exercise and my weight were my life and all that I could think about. At meal times, I would eat really slowly, savouring each mouthful, often taking minutes to consume something that should take mere seconds. It was also about this time that I started hearing a voice in my head, which told me what I could and couldn’t eat and what to do. It was impossible to distinguish if the voice was male or female, but it had its various tones: soft and reassuring if I listened to it, firm when I was struggling, and vicious if I stepped over the line of its authority. It would tell me to eat my food slowly, as it would be a long time until I could have any more. I listened religiously, confident that it was my guide to achieving everything that I desired. Moreover, if I listened to it, then its tone would remain caring and soft.

I’ve always loved cooking, ever since I was a little girl, but now I was trying to do it at every opportunity I had, but rarely eating anything I prepared. I would get cookery books from the Library and look at them for hours at a time, often writing out the recipes, and trying to think of ways I could make them low fat.

I was totally obsessed with calories and fat in both food and drink. Whenever I picked up a packet of biscuits or a bottle of juice, I had to turn it over and look at the calorie and fat content and that would determine whether I was allowed to have it. The voice told me to look at the content and study it, and if it was too high in ‘the bad stuff’ then I wasn’t allowed to have it, and I had to put it back without question.

As I ate less, exercised more and continued to lose weight, the voice grew stronger. Eventually, it took over my mind. For example, if I
thought I’d eaten too much at lunchtime, and afterwards I went on a bike ride, after my usual six miles, the voice would scream at me to do another mile because I’d eaten more than I should have. It told me that if I didn’t do that extra mile, I would get even fatter than I already was, and my life would become all the more terrible. I believed this and obeyed it. No matter how tired I felt, or how bad the weather was, or how much my joints ached or how intense the pain in my head was, I did that extra mile to make sure I didn’t get fat.

The more weight I lost, the more commanding and controlling the voice sounded in my mind. But I felt that I was in control and that the voice was just a firm, strict friend who was helping me to lose more weight and to achieve everything I wanted. I felt that at last I had control of one thing in my life.
In April, I hit an all time low. I became incredibly miserable and depressed, and started bursting into tears for no apparent reason. This was the time when the big arguments with my parents started, and they happened nearly every day. We would argue about food, school and moving house among other family issues. Mum and I both noticed I hadn’t had a period since January. Mum said it was because I was losing weight, and that I might now be underweight. She made me an appointment to go and see my GP, Dr Wilson.

When I went for my first appointment, I was weighed, but I was not underweight according to the medical scales. Dr Wilson thought my periods were just adjusting to the monthly cycle, even though I had been having regular monthly periods for two years! Dr Wilson said that I wasn’t overweight, but was OK for my age and height, and that I shouldn’t want to lose weight (I thought the complete opposite), but it was clear that I had some problems in my life.

As the weeks went on, I became more depressed, and my visits to see Dr Wilson more frequent. At my appointments she weighed me, and then we would talk about how things were going. We’d talk about most things, school, life at home, and my relationship with food and exercise. I’d tell her how I wanted to go back to being a small child, when life was simple and every day was happy and a new adventure. She replied bluntly that of course that wasn’t possible, and I had to face up to reality and grow up. Often, I’d just sit there, not say a word and just cry for the hour. I’d let her do all the talking, but not taking in anything that she said.
Since the first visit, I came each time to find that I’d lost more weight; but I was still convinced that I didn’t have a problem. The only thing I thought was wrong with me was that I was having a hard time at school with the boys, and that I was weak and pathetic for not being able to cope with it. And, of course, that I was far too fat.

When Dr Wilson told Mum I had lost weight, Mum tried her hardest to get me to eat more. But I refused. It was at this point that I became very secretive and sneaky, to try to deceive Dr Wilson and my parents. I started to wear heavier clothes to my appointments and all my jewellery, even bracelets around my ankles. Then when I stepped on the scales, it would appear as though I hadn’t lost weight. It worked for a while, but I was eventually found out and asked to take off my clothes and jewellery before I stepped on the scales. (I think it was my gaunt face and blue-tinged hands and nails which gave the game away.)

Seeing Dr Wilson, helped get some things that were bothering me off my chest, but it didn’t solve my problems. It made the situation at school even worse because the boys would question me about having to go home early, or missing lessons. When I told them why I had to go early, they would laugh and tease me. The teachers at school appeared to do nothing about the bullying. I think that some of the teachers thought that I exaggerated how bad it actually was. Even when the boys were told off, they didn’t care and the teachers would be told to ‘fuck off’ or ‘get lost’.

I think that some of the teachers were afraid of my classmates because the boys could do nothing wrong, although the teachers suffered from constant verbal abuse. A blind eye was turned on the effects that the nastiness was having on me, as it was too complicated an issue. As the year progressed, so did the bullying and the teachers’ denial of it. And so, anorexia’s grip tightened around my life.
Chapter 4

A Lesson In Obsession

Every day, my diet was becoming more and more restricted. Instead of having six rice cakes at tea, I went down to four, and the spreads I put on them were also being reduced. I started to eat cereal at breakfast with the fewest calories I could find — the types dieters were recommended to have by doctors. Normally, I’d have the cereal drenched in milk, but the milk also became less, until I wasn’t using any at all, and would eat my cereal dry. Doing this hurt my mouth, and soon my gums became sore and bled. I’d wet my bowl with water so that it looked as though I’d had milk with it. I hid my food too. I’d hide it in my room, wrapped in tissue paper and plastic bags, until the coast was clear to dispose of it. I wouldn’t do it always, just when I felt I had to. I was caught a few times by my Mum trying to throw away food, but I always talked my way out of it by saying something like I’d dropped it on the floor, or I didn’t like it. I hated hiding my food and lying to my parents, and I guess I was lying to myself too. But, I’d be convinced by the voice, when I got away with hiding food, that I had done a good job. It was the anorexia that was in control. Not me.

My exercising became more and more obsessive, and I was doing more than ever before. I noticed I was now feeling the cold more than before, but I didn’t believe that my weight loss was the cause. I was adamant, as was the voice, that I was still fat. Whenever I looked in a mirror, I saw two black dots driven into a mound of quivering blubber staring back at me. It was at this point that my hair began to come out in clumps when it was brushed. In the morning, my pillow would be covered in hair. The long, thick, beautiful hair that had always been one of my best features was rapidly thinning. My nails and lips were blue when I went outside, although it was May, and my nails were becoming brittle and flaky and snapped at the slightest touch. I found all this
devastating, but refused to believe it was a result of my dieting. My Mum noticed that a downy blonde hair had appeared on my arms and back (lanugo, one of the common signs of anorexia). I was showing classic symptoms of anorexia, but still refused to believe that I had it. So, I stuck to my crazy diet and exercise routine. I kept my appointments with Dr Wilson, but nothing she said convinced me that I was suffering with an eating disorder and becoming dangerously thin.

In July, I came to the end of my year eight, and the end of my time at Botton School. On the last day, I remember going into the classroom and going to my desk. All three boys’ eyes were on me as I walked across the room, but I couldn’t see what they were looking at, so thought they were being their usual pig-ignorant selves. When I sat down and tried to open the lid of my desk I found that it had been glued shut and I couldn’t open it. The boys were in hysterics as they watched me struggle to get it open. When I finally succeeded, I found all the pictures I’d had stuck on the inside of Marilyn Manson, Metallica, Nirvana and vampires had been ripped out. All I could do was ask myself was why? What had I done to deserve this treatment? Why had they ruined the pictures of the bands I doted on and the culture I was part of? I felt the tears sting my eyes as I got up and went to tell the teacher what they had done. But she actually found it amusing, and didn’t think it was such a big deal. And she LAUGHED along with the boys, and told me not to make such a fuss. It was meant to be a joke, and pictures could easily be replaced. This was the same teacher who, when told that I had an eating disorder, told me that it was better to be slightly underweight than slightly overweight. And I believed her. This was also the same teacher that I’d felt incredibly close to only a year before. She was someone I could open my heart to and tell everything to. She’d changed and now, to me, was a stranger. Slowly, everyone around me was changing into strangers.

I was glad to leave that class, but I was still very fond of Botton School, and didn’t want to go because it really was a lovely area, and I think I was blessed to have had the opportunity to go to a school in such an idyllic place for so many years, even if the last year there had been a living hell.
Chapter 5

A Summer Of Sickness, Skin and Sparrow-Sized Portions

The long summer holidays now stretched before me, which meant I could focus all my attention on losing weight, as I didn’t have any schoolwork to worry about. So nearly every waking minute of my day was spent exercising, and I was eating less and less.

In August, we went on a family holiday to Tenerife for two weeks. This was the first holiday we’d had in five years and the first time we had ever travelled abroad together. We went all inclusive, which meant that all our meals and drinks were included in the holiday package. I was nervous about how well I would manage to stick to my strict eating plan and exercise routine, as I couldn’t bring my rice cakes and bike along with me to Tenerife. I was also very excited about going abroad with my family for the first time, and determined to have a good time, as well as sticking to my routines.

Before we went on holiday, Mum and I went shopping for clothes to take with us. I felt really proud that I had to buy clothes in sizes ten, eight and even smaller, and the fact that I had to use safety pins to hold up my new trousers and tops thrilled me all the more and made me feel as though I had achieved something fantastic. It was a wonderful feeling at the time, knowing that half a year ago, there was no way that I would have fitted into those size clothes. And so, with my new clothes, we set off to Tenerife.

But, our holiday didn’t get off to a very good start. I was in the bathroom at the airport, when we had to hurry because our plane would take off in five minutes. All the passengers were ready (except me). So I hurried, and quickly dried my hands. It was only when we were running
to board the plane that I realised that my thumb ring was missing. I stopped short and flipped out. I begged Mum to take me back to the toilets to go and find it, but we had no time, as Mum and I were the only passengers not on the plane. I was in tears as the plane took off, as the ring had belonged to my Nana, and it was very old and incredibly valuable to me. I never took it off. I couldn’t work out how it had come off, as my fingers weren’t that thin for it to slip off. So I decided that it must have come off when I was hurriedly drying my hands. My Mum tried to persuade me that it was because my fingers were too thin, but I refused to believe her. My thumbs were the size of pork sausages; it simply wasn’t possible for the ring to come off without being pulled by force. The voice naturally reassured me that Mum was wrong and that my perception of why it had come off was accurate.

The loss of my most loved piece of jewellery and the confirmation of my still ‘pork fat fingers’, meant that I was miserable, irritable and horrible to be around for the entire flight there, and for days after we had arrived at our destination.

On the first morning in Tenerife, when we went downstairs to get our breakfasts, I was amazed at the wide range of foods there was to choose from. I wandered around the serving area with my plate, past all the fried foods and the array of continental breads and cakes, trying to decide what to have, but knowing that I wouldn’t have any of the things that I really wanted. I knew the voice simply wouldn’t let me. In the end, I settled for muesli. It wasn’t very nice, it consisted of raw oats and hardly any fruit, but I knew it was the food with the least calories in. I didn’t fill my small bowl up though, just in case people thought that I was a greedy pig. I did get a few strange looks from other guests as I walked back to our table with my little bowl and glass of orange juice; it didn’t occur to me that it was because of the tiny amount I had and how thin I looked. I automatically assumed they were looking because I had far too much food on my plate.

After breakfast, we went swimming, to my relief, as I could burn off the calories that I’d eaten at breakfast. I was very, very paranoid about people seeing me in my swimming costume, because of my thunder
thighs and elephant bum, so I wore a towel around my waist until I had to take it off to get in the pool. (If I could have, I would have gone in with it still around my waist.) Once in the pool, I swam for ages, up and down and up and down, until my legs and arms ached so badly that I had to stop and get out. I’d wait in the pool, until I was sure that no one was watching, leap out, and quickly wrap my towel around my bum and legs before anyone had the chance to see them and be scarred for life from the disgustingy foul sight that was my body. It was like that every day of the holiday and my attitude towards my body in a swimsuit didn’t improve in the slightest; it became far worse.

My Mum noticed that my lips and nails turned blue when I got out of the water. So she ordered me not to swim for so long. But did I listen? Did I hell! The exercise was burning off calories and unwanted fat. Of course, I wouldn't do less! I felt, and the voice told me, that I was putting far too many calories into my body anyway.

Another way I burned off fat was by always using the stairs, taking two at a time, even if my body protested, and never the lift to our rooms on the sixth floor. My legs soon felt the pressure I was putting them under, and I would often fall asleep crying into my pillow because of the constant pains. The voice reassured me that the pains were a sign of strength. Signs that I was progressing with my weight loss. The pains
were something that all people who aimed to lose weight felt. Of course, I fully believed this, and my legs continued to suffer the abuse I forced upon them.

Every meal time, Mum, Dad and I would argue over portion sizes, and they’d moan at me that I wasn’t eating a variety of foods. I do remember, on the first night we were there, I’d done masses of swimming during the day, and I had satisfied the voice’s ‘appetite for exercise’, so I decided what the hell! I’ll treat myself! So at dinner, after a small meal of salad and pasta, I went to get some pudding with my sister, Penny. I said I would, if she would. There were all the things that I adore, so Penny and I decided that we would each get a few different samples and share them. There was rice pudding, custard, chocolate tart and apple cake. So we both took a little of what we fancied, and went back to our table to share our puddings. I remember Mum and Dad’s faces when they saw what we were doing. They were both smiling as though they had won the Lottery. I automatically thought they were thinking I was a fat pig and laughing at me for being so greedy. I’d already eaten pasta, and salad, what right did I have to get anything else? What right did I have to stuff my face with treats? So, with these thoughts fixed in my mind, I stopped eating, left what remained of my pudding which was almost everything I’d taken to begin with, and excused myself. I sprinted up the six flights of stairs to make myself sick. Kneeling before the toilet bowl, my hair messily tied back, I pushed two fingers down my throat, so forcefully that I scraped the skin. With the faint smell of urine and bleach it wasn’t hard to lurch up the small amount I’d eaten. Yet I heaved again and again, until I could see small specks of blood among the regurgitated food and my stomach felt sore and empty of the with the foulness of food.

I shakily made it to my feet and splashed my face over and over with freezing water until it was numb with cold. Feeling less faint, I inspected the damage. I stared down into the toilet bowl, disgusted yet thrilled at the same time. I flushed the badness away, and smiled as it swirled down the drain. Swirling away with it was my interior pain. I observed the floor, and was impressed to find that not a trace of vomit had found its way there. I was an expert already on only my first attempt. The smell
was vile, but was soon replaced by cheap perfume. Knowing now how easy it was to rid myself of the impurities of food, I was determined, as was the voice, to continue to use the skill whenever I needed to. No one would ever find out about it, and how could they? It wasn’t as if Mum, Dad or my doctor could inspect my stomach regularly. How would they know if it contained food or not? Again, the voice in my head had ordered me to do something, and again I had obeyed.

It was nearly always my Dad who started the arguments at meal times, saying that my portion ‘wouldn’t feed a sparrow’, and he would march me over to get more food. (But I know now that it was only concern for me that made him do it, and the fact we had paid over three thousand pounds for our holiday and he didn’t want to sit back and watch me eat miniscule amounts of food.) But when he’d comment on my portion sizes and attempt to make me eat more, I assumed he was trying to make me fat, and there was no way I would let that happen after the hard work that I had put into losing weight.

All in all, it was an enjoyable holiday, minus the lost ring, and the arguments about food. I had successfully managed to stick to my routine and exercise every day, and stick to my meal plan, even eating less some days which I thought was an enormous achievement. As did the voice, and so it kept reminding me, to ensure that I wouldn’t lose track, and to ensure that I would continue to abide by its rules and regulations to reach the state of perfection it had promised.
Chapter 6

Horrendous Heartache And Hospital Hell

We were home from Tenerife for one day before I started at my new school, Billingham Campus. (The school term had already begun while we were away.) I was quite excited about starting at a new school, but also nervous as hell. I didn’t have a clue what the people there would think of me. I thought they might all think I was fat and stupid. But when I arrived, none of the boys called me fat or overweight, as I thought they would, and neither did the girls. People did notice my alternative appearance, which although subtle at school with a Nirvana hooded top, black nail varnish, black hair and silver jewellery, did make me stand out. People who noticed shouted, to my dismay, ‘mosher’ and despite being the new girl, known for being quiet, I immediately corrected them, stating that I was a ‘Goth’ and not a ‘mosher’. So I was called ‘Goth girl’ instead, which I didn’t mind, because at least that’s correct. I didn’t take the ‘mosher’ comment as a form of bullying. It was nothing at all compared to what I had to endure a few months previously. I just feel it is important to be addressed as something that I actually am.

I managed to make quite a few friends in the first days that I was there, both boys and girls, alternative and not. It did actually seem to me though, that being alternative was the ‘in thing’ to be at school which played to my advantage and made me likeable to most of students. A lot of the girls in my year asked me how I stayed so thin? I laughed and said ‘I’m not thin!’ Then just shrugged and said that I tried to eat healthily and exercise often. To me, I wasn’t thin by any stretch of the imagination. I was still a blubbering blob. But, I was thrilled that some people had noticed the effort I was putting into losing weight.

When lunchtime came around, I’d sit by myself with a packed lunch. All my new friends went home for their lunch, but that wasn’t
possible for me, as I still lived twenty miles away in Margrove Park. I’d pack my lunch at home in the morning myself. At first, it consisted of two thick rice cakes with peanut butter, two Ryvitas with Philadelphia Light cheese, and two Ryvitas with jam, and one or two pieces of fruit. Soon, it only consisted of two Ryvitas with a scraping of cottage cheese and a piece of fruit. (I stopped using peanut butter and jam, as the fat and calorie content was far too high.) Most of it would end up in the bin. I’d often get strange looks (not surprisingly) from other students as I sat there with my crackers and fruit; they had their ham sandwiches, crisps and chocolate. I remember the dinner hall was really cold because the doors were constantly left open, and it wasn’t heated. You would have to take off your coat, even if you didn’t have a jumper, and my teeth would physically chatter, because I’d only be wearing a school shirt. I requested a number of times to be allowed to put on my coat (despite the voice’s demands not to – one of the rare times I ignored it) but my request was denied. I was told that it couldn’t be one rule for one, and another for everyone else. I accepted this, and punished myself for being so selfish by taking another item out of my diet, and riding for an extra mile.

My concentration was getting worse by the day. I couldn’t focus on my schoolwork because food dominated my thoughts all the time. I’d always be the last one to leave the classroom because I’d have to make my work perfect, and I wouldn’t leave until it was.

To my absolute amazement I was put in the top set for every subject, including maths, which I hated the most. Maths was also the subject I found the hardest to concentrate on, and often I couldn’t understand anything the teacher was explaining or telling us to do because the voice would be constantly nagging in my ear, telling me to swing my legs that little bit faster, and twiddle my fingers until they turned numb.

I’d often end up in tears, sobbing into my desk. I felt such a failure at not being able to understand. I wouldn’t believe it was because my body and brain were starving and begging to be nourished. I didn’t believe that being underweight affected the brain’s ability to function. Well, I didn’t believe that it affected my brain because I was certain I
wasn’t underweight anyway. Of course, it would have an effect on the starving children in Africa and girls with real eating problems and real mental illnesses. But me, I was having problems because I was thick, pathetic and useless and would continue to be so until I was as light as air.

After school, I had the same routine, day after day after day. I would get home after a silent hour and a half car drive with my parents. During the trip they’d ask me about school and how I was feeling, in a desperate attempt to get me to talk. But, I would only murmur in response, too wrapped up in my own world, too preoccupied with arranging my routine in my mind. I knew that nothing would change unless the voice demanded that I altered it in some way. I would do at least two hours of homework, and then go for a six-mile bike ride (maybe more if I thought I had overeaten that day), then I would have a tiny, healthy dinner (usually pasta and salad). This was a tiny portion by Mum’s standard but huge to me. Dinner was followed by yet more homework, often till as late as eleven thirty. All my homework had to be perfect; no letter wrongly shaped, no paragraph the wrong length, no number in a maths equation wrongly formed, before I’d finally allow myself to fall, exhausted, into bed.

My concentration deteriorated as I continued to eat less and exercise more. A few weeks into starting at Billingham Campus, I began getting sharp, stinging pains in my heart and chest area during the day, which worsened when I exercised. I ignored them, and never mentioned them to anyone, for fear of being an inconvenience. (What a big mistake that was.) Generally they would fade away, but one evening, after coming back from an eight-mile bike ride in the pouring rain, the chest pains were far worse than before. I was doubled over in agony and could barely breathe. When I finally made my way through the garden in the pitch darkness I stumbled into the house, my hands clutching my chest. Mum had prepared my tea: a mushroom burger, peas, and boiled potatoes. I told her immediately, through sobs, about the pains in my chest but she thought that I was faking so that I wouldn’t have to eat. I was made to sit at the table, and make at least attempt to eat some of the meal.

“Eat it,” my sister snapped. “Mum made it for you. Eat it.”
“Yeah,” my brothers cried in unison while smothering their own food in tomato ketchup and banging their tiny fists on the table in protest at my not eating. “You have to!”

I felt trapped and cornered with nowhere to run to or hide. With Mum hovering over the table, and my siblings glaring at me with their wide eyes over their forks full of food, I took one bite of the burger. One hand still clutching my chest, in some hope that the harder I clutched and wished the more likely the pain would fade. I nearly choked on that first mouthful and spat it back out again. I refused to take another bite. Tears were streaming down my face as I tried to convince Mum that I was not faking the pain. It was then that she realised something really was wrong. She told my siblings to shut up with their comments and made me go straight to bed. She made me an appointment to go and see Dr Wilson first thing in the morning and prepared a hot water bottle and a mug of hot chocolate in the bleak hope that I’d drink it. She spent hours stroking my hair and telling me that everything would be just fine while I continued to plead silently with the voice to make the pain stop. I felt as if I was five years old again, when at times when I was feeling ill, my Mum’s attention, a hot water bottle and a drink would make things much better.

That was not reality now. The illness in my life would take a lot more than a mother’s attention to beat it. The discomfort remained throughout the night, and at some points became so painful that I longed for my life to be cut short just so that I no longer had to endure it. I watched my Mum’s face contort with distress. Sleep never came that night, and as I watched through my sandy eyes, the sun shift into the skyline, I felt a sinking feeling in my empty, groaning stomach, that the discomfort in my chest would be something more than simple pains.

After a failed breakfast, I went for my appointment and Mum and I explained about the pain, which had calmed down slightly. The doctor took my pulse and blood pressure, and found they were both dangerously low. My heart was under enormous stress. She explained that if I had not told Mum, and had just ignored the pains, it was likely that I would have had a heart attack and quite possibly died! That really shocked and scared
me. I thought that it was only old people who had heart attacks, not girls my age. She told me that it wasn’t safe to be walking around as I was, as I was vulnerable to having further serious chest pains and heart failure. She phoned South Cleveland Hospital there and then and told them that I needed a bed immediately. I was very anxious about going into hospital, as it would mean missing my exercise routine and being in where everything was different again.

Mum and I went home to collect some overnight clothes and toiletries, and we didn’t speak in the car. Only cried silent tears. Mum would reach for my hand but I’d purposefully place mine out of reach. For some reason, I didn’t want her touching me at that point. I didn’t want her anywhere near me. I didn’t want anyone at all, other than the voice. I wanted the voice to reassure me again and again that everything would be OK, and I would be able to exercise in the hospital, that I wouldn’t be force-fed and that I wouldn’t grow into an obese whale. It had already told me that the pains in my chest were normal, nothing to worry about. It told me that I should be happy that I was feeling them, as they were a sign of strength.

Mum and I drove to the hospital I couldn’t believe what was happening to me. I was confused and angry with myself for making such a big fuss. Of course, I wouldn’t have had a heart attack.

When we arrived, I had lots of tests for all kinds of things, most I didn’t know the reason for, and eventually put into a bed and had heart monitors attached. They bleeped very loudly whenever I moved a muscle. It pronounced me dead about five times during the first several hours of my stay!

The first night was terrifying. I was petrified about what would happen to me, how long I would have to stay there and not be able to do my exercise routine. Worst of all, what if they forced food down my throat and made me fat again? Mum stayed with me in the hospital and Dad stayed at home with my brothers and sister. I didn’t know at the time, but my siblings were convinced that I was dying and that they would never see me again. Hearing this confession from them years later,
proved their true feelings for me. Their true feelings of love and concern: two things, which I was sure had long since died.

I was in hospital under observation for two nights and three days. In that time, no one forced any food down me, but I was encouraged to eat. I tried my hardest to ignore the voice and to eat something as I wanted to go home. The voice snapped at me whenever I went against its wishes, claiming I no longer cared about my weight and image. Claiming that I would abandon its friendship soon, and become the overweight, hideous creature that I had been before it had shimmied into my life. I did eat a little, but only because I made a promise to the voice that I would exercise the calories and fat off as soon as I got home. I didn’t want food inside my body any more than it did.

I was allowed to go home when the pains in my chest had fully subsided, and the doctors treating me said there was nothing else they could do to help. They couldn’t persuade me to eat more than half an apple. They couldn’t stop my exercise attempts or climb inside my mind and pluck out my new ‘best friend’. They couldn't approach anorexia and rip it from me. At this time in my life (or Limbo) nobody no one could help. I was firmly trapped in the depth of anorexia’s web of fate. While lying in hospital, in a state half in, half out of sleep, I heard the nurse say to my Mum, “Look at her – so peaceful. She looks just like an angel.” I gave no indication that I had heard the comment, and kept my eyes closed. One thought flashed in my mind as I lay there. How could I be an angel? I was still a fat freak, gaining weight every second. I was an ugly nobody. I was nowhere near being as light as air, as that’s what angels needed to be – light as air to fly.

The morning after I was discharged, I waited until the house was empty, siblings at school and Mum and Dad at work. No one could stop me from doing my exercise. I walked about three miles (walked because Dad had taken the shed key to stop me getting to my bike) although my legs ached with each step. I carried on, determined to burn off the fat and calories that I had consumed during my stay in hospital. The voice constantly congratulated my firm mindedness and kept up my will to continue. I didn’t notice the beauty of the countryside that before had left me awestruck. I didn’t notice the graceful swans that glided on the
smooth lake that I passed, making tiny ripples every now and then. I ignored the wild flowers swaying in the scented, light, cool breeze and the placid cows swishing their tales, chewing the cud and watching the world pass them by without a care in the world. None of that mattered to me anymore. Satisfying the voice’s demands was the only thing that mattered. Nature had always been my world, my escape, from my family and the trials and tribulations of life. But to me now, it was nothing.

I returned home, moments before my Mum arrived to check on me. I’d forgotten all about her returning, as exercise had been my focus from the moment my eyes snapped open. Mum never questioned my outside clothing, the gloves, hat and scarf. She had come to accept it as ‘the norm’. She failed to question my sallow cheeks and purple lips too. But, those were also aspects of me that she had come to accept.

The day after, I went to stay with my grandparents, for a few days’ break. (I wasn’t allowed to go back to school, as my heart was still very weak.) I promised my parents that I would try really hard to eat, and ignore the voice in my head. Lies, of course. I managed well for a few days, part of the reason being I didn’t want to be a burden on my grandparents by being fussy and awkward, and a disappointment to them. My grandparents gave me a lot of encouragement, which while I was there I embraced. When I got back home, things soon returned to normal, with me eating little as before, and often less. Along with eating less every day and drastically over-exercising, my depression sank to a totally new level. I became very anxious that I was getting behind with my schoolwork, so I got my Mum to go to Billingham Campus and pick up work for me to do, so I could try to keep up.

Arguments increased with my parents, and before long we were having rows more than five times a day. Most of the arguments were based around us moving house. Every time someone came to view it, I wished that they wouldn’t buy it. I didn’t bother praying. God, in my mind, no longer existed. The voice made it clear that if there was a God, then I would already be as perfect as I should be. I would be as light as air, beautiful and popular without a care in the world. If there was a
God, I wouldn’t have to eat, drink or sleep and I would still survive and be everything that I wanted to be.

I think my wishing helped, for a while anyway, as we had many people who came close to buying it, but then backed out for reasons unknown, which kept me happy for a short time. To put off potential buyers, I would wait until my parents were handing out coffee and offering them homemade flapjack, before slinking into the room to work my evil magic. I’d mention that the previous owner had hung himself in one of the sheds in the back garden, and that he had a passion for skinning mice and nailing their tiny mutilated bodies to the shed walls. Of course, I’d mention the fact that I had seen his ghost on numerous occasions too. Those comments almost always ensured that the flapjack was forgotten, and the coffee declined.

I confined myself to my room for most of the day, everyday. I would work for hours on end on my schoolwork, and continually worried that it wasn’t good enough. Mum had to work in the mornings, so when I wasn’t doing schoolwork, I would be secretly exercising. When Mum came home from work in the afternoon, she would try to get me out of the house for a while, thinking that it wasn’t good for me being alone in my room all day. I wasn’t allowed back to school, as I was in such a state, emotionally, physically, and mentally. I knew that something was wrong, but continually refused to accept that it had anything to do with my eating. As far as I was concerned, it was because I had a slightly ‘dodgy’ heart that would sort itself out sooner or later.

I was feeling the cold a lot more now, and so I’d do my schoolwork sat against my radiator. I’d get scorching red marks on my back from the ridges that would last for days and sting terribly, but it was the only way I could keep warm. My Mum noticed after a couple of weeks of me being at home, that I was putting almost all my energy and concentration into my schoolwork. She encouraged me not to do so much, as I was wearing myself out and overdoing it. I disagreed with her at first, so we ended up having many full-blown fights over it. After a while, I realised that the time not spent on homework could be time better spent exercising.
“You don’t burn many calories doing homework,” the voice would inform me. “Take advantage of the situation. Rid your body of those nasty, horrible calories. Lose the fat that’s keeping you from having a good life.”

My eating was getting worse, and I took the opportunity of being at home by myself to eat nothing at all. But, I was getting more depressed, and the less I ate; the more convinced I became that I was getting fatter and eating too much. My image in the mirror was becoming all the more distorted. A new chin would develop daily. Another layer of flab would flop over the waistband of my belted trousers. My eyes were gradually becoming pinpricks in a mass of pink putty. I was panicking that soon, I would be unable to see anything at all; the mirror would simply reflect a mass of flesh with no identity.

In reality, my cheeks had sunken so far it looked as if I was permanently sucking on a lemon. The lanugo was growing and my complexion beneath the blonde down was deathly pale. My eyes were wide and haunted, set deep into my skull, and my hair – my long, lustrous hair – hung thin and lank over my visible scalp.

I hardly ever talked anymore to members of my family, and I’d keep all my thoughts and emotions locked inside. Except, when I went for my appointments with Dr Wilson. But even at my appointments what I told her, more often than not, was lie after lie.

As my health deteriorated, the arguments increased with my Mum. Now, the only time I would really talk (or shout) was when I was arguing, and the only focus would be on what I hadn’t eaten, my exercise and my exclusion of the rest of my family from my life. It often got so bad, I would go and stay with my grandparents in Ripon, so that my family could have some time away from me, and I could have time away from them. In all truthfulness, if we hadn’t escaped one another someone would have ended up being seriously injured.

When I went to stay with my grandparents, they’d try to cheer me up, and make my stay happy, and so they would buy me the foods they
knew I loved. I would exercise while staying with them, going out for runs in the nearby woods, claiming I was ‘popping to the shop’. I didn’t want them to worry about me getting lost or being abducted by some stranger. I also exercised late into the night in my room, when they were asleep and unaware. Whenever I couldn’t dispose of the food that greeted me at mealtimes, I ate a small amount, excused myself, and visited my other familiar friend, the toilet. I had mastered the art of the anorexic, ‘being sick silently’, so they remained ignorant of what I’d been doing when I slipped back into the room. Neither of my grandparents had any idea what I was suffering, and supposed that I was simply going through a ‘stressful time’. When they offered me a piece of flapjack for a snack, or a bowl of ice cream for dessert, I’d politely refuse. I hated seeing the look of disappointment and surprise on their faces, and I’d feel guilty, but there was no way I could have allowed myself those treats. Times were different when I stayed with them as a child. Back then, when I was showered with treats, I accepted them with shining eyes and a smile. Now, my sunken eyes stared down and my smile was a forgotten memory. The voice had coached me well in saying no and coping with the guilty feelings that came along with saying it. It assured me that my grandparents would understand my reasons for declining their offers once I was the perfect person.

I was becoming more and more obsessed with my main enemy: the calorie, and had mad theories about how they would enter my body, other than in food. I thought moisturising creams, and toothpaste contained them, and they would get absorbed through my skin or down my throat. So, I’d only use moisturiser when it was absolutely necessary, and when brushing my teeth, I’d make sure I didn’t swallow even the tiniest bit of toothpaste. I decided that moisturisers that contained things like avocado oil or cocoa butter would have more calories than plain moisturisers, so I only ever used the plain ones with no added nutrients or vitamins just in case. I also thought that salt and pepper contained calories, so I stopped using them altogether too. But, when I found out that they have a fat and calorie content of nil I’d use them to the extreme to flavour the bland food that existed in my diet.
I also became obsessed with washing my hands after I had touched any food, even lettuce, as I’d worry that if I touched my lips with the hand that had touched the food, then I would have taken in unnecessary calories and fat. My hands soon showed the results of my new obsession. As my skin was paper thin and sensitive, tiny cracks appeared all over my hands, which oozed blood continuously. This was the beginning of my obsessive-compulsive disorder, which has taken me years to admit to. But, all the evidence is there; therefore, it is a fact of life I can’t deny. Anorexia was ripping my body apart piece by piece, and my mind was wasting no time in following. Still, I continued to play its game, adamant that my life was more normal than it had ever been before, because I felt that I was in control and had the best guide a girl could have to help me find my way in life. Never had I been more wrong.
Chapter 7

Screaming Silently Into The Snowy Season

As my depression worsened, I talked even less and cried more than ever before. More than half of my day consisted of me sitting hunched up, sobbing to myself for reasons I couldn’t understand. My mind was muddled on some occasions, clear as crystal on others. Dr Wilson decided I should be talking to a psychologist instead of her, someone who could understand the complexities of my ‘illness’ and what I was going through.

The appointment with a psychologist should really have been made much earlier. Talking to a GP about my illness had been useless. They’re not trained to understand mental illnesses, so, in theory, the hours spent in her office had been hours wasted. Dr Wilson made arrangements for me to have appointments at the Rosewood Centre for children’s mental health in Middlesbrough. My first thoughts when I heard that were, “Am I cracking up? Have I really lost it? Am I a certified lunatic? Are they going to put me in a straight jacket and lock me in a cell until I foam at the mouth and I have to be drugged into silence?”

Dr Wilson laughed when I relayed my thoughts to her. I, on the other hand, didn’t. It wasn’t funny to me. At my age, ‘mental health’ was straight jackets and padded cells. She reassured me that it wasn’t, but I didn’t believe her. Only when the voice said that I may as well go and get it over with, so they can see there’s nothing wrong with me, did I agree to go.

I started to have appointments with a young trainee psychologist called Beverly. She was friendly, and listened to me thoroughly when I finally got around to talking after a few weeks. I also started seeing a dietician, called Lia, who had a friendly air and took in what I told her. She said she’d had many girls with the same problem, and that it may
take a while, but I could get myself back on the right track. I shook my head, again claiming I didn’t have an eating problem. I was dieting, because I needed to. That was all. And everyone dieted at some time, so it wasn’t unusual. Lia plainly told me that I was very underweight, and I had to try to gain some, otherwise I would become very ill. I weighed 39 kg at this time, just under six stone. We talked about my eating habits, and together we formed a meal plan, which I promised to stick to. I promised with my fingers crossed under my legs, as I knew immediately that I wouldn’t be able to stick to it for long. I pretended to promise because I wanted Mum and Dad to believe I was making an effort. I was convinced that there was nothing wrong, but I thought if I played the game for a while, or at least pretended to, then I would be left alone to get on with my life, continuing with my diet, progress with my exercise routine, lose weight and become perfect.

In November 2001, to my dismay, we found a buyer for our house, and we moved to the town of Billingham. The only good point about moving for me was that I could have my own room with a lock on it, so I could exercise in there for hours on end without being disturbed. I was quite looking forward to moving to Billingham when I was at Billingham Campus, but now that I wasn’t allowed back to school, I thought it was pointless being happy about it when I would have no friends there. Now I am getting better I have found that there are many good points, as well as bad, to living in Billingham such as being close to Middlesbrough with its great shops and cinema, having two local libraries, being close to Hartlepool and Newcastle, having an ice rink, swimming pool and a superb theatre just down the road. Also, I was now living near to my best friend, Thea, but I couldn’t have given a damn about any of these things. Staying thin, and getting thinner was my only concern.

Moving to Billingham meant that I had to change doctors, and I didn’t know the new doctor so felt I couldn’t trust her. It had taken a while to build up even the smallest of relationships with Dr Wilson, and now I had to start the entire process again which added to my feelings of stress.
For the first few weeks in our new house, the arguments stopped. I suppose it was because we were all so preoccupied with unpacking and settling in, we didn’t really have time to argue. But all too soon, they started again. The fights would often get so bad it would result with Mum and I not talking for days. Those were the times when my eating would go rapidly downhill, because I blamed myself for all the arguments. My mind was scattered. I couldn’t decide if I wanted the voice or not. I started to try to hurt myself as a way of punishment, but they were never really drastic things compared to true self-harmers. I would pull my hair out, punch myself in the stomach, scratch my legs, arms and belly with my nails, and sometimes, when I was really stressed and upset, I would bang my head against the wall, to make the pain I felt inside stop. I tried to make the voice go away as well, but it didn’t. Nothing would make it disappear.

I was getting weighed regularly at the Rosewood Centre, and I was continually, unsurprisingly, losing weight.

As we were nearly into winter, the weather was getting colder. Whenever I went out (which was hardly ever) I’d wear thick tights underneath my trousers and socks, at least two jumpers over a T-shirt, a coat, hat, scarf and gloves. I would also wear them inside when I was really cold, which was quite often. In the house, I’d have to stand next to the fire to keep warm, and sometimes, when I went out in the car with the whole family, I would take a hot water bottle with me because the rest of the family couldn’t stand the car heater as it made them all feel sick.

Christmas was getting closer by the day, so there was a good excuse to do lots of baking. I baked trays of mince pies and biscuits, loaves of Stollen bread, etc. I tried to be excited about Christmas, and get into the spirit, although I was still very depressed. I felt that I had to make an effort for my family. Plus Christmas had always been my favourite time of the year. When Mum was not at work, I would beg her to take me Christmas shopping so that I could look at all the gorgeous food and urge Mum to buy it, and promise her that I would eat what she bought, knowing fine well myself that I wouldn’t. Part of me felt good that I could control myself around all this lovely food, and not be tempted
enough to have some, but another part of me wished that I could allow myself something, and wished that I could be how I was two years ago, eating what I wanted and enjoying it, and not caring about it.

As well as looking forward to Christmas, a part of me dreaded it, as I knew I would be surrounded by all my favourite foods, and everyone else would be eating and enjoying themselves. I might get tempted, overeat and get fat. I tried to ignore those thoughts, and be positive about the festive season while it lasted.

A few days before Christmas Day, I had my last appointment with Lia and it wasn’t a good one. I had not been sticking to my meal plan, and my weight had dropped since I’d seen her. I was now dangerously underweight, weighing just 38 kg and Lia, along with The Eating Disorders Team, decided that I should be admitted to hospital (The Newberry Centre). I would be admitted after Christmas.

At first, I wouldn’t believe it. I thought that I was just being threatened with hospital, but I soon realised that it was true, and I knew that I must have a serious problem. I was absolutely devastated. I couldn’t believe that this was really happening to ME. Two years previously I’d been reading a book about an anorexic while I was eating a bowl of ice cream, thinking, “The girl in this book is so stupid. That’s NEVER going to happen to me. I’m never going to deprive myself of things that I enjoy. I am NEVER going to prevent myself from having a happy life.” How wrong was I? I couldn’t believe that I had let a New Year’s Resolution get so out of hand. I felt so stupid.

I really didn’t want to be admitted, but I realised that it was for the best. I was making my entire family’s life a living hell, as well as my own, and my family could no longer cope. Neither could I.

Christmas Day went relatively well. I tried my hardest not to start or get into any arguments with my family. I helped Mum and Dad to prepare Christmas lunch, and I tried to eat some of all the vegetables that were put on to my plate. Although I felt like a greedy, fat cow, I wanted to please Mum and Dad, and avoid any arguments about food. I had the
smallest portion; I still finished last, eating one pea at a time, and savouring every morsel, as I was starving. But I didn’t want to look like a pig at a trough by finishing first. I couldn’t believe at the end of Christmas Day that I had managed to resist all the temptations and carry out my exercise routine. I felt really proud of myself, but I could tell my parents were upset.

The day after Boxing Day, I was back at the doctors for blood tests. They had never hurt as much as they did on that day. Because I was so cold, it was very hard to find a vein to draw the blood. I had to bite my tongue to stop from screaming. The pain was horrendous as the needle was stuck into my vein and the blood was slowly drawn out. But I knew it had to be done.

From that week, my bad eating habits, obsessive exercise, routine crying and the arguments continued until I was admitted into hospital.
Chapter 8

Admitted, Defeated And Bed Rest

On 4 January 2002, I was admitted into The Newberry Centre. I couldn’t believe it had come to this. So much for New Year, new start! Mum, Dad and I had an appointment with The Eating Disorders Team in the morning, and it was decided that that afternoon would be the best time for admission.

I was shown around the ward where I’d be staying, and I met some of the patients and staff, who all seemed friendly. But something I noticed was that the doors were kept locked at all times, and the windows could only be opened to a certain width. (I soon found out that it was done to prevent people climbing out and running away.) It made me feel like a prisoner even before I had moved in. Every bedroom was decorated identically, except for people’s personal belongings, and the boys and girls were separated – girls down one long corridor, boys down another. There was a kitchen, which you were allowed to enter and use under supervision; a small gym which, to my dismay, I was not allowed to use; a lounge with a TV where people could sit to relax or have debates and arguments (there were often arguments to be had), it was also where the Community Meetings were held; a pool room; and a dining room, which I never ate in once.

There was also a large garden, surrounded by a high wooden fence, which reminded me of a prison yard, as there was nothing there except grass and an old, miserable-looking tree standing in the centre. Beyond the hospital was an enormous cemetery, which made the place seem all the more depressing and morbid. It was also a dark reminder of where, if I continued to lose weight, I would end up.

Connected to the unit, situated near to the psychologists’ and doctors’ offices, was the ‘School’, where I would spend many an
‘inventive’ half an hour as I got stronger, creating cross-stitch and writing poetry. It consisted of about four rooms, and one lovely, friendly ‘teacher’ called Catherine, with whom I made firm friends.

I quietly sobbed as Mum and I packed a suitcase and drove there that afternoon. I apologised over and over again to my Mum for what I had done. I felt so bad for putting her and Dad through such hell, despite not knowing exactly what I’d done wrong (the voice insisted everything I was doing to lose weight was OK). My brothers and sister didn’t think much about me going into hospital. They imagined I was only going to be there for a few days, and that I would be home again soon. So they never really said anything when Mum told them. I have since found out that they were very scared for me, and were certain I would die.

I was weighed when we arrived, and because I was at such a low weight (I weighed 37.1kg) I was immediately put on to bed rest. At first, I couldn’t understand why. An hour earlier, I had been walking around, doing my own thing, and now I wasn’t allowed off my bed. I even had to keep my feet up, and wasn’t allowed to dangle them over the side, as I would apparently burn essential calories. I was told if I needed to go to the toilet I had to ask, and a nurse would take me there in a wheelchair. I found that humiliating, as I could walk and I didn’t need a wheelchair.

I cried for all of the first day. I couldn’t believe that it really was happening. I didn’t want my Mum to leave, and I held on to her hand tightly, squeezing her firm, strong fingers with my frail, weak ones, begging her not to leave me. But, when I saw the tears in her eyes, I let go of her hand and allowed her to go without further argument. I saw that she was tired, upset and needed her rest and it was not possible for her to stay. It was a hospital rule. I would have to face up to my fear of this strange new place, alone.

If any of the nurses came into my room, I didn’t talk to them. I just mumbled replies to their questions, and shrugged. I was also terrified that because I wasn’t allowed off my bed, I would instantly get fat. My plan to exercise while I was in the shower room was foiled on my first night as I wasn’t allowed one because of my unstable condition. I was
I was fuming that I was being told what I could and could not do by people I didn’t even know.

I was also put on five-minute observations so I couldn’t exercise in my room, which angered me even more. My life had changed in a matter of hours. From doing what I liked, when I liked, where I liked, I was now being treated like a baby who couldn’t look after itself.

The first night in hospital was the worst night of my life. I had to have my door open so that I could be checked all through the night. It made it impossible to get a good night’s sleep, as there was someone coming in every half an hour to make sure that I wasn’t exercising. I kept waking up from my interrupted sleep, and thinking I was having a bad dream, and that my Mum would come in and hold me, stroke my hair and tell me that everything would be all right. That never happened. It wasn’t a bad dream. It was a living nightmare.
On my first morning, the curtains were ripped back and I was exposed to the bright, early morning sun. I opened my eyes to see a woman I had never laid eyes on before in my life. She introduced herself as Alicia. I was taken to the toilet in the wheelchair, where I managed five minutes of vigorous exercise, stopping only when Alicia starting banging on the door with her fists and telling me to hurry up. I guess she had suspicions of what I was actually doing.

When I returned to my room, I was made to sit on my bed again, and was given my breakfast on a bed rests table. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. There was thirty grams of bran flakes, drenched in semi-skimmed milk, and a huge apple. And I was expected to eat it all. This was what was on the meal plan that Lia had given me but as I’d never followed it, I had no idea what the amount of food looked like. I nearly burst into tears. There was so much food. There was no way I could eat all of it. The last time I’d eaten breakfast, it had been fifteen grams of dry bran flakes, and a glass of ice-cold water.

Alicia sat down in the armchair next to my bed and attempted to make conversation with me. But I wouldn’t talk. I felt her eyes on me as I pressed each individual bran flake against the side of the bowl, attempting to drain off the milk, and then slowly, put it to my mouth. I felt tears sting my eyes. I hadn’t taken a full mouthful yet, and I already felt like a greedy pig for even contemplating doing so. I was also sure that the nurse was thinking the same thing – that I was a fat and greedy pig.

As I was on bed rest, I was allowed a television in my room, and I tried to focus my attention on GMTV as I ate flake after flake. I had eaten about five soggy flakes when Alicia said to me, “Katie, you have GOT to
put more on your spoon.” I lost it and shouted at her, “At least I’m bloody trying to eat them, aren’t I?”

I don’t think I’d managed a quarter of my cereal before I put my spoon down and refused to eat any more. I was sure that I had put on at least a stone by eating that much. I managed to scrape the skin off about a quarter of my apple before I put it down, and it was all taken away. Alicia never said anything to me about not finishing my breakfast, she just gave it to the cleaner to dispose of and sat down to supervise me.

I then had to have a rest for half an hour, which meant lying on my bed and not moving at all. I was supervised for the whole half an hour, so that I had no chance or opportunity to exercise or make myself sick. I wasn’t allowed to go to the toilet until my rest was over. I attempted to move my legs and feet constantly, in a desperate attempt to burn off the calories I had just consumed, a habit I still do now when I sit for any length of time, but Alicia kept giving me disapproving looks while she focused all her attention on me, which made it impossible to continue. Much to the voice’s and my complete and utter dismay.

After my rest, I was allowed fifteen minutes on my own to have a wash and get dressed. I used that time to exercise and move around as much as possible. After fifteen minutes, it was straight back on my bed with my feet up. But, I didn’t keep my feet up. Whenever possible, I would dangle them over the side of my bed and swing them back and forth in a desperate attempt to burn off calories. The voice in my head was screaming at me to move all the time and not stay still because I would get fat. And, of course, I listened and believed what it was saying.

That day, I remember two girls coming to my door, and introducing themselves as Phoebe and Louise. I noticed that Phoebe had bandages all the way up both arms, so I guessed that she was in hospital for depression and for harming herself. But I couldn’t see anything physically wrong with Louise. She was incredibly pretty, with shiny golden curls and rosebud lips, a slim figure and looked perfectly happy with herself and life. But I did think that she was too young to be in a hospital like this, as she only looked about eleven or twelve. (I later found out that she was
They both seemed like really nice people, and I muttered hello to them, and that was about it. I think they got the idea that I wouldn’t be very talkative at the time, so they both said goodbye and went. (I found out that Louise was in hospital because she had been depressed and suicidal. I then realised that you can never judge people’s emotions and feelings just by looking at them.)

At every given opportunity, I would get off my bed and stride up and down my small room. But, I was nearly always caught, as people were often walking past because my room was close to the main office. I was caught so often I was told that if I didn’t cooperate, I would be put on constant observations. It felt as if I was already.

At my second meal, lunch, I was equally shocked as at breakfast. The portion size was a hundred times bigger than what I would have at home. There was a large piece of cheese quiche, a scoop of mashed potato, and a huge helping of carrots, as well as a pot of low fat Muller Rice. Again, I nearly burst into tears. How was I even supposed to attempt to eat some of it? In the end, I picked at the cheese on the quiche, not even touching the pastry, poked at the carrots, and didn’t even bother with the mashed potato. I was so scared that it had all been smothered in butter. Although I couldn’t see any I was positive that it had been added secretly. They were on a mission to make me fat anyway, so of course, they were going to try sneaky tactics like that. It was the same routine as breakfast with a nurse sitting with me while I ate, which made me feel even worse because thoughts would go through my head like, “Does she think I am being greedy? Does she think I am being a pig?” So eating was even more difficult. I managed to eat a quarter of my Muller Rice, after which I felt greedy and fat, and as if I had put on two stone.

I had half an hour to complete my meals, and I had barely touched mine when thirty minutes had passed. The nurse took it away. Nothing was said, only disapproving looks at the plate and me. The food in the hospital was actually delicious, but I was so scared of over-eating, and of not knowing every calorific and fat detail. I then had to have another rest,
but this rest period was an hour. To me, these rest periods were like being punished for doing nothing wrong.

Today was Sunday – visiting day. I was secretly hoping I’d be taken home. My grandparents came to see me, which cheered me up a little. But I wasn’t even allowed to get off my bed to give them a hug. During visiting, a nurse came in every five minutes to check on me, and to see whether I was still on my bed. I wasn’t even allowed a few hours’ personal time with my family. I mean, what did the nurses think I would do? Climb into my Nana’s handbag and try to escape! Well, actually, if it had been big enough, that’s one thing I would have attempted. It made me very angry and upset that I couldn’t have any private time alone with my family, but what could I do? I was powerless in every sense of the word.

My grandparents’ visit passed incredibly quickly, and before I knew it, they were ushered out and gone. And as my grandparents went out of my door, to my utter dismay, my next meal came in through it.
I was given a care plan on my first day on the ward, which I had to follow until my situation improved, and it was changed to suit my needs. On it was a seemingly endless list of what I was or wasn’t allowed to do; how long I had to eat my meals; how long I was allowed in the shower, etc. When it was presented to me (I had to sign it to say that I agreed even though I didn’t), I couldn’t believe that someone had written rules for me to follow every day. I also had the meal plan which I was given by Lia, the dietician, before I had been admitted, which included two Ensure Plus drinks (Ensure Plus is a high calorie, high fat concentrated milkshake drink to assist weight gain) a day on top of everything else that I was supposed to eat.

I was weighed twice a week: Monday and Thursday first thing in the morning, while I was still in my pyjamas so I couldn’t hide anything. I started to deceive the nurses before long, by slipping my bracelets around my ankles, making it seem as though I had gained weight. I had to go to the toilet before I was weighed, in case I tried to drink a lot of water, because that too would make it appear as though I had put on weight. The first few weeks I was weighed, I didn’t look at the scales, I was too petrified, but after a while I started to make a record of if my weight was increasing or decreasing. If I had put on weight (even with the addition of my bracelets), I would try my hardest to lose for the next time that I was weighed. If I had lost, I would try hard for a few days to gain it again, but then I would get back into the routine of losing it.

The weight I needed to be was 38.5 kg, but I was terrified of getting to be that fat. Though I knew I HAD to put on weight to get off bed rest, the voice in my head would tell me to keep on losing, and if I put on weight, I would be losing my battle to stay thin. And for five months,
five long months, I listened to it and remained on my bed. I would phone my family immediately after I had been weighed, to tell them the news. When I told them that I had gained weight, they would be thrilled, even if it was only a tiny amount, which gave me a rush, but only for a very short time. And when I told them that I had lost, they’d be incredibly disappointed and upset, but always tried to give me all the encouragement they could. It didn’t help that my mind was focused on pleasing the voice and satisfying its needs rather than listening to my family and their words of love and advice.

Visiting in the hospital was on a Tuesday and a Thursday, 6pm to 8pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 2 pm till 4 pm, and 6 pm till 8 pm on the dot. Normally, my whole family would come and see me, and we would sit and watch TV and chat.

Mum recently has told me that I would often sit and rock backwards and forwards for the entire visiting time, ignoring everything that was happening around me, and when I looked up, my eyes would be wide and wild and my lips moving silently. I was talking to the voice, telling it that I would continue with my weight loss. This would apparently scare my siblings and make my parents cry. Often, visiting times would get very emotional, especially if I’d had a bad day, and I would beg Mum to let me come back home, but in my heart I knew there was no way that could happen.

I asked my Mum to bring in my posters and pictures off my wall at home, and stuck them up all over my new room, covering every inch of the drab, pale brown and yellow walls. Having my pictures of Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Manson, Seth Green, Orlando Bloom, vampires, American Indians, bats and wolves made my room feel a little bit more like home, a little bit more like my own space, and not like the bare prison cell it did when I was first admitted. Even having familiar things around me didn’t make up for the loneliness I am sure any prisoner feels when they are in the same room, day in, day out. I had people in my room ninety-nine per cent of the time during the day, my pens and paper, books, a TV and CD player with my music, but I still felt afraid and lonely with only the voice for company.
The first few weeks were definitely the worst, and I would wait in anticipation for the post to come, to see if any of my friends from my old school had written to me. I received a few cards from relatives (mostly from my Nana who would make me a card and send me it every week along with a little present) and one of my friends wrote to me. One friend. In all the time I was there, Thea was the only friend who wrote and came to visit me, along with her Mum, Monica. (My pen pal Seveana who lives in Martinique also wrote to me, but she didn’t know that I was anorexic, let alone in hospital. I only told her when I was discharged.)

I would listen out when the phone in the nurses’ office rang, to see if the call was for me. But the only people who would ring me were my friends Thea and Matt (an old friend I’d had met in Margrove Park and who had introduced me to the delights of Death, Thrash and Heavy Metal), my parents and my grandparents. None of the friends with whom I had spent years of my life before the terrible trauma of class eight even bothered. And it broke my heart. I’d always relied on these people and they on me, to get through the tough times in school when we were young. I stopped hoping after about a month, the tears for them dried, and I relied on my ‘true’ friends and family to stay in touch with me. My Nana’s daily phone calls and weekly cards and my family’s and Thea’s visits would be the sunshine in my darkness.

I had the same routine, day in, day out, for five months: get up at 8 am, have my breakfast (well, what I could manage of it), supervised, of course, then half an hour rest, also supervised. Fifteen minutes to change and have a wash, then back on my bed. I spent my time writing in my diary and writing stories, reading, watching TV and listening to the loudest, darkest and most miserable music I have, until 10.30 am, when a nurse would come into my room with my morning break. (Often, my morning break was forgotten but I would never remind anyone. The voice in my head would scream at me not to. I was escaping unnecessary calories, so why say anything?) When my break was remembered, I was given an Ensure Plus drink to try to finish. Normally, I would manage about a quarter of the carton. A supervised rest would follow my break for half an hour, and then I would continue with my writing in my diary,
or stories until midday, when someone would come in with my lunch. I would usually manage a quarter to a half of it.

Most of the nurses who sat with me while I tried to eat wouldn’t constantly stare at me (I think they knew how uncomfortable it made me feel) but there were a certain few who would lean over my bed as I ate, just in case I tried to hide food in my lap. Another hour’s rest followed, and then I did the same as before, writing, etc, until 2.30 pm, when a nurse brought in my afternoon break – another carton of Ensure Plus, and a Nutri-Grain Bar. Again, I could only manage about a quarter of the Ensure Plus, and only a nibble of my Nutri-Grain Bar. That was followed by yet ANOTHER supervised half an hour’s rest, and then the same as in the morning until 5 pm, when my tea would be brought in: three thin rice cakes, with peanut butter or cottage cheese, and a bowl of bran flakes with semi-skimmed milk. I tried to scrape as much spread as possible off my rice cakes, and hide it in a napkin when the nurse wasn’t watching. If the opportunity arose I would scrunch up the entire rice cake, put it all in the napkin and then hide it under my pillow. I would also drain off as much milk as possible before eating. Nurses noticed this, and certain ones would leave the milk to soak into the bran flakes before giving them to me as soggy mush which made it made it even more difficult to eat. Tea was followed by yet another supervised hour’s rest (this is getting boring now!) then writing, reading, etc, until I was allowed twenty minutes for my shower. Half of that time would be taken up by exercise: sit-ups, squats, press-ups, running on the spot, etc. I followed the routine I had done at home. After my shower, I would have my supper, if it was remembered, which was a cup of Cadbury’s Highlights, followed by yet another supervised half an hour’s rest. Then at 11 pm it was lights out.

So that was my life for five months. Boring, wasn’t it? I did not leave the hospital building in all those five months. The only times I went out of my room was to go to the toilet, for my shower, to the once a week Community Meeting in the Lounge, which all the patients and nurses attended. Here, we discussed if there were any problems with the building or our rooms. Also, if there were any problems with patients,
for example, if we felt that someone was bullying or simply being irritating.

There were many days in those five months when I would just break down and cry for almost the whole day, asking myself: “Why the hell is this happening to me? It’s not fair. I want to be normal again. I want to be at school, with friends, leading the happy life I should be.”

The voice would take on a soothing tone at times like this, insisting that I was normal and the people around me weren’t.

As I gained a little weight – one hundred to two hundred grams (which was inevitable because I couldn't make myself sick) I was allowed to attend the hospital’s ‘school’ in the wheelchair, once a week for half an hour. There, I would do simple handicraft things, supposed to help take my mind off my weight and food. They never did though, and the temptation to prick my fingers with the needles or press a pair of scissors across my wrists was overwhelming. I needed to punish myself for not being sick and disposing from my body the foul food that was invading it. The only thing that stopped me was Catherine hovering over and watching my every move.

Once a week, I had an individual session with my Key Nurse, Alicia, who had coincidently been the first human encounter on my first morning in hospital. A Key Nurse is someone who constantly reviews your care plan and is a person to talk to when you need to. You keep a diary for them to read, in which you’re supposed to talk about any problems you’re having. I wrote in a diary that I would show her every session, but I would never write the whole truth about things. I would never tell her about hiding my food, or how I exercised in the bathroom. I wouldn’t ever mention my obsession with having all my books exactly lined up or my obsessive touching of my bed when I made it in the morning, or having to have my toiletries positioned in a certain way. That would have been stupid. Sometimes I wanted to tell her about hiding food, my obsessive behaviour and exercising, but the voice would scream, “Are you mad? Do you want to give your secrets away?” I wanted the secrets and lies out of me, because I am not the kind of person who likes to lie
and have never done it naturally. I hate lying to anyone; I feel terrible about doing it. But at the time, the voice still had control over my thoughts, feelings and everything I did. Therefore lying was part of the game, and more often than not, every second word I spoke was a lie.

The sessions were often useful, but they were also sometimes a pain in the arse. I had so many days when I was feeling really low, and Alicia would come in for my session and give me a lecture about how I should try harder and make an effort with ‘battling against the voice’ and ‘eating more’. I’d switch off during her lectures, and stare into space. Her voice became a stream of nonsense to my ears, yet the voice in my mind rang clear.

It was a month after I was admitted that I began to drink different drinks instead of just water. I’d have a cup of tea in the morning with my breakfast. I had deprived myself of it for such a long time, that it was absolute bliss when I drank it!

After about two months, I started opening up to people, and had full conversations that consisted of more than just a mumbled hello, with the nurses who supervised me for my meals. I’d brought in my Lord of the Rings book collection when I was first admitted, along with an enormous box of other books that I was determined to plough through during my stay. I was halfway through The Two Towers, the second book in the trilogy, when Jackson, a nurse I found incredibly irritating, came into my room and made an announcement.

It was his passion to watch horse racing and football when supervising me, or read the Daily Star. As well as mimicking my so-called ‘posh accent’ – especially the word ‘wanker’ which I used on various occasions when I wanted to walk to the toilet or I was in a genuinely bad mood, despite these slight ‘imperfections’ Jackson was interesting and very friendly. The announcement he came to make was to admit, to my complete and utter delight, his own obsession with JRR Tolkien’s work. I was ecstatic about finding a ‘book mate’ as no one else, or so I had thought, adored Lord of the Rings as much as me.
We discussed the books for hours at a time, bickering over who we believed to be the best characters. He brought in his sacred collection of cassette tapes containing twenty-six half hour stereo instalments of *Lord of the Rings*, broadcasted by Radio 4 in 1981. He agreed to bring them in on the promise that I worked hard at eating more. I agreed to his blackmail on a handshake, although naturally most of the extra food I promised to eat was hidden away on the voice’s strict instructions. I’d escape into my own world when listening to Ian Holm portraying Bilbo Baggins and Michael Hordern speaking as Gandalf, or reading my books. I’d escape from anorexia, my illness, the hospital, the people there and all the other problems in my life and the world besides. For a few hours I’d have no worries, cares or concerns other than what was happening in the stories. Climbing mountains with Frodo and battling against armies of Orcs was far more preferable than facing my own difficulties.

Phoebe made visits to my room almost every day. We would chat about a range of things from music to movies, our illnesses and what we felt were the cause of them. She’d constantly encourage me to try to get off bed rest, reminding me of the many things that I was allowed to do once I was off. I would nod my head and agree with her, promising to work at my weight. I knew secretly that the promises I made would materialise to nothing. No matter how hard I tried to ignore the voice in my head, and eat just a little bit more, it always won in the end. And I have to admit that I felt safe and secure allowing that to happen. It was my routine, and I didn’t want to see that being disrupted.
Chapter 11

A Friend In Need Is A Friend Indeed

A few weeks after coming into hospital, Dawn, another anorexic patient, came to my room in her wheelchair (she was also on bed rest) on the way to the toilet. I instantly thought she was far, far thinner than I was, and couldn’t possibly imagine myself weighing less than she did. When she smiled, all her amazingly white teeth shone back at me, and her skin was taut but flawless over sleek cheekbones. To me, she was a beauty, and I felt like hiding in shame at my ‘fatness’. Now I realise, when I browse through old photographs that actually she looked just like a clothed skeleton, and so did I.

Dawn started writing letters to me shortly after we met, encouraging me to ignore the voice. She wrote that she knew exactly what I was going through, and she knew just how difficult it was to keep on fighting and ignoring the voice when you feel confused whether you actually want it in your life of not. I’d write back, sending my love, support, and encouragement. Often, we’d write as many as ten letters in one day, particularly if we were both having a terrible day when nothing seemed to be going right. Or days when we felt like bloated pigs after having something more to eat than usual. The letters could, and often were, pages upon pages long, displaying our fears about what we were going through, and how no one understood what we were trying to achieve. I’d sometimes spend up to two hours composing a single letter.

My Obsessive Compulsive Disorder not only interfered with my everyday activities, such as making my bed, but it interfered with my writing too. Every letter had to be written in black and shaped perfectly to suit my formal Gothic style. Every word had to be spelt correctly; there could be no errors although it was simply a letter going to a friend down the corridor. When I folded it in half, the line needed to be exact.
There were times when the line was fractionally out, and I ripped up a letter that had taken me an entire afternoon. When it was placed in the envelope, I licked my finger and wiped my saliva over the seal. Stamps contained five calories. There was no way that I would risk taking in the calories from the enormous seal on an envelope. There was a chance it contained well over twenty calories.

In our letters, we’d tell each other how well we had done at hiding food, and accidentally on purpose spilt drinks, compare our weights and give each other tips on how to dodge and burn calories.

All this time, we were still giving each other encouragement, to gain weight, which, looking back at it now, is most peculiar. I suppose that just indicates how very disillusioned we were. We would get other patients to transport the letters to and from our rooms, or nurses whom we knew we could trust not to look at them. As we were both on bed rest, the only times we’d see each other was when we’d pass each other’s rooms in the wheelchair on the way to the toilet or shower, or at the Community Meeting where we’d both sit shaking our legs and fiddling with our fingers trying to burn calories. We became firm friends, even though we hadn’t spent more than an hour in the same room together!

As my time in hospital went by, I developed good relationships with most of the staff on the ward. After Jackson had brought in his tapes, a young nurse, only a few years older than myself, called Lisa brought in old tapes and CDs of Goth bands from the 1980s. She introduced me to many bands that I had never heard of before, taking my mind off anorexia for a short time. I was re-introduced to aspects of my life that had been ignored because of my dedication to anorexia. Lisa was a friend of Nina, another young nurse who supervised me but hardly looked old enough to be out of college! She was caring and considerate, and constantly had my needs and interests in mind. She delivered cards from herself and little gifts in an attempt to help keep my motivation high and on the increase. They would both arrange activities that revolved around things I found enjoyable such as cooking (how ironic!), for example. I’d be wheeled down to the kitchen and allowed to grate cheese for a pizza or break a few eggs for a sponge cake mix. Nothing too strenuous, of course!
Strictly no whisking or beating allowed. I developed a relationship with both Lisa and Nina, which I never imagined possible to have with anyone other than people I’d known for years. I’d had proved myself wrong, in a good way.

My long period of almost complete silence was more or less over; there were some nurses I still struggled to exchange a sentence with. The nurses I got on better with, including Lia, Nina and Jackson (when the horse racing or snooker wasn’t on) I preferred to sit with me when I had to be supervised, as they wouldn’t constantly stare at me and make me feel paranoid. They understood how I felt about being watched, almost as if they had been through something similar themselves. It made me often wonder, had they? Had these people who observed me day in day out actually experienced just what I was experiencing? Had that inspired them to help others? Of course, I’d never ask. I didn’t have the confidence at the time to do so, and I doubt I would have been told anyway as it was, in many ways, an invasion of their privacy.

We’d watch the TV and act normally, sometimes having conversations about things that we shared in common such as *Lord of the Rings*, and heated debates about things that I didn’t have a passion for, including *The Daily Star*, meat eaters and *Star Wars*.

I had many arguments with certain nurses, as they’d accuse me of hiding food when I hadn’t, and would give me lectures about how I had to try to make an effort. I would get so angry with them. They had absolutely no idea what it was like to suffer with anorexia. (Or did they?) They had no clue what it was like to constantly deprive yourself. They had no inkling of the pain of splitting skin; the numbness of freezing fingers and toes, or radiator and hot water bottle burns on thighs and arms.

I would only hide food when I was having a really bad day and felt as though I had eaten far too much already. I didn’t like doing it at first, as I was nervous and convinced that I would get caught. But the more I did it the easier it became to just slip the food into a napkin and hide it in my lap, under my leg, or behind my pillow, until I could dispose of it. It
became a sort of skill. (Not a very good one to have, of course.) It was obviously easier to hide food from certain nurses more than from others. We would have training nurses come on to the ward, for example, and they would be left to sit with me. I’d start up a conversation that would involve laughing on both sides, when heads went back, and eyes closed during the fit of laughter, away the food went. Or I would ask for the television to be turned over so it would give me a few seconds to close my fists around the food, scrunch it up and slip it inside some tissue. They were oblivious to my sneaky tactics, making hiding food as simple as blinking. When I hid food from Lisa and Nina, I felt guilty about it, genuinely bad. But those feelings lasted only for a few hours at the very most. The voice would remind me that it didn’t matter who I was hiding food from, as long as I did it without being caught.

It was a lot easier to dispose of food at home, mainly because I had freedom of movement, but also because my parents never suspected that I would do such as thing. I was their daughter. I wouldn’t lie to them. I never did in the past, why would I now? Of course, they never realised quite how much power the voice had over my mind and actions. My parents were simply people to the voice. They were not anyone special. That was how I needed to see them: as people I needed to deceive to achieve my goals – anorexia’s goals.

During the first few weeks in hospital, the nurses didn’t say anything to me about finishing my meals, but now that I had been on bed rest for a lengthy period, and my weight wasn’t improving, I was being encouraged to finish my meal or at least try to eat a bit more than before. Some nurses would be pushy and more forceful than others, which I hated and it really pissed me off. Of course, at that time I didn’t even consider that they were simply trying their best to help me get well. All I knew was they wanted me fat so they could laugh and joke and make a mockery of me, and there was no way that I would allow that to happen.

I was eating just slightly more than when I first came into hospital, but that was because I was threatened with being tube fed; but I still wasn’t eating enough. I would now eat the same amount at every meal and break: half of my cereal; and apple at breakfast; half an Ensure Plus
drink at my morning break; half of my lunch, depending on what it was (if it were quiche or something else with quite a high fat content, I would eat less, or hide it); half of my afternoon break, etc.

I didn’t dare take one more mouthful than usual. I thought (and the voice told me) that if I did take just one more mouthful, I would instantly put on loads of weight. It was the same with drinks. At first, I drank only water, and thought that if I drank too much of it, it would start to contain calories and help to fatten me up. So I would only allow (well, the voice would only allow) myself to have a certain amount each day.

When I had bad days I’d look in the mirror and see a fat moon face staring back at me, with rolls of fatty blubber instead of a slim, graceful neck, and thighs that looked like tree trunks. But other days, I could look and see what was really there: a gaunt, pale face with almost transparent skin, and a bony bird neck, and thighs which looked as if they were going to cave in as they had no support. I would see the ghostly image that I was, but my visions of myself changed from day to day. One day I could be a quivering mound of flabby flesh, and the next, a skeleton just risen from the grave.

Because I wasn’t gaining weight and had been on bed rest for a considerable time, the nurses and my parents began to get extremely suspicious. There were quite a few occasions when my Mum would lose her patience and demand to know why I hadn’t moved forward with my recovery. I simply sat there, smiling at the wall. I was in my safe zone. I hadn’t gained weight. The voice was still patting my bony back and congratulating me on my success. But, sometimes the emotion would hit me, and I would collapse in sobs, screaming that I didn’t know why I wasn’t gaining weight. It was rightly assumed that part of the reason was that I was secretly exercising in the shower room. It was discussed in a Ward Meeting with the nurses and doctors that I should have my showers supervised by a female nurse, so that it would be impossible for me to exercise.

I couldn’t believe it when they told me. It also didn’t help that the nurse who came to tell me basked in my misery. She was one of the few
for whom my hatred ran deep. My shower was the only privacy that I’d get all day and they wanted to invade that and take it away from me as well as everything else. I was so upset and angry about it, that I remember bursting into tears, and shouting abuse at everyone that tried to come near. My life wasn’t getting any better at all. It seemed to be getting progressively worse. I had always been very, very paranoid about people seeing my body, any part of it, since I had become anorexic. I didn’t even let my Mum see me in my bra and knickers, as I was so scared that she would laugh at my fat legs, flabby bum, and saggy stomach. I was petrified that the rumours would spread around the ward like wildfire that I was a grotesque sight to behold, and that all the food should be kept under lock and key.

The first supervised shower I had, I was a nervous wreck. I very nearly didn’t have it. (I considered refusing to have a shower until they let me have them unsupervised, but then I reconsidered, as I don’t think I could have endured not having a proper wash.) To my amazement, having the supervised shower wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. Sabina, one of the nurses I got on really well with, supervised me the first time. She was very understanding about me feeling paranoid, and sat in the wheelchair and faced the wall, so I wouldn’t feel that she was watching me. I stripped off as fast as I could, and jumped into the shower, quickly pulling the shower curtain across. I managed to do some squats and lunges while I lathered and washed my body, not even stopping when I slipped and almost cracked my head on the showerhead. When I finished, I got out and dressed as quickly as possible. Sabina had no idea about my exercise in the shower, as the water had successfully muted the thudding I created on the shower tiles. I was glad the first ordeal was over, but I was positive that she’d seen some of my body and so I couldn’t look her in the eyes. But she reassured me over and over again that she had seen absolutely nothing.

Over time, having to be supervised in the shower became less of an issue (even though I still hated it) and I became skilled at undressing quickly and showering in under five minutes. I continued with my exercise while in the shower though.
When my Mum came, she would take me for my shower, but I made her face the wall, as I was still paranoid about what she would think if she saw my fat body. Even though she was my mother. I assumed EVERYBODY had the same image of me in their minds: an image of a fat, lazy, greedy, ugly, selfish slob.

After two months in hospital, I was allowed to join in the group activities held in the lounge or the kitchen, but not in any that involved going outside or walking or exercise, and I had to remain seated at all times – which was a real pain in the arse. It was fantastic joining in the activities though. It meant that I could see and talk to the other patients and get out of my ‘cell’ for an hour or so.

We would do a variety of self-esteem and positive thinking exercises; many were not as constructive or successful as the nurses imagined they would be. For example, once we were all told to create collages of things we admired in life and what we aspired to be. A mountain of magazines was set before us and, naturally, the thin models plastered my cardboard. Seeing their waif-like bodies decorating the pages of these glossy death wish lists, only urged me to strive to weigh nothing at all. Maybe if that happened, I would be the ethereal beauty that famous designers decorated. The models plastered my work. Layer upon layer of bones and haunting eyes, astronomically expensive garments hanging off slight shoulders and impossibly high heels clutching tiny ankles.

My finished work was placed underneath my bed for easy access. I’d remove it every day, and study the pictures. Sometimes, reality would coat my eyes and for a matter of moments I would see just what was there: ill girls sacrificing their health and often their lives for fashion and fame. The rest of the time, I looked through a green tint, and simply longed to be one of the paper-posed images of perfection.
Chapter 12

Making The Choice To Change

Time went by, and something suddenly clicked in my mind. I consciously realised that things weren’t changing. I wasn’t putting on a sufficient amount of weight; I wasn’t off bed rest; I wasn’t allowed to go out of the hospital; and I was still having supervised showers. What I naively thought would be only a few weeks in hospital had turned into months. My mind had shifted to another level, and I was beginning to see the reality of my actions.

I believe that the fact that I’d started opening up to people and sharing with them my emotions and feelings had helped this mind shift. A number of the other patients gave me their trust and would upload their worries and concerns, in the hope that I could help. I didn’t mind this in the slightest, and would offer them my views on what I felt would be best for them. My advice ranged from advising them to increase their calorie intake (something I now knew a heck of a lot about) to what to do when gagging for a cigarette. I never smoked, members of my family do and I had spent hours in the past researching into ways they could quit with the assistance of friends, family and their own willing minds. Phoebe constantly offered me support in all forms. She would hold me when I cried, restrained me when I would scream and want to hurt myself, and take away calorie counter books and glossy magazines when she knew that I needed to gain weight. It wasn’t often that I would see her break down and struggle to manage her own difficult situation. She always gave off the persona of a character who cared and coped. The seeping bandages on her arms, revealed the fact that she was ‘coping’ secretly, and not wishing for involvement from others.

Another friend I made through the Community Meetings was seventeen-year-old Lauren. She’d been in hospital since she was thirteen,
and her health problems stemmed from before then. Abuse from her family had created demons in her mind that I suspect will never fully fade, no matter how long she will be connected with psychiatrists, care and love. There was one occasion during my afternoon break when a number of nurses on the ward were ill. Therefore, there were fewer staff to take care of patients. I was dividing my cereal bar into numerous pieces when I noticed the flash of a smiling face pass by my window. I dropped the piece of cereal bar and peered out to see Lauren hurtling across the car park, her long, brown hair flying out behind her.

“What’s wrong?” Jackson asked, looking up from his newspaper. I opened my mouth to tell him what I’d seen. But then closed it again. What would Lauren say if I told on her? Would she ever be able to trust me as a friend? Would she hate me forever? On the other hand, what if she was going to do something beyond stupid? What if she was planning on hurting herself, or even taking her own life? How would I be able to cope knowing that I might have saved her by simply telling someone where she had gone? The guilt would remain with me forever. I would never be able to forgive myself for my act of stupidity. I would have to tell Jackson. There was no two ways about it.

“What’s wrong, Katie?” Jackson repeated, his eyes still trained on my face.” Something is wrong, I can tell. You look petrified.”

“Lauren just…” I began.

As if on cue, Norman, a training nurse appeared at my door.

“We need some help,” he said breathlessly. “Like now.”

Jackson looked at him and then at me. I nodded in indication that I could be trusted with my food. So he dropped the paper and ran.

I later found out that Lauren had run for three miles to Newport Bridge, one of the largest bridges in Middlesbrough that spans the River Tees, and had tried to throw herself from it. Miles, a schizophrenic patient and another friend of mine (except every now and then when his illness sparked up and he hated everything that existed) had followed her out of the hospital to the bridge and managed to keep hold of her arms until the police and ambulance service arrived. Hearing Lauren being carried back inside the unit, watching through the gap in my open door as she struggled to get free, listening, as she demanded to know why they’d
stopped her jumping, I realised that I was one of the lucky ones. I still wanted to live. I had the enthusiasm to continue with life.

The following day, Lauren was back to normal, apart from looking slightly more drawn than usual. She was at the community meeting and when I sent a smile her way, she sent one back. Although I knew it was only a mask. Inside, she was still screaming.

Meanwhile, Dawn had managed to gain enough weight and get off bed rest, which encouraged me enormously to battle with the voice that was still controlling me.

Seeing her having a brilliant time simply doing normal things such as taking a walk to the shop, inspired me and I thought, “If she can do it, then so can I!” I was getting sick and tired of my life on bed rest and the same routine day after day after day was taking its toll on my sanity. I began to listen more to what the doctors, nurses and my family had to say, not that I agreed with all of it. I was told, and I now knew, that it was me, and only me who could change things. I was the one who had to do the eating and ignore the voice in my head. Nobody else could do that for me. Nobody could reach inside my mind and pull anorexia out by its thin tail. No one else could wave a magic wand and make the voice vanish. I knew then that if I didn’t start eating more and put on weight, I’d be in hospital for a very, very long time. I was absolutely petrified of change and knew for a certainty that I would keep delaying my decision.

Nana phoned me every day, to see how I was and encourage me. She’d also sent letters, hand made cards begging me to try harder and telling me how important I was in her life, and little presents through the post regularly. She played a big part in helping me to battle harder and keep on fighting.

I was constantly encouraged to change my meal plan. I had previously refused to change anything at all. But now, I was having second thoughts. I pulled myself together and after a few days of agonising ‘Should I? Shouldn’t I?’ I decided to go for it, although I knew I would feel shit about it, and the voice would give me hell beyond belief.
An appointment was made for Lia to see me in my room. We decided that it was a good idea to start small and make changes to my morning break. I normally had an Ensure Plus drink, which contained 330 calories and 10 grams of fat (I had memorised the content!). So I decided to try to have chocolate instead, as the Ensure Plus had the same calorie and fat content as an average chocolate bar. I hadn’t eaten chocolate in well over a year, and it was a tremendous step for me to take. Everybody, including Dawn, encouraged me, saying that it would be fantastic if I could, and it would mean one step forward to beating the voice. The voice, naturally, screamed at me not to, to ignore other people’s advice and only listen to what it had to say. Of course, it used the old tactic too, saying that I’d gain masses of weight within moments. I attempted to block my ears, but still its scream rang shrill and unstoppable.

For three days I agonised over which chocolate bar to choose. I saw an advert for Cadbury’s Dream Bars, and I thought they looked gorgeous. So on 22 February 2002, I gave Lisa some money, and she went to the shop and bought me a Dream Bar. When it was placed in front of me in all its glory, I stared at it for about ten minutes, and I panicked and nearly backed out of even opening it. It looked less frightening tucked away in its wrapper. Although it had the same amount of calories in it as an Ensure Plus I was petrified of trying something new. The voice was screaming at me: “One bite of that chocolate and the bed will break under the weight of your lard! Don’t you dare eat it! DON’T YOU DARE!” But I did my best to ignore it. I even talked aloud to myself with Lisa sitting by me (speaking aloud to myself with someone in the room was something I’d never done before, but I knew it was necessary), telling it to sod off and leave me alone to get on with what I needed to do.

Eventually, I picked up the bar with trembling fingers. I felt tears prick my eyes as I slowly opened the wrapper and broke off one of the white chunks. I stared at it for a moment, taking in its simple beauty – a perfect piece of pure, white chocolate. I couldn’t believe what I was
doing as I closed my eyes and bit into half of the piece in my hand. I let it slowly melt in my mouth, and I was in heaven.

I’d never tasted anything as good as that half a piece of chocolate. I rang my Mum and Nana as soon as I had finished the piece to tell them the great news, and they were both ecstatic. I managed to eat four of the six pieces (the equivalent of about half an Ensure in calories and fat), and I was really proud of myself. But I also felt a tremendous amount of guilt, and my stomach felt bloated and sore. The temptation to throw up in my sink was enormous, but I was denied time alone, and despite claiming to need the toilet desperately, Lisa said I wasn’t allowed to go until an hour had passed and the chance of throwing up the chocolate was slim as it would be digested. As for the remainder of the day, the voice screamed at me, calling me a fat, greedy fool, who was losing control and who didn’t care about gaining masses of weight; a fool who’d given in to temptation for the forbidden food. The food, the voice told me, ‘of the fatties’.

But a little part of me knew that I had stood up for myself. I had done what I wanted to, what I needed to. I did find it difficult to stick to my meal plan for the rest of the day, as the guilt hung over me like a black cloud, and every glimpse of myself in a mirror would fill me with sickening horror, as I would observe a quivering mound of flesh and not a young girl.

The following week, Lia came back to see me and was all smiles and hugs when she heard that I had managed the chocolate. I made another change to my meal plan and altered it so that in the evening, I could have soup, a slice of bread and a piece of fruit instead of my usual rice cakes and cereal. That was another huge step to take; I hadn’t eaten bread in well over a year either, but Lia, through sheer determination and skill, persuaded me to give it a go. Although it would contain the same amount of calories as my rice cakes and cereal, I was still scared of changing my routine and of eating bread.

A few days after making the changes, I went for the soup and bread for my tea. It was put in front of me, but I had waited too long after
making the decision, and the voice was overpowering, reminding me of the complex carbohydrates and calories, so I couldn’t manage even a bite of the bread. I did eat some of the soup though, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The bread didn’t find sanctuary in my stomach; it ended up with the other rotting food in my bin.
Chapter 13

Fighting But Still Failing

As days went by after my two big changes, my determination to get off bed rest grew all the more powerful, and I pushed myself harder to eat more and to battle with the voice. My determination showed and I now managed to eat an entire low fat Müller Rice, instead of half. Occasionally I still hid food though, especially when I’d had a bad day, and was tired of battling with the voice, thinking ‘enough is enough, you can win this fight today’. But I still felt as though I’d achieved something when I successfully hid food.

I thought that because I was now eating more than when I was first admitted, and I was eating chocolate, I would have put on a sufficient amount of weight. But I hadn’t. I couldn’t understand it. I couldn’t do my full exercise routine in the shower because I was supervised, and I was still on observations, so exercising in my room was out. I couldn’t make myself sick because my door was constantly open. How was I losing weight still? Then I remembered all the little bits of food I’d hide. They all added up, each individual calorie and gram of fat. My little bits of exercise also added up, and as I was still at a very low weight, small things made a difference. Although I was eating, the calories I was taking in weren’t enough. The doctors told me if I didn’t start putting on weight, I would have to be tube fed, and I would have absolutely no say in the matter as I was under eighteen and was putting my life at risk.

I couldn’t believe it when I was told this. I was eating, and trying my best to eat new foods despite all the horror that I went through in my mind and the sickness and disgust I felt when I looked at myself in the mirror. Not to mention the physical pain I put myself through because my stomach felt bloated and my limbs heavy and sore after I thought I’d eaten too much. After all this, they wanted to punish me. I felt as though
I was fighting a losing battle, and seriously considered giving up altogether and allowing the voice to take complete control. I had always said that I would NEVER get so ill that I would have to be tube fed. The thought of it sickened me to the bone. Dawn had told me that she had it done when she was first admitted, and said that it was hell.

“It is much better to eat by yourself,” she told me.

I decided there was NO WAY that I would have a tube stuffed up my nose, pumping me full of calories when I could eat by myself. I used to hear Dawn screaming and crying, smashing her fists against her bedroom walls and threatening nurses with when she was held down and the tube inserted up her nose. My blood would run cold. I didn’t want to be in that position, ever. Having someone sit by my side for hours at a time, watching me, waiting for me to do the smallest, most insignificant thing wrong was bad enough. To have four people hold my body down so that I couldn’t move and ram something up my nostril was something that was never going to happen. I was adamant about that.

So I cried, and shouted, and swore, and cried some more while I forced myself to eat more food. My stomach felt sore and swollen, but still I continued. I needed to. The pain was deceiving. It wasn’t real it was only in my mind because the voice wanted me to feel it. I’d eat an apple and feel as though I’d consumed a six-course meal. One day, I’d be full of determination, and the next, I would feel like, “Why should I bother? What is the point of fighting this when all I really want is to be light as air and the voice’s perfect child?”

But, the tube threat really made me think: I’ve got a lot more to do with my life than sit on this damn bed day after day. I’ve got more to do than watch people watch me sitting, screaming and staring. It made me think of the hell I’d put my family through for years; the hell that I’d put myself through, and all my teenage life that I was wasting and would continue to waste if I didn’t make an effort. I mean, I hadn’t been out of the hospital in months. What kind of a life is that? A terrible and lonely one, I can tell you. I wasn’t a teenager, I was simply being, existing, just in the clouded bubble of a possessed mind.
So I battled the voice a little more each day. And instead of feeling as if my world had ended when I gained a bit of weight, I made the effort to be thrilled and positive about it. I constantly wrote down the positives of getting well and wrote hateful letters to the voice, claiming I was managing fine without listening to its orders. Of course, that wasn’t always the truth. Often, I’d long to allow it to take control again, and guide me to where I thought I wanted to be.

I thought of gaining weight as being a step closer to getting out of hospital and going home. It felt terrible when I had to ring up my family and tell them the news that I had lost weight. But it was fantastic when I’d ring them and tell them that I had gained. To hear them sounding so pleased would fill me with pride instead of fear as it had done before. That helped me to carry on with the battle, and get off bed rest. The added support from the hospital staff made my weight gain easier to deal with. I’d become very close to certain members of staff such as Lisa, Sabina and Jackson, and I looked upon them almost as family. I could speak to them about anything that concerned me, and they knew when I was in need of a hug or general attention. I would accept it with open arms, most of the time, unless the voice brainwashed me into believing that I didn’t deserve any attention.

The first time I was allowed out of the hospital, was on 10 March, Mother’s Day. (That’s the reason why I was allowed to leave the hospital.) It was discussed with a number of doctors and nurses, and they decided that I was allowed two hours’ leave (how kind is that! Not) on the agreement that I would promise not to walk around, as I was still on bed rest, and I had to sit in the wheelchair at all times.

I found it humiliating going out in the wheelchair. I saw people I knew, and who knew that I could walk perfectly fine. I also felt guilty when I saw old people struggling to walk, and I was being pushed along. But going out in the wheelchair and putting up with embarrassment and guilt was much better than not going out at all. The excitement bubbled up in inside of me for days before I went, and I was shaking with anticipation as my parents came to collect me. A burst of relief flooded through me as my Dad pushed me out through the hospital’s front doors.
and, as I breathed in the cool smell of fresh air, I couldn’t help grinning from ear to ear.

We went to our local pub for a drink, and then home. It was very strange going home, because I hadn’t been there for such a long time it didn’t feel like my home. I felt slightly awkward and out of place. Like I didn’t belong, and I shouldn’t be there. It was weird seeing our cat, Del, because the last time I had seen him, he was only a kitten and now I barely recognised him – he was a strapping, young tom cat (with one hell of an attitude problem!). I don’t think he recognised me either. He seemed to look at me as though he was thinking: “Who the hell are you, stranger? What are you doing here?” But it was great to be with my family and outside my small, stuffy hospital cell.

I cried when Mum had to take me back. My two hours of leave had flown by, and I didn’t want the time to end. I begged Mum not to take me, but when I saw her eyes fill with tears as she tried to explain that I had to go back to get better, I pulled myself together and I realised that I couldn’t stay at home. I had to go back. It was how I would get better. Staying at home was not an option. It just wasn’t possible, and if I did stay, well, I would have given up all the hard work I’d put into my recovery. I would have finished worse off than when I was first admitted. To put it bluntly, I would have ended up dead.

I arrived back at the hospital in time for my tea, and I was still crying as I ate my rice cakes and cereal. Although going home should have inspired me to finish my tea, it didn’t. I really wanted to eat it all, but I just couldn’t. The voice wouldn’t allow me to, claiming I had indulged in too many treats already that day and needed to pay for my stupidity. In the voice’s opinion, spending time outside the hospital, in the company of my family, smiling and laughing with them and drinking a can of Diet Coke at an unregulated time in a ‘strange place’ were all classed as treats, that I hadn’t earned.

I cried myself to sleep that night, wishing that I had been strong enough to eat all my tea. Wishing that I could be at home. Wishing I could make the voice in my head go away forever and leave me to be
Katie; free. Wishing that hospital and my illness was all just a bad dream, and that I’d wake up and I would be a normal girl, living a normal live, with a normal soul, body and mind.

On 28 March 2002, I had some fantastic news. I weighed 38 kg, only half a kilogramme away from my target to get off bed rest, and I was allowed to be off five-minute observations! I was over the moon as I now only had to be looked in on every half an hour or so. This proved to be evidence that the hospital staff were starting to regain their trust in me. I guess that it was because it had been a while since I had been caught hiding food or exercising. Plus, I was managing to gain weight, even if it was a stupidly tiny amount, instead of constantly losing it. After my visit home, I gradually started to put on weight, but I would get scared at my own determination to get well and I would lose what I had gained again. Half of me would be pleased, while the other half would be devastated. In a way, I was terrified about coming off bed rest. Part of me had this mad theory that I would be sent straight back to Billingham Campus (although I had been reassured that I wouldn’t be) and that because I was off bed rest people would think I was well again. They’d think I could cope with anything that was hurled at me. I can see now that those were the anorexic thoughts. My thoughts would tell me all the positive things about coming off bed rest, such as not having to use the wheelchair, having showers alone again and going out of the hospital on visits. I could join in with the activities on the Unit and be able to prepare my own meals instead of eating what the hospital provided. But the voice would tell me that these positive things weren’t as good as staying thin, so it was a better idea to stay on bed rest. It was far easier to stay in the voice’s routine and only change when it commanded me to.

But on 26 April 2002, I was having my afternoon break with Alicia supervising me and I had drunk half my Ensure when I put it down. Alicia turned to me and asked, “Have you finished it?”

“No,” I replied simply, as I swung my legs back on to my bed, reached for my book and leaned back for my rest. She shouldn’t have even asked such a stupid question, I thought. I would have made far more fuss if I’d even considered finishing it.
She went on to tell me all the good things that would happen if I came off bed rest. So I told her all the things I had listed in my mind and diary, and she said, “Well, how do you expect to get to those positive things if you keep listening to the voice and not finishing your Ensures?”

“I will get there,” I replied confidently; flicking open my book and focusing on the chapter I was reading.

“You’ll not get anything if you don’t finish your Ensures. Now try!” and she went on and on until I shouted, “OK! I’ll bloody try!” With tears running down my face I slammed down my book, picked my drink up and sipped through the straw until the carton was empty. I then threw it on my table and shouted, “Look, it’s finished! Are you happy now? Are you happy that I feel like fat, lazy shit? Are you happy that the voice will give me grief until I want to slit my wrists?”

She just smiled and said, “It will help you to get off bed rest.”

I flung myself down on my bed with a sob and faced the wall. But inside, a tiny bit of pride was growing.

The following day I asked, well pleaded, again for a few hours’ leave, as it was the Goth Festival in Whitby at the weekend which my sister and I go to every year. And I wasn’t prepared to miss it, even if I did have to go to it in a sodding wheelchair.

I very nearly didn’t make it, but after a couple of nurses (you know who you are! And thank you!) put in a good word for me, and my Mum said that she would take me out whether the doctors liked it or not – I was allowed to go.

I spent hours putting on my makeup, velvet, lace and silver and allowing the butterflies to flutter inside, but it was all over in what felt like a matter of minutes. My parents pulled out the wheelchair when we arrived, and I sat in it for a maximum of five minutes, before I was up and away with my sister amid the sea of black clothing, fangs and silver piercings. Although it felt like such a short time, it was fantastic being out again in the real world, the Goth world. This was my world – where I rightly belonged, and I wanted more.

Soon after my visit to Whitby, after an emotional phone conversation with my Nana which ended with us both crying, I decided
that I would talk to Alicia in my Individual Session about how much I wanted to get off bed rest, but I really needed help to get the voice out of my head. We discussed, in depth, how I felt and what we could do about it. Alicia saw how determined I was, but she also understood how hard it was for me. We agreed that I would try to finish one meal a day. That would help me get off bed rest and make the voice weaker, she assured me. I decided I would try to finish my tea, as that seemed the easiest at the time. I was very nervous about finishing a meal, and it took me a few days after our talk to actually do it.

It took me almost an hour to eat my three rice cakes and my bowl of bran flakes and afterwards I felt really fat, greedy and worse than shit. But a little part of me was pleased and proud that I had managed to beat the voice. My family was over the moon when I told them and that made coping with the guilty feelings slightly easier. The voice was still strong in my head, and the day after I had finished my tea, I felt a sudden need to lose weight and cut back on what I was eating again. My weight went down, down, down, up, down, etc. I was determined in my mind, but I was finding it really hard to put my positive determination into positive action.

My parents couldn’t understand why I was still on bed rest after such a long time. They would get upset and angry when they visited and ask why I wasn’t getting my life back on track. Their often harsh words upset me and I would try extra hard to please them, but I always ended up back at the same point. I didn’t want to be back there; it was a battle I was continually losing.

Many visits from my parents ended with them storming out in a flurry of tears and torrents of abuse from everyone. My siblings came less frequently now because my mood was constantly up and down. I would smile and laugh one moment, engaging in conversations and jokes with them, but the next, I would be screaming and shouting, claiming nobody understood me and everyone wanted to see me fat. Another reason my brothers and sister found it difficult to visit was the other patients and their behaviour. It wasn’t a rare occurrence for them to be confronted by a suicidal schizophrenic being restrained by at least four members of staff.
in the corridor. Or be deafened by the screams of an anorexic fighting against the tube.

I was again threatened with tube feeding, but this time I took it even more seriously. I decided that no matter how shit, guilty, confused or fat I felt, I would eat more and gain weight. Only I could do the eating, and only I could ignore the voice. It was me who could gain enough weight to put two feet on the floor and have the right to walk. It was my battle and only I could fight it and win. And I was determined that I would.
Chapter 14

Rising Out Of The Shadows

After five months of being on bed rest, having supervised meals and showers, restricted outings, using the wheelchair, and relying on others to help me get through my daily routine, I fought. I fought the hardest battle I have ever had to fight in my life. I challenged the voice every single day. I decided to change more things on my meal plan although it terrified me. I fought against the voice’s wishes and did it. The sense of power and pride was huge when I managed to ignore the voice and do what I knew in my heart was right. This gave me a massive confidence boost (most of the time). I was now finishing my Ensure Plus drinks and all my meals regularly. The amount of praise I got from the nurses and my family when I ate everything on my meal plan was enormous. It really helped me to continue. I discovered though that if I made the tiniest slip, the voice would try to worm its way back into my mind and take over again. The battle was ongoing and constant.

The date I came off bed rest (a date I will never forget!) was Thursday, 2 May 2002. That day was the happiest day in months but terrifying too. I was confronted with many aspects of life that had become alien to me. Here is the page from my diary on that day:

OH MY GOD! I AM OFF BED REST! I weigh exactly 38.5kg! I am over the moon! All my hard work has paid off. I was allowed to prepare my own breakfast for the first time in over five months, and I managed to eat it all! I spent all my morning readjusting my room exactly how I wanted it (I wasn’t allowed to when I was first admitted), and WALKING, yes WALKING to the toilet without having to ask.

I was asked if I wanted to eat my meals in the Dining Room, but I said I still want to eat all my meals in my room, as I am still really paranoid about eating in front of a lot of people. I now have so many things to be happy about. I can now have unsupervised showers and much longer leave at the weekend!
I did really well with my eating today, which included finishing an Ensure Plus again! There’s NO WAY I am going to go back on bed rest, so I am keeping up the hard work. Even if I feel crap about finishing my meals, life is too good off bed rest to go back on it.

This evening I had my first unsupervised bath in months; actually, it was the first bath I had since coming into hospital. And I can tell you I didn’t want to get out, it was heaven! I feel different, alive. I have never experienced these feelings of complete and utter joy before. It is scary too, all these new things at once – Very scary.

The next few days I was on a constant high. I kept thinking that I was in a dream, and that I would wake up any minute and be back on my bed. It was so fantastic not having to ask whether I could go to the toilet or have a shower, and it was brilliant being allowed to prepare my own meals. (No more soggy bran flakes for me!) It also made it much easier for me to eat and cope with the guilty thoughts and feelings now that I could walk and move around freely.

The nurses did advise me not to walk around too much though, as I was still at a low weight, and I could lose what I’d gained very quickly if I did too much activity. I tried to follow their advice, but it was hard, as I been stuck on my bed for five months. All I wanted to do was move around. I was free, and I wanted to move and let my legs ‘breathe’.

My entire family was overjoyed that I was finally off bed rest after such a long time. It felt like an amazing achievement being able to greet them at the front door of the hospital instead of them coming to my bedside.

At the weekend, I went out with my family for the first time without the wheelchair. We went into Middlesbrough, shopping, and despite the fact it was a mundane event for an outing, to me it was beyond exciting. It felt as though I had never done any such thing before, and I was discovering shopping for the very first time. I drank a full Ensure Plus in front of my Dad, and seeing the smile appear on his face when I finished it, feel the gentle squeeze of his hand in mine and the shine in his eyes gave me such an amazing feeling of happiness and pride.
that the voice’s words was reduced to incoherent babble. The feeling in my stomach was best described as a Catherine Wheel whizzing round and round. It felt so wonderful to see my family truly happy with something I’d done after such a long time of disappointing them and letting their hopes crash and die.

Before I knew it, weigh day was upon me again like a black storm cloud. I had tried to convince myself that I wouldn’t be back on bed rest, but I knew, deep, deep down that I would be. Although I’d been trying really hard to stick to my meal plan, I knew that I hadn’t done as well as I could have done. I woke up on Monday weigh day with a feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach. I had tried to be as inactive as I possibly could be the day before, and I hoped and prayed that it had helped. I considered putting my bracelets around my ankles again but resisted temptation. I knew I would be lying to myself, and so remained strong against the voice.

I stood on the scales and looked down at the digital numbers, and the disappointment hit me like a smack in the face. I had lost 300 grams, and my weight had dropped to 38.2 kg. It wasn’t an enormous weight loss, but it was enough to put me back on bed rest until the next weigh day. I was so angry, upset and disappointed with myself that I sprinted back down the corridor, not giving the nurses the chance to get the wheelchair to bring me back in. I rushed into my room and slammed the door. Tears were streaming down my face like Niagara Falls. I didn’t want to ring my family because I’d promised them and myself that I wouldn’t go back on bed rest, and I knew how devastated they would be. I’d already ruined my day, and there was no way that I wanted their day to be a miserable one too because of my stupidity.

I made an effort to gain the weight by finishing all my breakfast. It was humiliating and degrading to have to ask to go to the toilet again, and to use the wheelchair to get there. I was fidgety and restless, sitting on my bed once more. I wanted to be up and moving as I had been a few hours previously, and I was determined to be back off bed rest by Thursday weigh day.
All my focus went into finishing my meals and coping with the guilty feelings and thoughts, and the voice, of course. And I did it! By Thursday, I’d gained 500 grams, and I was back on my feet! I had the same great feeling, and I felt proud that I’d coped with the guilty feelings, ignored the voice and taken one step away from anorexia and one closer to home.
That weekend, it was my Dad’s birthday, so I went home for a special birthday meal. It was the first time that I had eaten a meal in front of my family for months. It went better than I expected, although I still felt unbelievably paranoid. It was hard to imagine ever having sat down and eaten normally with them. We had spaghetti, Quorn Bolognese and salad. I didn’t eat a lot, but it was better than nothing. None of my family said anything when I pushed my almost full plate away, as we all wanted to keep a good and happy atmosphere. I felt quite proud of myself when the meal was over. I had just taken another positive step and done something I hadn’t done in a very long time. I had faced another one of my big fears and conquered it.

Despite trying my best, I ended up back on bed rest again the following Monday by losing 300 grams. This time I felt like giving up, and not bothering anymore. I was trying so very hard, but it seemed as though I was going round in one continuous circle. It wasn’t right or fair. But I had a sudden change of heart and mind and I didn’t give up and managed, with a struggle, to fight on. I owe so much to Dawn and Phoebe, Lisa, Sabina and Jackson who reminded me hourly why I needed
to fight, why I needed to get out of hospital and why I needed to take my life back from anorexia. They continually praised my writing, emphasising that I couldn’t be a successful writer while stuck in a room in an adolescent mental health unit. I needed to snatch my health back and make myself known to the world.

I made a really determined effort to gain the weight I had lost. By this time, I was completing all my meals, except for my lunch, and on occasions I’d finish my morning break, too. I still needed to make a huge effort to ignore the voice, which was continually going on at me, saying things like, “If you finish that Ensure Plus, you’ll get fatter than an elephant and they weigh tons! You’ll break the bed! You’ll fall through the floor! You’ll be the fattest thing on earth!” and I had to keep on repeating to myself over and over again, “You are eating and drinking to get off bed rest. You are not a pig! You are eating and drinking to get better. You are not an elephant! You are eating and drinking to survive. You will not get fat.”

I was incredibly nervous when the time came to be weighed again. I was physically shaking and had to have assistance to stand straight on the scales. I wanted so badly to have put on weight. I just wanted to have gained enough to get back off bed rest.

I’d gained 500 grams, and my weight was, 38.9 kg. I was thrilled, but I was also very concerned about my new weight. I felt fatter than an elephant. A beached whale fitted the perceptions of my body. I was very uncomfortable at this new weight, and I was convinced that people would look at me and think: “Bloody hell, look at Katie! Isn’t she getting fat! What is she doing in hospital? What is she doing taking up precious space?”

I tried to ignore these negative anorexic thoughts and feelings, and thought of all the positives of being this weight. Things such as overnight leave off the ward, more freedom to do what I wanted, and another step to going home for good and of course regaining my periods. I found when I calculated that there were far more positives than negatives for gaining weight.
On the same day as coming back off bed rest, I asked whether I could have my evening drink unsupervised. I wanted to see for myself how well I’d cope without being watched. I wanted to battle the voice alone. The reply from the doctors was “Yes!” and I was overjoyed! At last, people had trust in me again. My request for longer leave at the weekend was also a positive “Yes”. It was a fact that my life was now really starting to look up!

That evening, when I’d prepared my mug of Hi Lights, and brought it to my room, the voice in my head said to me, “Go on, pour it down the sink. No one will find out. Go on! You’re unsupervised – you can’t be caught. Go on!” At first, the temptation was enormous. The voice was right. How would anybody find out? But I ignored it and said aloud to myself, “No! I will NOT pour it away. I will drink all of it!” And I sat down, with the voice still nagging at me in my mind, and I started to drink.

When I swallowed the last mouthful of ‘chocolaty goodness’, I felt an enormous amount of pride well up inside me. I had beaten it! I had beaten the voice! And there was nothing to stop me doing it again. I can do it! I can beat it! The feeling of the drink inside warmed me like a hug from inside. I felt nourished and unusually content, feelings that I had been alienated from for a very, very long time – feelings unfamiliar but wonderful. Oh so wonderful.

At the weekend, I went home again for another meal. I found it much easier this time than previously, and I had a number of mouthfuls more than before, too. I challenged myself again that day, by eating my tea at home as well as my lunch! I felt really proud that I’d achieved such
a lot in (what I considered to be) a very short time. My family was also ecstatic that I had made these changes. Knowing they were pleased made me feel even better and made the feelings of fatness and failure fade slightly.

The day after my second meal at home I became ill with sickness and diarrhoea. (I am not blaming your cooking, Mum!) I couldn’t believe it. I was trying my very best and doing so well, and this was my reward? Grossness coming out of both ends! Everything I ate went straight back up (or down) again. A few months ago I would have given anything to be in this situation – but not now! Not now when all I wanted was to fight against anorexia. I tried my hardest to keep everything I consumed inside. But it had a will of its own, and wouldn’t. Anorexia had taken the ball in its court again, and I was unwillingly tagging along.

The following day, which was weigh Monday, I had lost 1.2 kg and my weight had dropped to 37.8 kg all because of a bug. Had I been well, at a normal weight living an everyday life, the bug would probably have given me a slight stomach ache at the most, but because of my unnaturally low weight, my immune system couldn’t fight back. I was back on bed rest, and was well and truly devastated. All my hard work and energy for nothing; all the tears and tantrums, trauma and terror of confronting my worst fears – all of it totally wasted. Again, I felt like giving up and quitting my battle. I was filled with the desire to lie back and let anorexia take its hold again and let it keep hold until I was limp and lifeless.

It took me a long time to come to my senses and realise just how stupid I would be if I went ahead and did that. I realised that if I quit fighting my battle, if I were to lie back and die then my time on earth would have been a complete waste of time, space and energy. I had the world to live for. There was so much I needed to do, so much I wanted to achieve. A bug, I decided, would not be the death of me.

So I made a huge effort to eat, but continued to throw it back up again. I was told I would have to wait for the sickness and diarrhoea to pass, and then put all my energy back into eating and putting the weight
back on that I had lost. I begged and pleaded with the doctors to allow me to go home until it had passed, but was told that, for my own safety, I had to stay in hospital. I was in such a fragile state that if I collapsed a doctor needed to be immediately at hand. And to be honest, I felt as though I were at death’s door, preparing for the end.

I remember one incident when I had this bug, I went to the toilet about nine or ten times in one day. And the eighth time, I knew that if I didn’t make a dash for the bathroom I would have a messy accident on the carpet. There was no time to wait for a nurse to get the wheelchair, I rushed out of my room in my pyjamas, and dashed down the corridor, yanking up my trousers as I went, feeling and hearing my stomach churning and gurgling. But, as I was dashing down the corridor, there was a nurse called Lance sitting outside a patient’s room. As I whizzed past him sitting on his backside reading *The Daily Star*, he shouted at me to get back to my room and wait for a wheelchair. I instantly told him to sod off. I was not in a good mood and made my way to the bathroom and locked the door before I released hell.

When I’d finished, I walked back to my room, more slowly. Lance again started at me about how “it’s not safe for you to be walking about” blah, blah, blah. I shouted at him to get lost, and asked if he’d have liked to clean up the mess I would have made. He didn’t reply to that and stuck his head back inside his newspaper. I did get a telling off from Alicia, about not going in the wheelchair. It was as though they didn’t know the meaning of: ‘when you gotta go, you gotta go!’

Luckily, the sickness and diarrhoea lasted only for three days. But in that short time, the weight dropped off me, so I knew I obviously wouldn’t be off bed rest for Thursday. When I was weighed, I had maintained at 37.8 kg. I was disappointed, but the nurses, my family and I knew that it wasn’t my fault this time. Now I could eat again without throwing it back up, I concentrated on completing my meal plan. After months of drinking Ensure Plus, I was getting sick, literally sick of them. I found that now they tasted vile, really sickly and sweet. I don’t know why I began to hate them all of a sudden, but I think it might have something to do with having too much of one thing. I asked if I could
change my meal plan around so that I didn’t have to have them any more. The problem was that to consume the same number of calories the amount of food would be phenomenal. So I put up with them for a few days. But the last straw came when I nearly threw up after two sips. The nurses didn’t believe me at first, but when I went a sickly shade of green and heaved, they hurried to find a doctor who could prescribe an alternative.

The doctor came, and with him he brought a prescription for a meal replacement drink called ‘Build Up’, which is a milkshake drink and comes in loads of different flavours. They were 100 calories less than the Ensures (also contained less fat, not that I mentioned that to them!) so I was told that if I had them instead, I would have to add another 100 calories to my meal plan.

Lia was called, and we talked about what would be the easiest food for me to eat which had 100 calories in. We decided that biscuits would be the easiest. I could have them with my evening drink. So we put our heads together and decided on Fig Rolls, as they are my favourite biscuits. We worked out that I would have to eat one Fig Roll and three quarters of a half to make 100 calories. (Petty, wasn’t I!) Lia attempted to persuade me to venture past my safeguard of 100 calories, but her efforts were fruitless as I refused point blank.

I started with the Build Ups that day, and to be honest, they were gorgeous. Much, much nicer than the Ensures, and they remain one of my favourite drinks to this day. I thought that adding one and three quarters of a Fig Roll would be quite easy, but boy, was I wrong. I was so scared of eating more, that it took me over a week to eat the full 100 calories. It was only when I plucked up the courage to eat it that the voice giving me hell, quietened down a bit.

Although I’d lost weight and remained on bed rest, I was allowed the same leave as the previous weekend, and I was told I could eat a meal unsupervised if I wanted to! I realised that people’s trust in me was increasing with every day that I did well. The first unsupervised meal was my breakfast, and initially, I was tempted, as I had been with my drink,
to dispose of it. But I banished those thoughts and ignored the voice. Dawn had recently blocked her sink with various foods including rice pudding and bread, and had to have plumbers in her room to unblock the mess. The smell of rotting food that wafted down the corridors and lingered on the ward for days was atrocious. Through sheer determination and will power, I’d earned the trust of the staff on the ward as well as my family, and I had a strong desire to keep it. There was no way I wanted to face the humiliation of watching as my sink was unblocked. I didn’t want to lie to anyone any more. And so I ate all the breakfast, and it was a hell of a lot easier to eat it without being watched over, I can tell you.

Putting back on the weight I’d lost was really, really difficult but I forced myself to ignore the feelings, and to keep fighting on. I would constantly try to think of all the positive rewards that I would get at the end.

At the weekend when I went home, I ate all my lunch for the first time in months! I felt incredibly guilty, but seeing the proud look on my parents’ faces made the guilt easier to cope with. It also made me feel proud of myself.

I forced myself to eat everything on my meal plan the few days before I was weighed again. Although the guilty feelings were almost unbearable to the point that I wanted to let the voice take over again, I kept on pushing myself harder. I wanted to be sure. By completing my meal plan, I gained 900 grams and my weight was 38.7 kg. This was enough to be off bed rest again! It was really hard at first to eat properly after gaining that weight, but I was so determined and focused on not going back on bed rest ever again, that I completed my meal plan every day. Once my weight gain had sunk in, I had my goal set and I wouldn’t give it up for some voice in my head, even if it had controlled me for well over a year.

My determination, will and focus paid off. I stayed off bed rest. The second weigh day for the first time EVER! I had even managed to gain 200 grams. I knew my gain was another step in the right direction
towards giving myself a better life and banishing the voice from my brain forever. Now my Care Plan was changing almost weekly, allowing me to do more things, and granting me more freedom than I’d had since my admission.

At home that weekend, I decided I was ready to take another step forward in my recovery. The step this time was to eat a meal out in public. It was nobody else’s decision but my own. I had been encouraged to attempt something as extravagant as this by nurses, friends and my family but had paid no attention. I shrugged it off and muttered “Sometime, maybe,” of course not meaning a word. It was only now that I was actually listening and taking action.

My parents and I went to a restaurant, and I studied the menu for over ten minutes, calculating the calorie and fat content of everything I could. Eventually, I ordered a jacket potato, no butter, with baked beans and salad. It appeared to be the healthiest and lowest fat meal on the menu. I remember feeling waves of paranoia sweep over me while I was eating. I was sure that every single person in the restaurant had his or her eyes on me and was sickened by what I was doing. Watching me, and thinking, “Bloody hell! Look at the amount of food SHE’S got on her plate! What does that fatty think she is doing eating all that food?”

But of course they weren’t staring at me and thinking those things. It was the voice, whispering and taunting. My paranoia faded a little during our meal, as Mum kept on reassuring and pointing out to me that, clearly, no one was taking any notice of what I was eating (which was a first in a very long time!). I didn’t finish my meal, but I still felt proud of myself for taking another huge step forward. My parents were supportive as I had done something else I hadn’t done in a long time. I did leave the restaurant feeling bloated and sick, yet it was the anorexia’s frail fingers prodding my sanity and convincing me that everyone saw me as an obese whale. I wrote page after page about how I was feeling and the inner pain that I was going through. Although I also observed the positives, writing them down too. Those included the happiness I’d felt in my heart when my parents smiled at me taking my first bite of potato and the delicious taste of achievement.
The next day, I ate my lunch and my tea at home again. Eating at home and in front of my family was becoming gradually easier the more I practised. I was slowly beginning to realise that they weren’t interested in watching me. All they wanted was to see me eat again, to see me smile and laugh, be normal and happy around food and, of course around them and our home.

They wanted to see Katie, how I had been before anorexia had taken and twisted me into something nightmarish and unforgiving. It was too late for the ‘old Katie’ to come back and make an appearance. That time had passed and was never returning; a new Katie was slowly emerging. Slowly, slowly as though rising from an early morning grey mist to evolve from a shimmering shadow into a shining sunbeam.

By the next weigh day, I had gained 800 grams. I felt unbelievably terrible and enormously fat. I tried to continue completing my meal plan, although often I found myself not taking my breaks if I wasn’t reminded. A part of me wanted very much to take them to prove that I could be trusted and ultimately to prove my strength to the anorexia. Yet, another part of me wasn’t sure, and the voice said a definite “NO!”

When I’d gained weight, I found it difficult not to listen and obey what the voice said to me. So calories continued to claim their homes in the milkshake mix packets instead of in my body where they needed to be.
Chapter 17

Sleeping At Home

I had lost 200 grams but remained off bed rest (much to my delight and relief!). It was the fourth time I’d kept off. Although I’d lost a bit of weight, the doctors decided that, all in all, I was keeping focused and determined. I was granted another two of my requests: to have another meal unsupervised, and an overnight stay at home at the weekend!

Though I still had the voice plaguing my mind at most mealtimes, I was genuinely stronger-willed at the meals when I ate alone. I was determined to maintain the trust that people were giving to me.

As the day for my home overnight stay crept closer, my nerves rapidly increased. I am not sure why I felt apprehensive and on edge about staying in my own house. It was probably because it had been such a long time since I had spent a whole night with my family, and away from the safe and secure Unit.

I was positively excited and equally nervous on the day, but my parents and I went out for another meal, and the feelings of paranoia were not as bad as before. I also ate slightly more than before, which eased some of my anxieties about this enormous step.

The night at home went amazingly well. It was wonderful to sleep in my own bed again. It was a lot more comfortable than sleeping on the air-filled, rock hard mattress (which I had to have on my bed during my time on bed rest, to prevent me from getting bedsores). Mum came in throughout the night to check that I was all right, and to see her face smiling down at me, well, it was as though an angel was watching me. Her smile, of course, disguised the fear she felt about my health and her
concerns over whether it had really been a good idea for me to come home for the night.

When Monday weigh day came around, I had lost 400 grams. I was frustrated, as I’d been trying phenomenally hard. Although I have to admit that a tiny part of me was glad, as I had been feeling really fat and the weight loss helped to get rid of some of those ‘fat feelings’. Obviously, I shouldn’t have been thinking like this. I should have gained weight and lived with the ‘fat feelings’.

Over the next few weeks, my weight went up and down in small amounts, but I was still keeping off bed rest, and showing no signs of going back on. I was now trusted to eat all my meals unsupervised, and to have overnight leave at home every weekend and all weekend. It is hard to imagine now the incredible feelings I experienced back then about being able to do such simple things. It just goes to show that life really can get put on hold.
Chapter 18

Panic At The Loss Of Support

A few weeks later, it was announced that the TV in my room would be removed permanently. I freaked out and instantly started to panic. I had it on at every mealtime, as it helped to distract me while I was eating. (The only times I hadn’t watched a TV while I was eating was when I went out with my parents.) They couldn’t take it away! How would I manage to eat? How could I accomplish anything else without my trusted supporter? It was as though they wanted to make my life even more difficult than it already was. I was told that now I was off bed rest, some other patients were complaining that I had a TV in my room. I couldn’t imagine which of my friends on the unit would have done such a thing, I assumed that it had been made up so that I would co-operate. Also, the doctors and nurses wanted me to eat without having to watch the TV. I was told if I still wanted to be distracted while I ate, I could use my radio. I decided to try, but knew that it would be nowhere near as effective as the Television.

The first meal without the TV in my room was nerve-racking. But when I’d finished, I’d done quite well. Not as well as I would have done with the TV, but OK none the less. It wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be, and with each meal it became a little easier.

One day, Dawn came to my room looking overjoyed. Her eyes were shining, her smile wide and she gave off an all round feeling of happiness, joy and success. I guessed it had something to do with her being discharged, and it was! (She’d recently had her eighteenth birthday, so she would have had to leave anyway to go on to another hospital specifically for adults.) I was overjoyed for her. She had worked incredibly hard at battling her demons and winning the war with food. I was also heavy-hearted that she was leaving as we had become so close,
almost ‘sister close’, and I didn’t know what I would do without having her to talk to and to have my daily moans and groans with. It may sound despicable, but in many ways I felt closer to Dawn than I did to my own sister. The relationship between Penny and I hardly existed any more, to my utmost dismay, of course. The previous closeness that had existed between us seemed only a happy memory.

Despite being upset about Dawn leaving, I was positive and happy for her. It also provided an incentive to continue with my own fight against the voice. I did have my own personal doubts about her discharge at the time though. I was still ill at the time, and my mind was not my own. I had niggling thoughts that she was still too thin to go home. There was something about the way she continued to swing her narrow legs backwards and forwards when she sat down at the end of my bed, and something about the way she fidgeted with her frail fingers non-stop. She would also constantly twist towards my door to see whether anyone was there, as though she was petrified of being caught for doing something wrong. I know these facts today, the fact that she was fidgeting and twisting because anorexia still demanded that she did so. The fact that she had hidden jewellery on her body because the voice claimed it would ensure a fast discharge. If I had been more aware at the time, I may possibly have prevented her from being discharged too early.

Now that I’d been off bed rest for a considerable amount of time, I was granted permission to make visits to the ‘school’ section of the hospital, for a few half hours a week. To begin with, I was petrified, as I believed I would be treated as though I was back at ‘normal school’ and the thought of ‘normal school’ terrified me to the point of tears. I discovered it was actually easy, gentle work (the same as I’d been given to do on bed rest.) Catherine continued being kind, friendly, and caring. She didn’t transform into the bad-tempered, fire-breathing dragon that most teenagers associate their teachers with. I found that spending a short time at ‘school’ helped take my mind off food and other things that were happening to and around me. It also helped me block out the nagging voice most of the time because my thoughts were concentrating on something completely unrelated to anorexia.
I was also allowed to take part in the more so-called ‘active’ activities, which involved going for short walks, trips to local parks and the shops in town. Despite the fact it was only once a week, the more weight I gained, and the stronger I became, the more frequently I was allowed to go. It was wonderful to get away from the unit for a few hours. At first, the time was very restricted, sometimes only ten minutes, and I would always beg for more. When I went out with other patients, we’d be stared at and often people would point and laugh at the jumbled, dysfunctional group of teenagers. Some members were far too thin, others obese, or covered with bandages hiding their self-inflicted wounds. We were certainly seen as ‘the odd crowd’.

On one occasion, in Middlesbrough town centre, a woman approached Phoebe, asking if she had considered getting compensation for her accident. She had assumed that the bandages on Phoebe’s arms were the result of a car accident and had pounced on her like a cat on a bird. She had no idea that they were actually the consequences of an engagement with Phoebe’s trusted friend, the penknife. After Phoebe had calmly explained her situation, the woman hurriedly apologised, but stared after us while we walked away as though we were from another universe. It was at times like this that I felt most alienated from the world. As if I truly was a creature from another planet and that feeling made me feel sick to the bone.

Inside the unit, the sense of depression is suffocating, as though a plastic bag has been placed over your head and you are only supplied with a limited amount of air throughout the day. All you think about is your difficult situation, and other people’s sadness and complications. No matter how colourfully the unit was decorated; no matter how many beautiful pictures they placed on the walls, nothing could take away that sense of doom and destruction, death and devastation. To me, the colours and the pictures on the walls, the smiling nurses with their chirpy conversations, the wide-screen TV, pool table and video games masked a blackness that could only be seen by those suffering. It was a blackness that filled every patient’s soul. I would always dread going back after a weekend at home. I dreaded going back to the sadness and depression, the blackness that would instantly swallow me on entry, and back to
where strangers had the permission to tell me what I could and couldn’t do with my life.
On Wednesday, 10 July 2002, I had my first Case Review since being admitted. It was suggested that if my situation continued to improve at the same rate as it was currently doing, I would probably be discharged at the end of August, early September! I was delirious with happiness, but also slightly frustrated, as it seemed such a long time away and I wanted to go NOW! I wanted to get away from the bleak bedlam where I had been imprisoned for such a long time. Yet, I knew in my heart that it was necessary that I remain there until anorexia had been abolished from my head and body, and I was prepared to face the ‘big, wide world’ again.

They also discussed me starting school again in September, at Abbey Hill College for anxious pupils. My parents were satisfied about how my Review went and told me that both they and my brothers and sister couldn’t wait for me to come home permanently. They made it explicit that they didn’t want me home until they knew it was Katie who they were accepting back into the house; their daughter, who had no intention of inviting an old ‘friend’ to stay again.

After my Review, I went to visit Abbey Hill. I was hesitant yet curious, as I had major doubts, although I’d been reassured by Catherine that it was a wonderful place, and all the teachers were caring and friendly.

When I arrived with my parents and Catherine, a lovely lady called Fay showed us around. (She was eventually to be my Class Tutor.) The site wasn’t what I’d expected. It was significantly smaller than I anticipated and very run down. The people, nonetheless, welcomed me with open arms, pupils as well as teachers. The warmth I encountered from the people and, to my surprise, the ‘shack-like’ buildings,
encouraged me to look past my initial impression of the place and reconsider my first thoughts and emotions about it. I developed a strong, gut feeling that Abbey Hill was where I would like to go when I was eventually discharged and well enough to focus on school subjects again. I believe that the size of the site, and the student body were two of the things that most appealed to me. I was also given a guarantee that I would be allowed to work at my own pace. Of course, the fact that there would be people there who had been in the same situations as me assisted in my decision, as I knew that I most certainly would not be viewed as a detached weirdo. Many students there, I’d say about eighty-five, had severe learning difficulties, affecting their speech, learning capabilities and general everyday living. All the more capable students were polite and understanding towards them, accepting their differences with open minds – all the students were treated as equals by both fellow students and teachers.
Chapter 20

Sharing Sister Secrets

During the summer holidays, my parents planned to go and stay at Primrose Valley Caravan and Holiday Park in Scarborough. We used to take short breaks there when my siblings and I were younger. I think my parents wanted to try to recreate some of the happy times that we had as children because they were now a few and far between. I was eager to go, as I would then be able to spend some quality time with my family, away from everyday life at the unit. It would also be a superb opportunity for me to prove that I could succeed with my coping strategies in the outside world. Therefore, the possibility of a holiday for me created another topic of discussion in my Review.

It was decided, after much debate, especially from Alicia who was adamant that I wasn’t quite ready yet, that I could go, on the strict condition that I stuck to my meal plan and did not go to extremes with my exercise. I promised the doctors, Alicia, and my parents that I would give my utmost determination to stay focused. I’d prove to everybody that I could cope being away from the unit and from the watchful eye of its staff. I was anxious beyond belief about staying with my family for an entire week, but I was also enthusiastic and resolute that everything would go according to plan.

On the first day of our holiday, I ate my first ice cream in over a year! It was a Magnum Classic (my favourite) and it took me over an hour to decide whether to have it or not. The first bite was indescribable bliss. I had well and truly forgotten how good they tasted. My whole family cheered as I took my first bite, and Mum held on to my hand. They were all over the moon that I had finally managed to overcome another one of my long-time fears. When I had finally finished, my feelings were a mixture of extreme guilt and immense achievement. My
Mum told me that words could not describe exactly how proud and happy she was, and both of my parents’ enormous grins, cheeks and eyes shiny with tears, ensured that the guilt that raged through me was softened. It was difficult to comprehend the fact I had actually eaten a full Magnum ice cream, so I made Mum take a photograph of me holding the wooden ice cream stick, I could now keep the memory of my achievement forever. The voice made me suffer for my ‘dreadful deed’ by manipulating my thoughts so that I believed, again, that I would transform into a mass of quivering blubber and then, whenever I saw my reflection that is what would stare back at me.
The caravan we stayed in was the largest type available on the site, but where our family are concerned it was minute. It was bizarre having to share a room with my sister again after being apart from one another for such a long time. It was almost as though two strangers had been thrown into a room together and were ordered to get along. Well, you can’t really call what we stayed in a room, more like a cupboard! Our beds touched, and only one of us could stand at any one time. After reintroducing ourselves, so to speak, Penny and I got along better than I’d expected. It was wonderful to talk again on an evening, like we used to when we shared a room when I was well. That was something I had missed immeasurably: our hours of discussion about all manners of things, from boyfriends to spots, periods to kissing. Our conversations had, of course, changed drastically, and now focused on music and clothes; my Goth culture and Penny’s Punk one. Of course, sometimes my illness was dredged up and those discussions inevitably ended with arguments, tears and tantrums or, on many occasions, a melancholic silence.

Throughout the holiday, I bent over backwards to be as perfect as I possibly could be, so that every moment we spent together would hopefully go superbly and there wouldn’t be a chance for any major disputes or quarrels.

I managed my meal plan as I was determined to prove that I could do it and make it my own responsibility. I remembered to take my ‘breaks’ out with me whenever we left the caravan site, and ensured that I always had enough stock of the food I needed. The time of ‘being at one’ with my family was all over too soon and before I could blink, we were on our way home. It felt as though time purposely had speeded up to annoy me. Who knows what might have happened if we’d stayed a second week? The relationship between by sister and I might have moved that notch higher on the ladder we were climbing to renew sisterly love.

During our holiday I had my first swim in I can’t remember how long. I didn’t stay very long in the pool as I soon discovered that my arms and legs refused to follow instructions from my brain, creating great
difficulties. Also, I was utterly convinced that every single person in the pool had their eyes trained on me and was thinking, “Look at that fat girl trying to swim! She won’t get anywhere with those thunder thighs! Look at her flapping and flobbing. She’s a pathetic excuse for a human being! Her head should be bobbing under the water, not on top of it. And that’s where it ought to stay.”

After I climbed out of the pool (my head was whirling and my body tottering and trembling although I’d been in the pool for less than twenty minutes), I had to keep on reminding myself that my body was not a blubber beast and that I was not a pathetic excuse for a human being and I did have the right to breathe. Why would I have been put in hospital otherwise? If no one believed I deserved to live, I wouldn’t have been granted a bed and care.

I was dreading going back to the unit, but I knew that I had no choice in the matter. A few days after we returned from Primrose Valley, I went back, and was weighed. I discovered, to my delight, that I had gained 400 grams during our holiday, and my weight was now 40.4 kg! I had proved myself! I COULD manage out of the unit for a long time. I did feel regretful for gaining weight, but relief and achievement rose above that. The voice in my head (which was getting gradually fainter the more weight I put on) nagged at me to erase food from my meal plan, and concentrate on doing more exercise. “LOSE THE WEIGHT!” It would scream at me. “You’re getting FAT again.” But I would answer it back aloud to myself. “NO! I WILL NOT LOSE WEIGHT! I am not getting fat; I am getting better!” And onward went the battle.
Chapter 21

Extended Leave

I maintained my weight at 40.4 kg for an entire week. The doctors, the nurses, my parents and I agreed that I was coping extraordinarily well, and that remaining at the unit with the heavy, suffocating misery, pain and despair was doing my body and spirit no good whatsoever. So I was allowed home on extended leave and only needed to return to the unit to be weighed or for appointments! I hadn’t been discharged yet. I still had my room at the unit in case anything went wrong, or if I felt that I couldn’t cope and wanted to go back.

I was thrilled and enthusiastic about going home, but also slightly apprehensive. I wasn’t sure how I would adapt to life outside with all the new routines that I would have to learn. But I was delighted to be getting out and leaving all the depression, sadness, rules and regulations behind.

Being at home exceeded my expectations. It was amazing seeing my family every day instead of only at designated times on set days. It seemed unnatural sleeping and waking up in my own bed again, and sometimes, I would wake and think that I was dreaming. Cooking and preparing my own meals again was superb, as I didn’t have a nurse hovering around me as I did it. (Just my Mum sometimes! But, naturally, I preferred that.) I started to explore the delights of shopping with my sister, not realising until I was doing it, just how big an effect little things had on me. Even simple things like going food shopping or for a walk excited me, and it felt as though I was going out on an adventure whenever I stepped outside the door! I was anxious at first about going out of the house, but once I’d done some normal things again, such as shopping, I always wanted to be doing more to make up for all the time I’d lost. I wanted to cram as much as I possibly could into every minute of every day. About a week after coming home, I had an appointment
with the dietician about increasing my meal plan so I could do more energetic activities, such as going on short bike rides, or using my rollerblades for brief periods of time. I was scared about adding more food, so we came to an agreement – I could do fifteen minutes’ extra exercise if I added fifteen grams of dried fruit to my plan. It seemed impossible. But after hours of careful consideration, I agreed that it was reasonable enough and I would give it a go. It took a few days for me to actually build up enough courage to eat the dried fruit. When I did it, I felt regretful and the voice plagued me for a while, but the voice and the feelings of regret did fade gradually over the day. The more I occupied myself, the fainter they became. Taking more exercise was brilliant, and riding my bike and going on my rollerblades again was fantastic. It was weird on my bike that first time, I nearly fell off, I had almost forgotten what to do!

I was becoming more independent and confident with every day that passed at home, and I would go shopping and for walks by myself. It was daunting at first, as I was used to being shadowed by a watchful presence and guided on what I should and shouldn’t do.

I’d been terrified of what people in the ‘outside world’ would think of me, and how they’d react to me being out in the ‘real world’. I felt certain that every person was aware of all the troubles I had been through, and was ready to pounce on me with questions. They may ask why I was locked away or why I wasn’t...dead, but like everything else, making myself feel accustomed to ‘real life’ and acknowledging people became easier with daily practice. Gradually, I learned to banish the creeping thoughts of misery and failure.
I had been at home on extended leave for about a month, when my parents decided that we all needed a ‘proper’ holiday, and should go abroad. We decided that Majorca would be perfect – it had all the things we wanted: sun, sea, sand and fantastic shopping! (Well, for me, anyway!) It was rumoured to be wonderfully clean, which was perfect for my cleanliness obsession too.

I’d been successful in keeping my weight at a steady level for quite some time, so when my parents asked the doctors what they thought about me going, they said it was fine with them.

I was elated and enthusiastic about going abroad again, but disheartened when my brothers and sister decided that they didn’t want to go. (They had fears after 9/11 and the possibility of the same tragedy happening on a plane on which we were flying.) Despite this, I still looked forward to the time that I would be able to spend with my parents, and all the alcohol I could drink! Unlike the year before, when I’d lived on Diet Coke and water, I was determined to take advantage this time. I could have all the Baileys, Advocaat, Hooch and Bacardi Breezers I wanted. I thought that all my problems would be left behind in England, but it wasn’t as simple as that. Anorexia decided that it too wanted sun, sea, sand, my soul and spirit.

The holiday was All Inclusive like our last holiday had been, but when we arrived, we found that the hotel was half the size of the one in Tenerife – this meant that the buffet was a lot smaller, and had far less variety. I suppose that I was secretly glad as it meant that I had fewer foods to choose from, and it would be easier to reduce the chances of me overeating. We also discovered that we were on the very top floor of the
hotel. I was also secretly thrilled and relieved about this. I’d been panicking about not being able to go on my (now daily) bike ride – walking up and down the stairs would make up this. There was also the pool, when not packed with screaming children and bobbing babies, and of course the sea with its limitless lengths that I could use for exercise. I didn’t want to overdo it while I was away, I just liked to exercise every day as it helped me to feel better about myself, and it eased stress. It also gave me the chance to forget about many other problems in my life (what I didn’t understand then was that exercise was the problem).

I was hell bent on enjoying myself to the full while we were in Majorca, which included having some of my favourite drinks. I’d strictly denied myself drinks the year before in Tenerife and was determined not to this time. But it was an immense struggle to put the words into action. When Mum or Dad offered to get me a Baileys, Advocaat or a Pina Colada, I’d put them off saying claiming I’d get something later. The only alcohol I allowed myself during the whole holiday was a Baileys and only a few sips of that. I was furious with myself for not drinking some more, but I did manage to eat my second ice cream! (My second favourite: a Chocolate Cornetto.)

The achievement I’m most proud of that holiday was eating pizza. It took me three days to build up the courage I needed, as well as masses of encouragement from both my parents. We searched high and low for the best pizza restaurant Palma had to offer, as they wanted to make it a big occasion.

It took me at least twenty minutes to decide what pizza I wanted, and I very nearly backed out when I couldn’t decide. A number of factors helped – the pleading look on my parents’ faces, my growling stomach, a patient waiter (who came back to our table several times) and the delicious smell of melting cheese, crushed garlic and tangy tomatoes. Eventually, I ordered a Margharita, and when it arrived at our table, my stomach flipped and I nearly died. It was the smallest sized pizza available on the menu but, to my anorexic eyes, it was colossal. I hurriedly planned ahead in my mind that I would attempt to eat half of it. So I
slowly picked up my knife, and fork, and under the proud, shiny-eyed
gaze of my parents, I started.

The first bite was so good that it instantly brought tears to my eyes. I had forgotten how much I adored pizza, and how delicious it was. What the hell had I been putting myself through, denying myself the simple pleasure of such a basic food item? What had I been doing, allowing the voice to condemn such a simple pleasure?

It took me absolutely ages, but I did eventually manage to eat the half. I wanted it to last forever, so I took my time savouring every bite of chewy cheese, fresh tomato and doughy, soft bread. My parents finished what I couldn’t (or wouldn’t) eat and I watched, and wished, it was me. I so badly wanted to eat it all, but I was already feeling guilty, and the voice was giving me hell about the amount of calories and fat that I had just consumed. But the part of me that was still Katie, was very proud and ecstatically happy about what I had achieved.

I found it immeasurably difficult to eat what I was supposed to for the rest of the day, but I was back into thinking straight again before long, and continued following my meal plan. I must admit that I overdid the exercise while we were away, but everything was there for the taking – the pool, the stairs to our room, and the sea. I found it really hard to resist the temptation and ignore the voice, when all those opportunities were there. I’ve never been the type of person who wants to spend their holiday sitting on the beach all day getting a suntan. (I’m a Goth anyway and want to stay as pale as possible.) When I go on holiday I like to be active, going places and seeing things that I’ve never seen before and may never get the chance to see again. What’s the point of going to a different country when you are only going to sit on the same beach day after day? You should see the rest of the country while you have the chance.

All in all, the holiday went superbly. My parents and I did have our ups and downs like most families do, but it was wonderful spending time with them. I’d missed being their active daughter while in hospital. It was also a fantastic experience being in a place where nobody knows who you are, or what problems you have in your life. That was something I very
much needed then, and I’m sure my parents shared similar thoughts and feelings.

When we returned home from Majorca, I suddenly remembered my second Case Review, which would be taking place in a few days. I had totally forgotten about it. I panicked that I might have lost weight so I tried doubly hard to ignore the voice, complete my meal plan and not overdo the exercise. I was adamant that the result would be positive. The only way in my life, from now on, would be up – in every sense of the word.
Chapter 23

Seeing School In A New Light

On 5 September, I had my first morning at Abbey Hill. I started going for half days, and then, over a period of weeks when I’d built up my courage, I would go in for the full five days a week.

Catherine came to pick me up from home and took me in her car. I was really nervous but also giggly with excitement. I imagined that this would be a brilliant opportunity for me to make new friends. Being back at school and learning again would help me ignore the voice as my mind would now have different things to focus on. Catherine noticed my nerves as soon as I got into her car and reassured me that everything would go fine. She said if I wanted to come home early, I could just call her and she would come and pick me up.

Catherine was right, as my first morning at Abbey Hill went better than I had expected. Fortunately, I already knew a girl there called Amanda, who had been in hospital with me suffering with depression. She’d recently been discharged, and had started at Abbey Hill a few days before I did. It eased my nerves enormously to have someone there I already knew and helped break the ice with both teachers and other students. Amanda was quite a talker and was liked by everyone, so she was the perfect person to have by my side. I made a number of friends on my first morning, with the assistance of Amanda, but I was shy and so didn’t talk much, allowing Amanda to take the lead role.

As I was at school for the entire morning, it meant that I had to eat my morning break there, which I found difficult. I tried to stand with Amanda and the other kids, to act normal and just talk, but I found it way too hard because the voice was screaming to me, “They’re all staring at you, Katie! They’re all thinking what a fat, ugly, greedy pig you are! They all think you’re eating way too much.” (I was actually only eating
two plain oatcakes and a Strawberry Build Up out of a water bottle.) “Go and put your break in the bin. Go on! Go on! GO ON!” It continued to scream at me, but I refused to listen and wandered away from the ‘Smokers’ Area’ and finished my break where no one could see me. I tried to reassure myself at the same time that I wasn’t a greedy, fat pig. It was just a persistent voice in my imagination that was telling me so.

My Review was set for the afternoon after my morning at Abbey Hill. I was a bag of nerves, but tried to be positive about what the outcome would be. I was weighed because my newest weight would have an effect on the decisions made. I’d gained 100 grams since my last weigh day, and I was now 41.3 kg. I was thrilled and breathed a huge sigh of relief (completely the opposite of the voice which was fuming with me) as I stepped off the scales. Something good was bound to happen now!

There were many people present to discuss my future: my parents, Catherine, Fay, and Alicia, two doctors, myself and a nurse called Laurence whose job it was to write up the notes. My time in hospital and the amount of progress that I had made since going on extended leave was discussed as well as when I would be starting at Abbey Hill. Dr Edwards, who was the main doctor in my case, asked me when I would ideally like to be discharged. It was two days before my sixteenth birthday so I jokingly said, “Tomorrow. I would love to be discharged tomorrow before my birthday.”

“All right, then,” Dr Edwards replied. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! “Actually,” he said, “Let’s make it one better than that, shall we? Let’s discharge you today!” I couldn’t speak. I opened my mouth but couldn’t form any words, and I sat there looking like a goldfish. I really couldn’t believe it – it took ages to sink in. I wanted to hug every person in the room, but instead I just sat there mute, with my mouth now closed, but grinning. I was transformed from a goldfish to a grinning Cheshire Cat. I finally had what I wanted more than anything in the world. I was discharged. I was free from the ‘hole’ of despair, depression and sadness, rules and regulations where I’d wasted nearly nine months of my life. It wasn’t all wasted, of course. I’d made some new friends and they’d helped me to fight the battle with the voice, and to not give up. I
thanked every member of staff who’d helped me and wished the other patients all the luck in the world with their own recoveries.

It was odd but amazing at the same time, sitting at my own leaving party. For months it had been other people receiving presents and cards and walking through the double doors for (hopefully) the last time in their lives. Now it was my life that stretched out before me. I was the person stepping through the doors and into the sunlight that held so much promise. It was now the beginning of *my* new life experience.
Chapter 24

Stepping Towards Home

It felt unreal, packing my things into boxes to take home. The last time I’d packed it was to move from one room to another – it wasn’t even me doing the packing that time, it was the nurses; I’d simply sat and stared. This time it was a real move. Not a move down the corridor, it was a move back to the home I’d earned the right to return to. I’d earned the right to be with my family again.

The amount of random stuff I had to pack was unbelievable. I think I accumulated every single one of my belongings in the months that I was in hospital. When I’d finished packing, my room looked bleak and bare without the pictures, cards and posters that had adorned every square inch of wall. I felt as though much of my sorrow had seeped from my soul into the foundations of the building. The core of my illness would live there forever, alongside the cores of illnesses of all the others before me.

Now that my things were packed, it was ready for the next unfortunate patient to fill and adorn the walls with their belongings and emotions. The walls were ready to accept new pains. A minute part of me knew that I would miss little things like having my own sink (it’s much better having your own than having to share, I can tell you!) and being in possession of space where I knew that my brothers and sister couldn’t annoy me. But at this point, I couldn’t care less if my brothers and sister antagonised me or not. I couldn’t care less if they invaded my space. They could annoy me all they wanted to, they could shatter my silence and corrupt my tidiness – because at last I was going home! We would be a family again. And families annoy each other and argue sometimes, don’t they? We were never going to be the same as we were. I’d never recover the role of ‘big sister Katie’. It broke my heart that
we’d become as strangers to one another, but I had to face the facts and piece not only my heart back together again but the pieces of our fragmented family.

It was as though I was living a dream, being at home for my birthday. My Dad had promised me on the day that I went into hospital that as soon as I was discharged, he would buy me an electric guitar, and on my birthday, that promise was fulfilled. It made me realise just how much faith he and the rest of my family had in me, and to what extent they wanted my recovery. I made a promise to him that I would never again step a foot over the threshold of a psychiatric hospital carrying a suitcase. He had bought me my guitar, and I would keep my part of the deal.

Two weeks after I was discharged I began full days at Abbey Hill. I did better than I imagined I would, and I slowly made new friends. It got slightly easier to eat my break in front of other people, but now I also had the big challenge of lunch. I tried going into the Dining Hall and eating my packed lunch, but the sight of so many people made me turn around and walk straight back out again. So for the first few weeks, I’d stand outside next to a bench and eat my lunch there. I’d wish that I was invisible, as I thought that everyone walking past was staring in disgust at what I was eating. I know now that it was just my imagination, and the voice telling me, in the hope that I would throw it into the bin. A few people did ask, out of general interest why I ate outside, and I told them the truth that I didn’t like eating in front of people, but I would come into the Dining Hall when I was ready to. They got the picture and left me to it. Of course, when the rain started and still I insisted on standing outside with my food, people grew more curious and my unusual behaviour appeared to be even more abnormal.
Meanwhile, at home, things were going from great to fantastic. I’d built up a puzzling but wonderful and firm friendship with my sister, as well as her boyfriend, Jason, and his best friend, Louis. Louis and Jason had been in my class at Billingham Campus, but I didn’t get the chance to know them very well as I was only there for about six weeks. While I was there though I’d developed a slight crush on Jason. I find this odd when I consider it now because I was at such a low weight then that having feelings for a boy was unusual in a typical anorexic’s mind. My belief that he was the double of the actor Seth Green was a lot to do with it – as really it was only his looks and manner that I found attractive. I wasn’t aware of any sexual attraction. When I met Louis again after I had been in hospital, I fell for him instantly. The crush on Jason had died a long time before.

What made the combination of Louis and myself so appealing was that we were interested in the same things: the same music (Rock and Heavy Metal); the same films (Horror); the same idols (Kurt Cobain and Marilyn Manson). Louis even played the electric guitar, same as me! So we always had stuff to talk about. It really felt as though my life was piecing itself back together.

After only a few days of ‘hanging around’ with Louis, Penny urged me to ask him whether he wanted to go out with me. I’d told her that I fancied him, and he seemed to be showing signs that he liked me too, touching my hand, staring at me when he thought I wasn’t looking, giving me doe eyes when I realised that he was staring – you know, the same old same old stuff of teenage romance.
It took me about two days, before I eventually plucked up the courage and asked him if he would like to be my boyfriend. All through those two days, the voice taunted me saying: “Why would he want to go out with you? You’re an ugly, disgusting freak! You’re FAT FAT FAT! No one would ever want to go out with YOU! YOU’RE GOING TO BE SINGLE UNTIL YOU DIE!” I tried very hard to ignore its taunts, and anyway, it was wrong, because when I did ask Louis, he said “Yes!”

I was both over the moon and shocked. I had a million and one things going through my head at this point. I really couldn’t understand why he wanted to go out with me. ME, of all people! At first, I thought it might be because he felt sorry for me, but I banished those thoughts from my mind, as he didn’t seem that kind of guy.

Louis was the first proper boyfriend that I ever had, and the first time we walked down the street holding hands, I felt contented and tingled with happiness and joy. I felt the most positive that I’d felt with myself in a very long time. The first time he kissed me was the most wonderful feeling and experience, and I was the happiest girl in the world. When he told me, after a few weeks of us going out, that he loved me and thought I was beautiful, well, the feeling was indescribable.

It gave me the incentive I needed to increase what I was eating, and gain more weight. (How weird does that sound!) What boyfriend wants to see his girlfriend’s ribcage? Unless, of course, he is some sort of weird thinness fanatic who believes that girlfriends should be kept as trophies and are not real people with true feelings.

As the weeks went by, I did start to struggle, and feel that my diet was too loaded and that I was putting on weight too quickly. (My weight was actually yo-yo-ing, but I managed to gain more often than I lost and kept above ‘bed rest weight’.) The voice told me so every day I was getting fat – insisting I would be dumped soon if I didn’t make the effort to cut out the calories and boost my exercise.

I had weekly sessions with my psychologist, Marie, and I told her about these fears. We discussed them, and she helped me to cope, giving
me helpful advice on how I could ignore the voice by doing various writing exercises and mind games. We also discussed my fear of eating in front of Louis. I’d miss out on quite a few meals or breaks in a day, if Louis was at my house or if I was at his, and it was resulting in weight loss. Marie reiterated the importance of not missing any meals or breaks as it would lead to my ultimate downfall. We agreed that when I was ready, I would try to eat in front of Louis. Otherwise, I would just have to see him before or after I had eaten. I couldn’t risk the possibility of all my accomplishments slipping away.

It took me a number of weeks, but eventually I ate in front of Louis (I mean, he was my boyfriend, and I had to do it sometime!) and it wasn’t as bad as I had imagined it would be. He didn’t stare at me or make any sarcastic comments. It was just a normal thing to him. To begin with, the foods I ate around him were snack type foods, but as that became easier, I ate meals with him around and sometimes he would eat with me. That made it even better, as then I didn’t feel greedy.

I felt immensely proud, but he had no idea how much I had struggled, and just how big a step I’d taken. I guess it was a good thing in a way as it’s a normal thing not to make a fuss about eating and that’s what I wanted to be – normal again.

It was beyond frustrating that we didn’t go to the same school as one another, but I soon discovered it didn’t affect our relationship, and maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing not to see each other all the time.

I talked to Louis about almost everything, including the time that I had spent in hospital. It didn’t bother him at all and I don’t think he saw that part of my life as a big deal to be honest. If people don’t make a big deal of someone being in hospital, then that is sometimes be a good and positive thing. A sign that he was aware I simply wanted to move right away from that aspect of my life. It was wonderful and convenient being able to go around to his house whenever I needed to get away from my family for a while. He would never pressure me into doing anything that I didn’t want to, which made me feel respect for him and love him all the more.
Louis was the first person in my life that made me feel truly special and worth something. Whenever we’d kiss or walk down the street holding hands, I’d love it when people took a second look. I knew it was because I’m a Goth, and he was a Skater but I just loved getting noticed. I thought Louis fulfilled all the requirements of a loving, caring, supportive and understanding boyfriend.
Chapter 26

It’s Over

After almost four months into our blissfully happy teen romance, Louis became cold and distant, and he didn’t seem to want to be around me anymore. It was clear, no matter how hard I tried to deny it, that our relationship wouldn't last much longer. I instantly assumed that it was because I was getting fat and he was repulsed by me (it couldn’t have been, as I had recently lost a little weight and my clothes were looking and feeling looser.) Then I realised that there was probably another girl involved. Louis spent a lot of time chatting to people on his computer via MSN Chat Room, and I was aware that he chatted to a girl in his class on a regular basis, but I never thought that there might be something going on between them. I had one hundred per cent trust and faith in his words and actions. My Mum said that maybe he was getting bored with what we would do together. She suggested that I asked him to go out and do more things so that we could get out of the routine that we had at the time (which was generally watching films and moping around as most teenagers do).

I thought it was slightly unfair that I should have to be the one to bring the spark back into the relationship, as a relationship is and needs to be a two-person thing. It doesn’t work with just one person, but I took into account what Mum had said, thought about it, and decided to give it a go because I still wanted us to be a couple.

Anyway, I never got chance to see if I could reignite the flame, as after about a week of him being distant and cold he ended it over the phone. I had sort of expected it on the night it happened, as Penny and Jason were making subtle hints about him phoning me. (Louis, Penny and Jason all went to Billingham Campus, so I guessed that he’d told them that he would finish with me, when they had been at school.) I
asked him on the phone if he still wanted to be friends, but I haven’t heard from him since. To put it bluntly, I now believe that any guy who ends it over the phone isn’t worth hearing from again anyway. If they had guts, they would end a relationship to your face and take the punch in the jaw like a man!

For a while after, I was distraught, and couldn’t understand why (I had the voice in my head saying, “It’s because you’re too fat! It’s because you wouldn’t have sex! He’s got someone better and thinner than you!”) At first, I thought it was something I must have done, and I wondered if the things the voice was saying were true, but I forced myself to remember that the voice is only in my imagination. It’s not a real thing.

A few days after we had broken up, Jason told me that Louis already had another girlfriend. It was the girl he chatted to on his PC. Hearing that news was painful and upsetting but it helped me to get over him once and for all. It also made me doubt the things he’d said to me, such as telling me that I was beautiful.

I soon got used to having spare time on my hands again, and the time was easily filled, but the thing I found that I missed more than Louis was the time hanging around with Penny and Jason. I really missed the friendship that we had together because that was now well and truly over.
Chapter 27

Still Travelling The Rough Road To Recovery

By December 2002, I was managing to increase my weight. I would still have ‘off weeks’ where it would fluctuate. Sometimes my anger would flare up, my stress levels soar sky-high and my emotions would scatter like leaves in an autumn wind. So my family would need to deal with the devil. That’s all part of the long and frustrating recovery process. Things aren’t always comfortable and a simple walk in the park. There are many ups, just as many downs and hoards of bumps along the way. My diet consisted of all the nutritional elements that I needed, and it was still considered, by everyone other than myself, as too little.

I had settled in at Abbey Hill well and I enjoyed going every day (I never thought I would say that about school!). By now, I was also eating both my morning break and my lunch in the Dining Hall with the other pupils. (The days were getting colder, so I didn’t have much choice if I wanted to keep all my fingers.) When I first had thoughts about going inside the (now much fainter) voice went on at me, saying, “Everyone will look at you and think you are a pig! They will all want to know why you, fat pig, are not outside rolling in the filth where you rightly belong, eating everything and anything that you can get your disgusting trotters on!” I found some inner strength and pushed the voice to the back of my mind. I discovered that when I eventually did go inside, the voice didn’t plague me with those taunts anymore. It was quiet, for once. I had shown it who was boss! I didn’t sit with the other pupils; I would just stand in the corner and try to look as if it was a normal thing to do. It was a big improvement from standing outside and, with time, I knew I’d sit with everybody else, share conversations and eat normally – but one small step at a time.

I was still seeing Marie every week. I’d get weighed, and we’d discuss life at home with my family. We’d also talk about any problems I
was having and about how I was managing to ignore the voice and continuing with my recovery. This was also when I allowed myself to eat more ‘new’ foods. I managed to eat my favourite sandwich, egg mayonnaise, and an egg toastie, which I hadn’t had for two years. And as I said before with the chocolate and the ice cream, the taste was indescribable, and once again brought tears to my eyes and a feeling of complete and utter confusion as to why I had deprived myself.

It was four months since I had been discharged, and family life was slowly returning to a sort of normality. A family that includes the brawling, bickering and disputes! All the ‘natural qualities’ every family has to be a family who love and cherish one another and pick each other up when they fall, soothing bruises and healing hearts to the best of their ability.

And so, here I am. I’d survived the year and anorexia.

**Important Things I Have Learned…**

Here are some important things I learned while suffering with anorexia that I believe will help others:

DON’T DIET!

Don’t waste time fretting about what you look like. Life is too precious.

Shrug off what other people think of you. What you think about yourself is what really matters the most.

Eat what you want, when you want. Life is for living.

Treat your family with the love and respect they truly deserve, and listen to all the advice and encouragement, even if you do not use it.

Never turn your back on your family and friends. Remember that life is more than difficult for them too.

When you want to talk to someone about anything, anytime, talk. Don’t keep things to yourself as they build up and may erupt with dire consequences.
Ignore and walk away from people who disrespect you and call you names. They are not even worth looking at.

If you don’t want to talk, but want to express how you are feeling, write it down in any way you feel is best. That could include song lyrics, poetry or a short story.

Keep a diary to record your personal thoughts and feelings. You can even use it as a special friend to whom you can tell all your secrets. It will never tell a soul.

When you need to cry, cry. Never hold back tears, it’s the worst thing to do. They block up within you, creating bad energy and they eventually erupt in something far worse.

If you need a hug, tell someone you need to be hugged, and never feel stupid for doing so. Everyone needs to be hugged sometime.

Live life to the full everyday. You’re a long time dead.

Never listen to the voice inside your head.
Only listen to your own voice.
It’s your life – your voice, your body, your rules.
Chapter 28

Family Fear

Generally, people assume that the illness Anorexia affects only one person – the person with the symptoms. The person they can see is emaciated, physically ill, not eating and suffering immeasurably. It doesn’t; Anorexia has a terrible effect on the friends and family of the anorexic as well, causing unimaginable torment, anger, upset, and heartache.

Anorexia can affect any person and family, anywhere and at anytime. It is important to stress that it is not an illness that affects only a certain type. It doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, a large family or small, a family that gets on well with each other or a family that despises one another. It’s unimportant whether you live in Australia or England. If Anorexia is given the opportunity, it will slip into your lives and your home and not leave without a fight. Another factor we want to make very clear is that Anorexia is not only about the desire to be ‘supermodel’ thin. It goes far deeper than that, with many more factors than just those surrounding weight.

Anorexia affects people who have a constant want for perfection and order in their lives, and who do not want for change.

This book delves deep into the core of one family. Our family. Who have all suffered over six long years! The six years that have been dominated by the illness Anorexia. Dominated by a demon who one day just decided to move in and who almost destroyed an affectionate family.

We all sincerely hope that we have helped answer a number of the questions that you may wish to know about this horrible illness and the devastating effects it has on the sufferer, their families and friends. Creating this book has been fantastic therapy for all concerned, and we hope with our hearts that it will help others.

Rosemary, Tony, Katie, Penny, and Samuel Metcalfe

(Anthony decided for personal reasons that he wouldn't participate in the making of this book).
Now Whole by Katie Metcalfe

Mother
Father
Listen
Please
To my heartfelt apology.
I never
Not once
Meant to hurt you
I never
Not once
Meant to make you cry.
You have
To me
Been like statues of stability
Rays of sunlight in the bleak black
Anorexia had torn us apart
Limb from limb
Soul from soul
But together
We have battled.
Forever
Will we stand.
So Please,
Both of you,
Wait,
Listen,
Take heed,
To the voice calling to you from the depth of my heart
From the centre of my soul.
Mother
Father
We are now whole.
Rosemary’s And Tony’s Story

Why Our Little Girl?

When we found out that I was having a baby, Tony and I were both so thrilled. When I was pregnant with Katie it was a bit scary like it is with all pregnancies, but at eight to nine weeks I had a threatened miscarriage. Luckily the rest of the pregnancy was lovely and after a quite easy labour, I gave birth to a beautiful 9lb 13oz baby. I thought I had never seen anything so amazing and she was ours. The immediate love you feel for a baby is so special you don’t think you can ever feel that way for anything or anyone else (but with the subsequent babies you realise that you can). When Katie was six months old, I went back to work, and Katie stayed with a child minder called Sylvia, who she adored. Katie was a really contented baby; there were only a few sleepless nights. She did suffer terribly with ear infections and at seventeen months old was taken into hospital having febrile convulsions. These were quite severe, but once Katie’s temperature was under control the convulsions stopped. In May of 1988 we had another baby, Penny, and Katie was thrilled to bits to have a little sister. I stopped work then as Penny was not an easy baby and wouldn’t settle with the child minder. Soon, we settled into a routine with the girls and everything was rosy. When Anthony was born on Katie’s third birthday we think she was happy although she wanted a slide.
We moved in February of 1990 to Thornaby, which I think the children were OK with. That was when Katie stopped sucking her dummy as we had left it in Ripon and couldn't buy one that night. She didn't really bother with one after that. Katie was always very bright and able to converse from an early age and at about four, and a half began to really develop her own mind and opinions and could sometimes be a bit rude saying what she really thought!

When Sam was born in July of 1991 our family was complete and what a lovely little family we were. We did lots of walks and going places, and actually it was a great time and the kids were well behaved really and they all played beautifully together. They always did things together as a foursome. Katie was at school and Penny at nursery when we thought about sending them to a Steiner School. The curriculum, founded by Rudolf Steiner, is based upon a pedagogical philosophy, which places emphasis on the whole development of the child, including their spiritual, physical and moral wellbeing, as well as their academic progress. The only one close was in Botton Village, some thirty miles away. The amazing surroundings, the wholesome education and the whole package we thought would suit us all. It was hard work getting up so early (six every morning) and travelling all that way, but the children coped very well. Often, we would have picnics on the way home and make a day of it. Katie settled in really well, enjoying the space, the school and her friends. Katie’s teacher, Erna, became a firm family friend and Katie would often stay at her house in Botton with Annie and Martin, Erna’s children. Altogether, family life was very pleasant.

We moved to Margrove Park in 1994, a tiny hamlet in the middle of the countryside, surrounded by moorland and forests. It seemed the ideal place to bring up small children, a village green, community life, and not so far to travel to school. Quite soon we realised that we were not accepted by a few of the people who lived there, and it was quite a shock to discover how narrow-minded and bigoted some people can be. Some local children picked on our children, and it became horrible. There were two particular families who made our lives hell. We received poison pen letters, had things stolen from the garden, our children were called names and even spat at by an adult! (When Katie became ill, and
her hair was very thin so that her scalp showed through, the mother of one of the village children called her ‘Baldie’.

All the children were at Botton School by now and thoroughly enjoying it. When Katie reached thirteen she went to Israel with her school, and had an amazing time. When she came back from Israel, she became a vegetarian and very aware of problems with the world. At this time her teacher of seven years was leaving the school, and it was decided that there would be no Class 8. Katie was distraught at the thought of leaving Botton. At the same time, we decided to move to be nearer Tony’s work and so that the children would not have to go to a school in Guisborough with the same kids that we lived near. Katie really did not want to move and made it quite obvious. Also, Anthony was having problems at school, and suddenly things were not quite so rosy in the garden. Tony and I were also having arguments and finding life really tough.

In January 2000, I noticed that Katie began to get very fussy and even more tidy than usual. She was still vegetarian, and her interest in food increased as well as a desire to exercise, come hell or high water. I had also begun to exercise and lose weight. Almost overnight Katie’s periods stopped; she wouldn't let you in the bathroom or bedroom if she was getting changed. Because she was getting older we respected this, but I began to think there was another reason. I walked in when she was getting changed and was horrified at what I saw. My beautiful daughter had lost weight, so that her bones shone through her skin and her little body was covered in hair.

She was exercising every day come rain, sun or snow. At school it was tough, as they had decided to go up to Class 8. So there was Katie and three boys. It was not easy for any of them, and we asked Katie to leave but she was adamant that she would finish Class 8. Katie became the target for their teenage jokes and pranks and remarks that are usual in school but as she was the only girl it was so hard for her. She would react, often quite aggressively. She thought no one was on her side, although they were. It could sometimes get so bad she would end up in tears but still refused to leave. I made an appointment for her to see the
Doctor. I already knew she was ill before the doctor said and when she was diagnosed as anorexic it came as no surprise. We had no idea though of all that it entailed. Katie became hysterical a lot of the time, finding fault and being critical. It became harder to find the real Katie as Anorexia took a hard hold of her. The other children found it confusing, hurtful and asked, “What the hell is going on?” As a family it tore us apart.

By now we had moved to Billingham, a small industrial town, and that compounded everything. Katie had started at Billingham Campus and tried so hard to fit in, but it was getting harder for her as anorexia was well and truly part of our family. After a few weeks she began to get physically ill and had to go to hospital for monitoring. I have to say this was the most devastating time of our life. I felt as if my entire world had turned upside down and did not know what to do. Katie’s friends by now had all disappeared, not knowing how to cope with her moods, attitudes and appearance. Because of that, she felt even more isolated and more dependent on the voice. Katie had been going to the Roseberry Centre, and getting weighed and, seeing a counsellor. I felt no one understood, or did enough or actually really cared. I am sure that this wasn’t the case but that is what it felt like. When Katie was taken into hospital she was just like a toddler – that is what it feels like sometimes, a toddler that looks eighteen but in a body of an eleven-year old. What to eat, what to wear, why are you doing this, why are you talking like this, what a mess, don’t swear, don’t fart, don’t drink, I hate you, please help me, no piss off, I should have been an only child. No one cares, don’t tell me what to do, go away, come back, don’t leave me, I love you.

When Katie was little, she had to go into hospital with an ear infection and that we could make better, but this illness, how do you make it better? Can you make it better? What do you do? We visited Katie every available opportunity. The kids found it so hard because we would just sit there, in this room, Katie on total bed rest not speaking, not listening, just rocking her legs and staring into space. If they did not go, Katie would go mad, and if they did go they almost always ended up arguing. Teenage years are tough enough for them but when they have a sister that changed so radically in such a short time it must be
heartbreaking. I know as their mum it broke me to see them and hear them, the nastiness and confusion.

I don’t know what we expected from the hospital, really. They were great and we will be forever thankful, but we did feel that they could have done more alternative things like meditation, relaxation, massage and the like. We were having family sessions with Dr. Steven Harrison, a ward nurse called Jackie, and Dr. Stephen Westgarth. It was so bizarre, Dr Westgarth and Jackie looked as if they had just left school and were not old enough to be in the kind of job that they were. Katie was on observation and had to have accompanied showers. Often, I would leave her crying and when I got into the car I would break down myself. Her weight was up and down and once she had tried so hard put some weight on but then got a tummy bug and lost it all. Back on bed rest, it seemed so unfair. My mum was also sending her things every day, which at first was great but the others felt left out and when it stopped Katie felt so sad. I think we lived in limbo every day, not sure how it would be.

After a year, Katie was discharged. I really felt that it was too early, and we were not ready for her to come home. I had to say to the doctors, in front of Katie, that we did not feel ready for her to come home and we also felt that Katie was not ready to come home. No one listened, and indeed Katie was discharged.

We went on holiday to Tenerife and had a lovely time, but Katie would spend as much time as she could swimming up and down not for pleasure but for the exercise – she looked so, so thin. When Katie did come home, hysterical outbursts became the norm and not just from Katie but from all of us. We were walking on glass, worried about what we said, what we did, continually coming under criticism. It became a vicious circle; a pattern has been set that we cannot seem to break out of. The boys and Penny say such hurtful things to Katie, and she to them. It is such a negative atmosphere; I don’t know how it can continue. For things to thrive they need light, warmth, water, love and it is just so bloody hard. The support you need and want is so hard to get because you don’t know where to get it, how to get it, and what it is that you actually need. You need someone to listen to you, someone to take them
away for a few days, someone to make it all better. I know it will get better, but when? What Katie, Penny, Anthony and Samuel should know is that we love them, but not unconditionally. We might be Mum and Dad, but we are human; we have flaws, bad days and good days.

Katie went to Abbey Hill School – a unit for anxious pupils – and they were fantastic there. She worked phenomenally hard and got her exams, applied to Bede College, was told she could go and then went on her own for the entrance interview (we were visiting friends in London) and was told that her exam results, the ones she had worked so very hard for weren't good enough for the course she wanted to do. Katie felt as if her world had ended there and then. When we got back from London, we went to Bede and sorted out the confusion. For the courses Katie wanted to do she had to have As, or Bs and the level of exam Katie took she couldn't get better than Ds or Cs (except for English in which she got a B). She then enrolled at Kirby College to do catering. Many people with eating disorders go into catering.

I think that anorexia is a control thing, but to constantly deny yourself something can’t be good for you. We all know that to survive you need food and water, and to deprive yourself of this could kill you, so how can they do it to themselves?

At the moment Katie is doing very well at college, our life feels like it’s on hold, and the kids are being teenagers, but with a difference. Sometimes, I will look at this child and wonder what in God’s name I did to deserve this, when they are shouting at you, swearing at you, telling you how worthless and lazy you are. It is themselves they are angry with, but it is so hard to remember that. They can bring you down so low and you get so tired but you must take time out for yourself and take whatever help is made available to you.
A Letter To Anorexia

Dear Voice in Katie’s head,

For the first time in my life there is something that I hate, and that is you. I can’t find one thing about you that is good. You are sick, twisted and bad. I hate you for all that you are. I know you are there for a while so we as a family will have to show you we are strong and we will show you how to change and form yourself into a voice that is a bright light full of love and good. So the choice is yours. Stay and change.

Yours,

Rosemary

(Katie’s Mum)

Questions and Answers:

How did you first notice that Katie was becoming ill?
We first noticed that Katie was becoming ill when she began to change from the lively, laid-back, funny, normal teenager, into someone who could not tolerate other people and their flaws and wanted everything to be perfect. Katie began to exercise obsessively and to pick at her food, something she had never done before. She began to criticise her family and friends. At this point, we realised that she was in fact missing meals and lying about what she had eaten. Katie would also over-react to normal situations and become hysterical, and would not listen to anything that was said to her. Katie also would not let anyone see her semi-dressed. We took her to the doctors who said she was not underweight and it was probably a phase. Soon we realised this was not a phase and the doctor saw her more regularly. Katie’s periods stopped and she began to grow hair all over her body.
What was and is bad about the changes that have happened to Katie?
Anorexia has robbed Katie of her teenage years, not letting her have the life she should have. Out with her friends, clubbing, having boyfriends, getting drunk, etc. Instead she is obsessed with food, routines, perfection and listening to the voice. The relationship between Katie and her sister and brothers has deteriorated so much we worry that it won’t get back to how it was. Their pattern of behaviour is so routine now that it is going to be difficult to alter it.

What was Katie like before she developed Anorexia?
Katie was a normal teenager, growing up, testing boundaries, caring, funny, asking questions about life, boys, looking forward to growing up and being able to go out, get a boyfriend, a job, travelling, etc. Katie was always trying to please people, anxious not to upset anyone. Katie was in love with life and really enjoyed discovering new things.

How does Katie act now?
Now she finds it difficult to relax, trying to take charge of everything, acting as a parent not a sister. Katie also clings to the past, good and bad, and finds it oh so difficult to forgive and forget. We often talk about what we did when she was younger, stories we would read, songs we would sing, etc, and this she hankers for. She does not want to grow up and get older. Sometimes Katie can be horribly selfish, demanding time and attention, and woe betide if you say no. Also, she acts as if no one else matters to her and therefore should not matter to you. She can also be caring and thoughtful but often to those not connected to the family.

How did you feel when you found out about Katie’s illness?
We weren’t surprised when Katie was diagnosed anorexic. Then we were devastated as we began to realise what this meant, for her and for the family. At first we thought we were a strong enough unit that it wouldn’t affect us so much – how wrong we were.

Was there anything you wish you could have changed when you found out?
Everything. We felt so helpless, not knowing what to do. Our daughter was in pain, physical and emotional, and there was nothing we could do. The voice had taken over.

**How was the family as a unit before anorexia?**
We were a normal everyday family. Mum, Dad, kids, hardly any sibling rivalry. Not many holidays, Dad working a lot, days out usually just involved Mum and the kids. The kids were growing up and becoming more opinionated and testing boundaries, wanting to explore the benefits of being a little bit older.

**How do you think the family would have been if Katie had not become anorexic?**
We really have no idea how the family would have been if Katie had not become ill. We imagine that it would have been a little less stressful in some areas, but who knows? We are sure it has affected us all in many ways – some that we may not know about for years, and it does worry us that our other children are being made to grow up. We do feel that sometimes it’s almost abuse the way they are spoken to and treated, and now they react to Katie in such a negative way and it is hard for them to break out of this cycle.

**How do you think things are progressing now with Katie’s recovery?**
Very well! Katie’s positive attitude and determination to get well is beginning to reap its benefits. The professional help Katie and our family are receiving has helped enormously but we would have appreciated more. As Katie is getting better, she is more able to believe that the love and support given by her family is genuine.

**What do you hope for the future of the family now?**
We both wish health and happiness for all of the family – for all of us to achieve our goals and ambitions in life. For our children to eventually find partners, have families of their own and enjoy their lives. We want them to feel happy and peaceful within themselves, their friends, family and environment.
What do you hope for Katie’s future?
We both imagine health, happiness and Katie enjoying her life. Achieving her goals and ambitions – meeting a partner and having her own children and finding fulfilment in her life.

Do you think that having this demon in your house has changed either of you in any way?
Mum: I’m sure that this illness has changed me, but I don’t know how. I really don’t know how I would be if it had never happened.
Dad: Well, personally I believe it has contributed towards me experiencing bouts of depression. However, overall it has torn our family to shreds, making life so much harder for everyone involved and it has ruined relationships forever.
Chapter 29

An Answer To Anorexia

Katie, what is the definition of anorexia to you?
To me, there isn’t one definition of anorexia. It has been classed by so many as an illness, a disease, where the sufferer wishes to be thin by not eating. However, there is far more to it than that; an anorexic longs for their body to look and be perfect, better than anyone else’s. You don’t want to be thin, you want to be past thin; you want to be skeletal. You aspire to go as far down as you can get. You want to be able to live on air. You have the desire to watch others consume food, while you sit, rock and watch, feeling immensely proud that you can refuse it. However, there is always a tiny part of you that wants food. That wants to be fed and nourished. That wants whatever the voice is refusing you. Being anorexic, to me, means you need complete control over every single minute thing in your life, as well as everyone around you, every waking moment of every day. You want to achieve perfection with every single thing you do, and are not fully content until you have achieved it. And being anorexic makes changes of any sort unbearable. You want to remain childlike; you want to remain in a bubble of self-contentment where everything is wonderful and absolutely nothing can go wrong. You think that if your body remains in a childlike state, you won’t need to develop and grow up.

How do you think you were as a person before you became anorexic?
I was unrecognisably different. I was an easygoing, calm, caring, protective and happy person. I was bubbly, full of energy and enjoying life to the full most of the time. (We all have our bad days, naturally!)
Before anorexia placed itself inside my head, I was constantly thinking about boys as well as having as much fun with my life as was humanly possible. I wasn’t obsessed with anything and could let most problems go straight over my head. Irritating things like dirty dishes in the sink, empty coffee cups dotted around the house, loud music blaring in the room, or my sister’s dirty laundry on our bedroom floor didn’t bother me at all. I didn’t care about those kinds of things, to the horrifying extent that I do now.

I admit I had a few obsessions before I became ill, such as that my books and CDs had to be in a certain order, and that they always had to be kept in perfect, pristine condition. Presumably because they were two of my main hobbies, but I think that everyone in the world has his or her own little obsessions to a certain degree. It’s only natural and healthy. Set routines didn’t control my life, and I would get up when I wanted to on weekends when I wasn’t at school and lounge about in my pyjamas all morning, watching TV if that’s what I wanted to do. I’d eat when I felt hungry, but also when I didn’t I’d drink when I was thirsty and sometimes simply for the sake of it. I would eat and drink what I wanted, when I wanted. I wouldn’t even consider the amount of calories or grams of fat I was consuming. The thought didn’t even cross my mind. If my palate developed a particular liking for a specific food item or drink – I wouldn’t deny myself it. I could easily devour two slices of white bread slathered with peanut butter and chocolate spread. I could down a can of Coke, and not worry if I popped open another one because I was still thirsty. I would exercise when the fancy took me, and for whatever time I could be fussed with. If I couldn’t be bothered to strain my limbs, I wouldn’t – simple as that.

As a typical teenager, I wasn’t particularly apprehensive or daunted about what the future had in store for me, and with a free and easygoing spirit I simply took each day as it came. I was convinced, however, through and through that I would be a best-selling author, so I suppose that my self-belief was sufficient for me not to worry about what lay ahead. I was convinced that nothing would pose a threat to my dreams and aspirations in life.
I was a normal teenager who generally got along with her parents, had friends, and who was looked up to and admired by her younger siblings, and who naturally, adored and loved them back. I was an unbelievably protective sister and would be at their beck and call whenever trouble arose. Family arguments were a common occurrence, but they would always be resolved within a matter of days, if not hours, and would never be as bad as they are at this current time. My life before anorexia twisted my thoughts was wonderful. I had a loving family, good health, an independent mind and a world where I wanted it to be.

Do you have any suspicions that being a Goth i.e. wanting to look pale and ‘death-like’ inspired you to become anorexic?
ABSOLUTELY NO WAY! I believe in my hearts of hearts that I was born with my obsession with ‘the dark side’ of vampires and the supernatural, black and a morbid fascination with the world of Gothic fantasy. There is no way that I wanted to lose weight because I wanted to look dead. That’s what wonderful products such as face whitener are available for. I can look perfectly death-like with makeup.

At what point did you realise that this illness was taking over your life?
I think that it was when I was admitted into South Tees Hospital by my GP because I was suffering with serious chest pains, an irregular heartbeat, and frequent sessions of passing out. When I was discharged from hospital after two nights’ stay, I immediately did what the voice demanded me to do, which was to go for a walk to exercise off the calories I had consumed in hospital. (I remember I ate a bowl of pecan and maple crisp cereal with semi-skimmed milk, and that was only so I’d be allowed to go home.) I realised then that it was taking over because I didn’t want to go on a walk, my legs were sore and ached like crazy, but I still obeyed it and went. Although I had come to terms with the fact that it was taking over my mind, I was too scared to challenge or disobey it in any way, in case I became ‘fat’ again. And so I continued to allow it to ‘guide’ me, while refusing to believe that there was anything wrong. It was only after five months on bed rest in hospital that I finally believed that I was suffering with something serious that could end with me dying within months.
How has having anorexia affected you and the life you lead?
Being the victim of anorexia has affected and changed me in every single way possible. I am no longer a happy-go-lucky young woman, with no real worries and cares about life or the future. Anorexia has transformed me into an obsessive, moody, angry and self-conscious, often self-hating person. Someone neither my friends nor family recognise.

Anorexia has affected my body in numerous terrible ways. It has made my skin dry and thin to the point that it cracks and bleeds and makes me cry in pain. It has made my hands resemble an old woman’s – bony and fragile, my hair to fall out in masses so that my scalp shows clearly through, my nails are brittle and week and snap at the slightest tap. It has damaged my bones too, to the extent that they are now at the beginning stage of osteoporosis. It has stopped my periods therefore reducing my chances of conceiving, something which eventually I am desperate to do. I could go on and on for page after page about the terrible things that is has done to my body.

It has affected me in that I am no longer able to eat what I want, when I want. It has not only affected me in the foods and drink that I can consume, but with what I can do with my life every day too, from the time that I have to get up, to how much television I am allowed to watch and how long I can sit reading a book. (Can you believe that? Something as trivial as reading a book.) From what time I eat, to how long I am allowed to sit down for. It even dictates when I can and cannot socialise with my friends. It has control over everything.

It is getting better now. I am beating the voice that has affected my life for so long, and I am again, slowly, starting to take control. I have had enough of not being the one in control of my existence. If I want to watch television, and the voice says ‘Don’t. Do something more productive instead’, I will watch television and ignore the voice. And eighty per cent of the time I will feel proud of myself afterwards for having managed to do so.
How do you feel it has affected the family?
I am a firm believer that out of something negative, there has to arise something positive, so I believe that as a whole, the entire family is more open-minded, accepting and knowledgeable now. Not only are they more educated about anorexia, but about each other too, the people around us, ourselves, and life generally. It has affected simple things such as asking me whether I’d like a cup of tea, or if I would like to go for a bike ride or watch a video. The rest of my family, other than my Dad’s parents, have slipped out of these routines because they are now so used to me saying ‘no’ or not being allowed to, as I don’t weigh enough. I am certain that my brothers’ and sister’s relationships have vastly improved since I developed anorexia and they are a lot closer to each other now. Yet my relationship with them has deteriorated, unfortunately. I think part of the reason for this is because often they are unsure of what to say around me or how to act, and the other reason may be because the anorexia has turned me into an obsessive, uptight person, who probably takes everything in life far too seriously. I am now also smaller in frame and weaker than all my siblings are, so they don’t feel that they should look up to me any more. I assume that they believe I don’t deserve to be respected by them, because of what I have ‘allowed’ anorexia to do to my body, soul and spirit. I presume that they wonder why should they respect somebody who didn’t even respect herself. I am already certain that my brothers and sister no longer feel that they can ask my opinion or advice about anything, even if it is a topic as trivial as clothing or a hairstyle. Penny believes that she should ask Anthony and Samuel for their opinions and advice, and they both think they should ask Penny. When they ignore me, and rush to Penny, it results in me feeling detached and discarded. It was always me they came running to, to ask if their trousers were baggy enough, their hair was cut right, or the music they were listening to was cool enough. Evidently, my opinions and views on their choices no longer count.

What are the positives about the illness …
There is one positive to having had anorexia, which is the fact that hopefully, through my personal life experiences I will now be able to help others battle their demons and recover full health so that they can
love themselves for who they truly are and lead honestly happy lives along with their families.

**And the negatives?**
The negatives of this illness far, *far* outweigh the positives. Anorexia has divided my family, ruined my relationship with them, and has made my parents struggle through six years of hell – loving, but understandably, loathing me at the same time. I don’t for one moment believe that I will *ever* be able to understand the extent of torment both my parents and siblings have had to live through.

Anorexia has crushed all aspects of respect that my siblings ever had for me before I became ill, and it has wrecked the wonderful relationship that was once present. Anorexia has torn away four precious years of my teenage life. I have not been allowed to experience things that I should have experienced; things I should have done when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, such as go out on disastrous or successful dates with boys, have sleepovers with friends, have sex, rebel against my parents, stay out late and get drunk and then get grounded when I eventually crawled in at three in the morning with a ‘hedge head’ and a voice like car tyres on gravel. Anorexia has prevented me from doing all the things that are perceived as normal teenage behaviour. I can never experience those years.

The chances of me developing illnesses and ailments along the lines of osteoporosis, diabetes, anaemia, kidney failure and arthritis have multiplied. Gradually, Anorexia is taking away my chances of conceiving and being a mother to a child. This illness has caused lanugo (blonde downy hair) to grow all over my body, which has in turn added to the paranoia I possess about showing my body. I have the belief that I am now unattractive to the opposite sex, as I no longer have the curves or breasts of a natural woman, or the flirtatious and happy attitude. My spontaneous spirit has been replaced by a dark, depressive shadow. Many of my friends have evaporated because they are now too scared to approach me, let alone talk to me. I cannot achieve my greatest potential concerning my studying and simple activities such as playing the guitar, because of my concentration not being one hundred per cent.
Do you find that people treat you differently now?
Yes, most definitely. All my friends are a lot more ‘wooden’ when they are around me, and overly conscious about what they say and do, which makes it difficult to have a normal, friendly chat or ‘time out’ with most of them. I assume various people, teachers for example, are aware that I have matured greatly since having anorexia. And although they are still careful about how they talk and act around me, they obviously can talk to me in a more adult manner because of what I’ve been through, the struggles I have experienced and what I have learned from it all. They are conscious of the fact that I have a broader view on life than I did before my illness.

People whom I have no connection with, but are aware that I am anorexic, often stare at me and whisper to their friends or colleagues, point and call me weird. But some people are understanding and sympathetic. A good example is when we were in Greece, one particular restaurant guessed that I had a number of issues with food, and so volunteered to make me something that was not on the menu, and offered to give me a smaller helping if I wished for one. The way in which I am treated depends on the individual, and how much they know about me.

Are there any things that you think could have been done to prevent anorexia?
I’m really not sure – maybe if I hadn’t stayed in the class with four boys I didn’t get on with for an entire year. Perhaps things would have been better if we hadn’t lived in such a secluded area where I didn’t have many friends to spend time with. However, a part of me thinks that nothing could have been done to prevent me from developing anorexia; that it would have happened anyway, sometime during my life.

What do you hope for the future of the family now?
I hope that peace, love and harmony returns to our family, as it is something that has not been there for such a long time! I contemplate that we can be a ‘normal’ family again, and get along with each other. It may take a long, long time, but I am certain that if we all try hard enough, the possibility is there for that to happen.
What do you hope for your future now?
I intend to recover entirely from this illness and not look back. I want to be healthy, happy, content and at peace with my body, mind and soul. I anticipate recreating a wonderful relationship with my family and sealing the bond that was brutally broken. I intend to be recognised and rich with my best-selling novels and to have articles in national, respected newspapers, journals and magazines.

I aspire to travel the world and observe the wonders that both nature and man have created. I hope to have a family of my own, and a husband whom I adore and who adores me for the person I am. Finally, I intend not to waste a second of my life, and achieve everything that I want to achieve.
Chapter 30

The Siblings Side Of The Story

My three younger siblings Anthony, Samuel and Penny have travelled their own paths of devastation and sorrow because of anorexia. They have watched me threaten to slit my wrists with a kitchen knife; they have sat in silence as I rocked backwards and forward for hours neither in their world or mine but anorexia’s. They have cried over my constant refusal to eat, and have been stunned into shocked silence when my death was predicted. Therefore, they too should have their say.

Penny
The Little Sister

I’m Penny Sophia ‘Wren’ Metcalfe, Katie’s little sister, and this is to be my story too. This chapter is my chance to explain about what our family has been through in the years of Katie’s anorexia. Also, for me to explain about how I think our family has suffered and changed.

My Big Sister, Katie

It was the year 2001, and Katie had decided that her New Year’s resolution would be to get slim. I’m still now not quite sure why she decided upon this, as she was a beautiful young woman with a perfect figure. At the time, I couldn’t have even imagined how ‘slim’ she would actually get with this New Year’s resolution.

Katie first started just eating healthily, cutting out foods that had that little bit too much fat in them, but still treating herself to sweets and desserts every so often. It was strange seeing Katie stop eating things she enjoyed, as she had always been a great cook and loved creating recipes
for herself and for us all to try. It was one of her ambitions in life to have the best vegetarian restaurant in Britain and to be a best-selling author.

She went for bike rides and walks every day, either on her own, or with myself or another member of the family. We would sometimes take picnics, but Katie would only have a piece of fruit and some water. I remember one time, Katie staring at me eating a piece of cake for my dessert, and I wondered what was wrong with her. Why wasn’t she eating cake? Why was she staring at me as though I was eating a maggot-infested apple?

I noticed Katie eating less and less throughout the spring and summer, and became rather worried as she was losing a lot of weight. She was going on eight-mile bike rides each day and barely eating enough to get her up a steep hill. I decided to tell our mum that I was worried Katie might be developing an eating disorder and she was getting too slim to be healthy. She said she was sure Katie was fine and she did not have an eating disorder. I was not convinced.

As the year went on, Katie lost more and more weight. She was eating much less and doing gradually more exercise. Her backbones and ribs were becoming visible, and she had lost a lot of natural body weight and fat.

Katie went into hospital for almost a year. She has had numerous ups and downs. I am confident that Katie will, in time, get better, with the help of her family, her friends, and of course she will have to put a lot of work into it herself. I wish Katie the best of luck and she has all of my support and love.

Well done, Katie.

Sam
The Younger Brother

I’m Samuel James Metcalfe, but most people just call me Sam, and I am the youngest in the family. I am fourteen and I was eight years old when all of this stuff started to happen. I now have different views about it all
than what I had back then, because I am older now and I know a lot more, and I have gained loads more knowledge and understanding about it all.

**Why Katie Was Important To Me**
Before she became ill Katie would stick up for me whenever I was in trouble. She used to be really strong and was a fast runner too. But sometimes the bullies would catch her when she was trying to run away, which wasn’t nice as they used to hurt her with planks of wood and things like that. We used to ride bikes and go for picnics in the woods and make dens, which was wicked. But sometimes we would get lost. Katie would lead us off the path because she wanted to explore places that we had never been to before. It was scary sometimes, but mostly it was fun. Katie wasn’t able to stick up for me anymore after she became ill. She was too thin and weak and had no strength. Katie changed so much, and I want the old Katie back. But I don’t think that will ever happen. No, I know it will never happen. Ever.

Penny and Sam, as Katie’s younger siblings the illness must have affected you in many ways. When did you first notice that Katie was ill?

**Penny:** I first noticed Katie was ill when she started eating less, and leaving food on her plate, even if the food was healthy, for example, salad or pasta.

She started doing a phenomenal amount of exercise, and I noticed she was losing weight pretty dramatically. I told Mum that I thought Katie had an eating disorder, but she didn’t listen. I think she didn’t want to believe it.

**Sam:** She started going on more bike rides, and eating less, basically. She became paranoid about her looks and what she would eat. Let’s say, for example, we would all be eating ice cream, Katie wouldn’t. She’d have a piece of fruit. That’s how I noticed.
What did Katie start doing differently and what changed when she first developed anorexia?

**Penny:** Katie would ask to go on a lot of walks, and/or bike rides, and she would ask Mum if she would make more healthy meals. She started acting differently too. She would keep everything overly tidy, neat and clean. Katie had always been tidy but she became obsessive. She would argue about the pettiest things and call me and our two brothers ‘fat’ and ‘lazy’, which none of us were.

**Sam:** She started getting angry easily, and her emotions changed, if that’s the way in which you describe it. Her writing changed. It became neater, more Gothic, and less colourful. She became tidier, a bit of a control freak about mess, if you know what I mean.

What can you describe as the bad changes in Katie?

**Penny:** There wasn’t really anything good about the changes. Everything was bad. I’d be expected to say her newfound tidiness was a good change, but it was so obsessive and it caused so much friction between myself and Katie and the whole family.

**Sam:** She didn’t feel like my sister anymore. She was getting weird.

Well, was there anything good about the changes in Katie?

**Penny:** No. I have lost the sister I once had. I have lost my sister who I used to look up to, and respect and get along with. I have lost our ‘girly’ chats and days out. Nothing good has come out of Katie’s suffering. Out of these changes.

**Sam:** No.

So, how did Katie act before she became ill, and how differently does she act now?
Penny: Katie acted so much differently before her illness. She was friendly and approachable. She wasn’t obsessed with food and what everyone eats. She was more open-minded, and more caring of the people around her. She wasn’t selfish and at the same time self-hating as she is now.

Sam: She wouldn’t be so self-conscious about her food, and she wouldn’t mind a bit of mess around the house. Now, she is much more concerned about mess, cleanliness, things like that. She now likes to know what people eat. She is always cooking for the family, but doesn’t always eat what she makes. She will do sometimes, but not all the time. When she does, it makes me pleased.

How did you think and feel when you first found out that Katie was suffering from anorexia?

Penny: When I first noticed the signs of an eating disorder, I was worried, concerned and angered. I was worried because obviously I didn’t want my sister to have an eating disorder, she could die, and I loved and cared for her, and I didn’t want anything to happen to her. I was concerned for the same reasons. I was angry at Katie for letting herself get the way she was. I was angry at the family and myself because I thought we weren’t a good enough family to prevent this.

Sam: I was just upset.

Was there anything you wish you could have changed when you first found out?

Penny: There wasn’t much I could do. I realise now that it wasn’t me our fault and I wish that Katie and we could have got help earlier.

Sam: I wish it never had started. Katie didn’t deserve it.
How do you believe the family ran as a unit before Katie’s illness started?

**Penny:** Our family was a nice, ‘normal’ family. We had our differences amongst ourselves, but we got on because we loved and cared for one another. We (Katie, Sam, Tony and I) used to play football, play at the park and generally hangout and have fun. We’d go out to places with Mum and Dad, when he could get the day off work! We were kids enjoying our childhood, and a family enjoying life together.

**Sam:** We were normal. Sometimes we were happy, sometimes sad, sometimes medium.

How do you believe the family operated during the traumatic time when Katie’s condition was worsening?

**Penny:** When Katie was becoming increasingly ill, our family wasn’t used to her new ways of ‘living life’. Life was particularly strained at home, and the strain was hard on all of us. It was forcing us to grow up faster, and forcing us to leave our own childhood behind. Although I think it was only Katie and I who actually did it!

   Everything changed. The way everyone acted around each other, and Katie, the way we lived in the house, the things we ate, the way we treated each other. Everything.

**Sam:** There were lots of very emotional times and mood swings in the family.

Are the family and Katie making progress simultaneously?

**Penny:** A week ago, I didn’t see any progress. But this week, there seems to have been a change in everyone’s attitude towards each other. Katie seems to have had some sort of revelation, and be progressing better than before.
Sam: Things are progressing well. Katie is doing better than before. She is eating better, which I am really pleased about.

So what do you believe lies in store for the family in the future? Do you have any hopes or wishes?

Penny: I hope our family becomes like it was before. I just want my family to get back to ‘normal’. I want us to be happy again. I want my sister back.

Sam: To be normal. Like we were before all of this started.

Do you have any hopes for Katie’s future?

Penny: Katie is a remarkable girl, and I know she can overcome it with the help of her family and friends. I hope for Katie to become what she wants to become, and to do what she wants to do. I hope for her not to be tied down by her illness anymore. I hope for Katie, to be Katie.

Sam: I want Katie to be like she was before she got this illness. I want her to be happy and famous with her book and to have a restaurant. I believe Katie can get better. I believe in her.
Chapter 31

The Lies And Truths Surrounding Anorexia

This is a list of things, which the voice may say to you regularly to try to avert you from battling against it. Do they look familiar? I can guarantee that at least two of them, which I have listed, would have been said to you at some point. It is vital that you ignore these lies that the voice says to you, if you wish to become well again. Truths that will be hard for you to believe, but they are honestly one hundred per cent THE TRUTH.

That is how I managed to beat my demon; by ignoring the lie and focusing only on the truth. It took me a very long time, but I managed it in the end! I promise you that the more you ignore the voice. The easier it will become not to believe the things that it is saying to you. Are you doubtful? Well, try it for yourself! It will be very difficult to begin with; I can’t tell you that it won’t be easy. But be reassured that it will, and does get easier. Go on give it a go! Listen to your own voice, and listen to what you truly believe.

Lies And Truth For The Sufferer

•Your bum looks huge in that skirt/trousers you need to do more exercise to make it small again – Of course, your bum doesn’t look big! The demon is only saying that because it wants to satisfy its appetite for excessive, unnecessary exercise. It wants you to feel bad about yourself so that you listen to it and act, as only it wants you to. Only when you do as it wants, does it gives you praise. (Have you noticed this? Whenever you disobey the voice, it gives you hell and grief, and when you obey it praises your actions.) But what the demon is giving you isn’t praise at all; it is negative feedback in the real world. Feedback that you’re slipping, slipping into its grasp again and its ways of doing things.
• You can’t have that sandwich for your tea, you can’t change your daily meal routine – Of course, you can have a sandwich! Who has the right to say that you can’t? Who has the right to say that you can’t change your routine except you? If you want the sandwich, you can have one. You make the rules of what you do and don’t eat. NO ONE should dictate to you other than yourself. Only YOU have the right to decide.

• You can’t watch TV, you don’t deserve to – Who is to say that you don’t deserve to watch TV! You deserve to do anything that you want to do. And you don’t need to deserve to watch TV anyway. Watching TV is a NORMAL thing to do. (If you have one, of course!) You don’t have to do anything to gain the right to be able to sit down and watch a favourite programme. (Unless, of course, a family rule states so! This is the case in a large majority of families.)

• You can’t watch TV/read a book, you have more constructive, important things to do – If you have free time, and watching TV or reading a book is what you like to do, then do it! Only YOU can say whether you have more important things to be doing. You are the one who really knows and who can make the correct decision.

• You can’t spend longer than five/ten minutes in the bath – Of course, you can! Unless it has something to do with a family situation or rota, then spend longer. Spend as long as you want! (Of course you shouldn’t spend too long though, or you’ll end up looking like a shrivelled prune! As everybody does.)

• You can’t have a lie in bed under any circumstances. As soon as you are awake you must get up – If there is no need for you to get up, say on a weekend or a holiday, then lie in for a while longer. Nothing will happen to you if you do. You will probably feel more refreshed and awake if you get up after having an hour or so more sleep than normal, and especially if you had gone to bed late the previous evening.
• That headache/stomach ache isn’t real. Carry on as normal. Don’t stop for help or get medicine – If you feel ill, depending how bad you feel, you need to REST, see a doctor and/or get medicine. It’s as simple as that. NO ONE can carry on as normal if they are ill. EVERYBODY needs rest if they are not well. Why should you be an exception? You’re not an exception. YOU have the same rights as everyone else has. Remember that next time you’re feeling under the weather.

• You must do the exact amount of exercise everyday otherwise you’ll blow up like a balloon – Ha! What a joke. That is all it is, a massive joke. There is no way on this earth that you would blow up like a balloon if you didn’t do the exercise that the demon instructed you to do. It’s NOT possible. If you don’t believe me, try it for yourself. I tried it. I altered my exercise routine and did not blow up into a balloon at all! (I’m sure you would have heard if I had done though, as it would have probably made it on to a national news programme!)

• You can’t have anything extra to eat. Not one mouthful. You will get instantly fat – This is yet another NO-WAY-that-would-happen-one. Having a little something extra is the beginning of normalising your eating habits. If you don’t have anything extra to eat then you don’t gain weight, you don’t gain weight the demon is still in charge, the demon is still in charge you don’t get better. Ever. It’s as simple as that. Unquestionably. You WILL have to force yourself to eat more, as YOU ARE the only one who can. Once you have managed to eat extra, you MUST, MUST, MUST keep it up. There is NO point in eating extra one day, and then thinking ‘OK, I’ve eaten extra today; I can go back to ‘normal’ tomorrow. Things will improve from now on.’ They won’t. You have to be consistent and dedicated to sticking to your new changes. It took me an absolute age to realise that I had to be consistent with my changes. That I couldn’t do it one day and then not the next. I eventually realised this after months of continuing to hover around the same weight and not making any real progress at all. You must make changes if you are to improve. There are no if’s or but’s about it. And don’t be thinking, ‘Oh, I can’t do it. It’s not possible,’
because **IT IS. IT IS** possible. I am living proof that it is possible to make changes and stick to them. So come on! Join me in proving that **IT IS** possible. Prove to yourself. Prove to your family. Prove to everybody. Prove the Anorexia demon wrong.

**Lies And Truths For Parents**

This list has been created to reassure parents about comments that their child may make. They are not true, and are actually voiced from the anorexic demon. We are sure that you will be familiar with most of these.

- **I HATE YOU!** – Let’s get one thing straight immediately. Your child does NOT hate you. ‘I hate you’ is often said when you are trying to encourage them to make changes. It’s what the anorexia demon is telling them to say to you, as it hates any changes being made, unless, of course, they are made in its favour. The Anorexia demon hopes that by getting your child to say that they hate you, you will back off and leave them to do what they want. Well, what the demon wants.

- **Leave me alone. I don’t want anyone near me** – Your child WILL need someone near him or her, in their own heart. But, the demon will not allow it. When your child says this, you must try to let them know that it is all right not to be alone. You need to reiterate that it is perfectly acceptable and normal to be with and near people.

- **You’re a crap parent** – They don’t mean this at all. If you are trying to encourage your child to eat/not exercise, etc, you will be told that you are a crap parent, or often worse. There is no doubt about it. However, you need to remember that it is NOT your child who is speaking, but the demon voice, the Anorexia. Constantly keep in mind that when your child has recovered, they will apologise profusely for years to come for calling you a crap parent!

- **I can battle this all by myself I don’t need any help** – An anorexic person has to battle the demon inside their mind by themselves
by refusing to do as it says, but they will need help in their battle in other forms such as gaining weight. Whether it is from a doctor, sibling, parent or friend, they will need unconditional support, love and encouragement along the way. How you decide to help them in their battle will ultimately be your decision: whether it is sitting with them while they eat, assisting them to occupy their mind, or in a severe case, admitting them into hospital. I can battle this all by myself is one thing if said that cannot, under any circumstances, be agreed with.
Chapter 32

What To Do To Help Yourselves And Each Other

What Parents Can Do To Help The Sufferer In Their Recovery

It is notoriously difficult to know what, when and why to say specific things to your anorexic child. It’s equally, if not more difficult to know what to do when your child is on the road to recovery. Hopefully, this chapter will provide some basic, good, solid advice on what you can do to help your child on their journey and ultimately, your journey as well. However, each journey is different, as we are all individuals with separate lives; the same applies, generally, to all anorexics in forms of the love, attention and support that they need.

• Tell them that you love them and care:

Ensure that you tell your child that you love them every single day. You can tell them more if needs be. Even if they are abusive to you, nasty and horrible you must tell them. Try to remember that IT IS NOT THEM that is being abusive, nasty and horrible. Ignoring the abuse and nastiness is an unbelievably difficult thing to do, but it is necessary and needs to be done if you want to get through to your child, and make your message heard over the voice’s domineering orders. Telling them that you love them and that you care about them doesn’t have to be done face to face. It can be done by text message, email, telephone, a letter or even a simple note left on their bed. It doesn’t matter how you express it; it’s just important that you do. It will mean just as much to them, anyway that it is done. During their recovery the anorexic needs to feel and know that they are loved and cared about by you.
• Show affection:

If you can tell that your child needs to be hugged and soothed, do not wait for them to ask. It is common for anorexics to feel as though they do not have the right to ask for a hug, and they don’t deserve one. You can gently either ask whether they would like a hug, or just give them one without asking if they need one or not. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, they will accept your comfort. While you are hugging them, it helps to mention the fact that everybody needs to be hugged sometimes, and everybody deserves to be hugged.

• Supporting Changes:

If your child decides that they want to try something new in their diet, encourage and give them praise for deciding to. Changing eating habits is one of the main and hardest parts of the recovery, and is a long and tediously slow process. (You need to be prepared for the time that it will take, and be aware that each case is individual. There is no set time for how long it will be before your child’s eating habits resemble anything deemed the norm.) If, for example, they decide in the morning that they were going to have a cheddar cheese sandwich instead of a cottage cheese sandwich for their tea because they want to be brave and challenge the demon, but when the time comes for them to have it, they say that they have changed their mind, and want cottage cheese instead, what they have everyday, encourage them as much as possible to stick with what they had originally planned to have that morning: the cheddar cheese sandwich. DO NOT immediately agree with them, and say ‘all right then, it’s OK for you to have the cottage cheese instead’. Try gentle persuasion, and be persistent. Often, when an anorexic first starts to make changes in their life, they feel that they need to have someone else saying to them that they can have the different choice. They need to be reassured that it is OK to have something different. Maybe offer to have the same as them. You too could have a cheddar cheese sandwich for your tea and show that it really is all right for anyone to have what he or she wants to eat.
• Keep calm under stress:

Try to not get angry, upset, and frustrated or stressed when your child flies into a rage or has a violent mood swing. It is easier said than done, and will be difficult, but try and remember that your child still has a different being inside them, an anorexic voice. Depending on how well your child may be recovering rests on how big a space the Anorexia occupies inside your child. Remember that it is not your child who is acting this way but the Anorexia. There are a few options available regarding what you could do in a situation where your child is being abusive. You could walk away from the situation, remaining calm and either telling your child that you are there for them when they have calmed down. Or you could ask straightaway if they would like to talk or need a hug. It is often at times like this when hugs and kind, soothing words are required most. Walking away and not reacting isn’t an easy thing to do at any time, but sometimes it honestly is the best thing to do. And remember, it is not your child who you are walking away from and ignoring, but the demon inside of them.

• Other options:

If your child is trying to gain weight, but wishes to exercise every day, attempt to distract them from wanting and feeling the need to. Suggest that they do something else, such as painting. Something, which involves movement and activity to a certain degree, but nothing as strenuous as going for a bike ride or swimming. If your child is managing to gain weight, you may wish to do some ‘gentle exercise’ with them, such as going for a short walk, for example.

• Help them to socialise:

Try and avoid having your child spend too much time alone. It is really important that they try and socialise and get involved with things that involve more than one participant. If your child is left alone for long periods of time, to mull over their thoughts by themselves, the Anorexia will try and take complete control again. If your child is with other people, and taking part in activities that have nothing to do
with their illness, it makes it easier for them to block out the demon voice, as they will have many other things to think about other than food, exercise, their weight and satisfying Anorexia’s demands.

**Simple Suggestions For A Smile**

- Every now and then buy a nice card or even better, make one and write a meaningful quote or verse inside of it. Leave it on your child’s pillow maybe with a flower picked from the garden.
- Organise a family event, such as an outing to the cinema, bowling or a video/games night.
- Ask for assistance in preparing a meal, and listen to music while cooking together. Encourage your child to eat what you have both prepared. Lay the table with napkins and nice crockery, light a candle, and make it a special event.
- Take a trip to the beach or nearby countryside and talk about the nature around you while you stroll. Discuss the ways in which nature naturally changes and evolves. This may have some effect on the way in which your child thinks about changes in their own lives.
- Prepare a food item that your child remembers and loves from their early childhood such as flapjack or shortbread and gently persuade them to sit with you and have some.

**Brothers And Sisters:**

**What You Can Do To Help Yourselves And Your Sibling**

**Try not to react:**

- If your sibling gets into a terrible mood with you, becomes aggressive, angry, or abusive, calls you names and says the most horrible things to you for no apparent reason at all, try as best you can to let it go straight over your head. Ignore it and try not to react at all. The anorexia demon inside of the person close to you, wants you to rise to the bait. Its aim is to see you losing your temper and calling them horrible names and getting your own back at them for being nasty to you. As it wants to see your sibling suffer. Every time that you can tell
your sibling is going to ‘erupt’, leave the room quietly, or if that’s not possible, try and shut off from it completely. Constantly remember that it is not your sibling saying or doing those things, but the anorexia demon.

**Spend time together:**

• Try and spend time with your sibling when you are able to, doing things that you both enjoy, or used to enjoy doing before they became ill. If they are having problems with their social network of friends, allow them to sometimes be a part of yours. For example, if you are going out to the cinema with a few friends, and they would be at home with nothing to do, ask them if they would like to join you. **Do not get angry** if they refuse your invitation at first. Remember that it has been a long time since they have been allowed to participate in such an event. Try a little gentle persuasion saying that it would be good fun, but don’t try and force them. It is important that they make the decision to change their ways themselves. If they do not give in to gentle persuasion, back down, suggesting ‘maybe next time’.

**Show encouragement when the time is right:**

• If your sibling would like to try something new, **be enthusiastic** about it and **encourage them**. Even if it something which you might think of as minuscule, such as another slice of bread at teatime, or going out somewhere when otherwise they would be hidden away in their room. Remember, **don’t try and force them**, as it **has to be their own individual choice**, but show real, honest enthusiasm about any change. If they tell you about it, for example they say ‘tonight I’m going to have a drink of hot chocolate instead of a cup of tea’ it most likely means that they want and would really like and **appreciate** some **moral support, reassurance**, and, in some cases, **permission**. But if you notice them doing something different, for the better, such as making themselves a different drink, and they haven’t said anything to you about doing it, it’s often best not to say anything at all to them. Just smile and leave them to it.
The Sufferer: How To Help Yourself

Trying new things:

• If you want to try anything new in your life, such as a different food, a change in your daily routine, anything at all. DO IT!! If the demon says not to, do not listen. Do not give in. YOU CAN BE the more powerful voice. If you want to recover. If you want your own life back again. If you no longer wish to share everything with the Anorexia demon, ignoring what it tells you to do is a very, very important part of the recovery process. Change has to happen if you want to get well again. If there is no change in your life, for example, if you eat the same foods day after day, if you exercise the same day after day, if you have the same attitude day after day, you WILL remain the same until you die. Not a nice thought, is it? Having the demon with you until you draw your last breath. And it would most likely tell you how to draw that last breath too! It doesn’t matter if the changes you make at first are tiny ones, all that matters is that they are made and that they continue. That you keep them up and they happen more and more as time goes by. Make sure that when you make a change, that you do not revert straight back to your old habits after a day or two, as that would be allowing the Anorexia to win. If it is saying to you, ‘If you have something more/different to eat you’ll get fat’, DO NOT LISTEN. IT IS lying to you. To prove it, experiment – have something extra or different, and see that it doesn’t make you fat. I did it and it proved it to me.

Gaining weight:

• Gaining weight is a very scary thought, and an even scarier thing to actually start to do, but it is what you are going to have to do if you are to get well and have your life back again. You can gain weight at whatever rate you want to, but remember that the longer you take, the longer the demon will remain with you. Whatever rate you take, it is going to be uncomfortable, unpleasant and difficult. There is no escaping that fact, but you have to go though all the unpleasant and difficult times to be able to come out the other end of the
tunnel, triumphant and well. Research has shown that anorexics who ponder and take a long time to gain a little bit of weight, are usually the people who are unable to have children, and who end up suffering from osteoporosis, as well as other problems when they eventually do reach a healthy weight, more so than the people who gain weight faster, and reach their healthy body weight in a shorter space of time.

Talk if you want to:

- If a member of your family or a friend asks whether you would like to talk, and you do have many things on your mind that you are desperate to discuss and get out of your system, **accept their offer**. You **deserve to talk** about your problems as much or if not more, as anyone else. If you think that they are only asking you because they feel as though it’s their duty, well, that’s wrong. They’re asking you if you would like to talk because they **care for you**. They **genuinely** want to know if you are struggling and need someone to talk to. If the demon says to you that it can talk to you instead, that it can provide you with all the support you need, **DO NOT LISTEN**. How can something that has caused so much pain and heartache, grief and sadness really give you support and be something that you can talk to about your problems? After all, it is the one who caused them in the first place! **The demon only wants what’s best for it. NOT WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU!**

  It is a selfish, ignorant, cunning, manipulative thing, which will only stay with you for **AS LONG AS YOU LET IT**.

You don’t have to:

- If it is raining or snowing, cold and miserable outside, but the demon voice is ordering you to go out and exercise, saying that if you don’t then you will become an elephant, that the fat will just pile on you. **IGNORE IT**. I know it’s not easy; remember, I’ve been there, too. However, it is possible. If you miss out one day of routine exercise you obviously **will not become an elephant**. Fat will not pile itself on to

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1 Women are unable to conceive because of non-existent periods or irregular menstrual cycle due to dieting and fluctuating body weight. Men can become infertile.
you immediately. That’s just what the demon wants you to believe. It’s not the truth and it’s far, far from it. Try, and you will see. It will be hard, but it will prove yet another point, which the demon is wrong about. **It is normal** for people **not** to bother with a certain amount of exercise when they don’t feel like it, or if the weather is terrible. And **it’s all right for you not to bother too. It’s your life.** If you **don’t want** to exercise in the rain, wind or snow, and every single day, **then don’t!** Dig your heels in and **refuse** to obey what it wants you to do. **DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.** I disobeyed the voice eventually, and didn’t go outside and exercise when I didn’t want to, and I never ended up fat or looking like an elephant because of it. I admit that I felt like one, at first. However, I stuck with my determination to do what I wanted, and eventually overcame my false fears.

**Accepting encouragement:**

- If your family and friends are trying to give you **encouragement** and **support** when you are attempting to make changes, you may **not see it** as support and encouragement, but be reassured that it is. You may think that they just want to see you fat. **BUT THEY DON’T. HONESTLY. THEY WANT TO SEE YOU WIN.** They want to see you **healthy, happy** and **well** again. Your family and friends want to see you able to make your own decisions again, without the demon voice interfering 24/7. For example, if your mother smiles and says things such as ‘Go on, it’s OK’ when you are eating something new, she is smiling and telling you it’s OK because she is happy for you and thrilled that you are progressing with your recovery.

**Reassuring and explaining:**

- There will be arguments, misunderstandings, shouting matches, etc, as you make your way down the rocky road of recovery, there is no doubt about that, and there will be no way of avoiding them. Unless, of course, your family is abnormally perfect which is extremely doubtful. Arguments, and shouting matches, etc, will usually occur at times when you are saying things to your family or friends that you **know** are not
what you intended to say. Things that you know are what the demon is making you say out loud. It is at times like this when it is very important to reassure your parents/siblings/friends, that it is not you who is saying these things.

Socialising:

• This is a major factor to take into consideration when you are recovering. If your siblings ask you if you’d like to go out with them, an example being, going out on a shopping trip, but the demon voice is telling you not to go, saying that you don’t deserve to go, that you could be doing better things with your time other than enjoying yourself, although you are bored and have nothing to do – say to it, out loud if needs be, that you DO deserve to go out. You do deserve to enjoy yourself as much as any other person does. You do have the right to spend time with people whom you care about and who care about you too. Tell the demon that you do not need its orders anymore. It will be a very difficult thing to do, but you, with will power and determination, CAN DO IT! I have, and I will tell no lie; it was difficult beyond belief. There were even moments when I considered surrendering and allowing the demon to take control over me and make everything easier. However, I persisted and I won. And if I can manage it, anyone can. ANYONE. Also, everyone in the entire world, whatever age, race, or sex has the right to socialise. Socialising is a very important part of life. It is a very important part of living. And don’t forget, it is a vital part of the recovery process.

When you have beaten the anorexia demon

When you are well again and the anorexia demon has been finally kicked out once and for all, the doors will be wide open. Here are a few (of course, there are many, many more and feel free to create and write down your own) of the main advantages to being well and free from the demon that is Anorexia nervosa:

• You can go swimming, cycling or to the gym for pure fun and enjoyment instead of in order to satisfy the voice’s needs and for
punishment.
• You will be able to exercise when you want, where you want and why YOU want to.
• Eating can again become a pleasurable activity which you enjoy doing with others, instead of a fearful task.
• Making decisions normally, and on the spot, e.g. agreeing to go out with friends at the last minute, will be much easier to do and not a problem, or at least not so much so.
• Doing normal pastimes which you enjoy, e.g. reading, watching television, will not be seen as an infrequent treat, which you would only do when the demon voice said you had earned the right to, but as a normal pastime which you can do in your free time once again. You might have noticed that you insist on doing two things at once e.g. reading whilst eating breakfast. Now that should be able to be done purely as a personal choice, instead of as an order.
• You will begin to notice the opposite sex through different eyes!
• If you are a female and your periods have returned, your chances of fertility and conceiving healthy children will increase.
• If you are a male, you will feel significantly more sexually active (of course this applies to the ladies too!)
• Having a close relationship with someone will be easier as you will not feel self-conscious, uneasy or hesitant.
• You will not be concerned about insignificant things in your daily life, for example, a dirty cup forgotten and left on the table, or something being slightly out of place such as your bedcovers not being exactly the same lengths over both sides of the bed or your shoes not positioned exactly straight.
• Eating in public will be a normal thing to do again, and you will not have constant fears about what people think about what you are or are not eating. It took me a long time, and a lot of practise starting small with a drink and working my way up gradually. But, it was worth it in the end when I could have a full meal with my parents and friends in a busy restaurant. Take it one step at a time. Start with a coffee, then a snack and a coffee, progressing on to a lunch or dinner, and finally a full meal including starter, main course and dessert or a full day out, eating in public at every meal.
The relationship that you have with your entire family will greatly improve, as you will not be or get as easily annoyed, upset, or irritated by them, as you were when the Anorexia demon had control, and vice versa.

Missing a meal will not be a big deal as you can have something at another time.

Your family will not have to worry every single day about whether you have eaten enough, exercised too much, or ‘over done it’, etc.

Your concentration and focus will be set on other aspects of your life, other than food, calories, weight and exercise. Your thoughts will be free to roam wherever they please! Some of which will include relationships, pleasurable activities, work, school, college, and university, whatever!

Your friends and family will not have to be as cautious as they were previously, in case they say the wrong thing to you at the wrong time. And if they do happen to say the wrong thing, you will be able to handle what they have said in a much calmer, more realistic manner.

You will be able to handle any situation that occurs one hundred per cent better, e.g. complications at work, school, college, etc.

Any type of change will be easier for you to handle, from the tiny things such as having a different sandwich filling to moving house! As your body and mind has evolved and changed, so has your ability to cope with anything. It works hand in hand.

You will not have to stick to a strict daily routine, which may or may not have rotated around your meals. You will be freer to alter your day how you wish to.

You will be able to wear clothes that compliment or show off your fantastic figure, and don’t swamp it. You will feel good about your figure and your body, and so you should! Your body is yours and yours only. It is an individual, the same as you are inside. You have to be proud of it!

Outings with family or friends will be a pleasurable event, not a military operation as before where there would always be worry, e.g. “Oh no, we have to stop our walk. They need to have their lunch now” or, “We can’t go any further, they might burn off too many calories.” Instead, there may be phrases used such as “Let’s stop here for lunch,” or
“Does anyone feel like going on for another mile?”

• Everything in life will be better without the Anorexia demon there. Our family is one of the many (however, not enough) who are living proof of this fact. So consider the magnificent aspects of life that you would be able to enjoy without Anorexia when you are next going to challenge it. There are far, far more positives to getting better and beating this illness, than remaining within its hold.

• More Advantages Of Recovery

• Your nails will grow stronger.
• Your skin will not be as dry, bleed or crack.
• The cold will not affect you in the way that it did.
• Your hair will cease thinning.
• Chances of developing osteoporosis will be lowered or halted.
• You will feel more confident and out-going
• People will see you as being more approachable.
• Your pain threshold will be higher, e.g. having your legs waxed.
• You will be more flexible with your sleeping hours.
• If you are making food and wish or need to taste it, you will be able to.

As you can clearly see the positive aspects of banishing Anorexia from your life and, the lives of your family are limitless. Read over and over this list if you wish, and make your own too, using only positive thoughts to fuel your positive thinking and creating.

Top Tips, And Help Charts
Write a list of all the goals that you think you will be able to do as you are recovering and when you are fully recovered. Date each suggestion, tick it and date it again when you have managed to achieve your goal.

See the examples set below:
Example 1:

**Bar Chart Of Progress**

**Katie Metcalfe Progress chart 2004-2005**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Go cycling with Mum when I reach 8st</th>
<th>Date: 7.4.04</th>
<th>Went cycling with Mum</th>
<th>Date achieved: 2.11.04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weight now: 6st 7lb</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weight now: 8st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Go to the cinema and have some popcorn | Date: 10.5.05 | Went to the cinema and had some popcorn | Date achieved: 15.5.05 |

**Progress List**

**Katie’s Progress List 2005**

- ✓ 1: Make a three-course meal and eat with my family.
  Date I set task: 2.4.05.
  Date I achieved task: 4.5.05.
- ○ 2: Go for a hiking weekend with my friend when I reach 8st.
  Date I set task: 4.5.05.
  Date I achieved task: 9.7.05.
This chapter is focused on giving a helping hand with the eating and weight gain part of the recovery process. Although being primarily aimed at the sufferer, it is a chapter written with parents in mind as well, and fundamentally all those who are involved in the recovery and the life of the sufferer beyond Anorexia. Most of all, the foods that are listed in this chapter are healthy with the odd treat thrown in here and there. It is important to remember that treats are also healthy too! Just as long as you don’t have them 24/7. Although, you will find that if you are trying to gain weight, having more treats than a person who is at a healthy weight is perfectly acceptable. It is important to remember that the needs of an undernourished, underweight person are different from those of a well-nourished, person at a healthy weight.

The mention of calories and fat has purposefully been avoided, as it’s important while you are recovering that those two things do not continue to control your thinking as they have presumably done. Although it may be necessary sometimes to have a guide at first to how many you are managing to consume in a day, so that you can be sure you’re getting enough.

You can alter and change the suggestions for food listed in this chapter, to suit your personal taste. (Your tastes, and not the anorexia, remember!) They are not written in stone. However, make sure that it’s not all low calorie/fat things that you change them to! You are most likely to find that to gain weight, eating three meals a day and three snacks will be required as a minimum. It is important to get a good balance of protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins and minerals with every meal so that what you are eating is providing you with everything you need in order for your body to function properly and to gain weight.
successfully. Now is the time to stop denying yourself nice, good food. You need to allow yourself to be creative; ignore that voice ordering you what, when and why to eat. We all need to eat; it’s a fact of life. Simple. So break those set routines. Live for the moment. Live for you. Carpe Diem!

If you are a recovering anorexic and are trying to gain weight, I really hope that this chapter provides you with a good insight into what can honestly help you to reach your goal weight and a healthy, happy lifestyle.

At Mealtimes

Information For The Sufferer

As an anorexic, you are probably used to eating alone, away in a different room from your family. Now is the time to quit that routine! Bring yourself back to the normality of eating with and around people. It’s a proven fact that families who eat together regularly get along with each other better than those who don’t. Bear that thought in mind. It won’t be an easy move to make, but it is possible. You can do it with determination.

Mealtimes aren’t only about eating and getting it finished; they’re also about socialising with your family, talking about your day, what everyone has done, discussing future plans, and having a joke and a laugh with one another. Mealtimes are supposed to be pleasurable times, where you take time over your food and enjoy what you are eating, as well as enjoying the company you are in. It is advisable, if possible, not to sit in front of a television or read while you are eating, as you are supposed to concentrate on taking delight in consuming your food. You should try to experience the smells, taste and texture of your meal. Doing this makes eating a more pleasurable experience. It is important to remember to make sure that when you are eating you are sat down. This might sound stupid, but many anorexics (and non anorexics) stand when they are eating – either out of pure habit or because they feel they would be lazy or fat if they sat down.

(If you find that you can eat better by watching television or reading, then by all means do so. When you are in the first
stages of recovery, any distraction that helps you to eat is acceptable. However, as you progress, ease yourself away from this routine until you can cope without it.)

It is a good thing to remember that after eating a meal, it is important to try to relax for at least half an hour. Read a book, paint or listen to some music. The reason for relaxing is so that you can reserve some of the energy you have just consumed, and, if you try to participate in vigorous activities too soon after you have eaten, you will find you will have heartburn, or simply not feel too good.

It’s perfectly understandable that breaking routines, and eating with and around others will be an enormous step to take, but it is something that has to be done as a stage of the recovery process. And you can’t say that for the rest of your life you want to eat alone. Can you?

Take it one step at a time. Begin with one meal a day, or a snack, and work your way up. Organise what you will be eating and at what time in advance, if you feel anxious. I am positive that your family will be only too happy to accommodate your needs. (The need to organise your mealtimes will decrease the more weight you manage to gain, and eating will become something that does not need so much thought and consideration.)

The same applies with friends. Is it your dream to be able to go and see a film at the cinema and join in the ‘passing of the popcorn’ or the ‘sharing of the sweets’? Going to a café and ordering a cappuccino and a piece of cake while laughing and chatting with friends? Make your dreams a reality. Do it today. Don’t wait until next week, or next month. Before you know it, it will be next year…and then where will you be? I think, and hope, you get the picture now.

You might just want to invite one friend over to your house, and eat something in front of them while watching TV or doing homework. That’s fine. As with the family mealtimes, start small and work your way up. I started small, and it worked for me. It can work for you too
Useful Food Information

Vitamins And Minerals – Why We Need Them

Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients, just like carbohydrates, fats and protein. We need to consume them regularly and in the correct quantity to become and stay healthy. They play an enormous role in building and maintaining the body’s bones, tissues, fluids and organs.

Vitamins help to balance hormones, provide energy, boost the immune system, keep skin healthy, protect arteries and ensure the brain and nervous system work properly. (And you always wondered why your parents and teachers harped on at you!) Minerals build strong teeth and bones. They allow oxygen to be carried within our blood, control blood sugar levels and help to repair cuts or bruises.

The key to getting the right balance is a healthy mix of foods, fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products. Nuts and seeds are great too, as they provide a fantastic source of many minerals.

Salt – Why It Is Important To Cut Back

Anorexics tend to use vast quantities of salt, and it does enormous harm to the body. Not only can it cause high blood pressure, which triples the risks of developing heart disease, but overusing can also lead to strokes and kidney failure, whatever your age. Overusing salt also promotes fluid retention, which results in swollen ankles. A high salt intake also promotes an increase in calcium excretion and may exacerbate osteoporosis. You can easily cut back on salt that you use on your food by substituting it with fresh and dried herbs and spices.

Chocolate – It’s Not As Bad As You Think

Chocolate will most likely be something that has been out of your diet for a very long time. However, despite all the bad publicity this ‘food of the Gods’ receives, there are many positives to balance this out. So go on, break those anorexia rules and live. Have some chocolate today!

• Chocolate contains more antioxidants (substances that help to prevent cancer) than red wine and green tea.
• A single bar of milk chocolate contains ten times the calcium that is in a medium sized apple.
• There is more caffeine in a cup of decaffeinated coffee than in a medium sized bar of chocolate.

So, how many more reasons do you need to enjoy some chocolate?

Breakfast

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Always make sure that you have it. Eating breakfast starts up your digestive system after its long period of rest and fuels you up for the day ahead. It’s really important that a balanced meal is eaten at breakfast, consisting of protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals. Here are two examples of meals, which include a balance of all:

(I must stress that these are only guidelines for mealtimes. Some people may need more, others less. Make sure you accommodate your needs with the food you eat.)

If you eat meat: grilled bacon, tomatoes, one poached egg and a slice of toast, followed by a hot drink, tea/coffee/Horlicks with milk and sugar, or pure fruit juice or a smoothie.

If you are vegetarian: a bowl of Cornflakes with one chopped banana and milk, one slice of toast spread with butter and jam/marmite followed by a hot drink, tea/coffee/Horlicks with milk and sugar, or pure fruit juice or a smoothie.

Breakfast Choices

Chose one or two, depending on your eating routine, of these options for breakfast everyday. The measurements for amounts of cereal, sugar, milk, etc, have been left up to you, as you yourself should be aware of the amount you need to have. If you aren’t sure, ask your doctor.

Swap and change your breakfasts. Don’t stick to the same thing day in day out. Be adventurous and try something new each day or every
other day. I’m positive your palate will be craving to try new tastes after enduring the same things for such a long time.

• Two Weetabix with semi-skimmed/whole milk and brown sugar
• Fruit muesli with semi-skimmed/whole milk or natural yoghurt
• Cornflakes with semi-skimmed milk/whole milk and 1 teaspoon sugar
• Branflakes with semi-skimmed/whole milk and a chopped banana/strawberries
• Porridge made with semi-skimmed/whole milk served with sugar/jam/treacle
• Peanut butter/jam/chocolate spread/cream cheese/mushroom pate on wholemeal/white toast
• Scrambled/poached/fried egg served on toast spread with butter
• Two crumpets topped with butter jam/honey/cream cheese
• Croissant with butter, jam/marmalade
• Fruit smoothie followed by a slice of toast with honey
• Waffles topped with syrup
• One mashed banana on two slices of toast spread with honey
• Grilled bacon/sausage in a bread roll with tomato sauce and one grilled tomato
• Kippers on two slices of buttered toast
• Hot plum tomatoes on two slices of buttered toast
• Toasted English muffin topped with butter and honey/poached egg
• Kedgeree
• Pancakes served with lemon and sugar/syrup/honey
Once again it’s important to get a good balance of all the necessities needed to keep your body in functioning order and of course to be able to gain weight. It’s up to you whether you eat a main meal in the middle of the day or in the evening. I personally prefer my main meal at lunchtime, as it sets me up for serious brainwork in the afternoon!

Below are two examples for both vegetarians and meat eaters.

If you eat meat: a jacket potato split and spread with butter, and filled with tuna mayonnaise served with a salad and followed with a piece of flapjack.

If you are a vegetarian: mushroom and cheese omelette served with a salad and followed by a slice of banana loaf/cake.

**Lunchtime Choices**

- Mixed vegetable fingers and bread sticks/pitta bread with humus dip
- Jacket potatoes with grated cheese/baked beans/tuna/coleslaw/chilli
- Soup with a bread roll spread with butter or sunflower spread
- Beans/cheese and mushrooms on two slices of toast
- Vegetable/chicken stir fry with egg noodles
- Tortillas filled with chicken/turkey/mixed beans/humus
- Farfalle pasta tossed with tuna mayonnaise and sliced cucumber
- Ham/cheese/mushroom omelette served with a crisp green salad
- Ciabatta roll topped with mozzarella cheese and grilled tomatoes served with a side salad
Dessert

Round off your lunch and evening meal with a delicious dessert or pudding. If you struggle to allow yourself something sweet, remember that you are in charge. YOU chose what you can and can’t have and not some stupid voice. Also remember that treats are allowed.

Dessert Choices

• Rice pudding/semolina/sago with jam
• A slice of fruitcake
• A slice of tea loaf/malt loaf spread with butter
• Steamed jam/treacle pudding with custard
• Apple/rhubarb crumble with custard
• Fresh fruit salad served with whipped cream/evaporated milk
• A portion of Greek yoghurt mixed with honey, flaked almonds and blueberries
• Portion of ice cream topped with chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans)
• Bread and butter pudding served with custard
Dinner

Once again, aim to include protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fat into your last meal of the day.

If you eat meat: toad-in-the-hole served with boiled carrots, cabbage, mashed potato and gravy, followed by a portion of apple crumble and custard.

If you are vegetarian: spaghetti bolognaise made with quorn mince, served with a lettuce salad and grated cheese, followed by a portion of vanilla ice cream topped with mixed nuts.

Dinner Choices

- Quorn vegetable stir-fry
- Fishcakes, steamed green vegetables and boiled potatoes
- Baked salmon/cod served with rice and green vegetables
- Shepherd’s Pie served with boiled carrots, peas and gravy
- Leek and cheese quiche served with salad and boiled potatoes
- Nut roast served with green vegetables and boiled potatoes
- Toad-in-the-hole served with vegetables and gravy
- Chilli con carne served with rice
- Vegetarian pizza served with a crisp salad
- Macaroni cheese served with baked tomatoes
- Spaghetti bolognaise served with a lettuce salad and grated cheese
- Lasagne served with salad
- Vegetarian/chicken curry served with basmati rice and/or naan bread
Snacks

Ideal times for snacks are mid-morning, mid-afternoon and just before bedtime. Including snacks in your daily diet is important if you aim to gain weight.

Snack Choices

- Flapjack
- Rice Cakes topped with honey/peanut butter/jam/cheese
- A bowl of cereal with milk e.g. Cornflakes, Shreddies, Rice Krispies, Crunchy Nut Cornflakes
- Roasted peanuts/mixed nuts
- Mixed nuts and dried fruit mix
- Half a mashed avocado on a slice of toast
- Jam and Edam cheese sandwich (Sounds vile but trust me on this one!)
- Peanut butter and jam sandwich (One of the greatest food combinations to have surfaced from America!)
- Teacake/scone/malt loaf spread with butter
- Eccles Cake
- Sausage roll
- Scotch egg
- Slice of banana bread
- Blueberry/chocolate/toffee muffin
- A cereal bar
- Crackers and cheese
- Snack size chocolate bar e.g. Snicker; Mars Bar, Milky Way
- Small packet of crisps
- Popcorn
- Three Jaffa cakes
- Two fig rolls
- One Wagon Wheel or Penguin biscuit or two digestive biscuits
- One choc ice
Drinks

Keeping your body hydrated is exceptionally important. As you increase the amount you drink, you will be certain to find that your skin improves, becoming less dry, sore and prone to bleeding. (Thus saving a fortune on hand cream in the long run!) Headaches will also decrease. Remember to drink before you are thirsty. (And not only water!) Aim to have a milky drink with each of your snacks, and fruit juice and water in between.

Drink Choices

- Water
- Horlicks/Ovaltine/hot chocolate made with milk
- Banana/strawberry/raspberry smoothie
- Herb tea
- Tea with milk and sugar
- Coffee with milk and sugar
- High fruit juice diluted with water
- Pure orange/apple/pineapple juice
- Milk/semi-skimmed/full fat/soya/rice
Recipes

In this section of the chapter, you will find a number of recipes, some of which will be included in the above lists. These recipes are suitable for the entire family, and include some Metcalfe family favourites! We really hope that you enjoy creating these dishes and really really hope you enjoy eating them too. Happy cooking!

Recipes For Drinks

Raspberry And Orange Smoothie

Makes two-three servings
Perfect drink for breakfast time especially on a hot day!

250g raspberries, chilled
200ml natural plain yoghurt, chilled
300ml pint freshly squeezed orange juice, chilled

1. Place raspberries and yoghurt in a food processor/blender and process for about one minute until smooth and creamy.
2. Add orange juice and process for thirty seconds or until combined. Pour in tall glasses and serve immediately.

Banana And Honey Smoothie

Makes 4 servings
Delicious any time of the day!
I find I enjoy it most mid morning, when I’m still feeling sluggish!

425ml semi-skimmed/whole milk
2tbsp honey
6 small bananas

1. Peel bananas; break up into a food processor/blender. Blend for about one minute.
2. Slowly pour in milk and spoon in honey. Blend for two minutes or until thick, creamy and smooth. Pour into glasses and serve immediately.
(This smoothie will keep for two days in a sealed container in the fridge).

**Strawberry Milkshake**

Perfect to have with a snack mid-afternoon.

Makes 4 servings

450ml semi-skimmed/whole milk
100g strawberries
225g vanilla ice cream
25g sugar

1. Place all ingredients into a blender/food processor and blend until combined, thick and creamy.
2. Pour into tall glasses and serve immediately.
   (Can be stored for two days in a sealed container in the fridge.)

**Cinnamon Milk**

This is perfect to drink just before bed, as the combination of warm milk and cinnamon relaxes you and induces sleep. Mum used to make this for us when we were struggling to sleep on school nights.

Makes one serving

250ml milk semi-skimmed/whole
Quarter to half a teaspoon cinnamon
2 teaspoons sugar

1. Warm the milk in a pan or microwave and pour into a mug.
2. Mix together the sugar and cinnamon and stir into the milk.
3. Sprinkle a little extra cinnamon over the top and serve immediately.
Recipes For Snacks

Apricot Muesli Bars

A very satisfying, tasty snack! These bars are crammed with goodness from the dried apricots that contain fibre and iron and are all in all a compact and tasty health food.

Makes 8 servings

200g dried apricots, chopped finely
Grated rind and juice of one orange
75g margarine
100ml honey
225g muesli
100g flour

1. Preheat your oven to 190F or gas mark 5.
2. Lightly grease a 17.5 cm/7 inch square cake tin.
3. Cook the apricots with the orange juice in a pan simmering slowly until the juice has disappeared. Allow to cool.
4. Melt the margarine, add the honey and heat gently. Stir in the muesli and flour and mix well.
5. Press half of the mixture into the prepared tin. Cover with apricot mixture. Top with rest of the muesli mix. Press down and smooth with a metal spoon.
7. Mark into bars and allow to cool. Cut through completely when cool and place on a wire rack. Store in an airtight container.
Flapjack

Quick to make and tastes delicious! I find a piece of flapjack kicks me into gear when I am feeling low and tired. This recipe is one my Grandma uses to make the best tasting flapjack, and eating it always reminds me of childhood when I used to look forward to her baking days.

Makes 8 servings

150g margarine
4 tbsp golden syrup
150g brown sugar
300g porridge oats

1. In a large pan, melt together the margarine and syrup.
2. Mix together the oats and sugar and stir into the margarine. Mix well.
3. Lightly grease a willow baking tray and place mixture inside. Smooth over and bake in the centre of your oven at 180F or gas mark 4 for 20 minutes, or until golden brown.
4. Remove from the oven and mark into eight bars. Leave to cool before cutting through completely. Store in an airtight container.

Variations
Replace 25g of the oats with 25g of desiccated coconut.
Add two tablespoons of crunchy peanut butter to the margarine when melting.
Banana Muffins

Makes 12 servings

These Muffins are superb Lunchbox material, and are fantastic as a “pick me up” when you are feeling a bit low on energy. A wonderful recipe to use when you have bananas that are turning black and everyone refuses to eat them.

200g butter/margarine
100g brown sugar
1tsp vanilla essence
2 eggs
400g plain flour
1 tsp salt
2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
4 ripe bananas, roughly mashed

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas mark
2. Cream together the butter, sugar and vanilla. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, until mixture is light and fluffy.
3. In a separate bowl, sift the flour, salt, and soda together.
4. Add the dry ingredients and the banana to the creamed mixture, and fold until the dry ingredients are just moist, but do not over mix.
5. In a bun tin, put 12 muffin cases, and divide the mixture between them.
6. Bake for about 20 minutes.

Delicious served warm with a glass of cold milk.

Alternatives
For a delicious and satisfying chocolate and banana experience, add two roughly broken up Aero chocolate bars to the mixture before baking. Or, add two handfuls of roughly broken up Chocolate Buttons. Alternatively, use any chocolate that takes your fancy. Experiment! Be adventurous!
Date and Walnut Scones

Dates are a lovely substitute for sultanas, and the walnuts give the scone a lovely and different texture and taste. A soft bite first, but when you reach the walnuts you hit the fantastic crunch factor!

Makes 8–10 servings

250g self raising flour
Half tsp salt
¼ tsp cinnamon
50g margarine or butter
125g ready to eat dates, roughly chopped
50g walnut pieces
25g soft dark brown sugar
150ml milk
2 tbsp milk for glazing

1. Preheat the oven to 230°C, 450°F, and gas mark 8.
2. Sift flour, salt and spice into a bowl. Rub in the margarine until it resembles fine breadcrumbs.
3. Stir in the dates, walnuts, and sugar. Add the milk and mix to a soft dough. Knead gently until smooth.
4. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface to a 1cm thickness and cut out 8–10 rounds with a 6 cm biscuit cutter.
5. Place the scones on a greased baking tray, brush with the milk and bake on the middle oven shelf for 10 minutes until well-risen and golden brown.
6. Delicious served warm with butter.
Cinnamon Toast

Delicious served as a snack, or before you go to bed. Perfect, also if all you have in the house is old cinnamon, a little butter, stale bread and the scrapings of the sugar jar! Despite this recipe being short, simple and sweet, for me it holds many fine memories. My first encounter with cinnamon toast was at the age of seven when I went for tea at my Dutch friend’s farmhouse. We were given the freedom of the kitchen and she taught me how to make what I consider the best snack treat ever created. We used thick slabs of wholemeal bread, real butter, demerara sugar and masses of cinnamon. I can still feel the tingling on my taste buds and the warm, satisfied feeling that lined my small stomach whenever I remember that experience.

Makes two servings

4 slices white or wholemeal bread
1 tsp cinnamon
1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
25g butter

1. Mix together 25g butter with the cinnamon and half a teaspoon of sugar.
2. Toast the bread on one side only. Remove from the grill, and spread the butter mix on all four un-toasted sides. Sprinkle the 1 tbsp of sugar evenly over the 4 slices, and return to the grill until toasted and golden.
3. Cut into fingers, or eat it as it is whole, and serve immediately with a glass of cold milk. Also delicious served with hot custard to dip the fingers into!
Ham And Tomato Toast

Simple but ‘sweeeeet!’ according to Samuel.

Makes one serving

2 slices white/wholemeal bread
2 slices wafer thin ham
½ medium tomato
Butter

1. Slice the tomato into four and grill whilst toasting the bread.
2. Lightly butter the toast and place the ham on one piece of buttered toast, top with the grilled tomato and place other piece of toast on top.
3. Cut into half and serve straight away.

Hummus

A delicious, nutritious dip, perfect with rice cakes, oatcakes, bread, vegetable sticks, anything you fancy! Mum learnt the recipe for hummus from an Israeli friend, and has mastered the technique of hummus making to a fine art. It has been a staple part of our diets for years. At home everyone knows they are in for a treat when the chickpea cans and tahini tin are waiting on the counter – the taste improves each time!

Makes four servings

400g can of drained, rinsed chickpeas
Juice of 1 lemon
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)
1 tsp salt
1 garlic clove crushed
Black pepper to taste
1. Place all the ingredients in a blender/food processor and blend until you have a smooth puree. Adjust seasoning to suit your taste.
2. Store in the fridge in a sealed container until ready for use. It will keep for three days if kept covered in the fridge.

**Fruit Snack Attack!**

Fantastic energy booster any time of the day! I take this with me to college and nibble it during lessons when I feel my energy flagging.

Makes four servings

100g dried banana chips
100g dates, stoned
100g dried apricots
100g dried prunes, stoned (optional)
100g sultanas
100g raisins
100g crunchy oat cereal (optional)

1. Roughly chop banana chips, or leave whole, according to preference.
2. Half dates, apricots, prunes and add to the banana.
3. Mix together the raisins, sultanas and cereal and add to the banana mix.
4. Stir well and store in an airtight container.

**Variations**

To make this snack crunchy and more nutritious, add 50g of halved walnuts and 50g of chopped almonds. Or any other nuts you prefer.
Brain Booster

This delicious crunchy, chewy combination not only provides you with a boost of long lasting energy, but it also helps you to concentrate. It can be eaten on its own, mixed into yoghurt or porridge, or mixed with oats to make muesli.

Makes approximately ten servings

100g mixed fruit  
100g sultanas  
100g raisins  
100g mixed nuts (cashew, pecan, almond, brazil, walnut)  
75g sunflower seeds  
75g pumpkin seeds

1. Combine all ingredients together and store in an airtight container for up to two months.

Spiced Almonds

Almonds are really high in vitamin E, are packed with disease-fighting substances and have been found to help lower blood pressure as well as having many more advantages. They truly are a bite-sized health boost! This recipe serves twelve and keeps well in an airtight container for two weeks. We normally serve this snack when we have company, as it’s a wonderfully interesting alternative to your everyday snack food.

100g golden caster sugar  
3 tbsp soy sauce  
½ tsp ground cumin  
½ tsp ground chilli  
300ml water  
400g almonds
1. Preheat oven to 200°C (180°C fan) mark 6.
2. Put sugar into a pan and add soy sauce, cumin, chilli and water.
3. Cook, stirring over a medium heat until the sugar dissolves.
4. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes until syrupy.
5. Add almonds and stir for 5–8 minutes until the liquid has almost evaporated.
6. Pour the mixture into a roasting tin and cook for 5–10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until deep golden.
7. Remove from oven, leave to cool, break up, sprinkle with salt and store in an airtight container.

Almond Butter

Fantastic spread on thick-cut wholemeal toast.
A delicious and unusual alternative to normal butter!

Makes approximately 20 servings

150g cashew nuts
150g blanched whole or flaked almonds

1. Put cashew nuts into a frying pan, and heat for 5 minutes, shaking the pan until they are golden all over.
2. Place into a food processor with the almonds and whiz for 5 minutes to form a smooth paste.
3. Spoon paste into a 300g jar and store for up to 3 months, or keep in the fridge after opening and use after one month.
4. Stir before using, as the butter contains no additives it will separate during storage.
Homemade Bread

Can you imagine anything as delicious and mouth-wateringly wonderful than a thick slice of fresh bread, still warm from the oven, slathered with real butter and strawberry jam? Well, no need to imagine anymore!

Not only is bread an amazing food to enjoy, but also making it is brilliant to release stress, as kneading, pounding and rolling releases pent up aggression and tension. This recipe makes four loaves so why not invite friends to share it with you? Plus, it will give you the opportunity to brag about baking your own bread!

Makes four loaves

680g whole-wheat flour
680g white flour
4 level tsp of salt (this is optional)
1 level tsp brown sugar
1000ml milk mixed with lukewarm water
50g yeast
1 tsp honey
A little vegetable fat or oil
4 medium sized loaf tins

1. Place the flour, salt and sugar into a bowl, and leave in a warm place.
2. In a warm bowl, whisk the milk-water mix with the honey and yeast.
3. Add to the flour and mix with your hands to a stiff dough.
4. On a floured surface, fold the dough over on to itself and repeatedly push down with a firm, rocking movement until it becomes smooth and shiny.
5. Continue for ten minutes then divide the dough into four pieces, and shape to fit the loaves.
6. Grease the loaf tins and half fill each one with the dough.
7. Press down firmly with damp fingers, cover with a damp cloth and leave to rise in a warm place until the dough has filled the tins. Rising will take about half an hour.
8. Remove the cloth once the dough has risen, brush the tops with melted butter or milk and bake in a hot oven for 25 minutes at 450 degrees.

9. Turn the loaves out of the tins, tap the bottom and if they sound hollow they are cooked. If not, place back into tins and bake for another five minutes.

10. Once cooked, turn out on to a wire rack and leave to cool slightly. Slice and eat while still warm with your favourite topping or nothing at all.
Recipes For Breakfasts

Fruity Bran Breakfast

Makes one serving

Transform a bland bowl of Branflakes into a delicious, healthy fruity delight filled with goodness!

40g Branflakes
1 small banana, sliced
25g raisins or sultanas
130 ml milk semi-skimmed/whole

1. Place the Branflakes into a bowl, top add the banana and dried fruit and mix gently.
2. Pour the milk over and serve straightaway.

Bean And Bacon Bomb

Makes one serving

1 rasher of bacon
200g baked beans
Butter/sunflower spread
1 English muffin

1. Grill or lightly fry the bacon. When cooked, cut into small cubes.
2. Heat beans in a pan and add the bacon, and continue to heat gently.
3. Split the muffin and toast on both sides. Spread with butter/sunflower spread.
4. Place on a plate and top with the bacon and bean mix.
5. Serve immediately with a large dollop of brown sauce.
Herby Scrambled Eggs

Delicious served with grilled mushrooms, tomatoes and hot toast
Makes two servings
20g butter, softened
6 eggs
2 tbsp chopped chives or parsley

1. In a small bowl lightly whisk the eggs with a pinch of salt, some
   ground black pepper and chives or parsley.
2. Heat the butter in a saucepan, add the eggs and cook, stirring from
time to time until almost set.
3. Serve piping hot.

Savoury Breakfast Combo

Makes two servings

This recipe is fantastic if you like something savoury first thing in the morning.

375g peeled, cubed potatoes
1 tablespoon sunflower oil
1 red and 1 green pepper, halved and seeded
2 diced tomatoes
375g button mushrooms, peeled and quartered
4 tbsp chopped, fresh parsley
Ground black pepper

1. Cook the potatoes in boiling water for 7 minutes. Drain well.
2. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the potatoes and cook for 10
   minutes, stirring every now and then.
3. Chop the peppers; add to the pan with the tomatoes and
   mushrooms. Cook for a further 5 minutes, stirring constantly.
4. Add the chopped parsley, season and serve.
Recipes For Lunches

Fillings for sandwiches and jacket potatoes

1 serving

Tuna mayonnaise: drain one small can of tuna, stir in two tablespoons of mayonnaise—season with salt and pepper.

Egg mayonnaise: hard boil one large egg. Shell, and cut up in a bowl. Add two tablespoons mayonnaise, a pinch of dill (optional) and season with salt and pepper.

Cheese ham savoury: grate 50g cheddar cheese, 25g carrot, and 25g onion into a bowl—season with salt and pepper. Add two slices of diced ham, three tablespoons mayonnaise and stir well. (Omit the ham to make a vegetarian option).

Carrot And Orange Soup

Makes two servings

Delicious served with a warm crusty bread roll spread with real butter.

2 tsp Olive/vegetable oil
75g onion finely chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
225g carrots, peeled and chopped
125g canned chopped tomatoes with liquid
Juice of 1 large orange
½ tsp ground cumin seeds
1 tsp salt
Pepper
200ml vegetable/chicken stock
Parsley to garnish
1. Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the onion until soft, adding garlic towards end of cooking.
2. Add carrots stir for 1 minute then add remaining ingredients, except parsley.
3. Bring to a simmer. Cook for 30 mintes until vegetables are tender.
4. Liquidise until smooth.
5. Reheat, adjust seasoning and serve garnished with parsley.

**Chilli Bean Stuffed Pancakes**

Makes four servings

Plain flour 4 oz
Pinch salt
2 eggs
300ml milk and water, mixed
Vegetable oil
425g can kidney beans, drained
4 tbsp tomato ketchup
Chilli powder to taste
50g grated cheddar cheese

1. Mash the drained kidney beans in a bowl with the tomato ketchup and chilli powder.
2. Put the flour, salt, and eggs in a large bowl. Add half the water and milk and whisk until smooth. Stir in the remaining milk and water.
3. Heat a little oil in a pan, and add three tablespoons of batter.
4. Cook until set, turn over and cook other side. Do this until all the batter has been used.
5. Fill the pancakes with the kidney beans and roll up. Pack in a willow, ovenproof dish and sprinkle the cheese over the top.
6. Cook in a preheated oven 190%c/375%c/ gas mark 5 for about five minutes, or until the cheese has melted.
7. Serve straight away with a crisp lettuce and tomato salad.
Alternative Fillings

Baked Bean and Cheese
Mix together one 400g can of baked beans and 50g grated cheese.

Spinach and Cottage Cheese
Cook eight ounces of spinach, draining off any excess water, and stir in eight ounces of cottage cheese.

Carrot and Mixed Nut Salad

Quick, easy, nutritious and tasty! Makes four servings

4 large carrots
200g roughly chopped mixed nuts (peanuts, walnuts, cashews, etc).
1 tbsp balsamic vinegar (optional)

1. Grate the carrots and put in a large bowl. Mix in the vinegar, and add the chopped nuts. Mix well, and serve immediately with crusty buttered bread for a delicious light lunch.
Recipes For Evening Meals

The Best EVER Macaroni Cheese

Makes six servings

Delicious served as a main meal with green vegetables such as cabbage and green beans. Equally delicious served cold in large chunks with tomato ketchup the day after making! Macaroni cheese is one of my fond food memories of childhood and staying with my grandparents. My Grandmother would make the most delicious macaroni cheese in existence and the taste was one that would put a smile on my face whatever mood I was in.

225g short cut macaroni (Fussili works well too)
50g vegetarian margarine or butter
50g plain flour
Salt and pepper
Half a tsp ground nutmeg or mustard (optional)
1 Pint whole/semi/skimmed/ milk
4 tbsp wholemeal breadcrumbs
225 grams cheddar cheese, grated

1.  Cook the macaroni according to packet instructions.
2.  Melt the margarine in a saucepan. When melted, stir in the flour, and cook gently for one minute.
3.  Take the pan of the heat, and gradually stir in the milk.
4.  Bring to the boil, and continue to stir until the sauce thickens.
5.  Remove from the heat and add salt, pepper, and nutmeg.
6.  Stir in the cooked macaroni and about three quarters of the cheese.
7.  Pour into a large, ovenproof dish, and sprinkle the remaining cheese and the breadcrumbs over the top.
8.  Bake at 200%c Mark 6 for 25–30 minutes, or until top is golden and bubbling.
9.  Serve straight away, with boiled peas and carrots.
Alternatives
Stir in 4 heaped tbsp of sweet corn when adding the cheese and macaroni to the sauce.
Add 100g of chopped, mixed nuts to the breadcrumbs and cheese when sprinkling over the top. You can use any kind of milk, flour or cheese in this recipe. Just adapt it to suit your taste.

**Nutty Bean**

Makes four servings
This is best served with rice as a main meal. Its also delicious served cold. It is very versatile, and can be adapted to suit personal tastes.

75g salted peanuts, roughly chopped
300g tin black eyed beans, drained
2 medium sized onions, chopped
400g chopped tomatoes
3 tbsp vegetable/olive oil
2 heaped tbsp tomato puree
1 heaped tsp oregano
Handful chopped parsley
2 cloves garlic, crushed

1. Heat the oil in a large pan and fry the onions and chopped garlic, until onions turn transparent.
2. Stir in the tomato puree, and oregano. Then add the chopped tomatoes, stir well, and simmer for ten minutes. Finally, add the peanuts and parsley, stir well and cook for a further five minutes.
3. Serve hot on a bed of rice.
   When covered, this will keep in the fridge for up to three days.

Alternatives
If you prefer, replace the peanuts with dry roasted peanuts, or cashew nuts. You can also replace the black-eyed beans with kidney beans.
Baked Bean Loaf

Serves four as a Main Meal
This dish is delicious served hot with boiled potatoes, green vegetables, and vegetarian gravy – also cold, with tomato ketchup or pickle or brown sauce and gherkins.

It’s cheap to make and packed full of protein and carbohydrates making it an ideal meal for students and families on a budget. Our entire family love this dish, not only because it is so fantastically cheap to produce but also because it tastes so good. There is never enough to satisfy everyone’s wants!

400g can baked beans
1 medium size organic onion
2 slices white or wholemeal bread
2 tbsp tomato ketchup
1 beaten egg
1 tsp Marmite
1–heaped tsp mixed herbs
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Crumble the bread, and mix with the beans in a large bowl.
2. Chop the onion and add to the bowl.
3. Mix the egg, Marmite, herbs, tomato ketchup and salt and pepper together and add.
4. Stir well and turn into a greased and lined 450g/1lb loaf tin. Bake in a preheated oven at 180%/300% gas mark 4 for about 30 minutes. Or till top is firm to touch.
5. Cool slightly, then loosen edges with a knife and turn out on to a plate.
Serve straight away with potatoes, vegetables and vegetarian gravy.
Pork Tenderloin In Chinese Sauce

Makes two servings. Perfect for a special occasion and to impress your family and friends! Delicious served with freshly cooked egg noodles.

200g pork fillet, cut into thin rounds
1 garlic clove, crushed
1.5–cm piece fresh root ginger, peeled
2 tsp runny honey
2 tsp soy sauce
1 tbsp dry sherry
1 tbsp sesame oil
2 tsp yellow bean sauce
2 tsp toasted sesame seeds

1. Preheat oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6
2. Place the pork fillets in a willow baking dish, in one layer, overlapping slightly.
3. Combine all the remaining ingredients except sesame seeds in a small pan and heat through, stirring well. Pour over the pork and combine well.
4. Cover loosely with a piece of foil, and bake for twenty minutes or until tender, basting two or three times.
5. Sprinkle with sesame seeds to serve.
Spiced Cod Cobbler

This high fibre meal is perfect served with steamed cabbage and broccoli to achieve the full potential of a balanced meal.

Makes four servings

200g button mushrooms  
700g thick cod filled, skinned  
4 tomatoes, halved  
1 tbsp butter  
Salt and pepper  
100g fresh breadcrumbs  
1 small onion, chopped finely  
2 tbsp sunflower oil

1. Preheat oven to 190°C/375°F/gas mark  
2. Make a layer of mushrooms in the bottom of an ovenproof dish.  
3. Cut the cod into four pieces and arrange over mushrooms. Place tomatoes around the edge of the dish. Cut the butter into small slices, dot over the fish and season.  
4. Blend the breadcrumbs with the onion and seasoning.  
5. Pour in the oil, mix lightly, and then spread over the fish.  
6. Bake for thirty minutes, until topping is crisp, and fish is cooked.
Prawn And Coconut Curry

Really quick, tasty and guaranteed to get your taste buds tingling!

Makes two servings

4 tsp vegetable oil
1 tsp mustard seeds
1 small onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp finely chopped fresh ginger
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
¼ tsp ground turmeric
¼ tsp hot chilli powder
½ tsp ground coriander
2 fresh bay leaves
1 small green chilli finely sliced
10 raw king prawns
200ml carton coconut cream
1 lime

1. Heat the oil in a frying pan and fry the mustard seeds until they pop. Add the onion. Fry, stirring, until golden.
2. Add ginger and garlic. Fry for 1 minute. Add turmeric, coriander and chilli powder. Stir-fry for ½ minute. Add bay leaves and chilli and cook for 1 minute.
3. Peel the prawns. Put into 150ml water, and boil for 1 minute. Add the prawns and spoon over the sauce. Lower the heat and simmer for 3–4 minutes or until prawns are cooked.
4. Pour in the coconut cream, warm through, squeeze in juice of ½ the lime. Season and serve with wedges of the other ½ lime.
Recipes For Desserts

Toffee Banana Crunch

Makes one serving

Quick, simple and mmmmmmm! The only way to describe this delicious dessert! It always goes down a storm in our household.

1 Large banana
2 large scoops toffee ice cream
1 and a half tsp white/brown sugar
2 tbsp whole/semi/skimmed milk
1 handful crunchy oat cereal (we recommend Mornflake Original or Pecan and Maple Crisp).

1. Mash the banana and whisk with the milk and sugar until a thick sauce.
2. Scoop ice cream into a bowl and pour sauce over. Sprinkle cereal on top and serve immediately.

Crunchy, Strawberry, Chocolate Cream Cascade

This is a dessert that always needs to be plentiful – guaranteed someone will see you eating it and demand some.

Makes one serving

2 tbsp crunchy raisin, almond, and honey oat cereal
4 pieces Dairy Milk Chocolate/Green and Blacks roughly chopped
4 large strawberries, chopped
200ml whipped cream

1. In the bottom of a tall glass, start with a layer of cereal, then the chocolate, half of the cream then the strawberries, and then top off with the remaining cream. Serve immediately.
NOTE: If you can’t find the cereal stated, use any crunchy cereal you like. You can also use any summer fruit you wish, if strawberries aren’t in season.

**Vanilla Custard Bread and Butter Pudding**

Simple but sensational! This dessert is perfect when you want something quick, easy and delicious.

Makes four servings

400g can vanilla custard, ready to serve  
1 small fruit loaf, sliced and crusts removed  
100g mixed dried fruit  
200 ml milk  
1 tbsp brown or white sugar  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp ground nutmeg  
Margarine or butter

1. Cut the sliced fruit loaf into triangles and spread thinly with butter.  
2. Layer in a medium sized oven dish, covering with a sprinkle of fruit on top of each layer.  
3. Mix together the milk, custard and spices and pour slowly over the bread. Leave to soak for 5 minutes.  
4. Sprinkle the sugar over the top, and place in a preheated oven 180% gas mark 4 for about 45 minutes, or until top is golden and firm to touch.  
5. Serve warm with a little extra custard or whipped cream.

NOTE: If you cant find vanilla custard in a tin, just make 300ml of your own, and add a few drops of vanilla essence or flavouring.
Katie’s Best Bread Pudding

This is the best dessert I have ever created both health wise and taste wise! Every bite brings a different taste sensation, and the addition of nuts and seeds adds a fantastically crunchy texture to this re-vamped old time favourite.
Eaten hot or cold it is a pleasurable experience.

Makes eight servings

600g wholemeal breadcrumbs
500ml semi-skimmed or whole milk
Four eggs
200g Demerara sugar
300g mixed fruit
100g pumpkin seeds
100g sunflower seeds
100g mixed, chopped nuts
2 tsp cinnamon
2 tsp mixed spice
75g Demerara sugar mixed with 2 tsp cinnamon for topping

1. Preheat oven to 180°C Gas mark 4.
2. Whisk the milk and the egg together with the spices.
3. Place breadcrumbs and sugar into a large bowl. Add the fruit, seeds and nuts. Mix well.
4. Add the milk mixture and allow to soak for about five minutes or until most of the liquid is absorbed.
5. Give a final stir and spread into a large earthenware dish. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar mix and place in the centre of the oven.
6. Bake for approximately 45 minutes, or until top of firm to the touch.
7. Remove, cut into 8 pieces and allow to cool slightly before serving with or without fresh custard.
Can also be served cold. Can be frozen for up to a month in a sealed container.
Homemade Ice Cream

Can you think of a better way to relax in the sun with your friends than sitting in the garden feasting on homemade ice cream?

Imagine how appreciative your family will be and how thoughtful they will think you are if you surprise them with bowls of homemade ice cream at the end of a meal.

You don’t need any fancy gadgets just some spare time and a freezer.

Makes approximately ten servings

110g icing sugar
4 eggs
300ml double cream

Flavouring of your own choice e.g. chocolate chips, crushed strawberries, toffee syrup – let your imagination run wild

1. Set the freezer to its lowest setting.
2. Separate the eggs and whisk the yolks in a small bowl. In a larger bowl, whisk the egg whites until they form stiff peaks.
3. Beat the icing sugar into the whites a little at a time, until it is all used.
4. Slowly whisk the yolks with the meringue.
5. Whip the cream until it forms stiff peaks. Fold into the egg mixture and add the flavouring of your choice e.g. 450g of crushed raspberries and 200g chocolate chips.
6. Mix well and pour into a 900ml container. Cover, and freeze for at least 2 hours before serving.
Recommended Nutritional Supplements

Before I maintained my calorie intake on a daily basis, I had to include nutritional supplements in my diet. The following list contains ones which I highly recommend, and which helped me to maintain my calorie intake and gain weight.

They are available in all different flavours, from vanilla to strawberry, chocolate to caramel and are just like milkshakes. They are available to buy at chemist stores, or can be prescribed through your Dr.

- Build Up (Nestle)
- Ensure Plus
- Scandishake
Chapter 34

Complementary Therapies

This chapter focuses on making you aware of the many aspects of help that are available outside the NHS for anorexics and their carers. Unfortunately, complementary therapies are almost unused by the NHS in the anorexic recovery process and for many other mental illness too; however, the therapies are out there and available. Be assured that if you do have to pay for the therapies, you will not be disappointed by what you receive. Complementary therapies have helped so very many people with their recoveries, and we are a family who recommend them to everyone we meet.

As the name suggests these are complementary and can work alongside allopathic medicines to aid in the recovery process? Homeopathy, massage and reflexology are non-evasive treatments that can be performed anywhere and fully clothed, which is helpful if you are a sufferer who is still learning to love your body, and who is still slightly apprehensive about strangers seeing you partly undressed.

However, you may find that after some time, you can feel comfortable with fewer clothes on. Just taking time out for yourself can be relaxing, especially if you are being treated with essential oils that can benefit many conditions, physical and emotional.

As a carer you may be under an enormous amount of stress, which can result in emotions running high, an inability to think straight, headaches, feelings of guilt, an aching body, and all these can be helped by having regular treatments.

Massage is a great liberator of emotions which when suppressed can cause damage.

Complementary therapies are available in many varied forms: art therapy, visualisation, dance and music through to yoga, massage, acupuncture, reiki, reflexology and the use of herbal medicines.

Many techniques are used based on systems practised thousands of years ago. All complementary healing practices have one aspect in common and this is that rather than treating a specific symptom or symptoms, they treat the person as a whole. Treating the patient at their
physical, mental and emotional levels. All three of which are affected by anorexia.

Art therapy, dance, and music can all help in the recovery. It may take some time to settle into a treatment, but once you do you will feel the difference and reap the benefits. Painting helped me enormously. We were fortunate that a friend is an art therapist, and she worked with me using a technique called ‘veil painting’. Working with tactile materials often helps with stress, and you may discover a skill you never knew you had.

Top Recommended Therapies For The Sufferer And Carer

Foot reflexology

What is foot reflexology? It is a natural healing art that deals with the principle that there are reflex areas in the feet which correspond to all the glands, organs and parts of the body when stimulated by using a unique thumb and finger walking technique.

What does it do? It helps to relax and calm, balance the body, and improve blood nerve and blood supply.

What to expect—first, the therapists asks for a full client consultation, followed by an examination of the feet. The treatment would normally last for about forty-five minutes, with the therapist working on both feet. Some people find that after the treatment they feel relaxed and sleepy for some time. Many others feel relaxed and soon after feel energised and motivated. Some people find that they have a runny nose, increased perspiration and shivering, but this is a sign that the treatment is working, and that toxins are being successfully removed from the body. Reflexology is not a painful treatment, nor is it ticklish as one might expect. However, if there are reflexes with energy blockages, they can be slightly uncomfortable until they have been properly worked with and balanced.
Indian head massage

**What is Indian head massage?** – Having an Indian head massage can promote relaxation, help concentration, relieve tension, headaches and aid work performance. Based on an ancient Indian healing system it is a massage to the face, shoulders head and neck.

**What does it do?** – It is said to rebalance the body’s energies and banish negativity, promote relaxation and relieve tension.

**What to expect** – The massage can be done with or without oils and is normally performed in a quiet room, with the recipient sitting straight in a chair with both feet on the ground. Before the treatment, the therapist will do an initial consultation where the client will be asked about their medical history, health and lifestyle. Treatment begins with the therapist and recipient taking deep breaths to relax. The therapist begins by using a combination of deep, rhythmic kneading movements working over the top of the upper back, neck, shoulders and then on to the head. The head is then worked. The scalp and muscles in the head are squeezed, rubbed, pinched and tapped. The face and head are worked using pressure point techniques. People may find that after the treatment they feel tired, but very relaxed. Hair might be slightly greasy, but it’s nothing that a wash won’t sort out.

Body massage

**What Is Body Massage?** – This form of therapy involves using the hands to perform movements on the skin to promote well-being, relaxation and healing. The main techniques involve rubbing, pressing, kneading and stroking. Aromatherapy massages uses essential oils derived from flowers, leaves, stalks, plants and the roots from certain trees.

**What does it do?** – When the body is touched, receptors in the skin send messages to the brain causing the release of chemicals such as endorphins. These produce a sense of relaxation and well-being, and can relieve pain. Massage also improves the flow of blood and lymph fluid, helps to eliminate waste products from the body, relaxes the muscles and can stimulate the immune system. Massage is used to treat specific ailments also, such as depression, neck and back pain and insomnia.
What to expect – Before the treatment begins, the therapist will give a full consultation about health and lifestyle. For a full body massage, all clothing is normally removed, with towels covering the parts of the body which are not to be massaged. However, clothes can be kept on if the recipient is uncomfortable. The recipient will lie on a massage table in a quiet room. The massage will normally start at the feet, and the therapist will work methodically around the body. The treatment will take forty-five minutes to an hour. After the treatment, it is common to feel tired, but incredibly relaxed and de-stressed.

Art therapy

What is art therapy? – Art therapy offers the opportunity to explore intense or painful thoughts in a caring, supportive environment using art materials in the presence of a trained art therapist. No skills are needed as the art therapist offers guidance and support as well as the opportunity to explore issues of concern using art materials.

What does it do? – The overall aim of art therapy is to enable a client to effect change and growth on a personal level with art materials.

What to expect – Before a session can take place, an initial consultation is taken to determine general health, medical treatment and lifestyle details. Art therapy can take form in many ways, for example creating batik, painting, collages, clay work and masks. Depending on the therapist, their place and method of work, art therapy can be done one to one or in a group.

Other Top Recommended Therapies

- Yoga
- Reiki
- T’ai Chi
- Music Therapy
- Dance Therapy
- Aromatherapy
- Acupuncture
- Shiatsu
• Visualisation
• Meditation
• Colour Therapy

Coping With Stress And Handling Your Emotions

Having Anorexia creates astronomical amounts of stress for both the sufferer and their entire family. And the road to recovery will not make that stress go away! However, as the sufferer gains weight and gets better, it will naturally decrease. At the beginning of recovery, stress will most likely increase. But, hold tight, push your way through, learn to cope with the stress and you can be assured that it will gradually become less. This chapter will give examples of how as a family we coped with stress during this difficult time, and advice on what you and your family can do to reduce stress levels. The previous chapter gave some very good ideas for a number of stress relieving techniques. This chapter also gives examples and advice on how to handle your emotions, which will be, no doubt, all over the place. As were ours.

Stress

Not all stress is bad. Strange to hear but true. A certain amount of stress is necessary to motivate you, and without pressures life would soon become boring and without much purpose. The trick is learning how to handle your stress in a positive and practical way. How you as an individual react to stress depends on whether you see yourself in control of a situation or overwhelmed by it.

Time To Relieve Stress

You don’t need vast amounts of time to reduce stress, as the points below signify.

• Smile!
• Pet a friendly dog or cat.
• Don’t know all the answers in every single thing.
• Look for the silver lining in everything you feel has
gone wrong.

- Say something nice to someone.
- Stop saying negative things to yourself.
- Ask a friend for a hug.
- Say hello to a stranger.
- Buy yourself a flower.
- Stop trying to ‘fix’ other peoples problems.
- Always have a plan B formed.
- Look at a work of art.

Making Time For You

It’s a fact of life; we are all extremely busy human beings leading chaotic lives one way or another. However, it is vital, as a human being, to allow time to yourself every single day. Whether it’s five minutes or an hour, you need to make it happen; time just for you. Listed, are various ways of relieving stress and spending time on you, varying from five minutes to a couple of hours. You’ll be pleasantly surprised what you can do to help yourself in such a short time.

Below are techniques to use if you have a spare five minutes. They can be used by anyone at any time, in school, at the office or at home. They have all been tried and tested and proven to work! There are also suggestions for twenty minutes, an hour and longer, if you can provide yourself with that time.

Five-Minute Stress Busters

- Massage the palm of your hand using circular movements.
- Rub your temples and ears using your thumb and first two fingers.
- Rub your scalp and run your fingers through your hair. This helps relieve tension.
- Eat a piece of chocolate. Dark is best with 70% minimum cocoa content.
• Read a short poem.
• Sing.
• Listen to a relaxing piece of music (Recommendations are: The Heart Asks Pleasure First by Michael Nyman, and L’Heure Exquise by Hahn.)

**Twenty-Minute Stress Busters**

• Sit in a really comfortable chair, put your feet up, have a nice warm/cool drink by your side and read a chapter from your favourite book, or an article from a magazine or newspaper.
• Make a phone call to a friend who you know will make you laugh and smile. Talking and laughing are both fantastic stress busters.
• Sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes. Focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Allow your whole body to become limp and loose. Imagine a relaxing scene, it could be a beach with waves lapping gently at the sandy shore, a field filled with beautiful flowers on a sunny day, a woodland glade with sunlight streaming through the green leaves on the trees.
• Take your time making a delicious coffee or hot chocolate. Sit in a comfortable chair and drink it from your favourite mug, maybe with a biscuit or two.
• Put the radio on. There’s guaranteed to be a radio show on to make you laugh, or one with a song on that you love and want to sing along to.

**One Hour And More Stress Busters**

• Run a warm bath, add some lovely oils or bubble bath and soak your stress away.
• Have a full body massage.
• Attend a yoga class.
• Watch a good television programme or film.
• Take a nap.
• Go for a short walk (NOT a jog or a run. Just a relaxing stroll).
• Write a short story, poem or an article.
• Do a watercolour painting.
• Sketch.
• Meditate.
• Bake your own bread (See recipe on p.g.).
• Make your own ice cream (See recipe on. p.g.).
• Go shopping for something really special.

Other Creative Ways To Relax And De-stress

Keeping A Scrapbook

All of us have interests and passions in life, and keeping a scrapbook is one way of monitoring your passions. You might be passionate about football or cooking, a particular TV show or an author. Whatever your interest happens to be you can keep a scrapbook about it. You don’t need to spend much money on this pastime, as all you need is a large grey page scrapbook or a blank notebook, some glue and scissors. Anything that you collect, stick it in. You could even keep one of your own life and chart your progress. Fill it with photos, poems and drawings. It would be a fantastic heirloom to pass down to your children’s children.

Write In A Journal

A journal is a record that you keep of impressions, feelings, emotions and responses over a long time. It is different from a diary, as it doesn’t have to be filled in every day. You can add something to it once a week, or month if you wish. In it you record what has happened to you during that time as experiences. As years go by, you will see patterns and notice changes and progress.

Logging your life experiences in a journal is a great way of looking back and seeing how far you have come and how much you have managed to change. A journal is also a fantastic thing to pour your heart out to.
You can ramble all you like, and it will not complain! Remember, your journal is yours and yours only. Display it only if you want to.

**What you can record in your journal:**

- How things happened to you on a particular day.
- What was the reason for them happening?
- How you felt inside when they happened.
- What your response was.
- How you felt about it afterwards.
- What steps you took to recover the situation or celebrate it.
- How you feel about such events ever happening to again and how you believe you would handle them.
- Of course, it is your journal and in it you can write whatever you want to. There are no rules. Follow your creative mind.

**Keep a reading journal**

For this pastime it is important to have an interest in reading! You’ll need a notebook, pen and a heap of books. (I adore reading, so invested in a beautiful velvet notebook, and a fountain pen to record the books I’d read.) Keeping a reading journal is a really good way of recording your reading habits and the styles of the authors you read. Note the book you read, who wrote it, why you read it, and what you thought of it overall. You will most likely find that over time the types of books that you read change, as your views on the world and yourself alter and shift, and you find answers to specific questions you subconsciously need to know the answers to.

**Write your life story in 50 words or less**

I learnt this activity from a creative writing teacher and found that it worked brilliantly. It’s a fantastic way to combine creativity with confronting your life, and the various changes that you need to make to
it. Think for about five minutes about your life so far. Then put your thoughts and feelings into simple and direct words, they don’t even need to be put into sentences if you don’t want them to be. This technique helps you to think about who you are as a person, and where you have come in your life. You will find that the real truths of your life will stand out. You will hopefully then be able to take steps to make any changes or improvements to your life that need to be done.

**Example:**


(21 words)

**Produce a family newsletter**

This is a brilliant way to bring your family closer together. It’s easy, cheap, fun and a wonderful way of keeping in touch with family who may be living long distances away or overseas, as if saved on a computer the newsletter could be emailed. It can be handwritten or produced on a computer. It really doesn’t matter how, all that does matter is that you make sure that every family member contributes. Children could draw pictures or write a short poem, teenagers could write articles, parents could write something about the family history or the possibilities of what to eat for dinner! The list of possibilities is endless. Be creative and create something unique and special.

**Keeping a dream journal**

Keeping a dream journal is an easy and compelling way of finding out what is worrying us. All you need is a pad of paper and a pen placed by your bed. Every morning as soon as you wake up, jot down what you can remember from your dream. If you cannot remember anything then put down the first thought that came into your head. Alternatively, you could set your alarm for a few hours after you lay down to sleep, and then when you wake up to switch off your alarm, write down what you had been dreaming about and then go back to sleep. It is important that you keep the journal for at least a month before attempting to make some sense of what’s been written. There are many books available on reading
your dreams. Search them out and look up what has been happening in yours. It is a possibility that you might be able to find solutions; therefore, you will be able to take steps towards dealing with the underlying problems.

**Better breathing**

I struggle greatly with my breathing at times of stress, and Mum taught me some important methods of ‘controlling my breathing’. When we are stressed we breathe fast, which makes us feel stressed, which makes us breathe fast and so continues the stressed-out cycle. Take a few minutes and try some deep breathing. Below are two tips to use, which will help to calm your nervous system and decrease your stress. Do these whenever you find that you are starting to feel tense, fidgety or stressed.

- Exhale for a count of six, inhale for a count of three and repeat for about three minutes.
- Breathe in through your nose, for a count of five, and out through your mouth for a count of ten. Repeat this ten times.

**Getting a good night’s sleep**

Believe it or not getting a good night’s sleep is a fantastic stress buster. Below are some tips on how to achieve a good nights sleep, and hopefully many more in the future.

- Eat foods which contain carbohydrates before going to bed, such as peanut butter on wholemeal toast.
- Drink a milky drink such as Horlicks, Ovaltine, or hot chocolate, which are perfect for inducing sleep as they contain both milk and malt.
- Play a relaxing CD, sometimes after a hectic day if can be difficult to sleep in a quiet room.
- Keep a ‘sleep book’. This is a notebook in which you write down all your worries before you go to sleep and don’t open it again until the morning when you are fresh and awake, ready to face the day ahead.
Handling And Expressing Your Emotions

It’s a well-known fact that every one of us feels anger at some point, but do you handle it well, or bottle it up inside? Below are some tips, which may help you to express how you are feeling when you are angry, down or just plain miserable.

- If someone has irritated, hurt or upset you, try to say so to them directly (there is no need to be rude) something along the lines of; what you said/did hurt my feelings/annoyed me. Try to be direct and express your feelings when you very first feel them.
- Don’t try to blame other people for how you feel, and remember that it is OK to feel anger and frustration.
- When you feel like releasing your anger in a physical way, do not hit anyone! It’s perfectly fine to hit a cushion or punch bag, but not another person.
- Try not to feel guilty about feeling angry or upset. Remember, it is human nature to have these feelings.

**Anger is not constructive if:**
- You bottle it up.
- You continually deny that it exists.
- You don’t direct it at the right person.
- You turn it against yourself i.e. under-eating, over-exercising
Suggested Guidance To Recovery Sheets

These sheets have been designed and produced to help encourage the positive thinking that assists recovery. Often, it can be a great help and support to see specific tasks set in writing and in an orderly format, i.e., a bar chart, as it makes the task a lot more real instead of just being thoughts swimming around in your mind. Plus, as an anorexic, it is not uncommon to forget. Therefore, it would help to have sheets as a reminder.

A number of these sheets may need to be filled in more than once or twice, for as you progress with your recovery, your viewpoints and tasks will shift, alter and change completely.

These sheets have been designed to detach when and if you do indeed need them. They are also photocopy friendly, so do not hesitate to print off, if the need arises.
Sheet No. 1 Action Plan

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<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<td><strong>Identified Problems (Physical, motivational, etc)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Goals For The Future</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation /Outcomes (Date to evaluate)</strong></td>
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# Sheet No. 2 Chart Of Progress

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<td>Progress Chart</td>
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<td>The Advantages Of Not Changing</td>
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Chapter 35

Useful Contacts, How To Find Help, And Recommended Books

Listed in this chapter are telephone numbers and contact addresses for associations, which can provide you with help, support and guidance. These people know their business, and will provide you with information and reassurance, weather you are anorexic, a member of family or a friend.

There are also a number of highly recommended books about Anorexia.

• Eating Disorders Association (EDA)
The EDA is a nationwide organisation, aiming to offer help, advice and support to sufferers and their families. They offer a telephone helpline, website, run self-help groups, send newsletters, reply to letters and provide information, advice and resources. Write, email or phone them for further details.

Website: www.edauk.com
Email: helpmail@edauk.com talkback@edauk.com
Address:
Sackville Place
44 Magdalen Street
Norwich
Norfolk NR3 1JE

Youthline Up To 18:
0845 6341414 Monday–Friday 8.30am–8.30pm Saturday 1pm–4.30pm

• Childline
Childline is a confidential, sympathetic helpline for young people, and is active 24 hours a day, so whenever you feel the need to vent, pick up the phone. They are there to help you.
Helpline: 0181-514 1177
MIND Redcar And Cleveland
MIND are a team based in the North East of England, and help with all sorts of mental health issues from Anorexia to depression.
 Helpline:
 01642-2996054
 Leaflet:
 Understanding Eating Distress

Contact Details
Website: www.lifeafteranorexia.com
My website offers guidance on anorexia and how to help yourself on the road to recovery, as well as providing an opportunity to see your work published on the site. It offers support with weight gain, and good eating. There are details from articles featuring me and my work, a guest book where you can leave your own thoughts about the site and much, much more.

Rosemary and Tony’s contact details –
Email: parents@lifeafteranorexia.com
- **Anorexia And Bulimia: How to help**  
  By Marilyn Duker and Rodger Slade  
  Published by the Open University Press  
  *This is a very straight forward, to the point book, explaining everything that you need to know about anorexia from the first symptoms, right through to recovery, using easy to understand language. It is the book that has assisted me more than any other book on the road of my recovery.*

- **Anorexia Nervosa Finding The Life Line**  
  By Patricia M. Stein R.D., MS., MA. Barbra C. Unell  
  Published by Comp Care Publishers  
  *This book provides insights into the worlds of recovering anorexics, and has a large emphasis on Anorexia in males which is more often than not forgotten about. It also offers clear and vital information and lists of practical prevention guidelines for parents.*

- **Anorexia And Obesity A Sense Of Proportion**  
  By Peter Dally and Joan Gomez  
  Published by Faber And Faber  
  *The authors of this book have both had vast experience in the treatment of eating disorders, combine acute, psychological analysis with much needed advice and information. It is a must read for both parents and sufferers.*
Epilogue

A family is an extremely important part of life. Don’t lose touch with yours, whatever happens. And the same applies to your friends too. Losing touch is possible even when you are together in the same house. You can become completely detached from one another when you have an unwanted guest to stay.

Spend time with your family, share jokes and laughs, share your love and affection with each other, and enjoy life together. Grit your teeth when the going gets tough, and plough through your problems to come through triumphant and happy. Your family is valuable. Your family is irreplaceable. Remember this.

The same applies to your life. You only live this life once. You only have one family to live it with. Make the most of every day, every minute, every moment that you have together and every moment that you, as a person has on this planet. There isn’t time to worry about eating an ice cream or sleeping longer than usual. Enjoy your ice cream and enjoy your sleep. Live for the moment. Live for you.

Don’t let an anorexia demon dictate how you live your life. Live this one life as you. It’s your body, your mind, your spirit, your soul, and your life and you have to make your own decisions about how you live it.

We sincerely hope that this book, which has shown you visions of our daily lives as a family travelling the road to recovery together, will help you whether you are a sufferer, a carer, a sibling or a friend and help you on your journey and to success.

Remember, help is all around you. Reach out and someone will take your hand to guide you and to guide the ones you love.

Katie, Rosemary, Tony, Anthony,
Penny and Sam Metcalfe