

It's difficult to talk about my experience with an eating disorder in an orderly fashion because there is nothing orderly about the experience of an eating disorder. People in the health industry like to say that eating disorders are mental diseases that have physical effects. This always seemed to me like a pathetic excuse anorexics used to justify their vain obsession with being thin. I was used to a world in which all the older females I knew dieted (or pretended to) because they were unsatisfied with their bodies. It was only the really superficial ones who took this discontent to the extreme and were given a legitimate medical diagnosis for such behavior. Girls who starved themselves did not deserve my sympathy because they were just looking for attention in the most ridiculous way.

Ridiculous is an understatement. No one can fully understand the complete irrationality and desperation of an eating disorder unless she/he, or someone close to her/him, has gone through it her/himself. Even my parents, who underwent with me the torture of battling my anorexia everyday, still get exasperated with my behavior from time to time. My close family and friends deal with the disease by remembering that no one conquers anorexia. It takes the obnoxious form of a half-life function. The irrational tendencies can be reduced gradually through a diligent, daily battle, but they never go away completely. Unhealthy compulsions and behaviors that are the root of eating disorders must be fought everyday by the "recovered" anorexic trying her/his hardest not to relapse. That is why I can't ignore the fact that I am anorexic, no matter how hard I try.

Resisting definition by my relationship to food helped my eating disorder develop in the first place. I had always been a normal weight for my height of 5'5" without ever seriously worrying about what I put into my body. I naturally tended toward fruit and vegetables so despite my huge appetite, I never noticed big changes in my weight and hardly ever stepped on a scale to check, either. Upon entering high school the unwanted effects of puberty began to accompany the exciting chest and hips that I had developed during middle school. Without changing my eating habits, my weight began to catch up and eventually surpass my figure. I gradually took on the fat girl mentality surrounded by my thin friends, and began to suck in my stomach and get self-conscious in tight clothing. A nascent negative body-image began to justify everything that went wrong in my life. Not only did I chalk up the minimal attention that guys paid me compared to my friends to my weight, but I sulked about my disgusting body when my friends or teachers were mean to me. I knew that if I had the figure of an eleven-year old boy- no hips, no chest, no fat- everyone would love me unconditionally. The world would be mine. This behavior perpetuated itself for two years as I gained more weight, until I stood at 145 pounds the winter of my junior year in high school. The weight had come on so quickly, but I felt like I had been the fat girl for my whole life. I drew a cartoon picture of what a skinny me would look like and meditated for about an hour about how easy my life would be then. I would be the best field hockey player on my team, I would get straight A's effortlessly, I would get the guy I had been in love with for a year, and I would be blissfully happy—and skinny. Who could ask for more?

My sister had put on the dreaded freshman 15 that fall at college, and she and her roommate decided to join Weight Watchers together to shed those pounds. My sister and I are very close and I was so excited for her and envious that she had the will power to go for it. I still did not put all my miserable energy about my body into action and just continued to sulk until my sister came back for winter break. She claimed she had only

lost ten pounds, but she looked like a different person to me. The whole week everyone gushed about her appearance and how great she looked and I became so jealous that I decided to do it too. My sister and I are similar in so many ways, and her example finally pushed me into action. If she could lose weight, I could certainly do it. On her last night home we went out to dinner as a family and I had her instruct me on how to order from the menu according to the Weight Watchers plan. I ended up with a piece of grilled chicken and a slice of tomato on my plate. Suffice it to say that I was in a bad mood that entire dinner. I hated to restrict.

But with each update over the phone of my sister's continued success, I gained more hope in my ability to lose weight. I stuck to the Weight Watchers diet, using my sister's advice and literature to follow the plan in a healthy way. After about two weeks I realized that I had lost about three pounds and I couldn't believe it. Looking back, it suddenly seemed so easy. If I could lose three pounds by making a few adjustments to my excessive diet, then I could definitely lose the full 20 pounds that it would take for me to get back to a healthy 125 pounds. After that initial victory, I was off and running. I have always pushed myself to do my best and beaten up on myself when I don't finish things completely. If a task was presented to me there was no question as to whether or not I would finish it. If I didn't outperform myself I would never forgive myself. It was the same with my diet. Weight Watchers scales all foods on a "points" system, and for my height, I was supposed to have a minimum of 18 points a day in order to lose weight. Once the first few pounds came off, I assured myself that I could eat about 15 points a day and make the rest disappear faster. 15 went to 13, which dropped to 10, and I started to get comments from people at school. "Wow, B., are you losing weight? You look really good!" "Ok, tell me your secret, I'm so jealous. I can never diet!" It got to the point where I couldn't go through a day at school without someone remarking on how great I looked, and I started to get performance anxiety. I was no longer losing the weight for myself—everyone was watching me! Everyone noticed when I lost a pound, I was convinced. If I wanted to continue getting all this great, positive attention, I would have to impress them and speed up the weight loss. So my 10 points a day dropped to 8 and I was in fierce competition with myself to eat less each day than I had the day before.

The weight was flying off of me and as a result, I didn't get my period that March because I had lost about 10 pounds in a few weeks. But that's ok, I looked good, and everyone was saying so. An old friend who I had always considered so skinny came up to me one day and whispered with a grin, "You know you're going to be a size 4 in pants soon, if you already aren't." For a girl who had suffered at an unflattering size 8/10 in pants for two years, she might as well have told me I won the lottery. Soon enough, a sort of manic excitement swept over me and I knew that I no longer needed food at all. I started out the week with half a grapefruit and then subsisted on gum, coffee, and water for the next five days before I would put another piece of food in my body. Flipping through my food diary that I had recently started was an addiction. I could chart the progression of my diet from 18 to 0 points and I was so proud of my will power.

I kept getting attention from everyone and after 2 months I had lost 20 pounds. I had a whole new wardrobe—I was a size 4! My dreams had come true, but if I could be 120 pounds, why couldn't I be 115 pounds? I would look so much better. The relationship between my weight and my appearance and self worth was completely inverse. The less I weighed, the happier and prettier I would be. People who had ignored

me every day of my life started to pay me significantly more attention and I knew it was because of my weight. I was just an irresistible 120 pound girl, and that became my defining quality. Forget about the community service I did, my dedication to academics, the clubs I was involved with, my love of drawing and painting, my knack for writing, my dedication to my friends and family. I was what the scale said. That was all that mattered, and 120 pounds was no longer good enough.

So I brought my program to the extreme. I was sustaining my coffee-gum diet for five-day stretches and was making a habit of collapsing every afternoon. Walking through the halls at school made my heart skip and I avoided stairs because they made me out of breath. After a minor fainting spell at school I explained to the nurse that I had always had a weak heartbeat and I probably just wasn't drinking enough water for the intense May heat. The condition of hunger was completely eradicated from me, so I was able to concentrate all my energy on battling these physical effects of my starvation. I would explain them away and ignore them by congratulating myself for having such great willpower. Each day I woke up my first thought was of how many days I had gone without food and plan how many more I could go before I indulged in a half grapefruit to tide me over for the next week. Eating out was way too complicated, which I realized after I ordered a salad at work with vinegar and the delivery man came with lettuce drenched in Balsamic vinaigrette dressing. I had to run to the bathroom to hold back my tears. I knew I would have to eat a couple bites to satisfy the suspicions of my coworkers and that would mean gorging myself on highly-caloric dressing. From then on I never ate at work, or at school, or at home, and everyone would shut up when I told them that I had just had a huge meal or was saving my appetite for dinner. I stopped drinking on the weekends with my friends because alcohol and its calories were completely out of the question. Eventually I was too weak to go out anyway.

My period was still gone and had been replaced by huge bruises that covered my arms and legs. My parents finally started to express their concern so I no longer could gush to them about my "diet." Instead I called my sister to tell her how much weight I was losing. The day she came home for summer vacation we went out shopping and I tried to hide my inability to make it up the steps to the store. As we tried on clothes I quickly ran out of energy and decided not to bother with all the things I had picked out. I was never satisfied with my appearance anyway. Everything I wore either accentuated the remaining curves I had or it was too loose and I worried that people couldn't tell underneath all the clothes that I had lost weight. It wasn't like me to not want to shop, and finally my sister asked if I was okay after I repeatedly had to stop midsentence because I had run out of breath. I could deny and deny to everyone else, but I struggled to not cry out to my sister and tell her exactly what I was doing to myself. I resisted, though, and after our failed shopping expedition she decided to grab a bite to eat. I told her I wasn't hungry and she demanded I get something. That's when I just broke down and told her that I hadn't eaten anything since my half a grapefruit 5 days earlier. After four months of privately abusing myself I wanted a shocked reaction and I got one. But it was quickly followed by anger. "You cheated!" she kept repeating. "I thought you were following a diet. I thought you were being healthy. So what if you lost all this weight. You don't deserve to. You did it all wrong. I can't believe you. Look what you've done to yourself." I thought I would tell the truth and feel an amazing release. I just wanted someone to hold me and tell me what I wished was true: that it didn't really matter what I

weighed. People would love me anyway. But all I got was anger and I knew that the cycle would never end because I would never be good enough to just be who I am.

My sister made me eat a full meal at the restaurant- a massive chicken sandwich with all the fixings and sauces. I hadn't tasted real food in weeks and my stomach was repulsed by the invasion. When we got home she made me tell my mom everything and her reaction was similar. My mom felt betrayed due to all the lies I had been feeding her about eating. She knew she could never trust me again and decided that my diet would no longer be in my control. I appeased her by saying I would go on the all-protein diet that my dad was currently on. He had always been naturally thin but had dropped even more weight on the magical diet in which he ate unlimited amounts of meat, eggs and cheese. The week I switched over to food my body went crazy. I missed a week of school and lay in bed completely immobile. I couldn't make my body work even though I was finally feeding it. Eventually I gained back my strength but my compulsive eating habits perpetuated. Instead of eating minimal carbohydrates at every meal as the diet instructed, I shunned all foods that contained a carbohydrate. Despite the weird looks I got at school, I brought a baggie of rolled up turkey to the cafeteria or bought a premade sandwich and meticulously selected and cleaned off all the meat inside, discarding the rest. But boy was I eating! And I maintained my low weight, so everyone backed off. When my doctor spoke to my mom about looking into treating my eating disorder, my mom reproached her for accusing me of having any problem at all. "I told you how much she eats. That is ridiculous. She does not have a problem." When my mom got a phone call from my camp that summer informing her that I had mysteriously passed out, she had to put additional effort into her denial.

But I continued to eat all summer- eggs and cheese and tuna salad. My cholesterol went through the roof and my friends started to get uncomfortable eating around me, but my weight stayed low. During the hectic homecoming week of my senior year I decided to join a local gym. In that same week I lost about three pounds without even trying, and the nagging obsession that I had kept to a minimum all summer came roaring out of its confines. I stayed on the diet but cut down my portions by about half and completely eradicated high-fat proteins from my diet. The pared-down diet and crazed workouts at the gym caused my weight to drop even further. I would check the scale several times a day and it always told me what I wanted to hear. At our big school dance I decided I was ready to go all out and wore the equivalent of a bikini top to show off my rock-hard, flat abs. People told me I looked like Christina Aguilera (oh, what a waif- now I had really hit the big time!), and right then I knew I had to look better than her or I would have lost all the weight for nothing. I no longer had a goal weight. I just knew that there were still a couple freshmen girls in my high school who were thinner than I was and I would have none of that. I didn't care what kind of body type genetics had cursed me with- I could be a size 0. My bra size had already shrunk from a D to a small B. I could rewrite biology and years of pain and inadequacy with each piece of food that I resisted.

As I dropped more weight, an eating Gestapo started to form in order to thwart my attempts. There were enemies at every corner and I had to anticipate the deception they had planned for me. My mom no longer let me go to the bathroom alone and my friends made a comment everytime I ordered plain salad without dressing at dinner. The positive comments about my weight had ceased altogether and they were replaced with concerned inquiries and disgusted looks, which couldn't fool me. Everyone was just so

jealous! I couldn't get away from it, though, and everyday at school I would see a little girl walk by who looked thinner than I was. "where did she buy her pants," I would think, "I'm too small for a size 0 and she's definitely thinner than I am. What the hell!?" I would sit in class squeezing my calves and under my arms to make sure they weren't sneaking up and getting fat on me while I was trapped in school. My friends started to annoy me so much that I gave up on going out and stayed in doing schoolwork and exercising every night. It was lonely on top, but I still had a ways to go because none of my clothes actually looked good on me. I knew it was because I was shopping at the wrong stores. If I bought kids clothing they would fit me perfectly and then people would realize I was gorgeous and then I would realize it, too. The disgusted looks would stop if I kept losing. Somewhere there was a magic weight at which I could stop obsessing and everything would fall into place, but I knew I hadn't hit it yet because I was still miserable and getting worse by the day.

One day my friends cornered me and attempted an intervention. They couldn't understand my behavior but they knew I had a problem and they were making me address it. They didn't understand, though, that food and I did not get along. They could eat if they wanted, but the minute I ate I would gain ten pounds. As they talked and I admitted that I obsessed about weight a little, I saw them as I saw every other girl I met: just as thighs. They cried and pleaded with me, and I compared our thighs—their width and shape and assessed how much thinner I was than them just to make myself feel better. I admitted to my parents that I had an obsession with food and weight shortly after and they were horrified at my complete vanity. I was, too, so I shut up about it from then on and continued to obsess to myself until my guidance counselor called my mom to talk about my eating disorder. He had had enough concerned teachers and students come up to him and he had to put it to an end. My parents grudgingly accepted defeat and admitted that their perfect daughter was not so perfect after all. I began to see a therapist who told me at our first meeting that my family's unhealthy dynamic was responsible for all of my problems. My skepticism at this was confirmed when she responded to a listing of my normal diet by saying, "You're not eating a balanced diet- eat twice what you're eating this week," and sent me out the door. Trembling and shocked, I vowed never to return.

My high school then granted me a "scholarship" to receive free treatment from a nationally recognized eating disorders program in the area. After two visits with the program founder and coordinator, I was deemed unfit for treatment and recommended to an inpatient eating disorders program. At that point, neither my parents nor I were willing to ship me off. We traveled further and further from home to find therapy that felt comfortable and safe, but to no avail. The new goal of finding someone who didn't think I was crazy temporarily replaced the state of emergency about making me gain weight.

In the meantime, I became more and more depressed because I knew the jig was up. Everyone now knew that I was a danger to myself, and my charade could not go on much longer. Unfortunately, what seemed to others like a conscious decision to be unhealthy was actually a way of life for me. I knew no other way, and I plunged into full-blown depression. Journal entries during this time articulate my sense of apathy and frustration with my self-hatred:

"I've become completely irrational and I can't be thin enough. I'm jealous of and obsessed and my life is falling to pieces all around me. This is not a joke. I've already sacrificed so much for this eating disorder and I don't know where it will stop. I can't

control it so it basically runs my life. It stripped me of all of my aspirations and the will and determination I once possessed. My motivation is gone along with my physical energy, so the only thing I can manage to do is sleep and walk around like a zombie. I hate myself and I am still only willing to lose weight. Everyone says my next stop is the the inpatient hospital, but at this point that no longer sounds like a threat. It sounds just like the pathetic existence I am experiencing on my own. The guilt I feel for ruining Mom's life with my problem is the worst, though. She's frantically trying to help me but neither of us understands this disease so it's driving her to tears and outbursts on a regular basis. Basically I've just snapped and I'm sitting here watching life pass me by, completely numb... So much is happening in my life – and in the world – and my anorexia is overpowering it all.” (December 28, 2001)

“I've lost complete sight of who I was a year ago, right before this all started. But it could be argued that this breakdown has been in the works for years... I regressed. I can't eat. Breakfast and lunch are okay, but by snack times and dinner, if I wait long enough, the feeling comes creeping back: 'I can't possibly eat; I've gorged myself.' Food is like a defeat and it's also all I want, which makes me feel guilty. I want my family to know I'm skipping snacks and reducing meals. But when they try to make me eat I go crazy and want to cry or punch someone. And I truly feel both ways at once, or subsequently, sometimes. I don't want them to think that everything is okay because I'm eating- because it's not okay. Inside it's getting worse and worse. My mom betrayed me. I thought she understood that it hurts me to eat, that I've died inside. I thought she understood that I was cooperating against my will in the hopes that they would stop the mental anguish. But when I broke down again this week she erupted at me and accused me of wanting to die. I wish I could think normally about food but I tried and I can't do it alone. She wants me to try harder, to push the irrational thoughts away until I can really get some clarity. If it were that easy, I wouldn't have wasted the past month gritting my teeth against the nutritionist's daily food plan. It's not even the food. At one point I had convinced myself that I hated the food I had to eat. Now it's the idea of eating that absolutely makes my skin crawl. I feel like I am lying down and letting myself get beat. Completely defeated. And I know now more than ever that I'll never be happy if I lose more weight because it will never be enough... But then the other feeling grips hold of me and I become mechanical – I revert back to my old habits automatically, knowing their futility. Rather than exercising and skipping meals to feel good, I do it just to keep sane.

I'm praying that the doctors will help me, literally free me, but until then I cannot help it. I can fully admit that I am a shell of what I used to be and I'm helpless. The unfortunate result is that I've also become absolutely weak-willed and comfortably in my dependent and pathetic state. I wouldn't call it self-pity at all, but my condition has certainly taken on a quality of wallowing. Sometimes I tell myself I think I want to die because I don't care so much. But I have to convince myself of that desire because apathy doesn't kill, no matter how severe it is. It just festers and turns over inside you. It makes you suffer without relief, because I have no comfort of suicidal thoughts. I just have disgust for myself and what I've become.

I had the idea yesterday that I would just put up with the eating and work really hard to convince everyone that I'm okay. And I know now that everyone can be easily convinced because they're all wishing so much to believe it's true. Then I could go off to college and be free from all the rules. I could go back to controlling my own diet and

restricting and be as thin as I want to be. But then I realized that I don't want that, which scares me even more...I don't know what I want. This is terrifying. I want to lose weight but I know that's pointless because I'll just want to lose more so then I don't want that. So I want nothing. But I utterly despise the way I am, and there is the dreaded apathy. That's how it turns over and around in agonizing circles and destroys me every day. It's spread to all other areas of my life as well. If I'm not indifferent to my social life, school, college, etc., I'm freaking out about being so indifferent and then that feeling slowly freezes over again by the belief that nothing matters. The futility in my situation is clear...This has calmed me down momentarily. I hope I can find the time to do it again.” (January 4, 2002)

“Now that I've made a contract with my doctors not to restrict anymore, life has lost all its appeal. I have plenty of schoolwork, college work, and housework to keep me busy, but it's all dead. I'm still dreading seeing people and I'm ashamed of my body and myself because now it's only me that I have to blame for gaining weight. The food is flavorless to me and it has no appeal. I've never had more of an urge to restrict but I would be found out in a second. I feel completely dead...Nothing excites me except the fear that I won't get into college. The world seems like such a boring, depressing place and worst of all, I feel completely helpless and without control. The world has given me permission to concentrate on myself for the first time but it's dead. There's nothing to think about. I'm so disgusted I could just not exist. I don't feel like I do.” (January 16, 2002)

“My mind has proven to be very weak...Now it's just the constant feeling that I'm fat that is driving me insane...Today I watched the Golden Globes and all I could do was compare myself to the movie stars and their sculpted bodies and not measure up. I've been going to the gym again to do my recommended walking, and I just get so frustrated watching all the thin people working out while I have to walk on the treadmill because I'm still not allowed to exercise. I've been very cooperative about my food contract, but all bets are off tomorrow. When I go to the gym I'm going to seriously exercise and I'm going back to 800 calories a day. This is the point where my rational, healthy mind is supposed to grab control back and reign in my compulsive thoughts and harmful behavior. I'm supposed to want to feel good and healthy. But I just feel fat and worthless...At this point, getting my period back is not a concern. I cannot gain any weight. I won't be able to live with myself...I'm already thoroughly disgusted with myself and I can't function normally.” (January 20, 2002)

At this point the school had recommended me for homeschooling with a tutor so that I could keep up with the curriculum while attending frequent therapy sessions with a motley crew of doctors, nutritionists and internists that my family had finally settled on. I returned to school a few months later as a changed person, convinced that I was able to handle the world and live life to the fullest. From that point until the summer, I did just that and everyday confirmed the fact that was fully recovered. Until my parents and doctors reminded me that I was still severely underweight and needed to put weight on before I went off to my first year of college. The intense weight-gain plan challenged, and eventually shattered my false sense of recovery.

I felt so relieved yet so scared all at once. Friday- my last day at the Hospital. I had been in the eating disorders program in this children's hospital for two weeks and I

was finally getting out and going home. I was going home to my house and my bed. Comforts I hadn't experienced for months and months because I had been at Dartmouth since early January when winter term began, and then went home for one night, only to get vitals done at the Hospital, be imprisoned there for two days, and then rushed by ambulance straight to a nearby medical center. It had been a long 3 weeks since I left Dartmouth, and I did not feel like myself at all. I doubted that I would ever feel like myself again. Too much had happened at the hospital for me to process at one time. Although I kept my journal handy and tried to record all the bizarre goings-on of the eating disorders unit each day, I realize now that I was numb the entire time. I wrote out of habit and out of a desire for comfort, but I didn't allow myself to really feel my fear or loneliness. I couldn't believe the whole time that I was actually being treated as an inpatient for anorexia-bulimia. The two days spent at the Hospital with a pink, squishy bag marked "lipid solution" being pumped into my veins along with potassium, water, and other nutrients seemed absolutely surreal. I didn't take the panic and chaos seriously. How could I?

I had agreed to go home from Dartmouth on medical leave under largely calm circumstances. The Sunday night after a busy weekend of performances with a campus group, heavy drinking at the frats, partying all night, and absolutely no eating, I was having a conversation with my boyfriend. My parents had just called to find out how I was doing as far as eating and staying safe, and I confessed that I was finding it very difficult to eat at all. This was very true. I was barely making it through each day between my frenetic work and activity schedule and my lack of sleep or nourishment. That week I had started to descend into a deep lethargy in which breathing was a huge labor and I nearly passed out every time I stood up. I would shrink at the bottom of large staircases and coach myself on the way up that I could make it. The freezing Hanover winter made me cry every single day when I woke up knowing I would have to brave mighty gusts of biting wind that had the chance of knocking me right over. But I couldn't complain because I knew deep down that I had a hand in all of my suffering. If I would just eat during the day, I could slowly regain my strength and be able to function as a normal human being. But I also knew that if I ate I would gain massive amounts of weight without a doubt. Starving myself was no longer helping me drop pounds as rapidly as it had before. My body only became greatly fatigued and my skin started to hang off of my bones. In my opinion I didn't look anorexic. I looked flabby and gray. My face was gray and sad and sick looking. But I wanted to look like the skinniest girl on campus. I was upset that my cheeks were sinking in and my eyes were drooping more and more each day without a comparable drop in my weight. I had been just hovering around 105 pounds.

Each time I went to visit the Dick's House dietician, I prayed that all my efforts to lose weight had paid off. When they did, I would quietly rejoice and finally be able to breathe, after several days of anticipation and fear of the menacing, sliding scale in her office. She would look at me disapprovingly and ask what happened and I already had all my answers ready and cued up for her. One week I couldn't eat because I didn't have the time between classes and running to volunteer activities and then running to rehearsals. Another week I didn't like the limited menu being served at Novack, where I had promised to stop between classes and grab a midmorning snack. The next week something backfired when I attempted to eat the snacks that I had promised the dietician I



would bring with me in my bookbag around campus. And there was the nagging problem that the food I was eating made my stomach hurt. That could not be avoided. If I ate too fast, if I ate too much, my stomach would swell and bulge and harass me. The food wouldn't just digest as it did in other people's stomachs. It sat and collected right at the base of stomach, creating a huge mound that made walking, talking, moving, even breathing, largely impossible. Then I would purge. If I wanted to go on with my days I would have to purge and there was no way around it. I couldn't sit through an entire class with a pile of undigested food in my stomach. The dietician didn't seem to understand that, but she continued to give me a scolding look and hand me a diagram of what a normal diet looks like. I had received about 10 of those daily nutrition breakdowns Xeroxed onto bright, yellow paper. They had all been recycled promptly after their receipt because I knew what they said and I knew that it was all bullshit. Healthy human beings should eat a balanced diet each day, incorporating all the food groups and regular intervals. Growing young adults required even more nutrition, and then there was the extra food added for a sick, growing young adult like myself. Did the dietician expect me to walk into her office and accept this information without a fight? Was she implying that I was a normal, growing young adult like the rest of the students at Dartmouth? How could she actually believe that? Didn't she see that I wasn't like other kids? I was different in that I didn't need the food. The food only slowed me down in pursuing my dreams of being liked and accepted by everyone. The dietician just didn't realize that I would lose everything if I put a piece of that disgusting, demoralizing food into my body. Not only would I gain weight immediately and look like a slob, but even worse, I would know that I had eaten that food. I would know that I had succumbed to the temptations of indulgence. My body didn't need the food and it certainly didn't deserve the food.

My goal was to be perfect, without one weakness or flaw, because I was convinced that perfection guaranteed me acceptance by everyone I met. Apparently my other merits weren't merits at all. The one thing that counted in my life, the one thing that made me special and worth anyone else's time, was my unbelievable self-denial. I didn't have problems, I liked everyone, I had time for everyone, I didn't need sleep, I didn't need food, I didn't need emotions, I didn't need anything! I was around solely for other people's benefit. Did you need someone to talk to? I'm there, until all hours of the night. Did you need someone to cover for your shift at the community service project? No problem at all. I have a little work to do, so I can always do it later. Did someone say something that offended you? Well, then, let me tell you why you're so much better than that person and let me help you get them back. Do you not like hanging out with so-and-so? Then we just won't associate with him. You say I'm not spending enough time with you? Alright, then, just tell me how I can improve. My alarm clock is too loud? Then I just won't use it. Problem solved. Problem solved. Problem solved. I can make your dreams come true. Just please like me and accept me. The last thing I wanted to be was a burden. All my decisions were determined upon the criteria of whether or not they would affect anyone else. If they ran the risk of even slightly bothering anyone, I would not choose those routes. If they could make someone happy, though, I would jump for the chance to please. If these people who I pleased saw my nourishing my body, they would know that I was a scam. They would probably think, "hey, she's eating food that someone else could be eating!" or, "she's eating right now when she could be helping someone." I knew that I was a waste of space and I needed to make myself useful. I

served a purpose in each of my friends' lives. For one friend I was a therapist and the only one who would actually listen to her talk about her woes for hours on end. I humored her repetitive stories and worries and monologues. For my boyfriend I was the ideal girlfriend. He could walk around campus with me on his arm and get envious looks from other guys. I gave him status, affection, attention, and best of all, I never gave him a hard time. When he stopped by, I always made myself available, and when he had other things to do, I never made a fuss. When he professed his love for me, I professed it back. When he talked about other girls, I listened patiently and with marked amusement. I never held him back and I only boosted him up when I could. I smiled and looked cute for his friends, and they loved having me around. I drank like a fish to amuse all the other party animals at Dartmouth. I listened with wonder and awe to all the upperclassmen's stories, advice and insight, playing the role of the naïve, needy freshman to a T. I played so many roles so well that sometimes it became difficult for me to make them all work. If I wanted to please some of my girlfriends by hanging out with them, I risked upsetting James if he wanted to spend time with me at that moment. If I wanted K. to like me, I couldn't really enjoy my relationship with James because she hated him. I wanted to please all my community service clubs, but soon realized that I was spreading myself too thin, because they all wanted 100% percent, and I could only give 33 1/3% to each of them.

The one area I let slide was my academics, because my grades only affected me. I could stay out all day doing for other people, and squeeze my work and study time in from 2AM until I passed out. I prided myself on being so easy-going about my grades. I was so chill with everything. I honestly did feel like a stronger person, because nothing got me down. If something bad happened, I could fix it because there was nothing I wouldn't do to make things right. Harmony was priceless to me. An unlimited amount of patience and self-denial afforded me enough will power to maintain the status quo. In order to make myself invincible, though, I had to deny myself emotions as well. But that fit in perfectly with the anti-enjoyment rule that guided all of my actions. My watch broke. Oh well. I'll just send in a hundred dollars to the company to have it fixed. I failed the economics midterm. Oh well. There is always next term. My best friend is upset with me. Oh well, I can fix this by devoting all of my time to her for the next week. My reserves were inexhaustible and I could handle everything fine.

Sharing directorship of my life with my parents, a therapist in town, and the Dick's House staff threatened the micro-management of my days. Eating didn't correspond with self-denial and strength. Sleep didn't allow me to spend time with everyone in my life. But the guilt that I felt for upsetting the doctors and my family also didn't bode well with my strict rule of pleasing everyone at all costs. So I reverted to lying. That's where all my food excuses to Joanna came from. I was not about to blatantly refuse to follow her meal plan, but I could certainly pretend to try. That would please her and I wouldn't seem disobedient. I wouldn't get the disapproving look from her that I loathed so much. I also begged my boyfriend to not worry about me, because I hated for him to worry and I could handle everything on my own. The last thing I wanted was for my boyfriend to start resenting me for making him take time out of his day to worry. The thought of causing him any discomfort or pain made me very uneasy. I hated upsetting my parents as well, so when we had that final phone call that brought me home, I told them that I would certainly get help for my eating disorder after finals. I just

wanted to finish finals and not be a failure. I had done 2/3 of the work for all of my courses and I wasn't about to drop out now. I also didn't want to end up in a state of emergency that would cause everyone to worry and pay extra attention to me. I could leave quietly once everyone was on spring break and then email them or something to notify them of my absence. Even better, I held on to the idea that I could attend two weeks of treatment during spring break and then return to campus in time for spring term. No one would be inconvenienced and everything would be running according to schedule. It was such an efficient plan.

But my boyfriend had other ideas. When he heard that I was at a high risk of collapsing and experiencing cardiac arrest, he made me call my parents and tell them that I was coming home immediately. The next morning I met with the dietician and found that I had dropped three pounds over the weekend. I was so overjoyed and proud of myself for that new burst of strength and resiliency to pressure and to the temptation to feed myself. She told me that I would have to leave school. I knew it was coming and I consented.

As the goodbyes were underway and the paperwork for medical leave was being filled out, I didn't feel. I was completely numbed out and didn't know what to expect. I just knew that there was no way I could feed myself. If I willingly gained weight, I would be a disgrace and I knew I couldn't go on living my normal life. No one would accept me. But if I didn't eat, then my parents and my doctors and the college would not let me go on living that life anyway. I felt forced into the decision, which was the only way I was willing to get started in recovery.

My lethargy was at its height when I returned home from campus. I still hoped that I seemed sick, because I was feeling so guilty for causing a commotion among my loved ones. If I wasn't sick, then I wasn't about to enter an inpatient facility and have my parents pay for me to get better. I prayed that I was sick so that people wouldn't find out that I was just a waste of space. Luckily, the Hospital staff found me admittable. At first I felt overjoyed that I wasn't just a joke, but after two days of endless napping, painful IV needles being inserted and taken out of my arm, and agonizing exhaustion, I wanted to go home. I started feeling claustrophobic in my uncomfortable hospital bed, and anxious that I wasn't doing anything. I didn't have the energy to lift a finger, but my head was constantly firing off commands that my body couldn't meet in its current state. As hard as I fought and as much as I beat up on myself for being such a waste, I sank further and further into lethargy. When the dizzying parade of doctors, nurses and psychologists finally subsided, I was on my way to the medical center in an ambulance.

As I lay in the medical center lobby on a gurney between two amiable EMS attendants and my frantic mother, I saw a group of teenage girls walk past me with an older woman. They had exited a nearby elevator and immediately noticed me stretched out and waiting for a final destination. Each one stared at me blankly as they drifted by. I looked away self-consciously and then tried closing my eyes, but then strained to watch them after they passed. They were buttoned up in puffy winter coats and jackets as they headed out of the children's hospital lobby through the main automatic doors and down the sidewalk. Compared to their little parade down the street, I felt so conspicuous, so silly. I wanted to jump out of the gurney and march along behind them; to be a normal, functioning teenager, rather than an invalid lying prostrate on a stretcher. But my body wouldn't let me do it, and I feared upsetting the attendants. Little did I know that the girls

were my new friends and they had all experienced similar, or even identical, embarrassment. Together we made up the eating disorder unit of the hospital, and were fated to endure hell together.

B. '06

*[Names have been changed or omitted.]*