

W's Story

It's like peeling lint from the lint trap in the dryer. It's like the deepest freedom after the darkest enslavement. It really is a different world after recovery.

I want to assure you that there is an escape from that hell. The escape is so confusing, so very windy and lonely at times. Sitting in a restaurant, watching someone eat whatever she wants, enjoying it almost unconsciously and pausing to speak to someone, to participate in life, as if the food on her plate wasn't the most important thing in the universe, as if the dilemma with which she was faced at that very moment was not one that would decide her fate as un-indulgent or hedonistic, selfless or selfish, good or bad. Soaking the carpet upstairs with my tears as I gave in to the misery, realizing that I had been wrong about it all but was nevertheless stuck, and wondering how my parents could be downstairs eating dessert yet simultaneously feeling sane and okay about existing. Desperately hiding the fact that I had skipped my run that morning, lest they think I was lazy and decadent, while someone else at the table bragged about getting to sleep in. That is indeed a lonely loneliness: enduring an existence that everyone else seems to be enjoying at least some of the time, knowing that you used to be there with them, and that everyone wants you there again, yet feeling utterly helpless, scared, and all the time guilty.

Recovery came slowly, sometimes in spurts, and much of the time I felt that I was lying to myself. But one thing I can say about what got me there was that it was sincerity: every encounter I had with clarity, with remembering what is important and with the ensuing hope that inevitable followed, began with an outburst of admitting just how badly I was suffering, just how much I wanted to stop suffering, and that deep down I was willing to soak myself in those things that scared me, but that I needed help and, (gasp) attention. Each of those explosions of honesty felt like epiphanies, and I was without fail frustrated when I woke up the next morning still worried about breakfast. But all of those epiphanies eventually added up to a rebirth that is... well, yeah...still in the process.

The overwhelming pain that made up my eating disorder was guilt. Guilt about eating, resting, enjoying, living and liking it, possessing, being fortunate, existing. And then there was the guilt about being vain enough to be anorexic, about needing help, about accepting the help, taking up space and time and money and still needing to take up more. About doing the things I so desperately wanted them to tell me to do but so feared at the same time, about breaking my own rules to follow theirs. Ultimately, a guilt about not being the one who could somehow live only for others-- instead being the one who also lived herself. I wanted them to take away my guilt about eating and, if they were lucky, about resting too, but leave the others right where they were so I could fulfill my plan to save the world and die happy knowing that I had come close to being a martyr. It wasn't until I admitted, trembling, that all the guilts were related, that I got anywhere. Their far-fetched theory that I wasn't obsessed with my body because I was narcissistic, rather that I tended to feel guilty about lots of things, finally sunk into my consciousness. This idea, that I found soooo hard to believe for such a long time, is now unequivocally true for me. One patch of the lint gone.

One of the saddest things I realized upon recovery was the extent to which the world around me also uses what I used for so long. The extent to which everyone is

masochistic and slightly anorexic. The extent to which every human escapes from herself (or himself) through self-deprecation, through punishment, often times through food. I dunno what went wrong in our culture to make us turn to the things to which we turn for relief; to make us look at food as a judgment of character. But now that we're there I suppose the only thing we can do is try to figure out how to get somewhere else, how to get to a more honest place where instead of distracting ourselves with self-questioning obsessions, we distract ourselves with sunsets and watching movies with people we love. Because if there's one thing I've learned, it's that it is an obsession in order to distract, and that it only creates more blinding pain than that from which we were running.

Another sadness that I have discovered is that I am not done. There is still lint residue around the edges, and some days I feel that the trap is completely covered again. These days, however, are so few and infrequent, and soooo much more easily remedied, that I can still call my recovery a success and a miracle. Whenever I start wishing for hunger pains to make me feel like a person who has earned her existence, or thinking that if I lost weight people would know that I don't take up more resources than my share, I can usually become myself again just by writing in my journal and admitting that life is ridiculously hard and that I just don't wanna think about it. And then I giggle, realizing how very blessed I am to have moved from that absolute darkness to this imperfect light.

W.