

# **My Eating Disorder Recovery Story**

## **Prepared for Teleconference for PEDAW 2009 Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009**

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My name is Andrea Roe. I am twenty-six years old and a recovered anorexic and bulimic. I am Austrian, married to a wonderful Canadian and am currently living in Langley, BC, Canada. I struggled with eating disorders for six long years and have finally overcome these deadly diseases—and this is my story...

Many people think that someone who develops an eating disorder, or any other addiction for that matter, has to come from a troubled home. This is not always the case... I have a wonderful family. My parents did a great job raising my siblings and me and there is nothing they could have done differently that would have prevented me from developing an eating disorder.

While I was growing up, food and weight were not a problem for me. I come from a very active and health-oriented family and never had to worry about my weight.

When I was thirteen, I developed acne. I tried everything that was on the market to get rid of my skin problems, but nothing helped. I felt ugly and hated myself. I became depressed and cried a lot. There were times I did not go to school because of my skin—I did not want anyone to look at it.

Only my parents knew about those struggles. My friends had no idea how big a problem my skin really was for me. I was a very sad teenage girl on the inside, but did not show this to other people. I pretended to be strong.

When I was fifteen years old, I had the thought that I had to lose some weight. I was always pretty slim and there was no reason for me to go on a diet, but I thought that if I lost some weight, I would feel better about myself. So I began experimenting with diets, but in the beginning I was still in control of my eating habits. At this point, I did not even know what an eating disorder was.

I actually do not know exactly when my eating disorder started and my dieting ended, I just slipped into it and developed anorexia. Back then, I did not know that I had a problem. I was in denial, and I thought that what I was doing was normal. Now, when I look back, I can see how much I was already into my eating disorder world. I just did not notice it back then.

After graduating at eighteen, I went to university. The idea of me not being beautiful was still stuck in my head. It was at this point that my eating disorder started to take complete control over my life.

I started bingeing in order to try and fill the emptiness inside of me... I ate and ate and ate and just could not stop. I gained weight really quickly, and that scared me. So I turned to bulimia... I felt disgusted with myself and what I was doing. I was very ashamed and embarrassed about my behaviour. For the longest time I did not tell anyone about my problem and struggled on my own, secretly and in silence.

Unfortunately, my eating disorder did not stop there. Not only did it change my relationship with food and weight—it started taking control over my social life as well. I did not go out for a coffee, lunch or dinner with my friends anymore. I felt uncomfortable eating in front of other people. I did not want anyone to force me to eat. I was terrified by the thought of gaining weight. I also feared that they would notice what was going on with me. I was afraid of them asking questions. I did not want anyone to find out what I was doing, and lied a lot to my friends in order to keep my eating disorder a secret. I did not like lying to them but I felt I had no other choice. I thought that if they knew they would not like me anymore and would not want to be friends with me.

During the first couple of years of my struggles, I knew almost nothing about them. I did not learn about them at school, my parents never talked to me about them, and there was not really anything on TV either about eating disorders.

I always thought that one had to be either extremely skinny or extremely heavy in order to have an eating disorder and to be taken seriously, but I was neither. My weight was always somewhere in the normal healthy weight range. And people with eating disorders have to be one of those extremes, do they not?

I eventually hit a point where I could not deny my problem any longer and was finally able to admit to myself that what I was doing was not healthy and that I needed to stop this behaviour. But I did not know what to do or where to start. I felt lost and confused, and thought I was the only one who had this problem.

I had always had a very close relationship with my parents, but my eating disorder forced me to move away from them. I became very reserved and quiet. Sometimes I wanted to tell them about my struggles, but was never sure what to say.

I eventually opened up to my mum. I gave her a book about how to deal with someone who struggles with an eating disorder, and wrote a letter to her as well. I could see how relieved she was that I finally opened up to her, and she took me in her arms and comforted me.

My eating disorder did not get better after my conversation with my mum, but at least I knew now that I had someone to talk to when I needed help, comfort and support.

For the next two years I continued my self-destructive path of bulimia. But no matter how much food I ate, I was not able to fill the emptiness inside me. I wasted so much money on food; I do not even want to think about the amount I spent on my binges. I withdrew socially, even more than I had before; I had spent most of my time alone—either eating, over-exercising, or starving myself. I led a lonely and sad life and had little hope about ever getting better. I spent so much time in my room alone, escaping into the virtual world of my computer. Here I was safe; nobody was able to see me, to judge me or hurt me. I know my parents were very worried about me, but they had no idea how to get close to me. When they tried, it was not successful. I did not let anyone get close. I completely shut them out.

What had happened to me? How could I have let it come that far? I felt completely hopeless. I wanted to get better and be happy and healthy again...but I did not even know where to start my journey towards recovery. Besides, I was not even sure if there was such a thing as “recovery.”

My turning point came when I met a wonderful man from Canada who is now my husband. We met in London, England, and it was love at first sight. We immediately felt a special bond, and it seemed as if we had known one another for a long time already.

In the beginning, I did not tell him about my eating disorder. I was afraid that if he found out he would leave me, and I did not want him to. I was afraid of being alone again. When I was around him, I would eat normally, and it felt good. For the first time in years I felt “normal.” I decided to move to Canada with him, we moved together, very quickly, which, in the long run, really helped me with my eating disorder.

I still binged, but I was not able to do it as often because I only binged when I was alone, and, since Brandon and I lived together, we spent a lot of time together.

It took me a couple of months until I was ready to tell him about what was going on with me. He had not even noticed and seemed quite surprised. Brandon took me in his arms, gave me a kiss and said that we would get through this together, and that he would always be there for me and do whatever it took to get me healthy again. It felt as if a heavy weight had been lifted off my shoulders. He believed in me, in us, and he believed that together we would be able to beat this disorder. For the first time in years, I felt, just maybe, recovery was possible for me.

My journey to recovery was difficult at times. I had to take it one day after the other. I had setbacks; I had a lot of them. Every time I fell, I got up again and continued on my journey. I did my best not to look back, but forward. My husband was always there for me and with me, every step of the way.

Today, I am healthy. I am recovered. Food and weight are not an issue for me anymore. I am no longer obsessed with clothing sizes and my weight. I am comfortable in my body and learnt to love my curves—which I hated for so long.

I honestly consider myself lucky to be still alive. Eating disorders are something very dangerous and every year many people die as a result of them. I abused my body for so many years and am thankful that it has not given up on me.

I want you to know that it **IS** possible to recover. Please do not give up on yourself. You **CAN** get through this! I know—I did it, and so can you! Your eating disorder did not just happen overnight, it started a long time ago, before you first binged, purged or starved yourself. It will take time to get better—one step at a time. Eating disorders are not simply about food and weight. They are an attempt to use food and weight to deal with emotional problems. An eating disorder is just a symptom of something deeper going on inside of you. Food and your body are not the enemy, even though it sometimes feels like it. You can learn to enjoy your life again. I urge you to speak out and get help—yes, help is out there!

All the best,

*Andrea*

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