

My battle with anorexia began as nothing more than a desire to begin living a healthier life style. Even after nearly a year of self-starvation, blackouts, and fits of inexplicable rage, I was in utter disbelief when I found myself being assessed by the Eating Disorders Program at the Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH) in April 2007. I had taken the time that morning to apply a thick layer of concealer onto the dark bags under my eyes. I had put on a ridiculous amount of blush to cover my grayish skin tone, and I had layered my clothing so as to appear healthier than the one hundred and four pounds I was carrying on my 5'9" frame.

When I met the pediatrician at the ACH clinic, I tried to work up the energy to appear happy as I answered the same questions I had been asked for months by my family doctor about my eating habits. The rest of that day is very blurry. I was admitted to the ACH due to my weak vital signs, and was awaiting a transfer to the inpatient unit for eating disorders at the Foothills Hospital. As reality began to set in I became very upset with the program. I was unable to accept the fact that I was incredibly sick and would, in fact, die if I continued on the path I was on.

I was moved by ambulance to the inpatient unit four days later and found myself in a room with three other women all suffering from eating disorders. They varied in age. I was the youngest at seventeen, whereas the oldest woman was in her forties. They were all very welcoming but it did not change my hatred for the situation I found myself in. I felt I did not belong there. I hated the group therapy that we were to attend twice a day but within a week I began to try to participate and make small steps towards recovery. The main objective of the therapy was to identify the issues that had led to us using an eating disorder as a coping method. Uncovering my deeply hidden issues was painful, but there was always a staff member available to confide in and help me to realize that facing my problems would help bring me clarity and strength. Another important aspect of the inpatient program was the family therapy that helped us to make huge strides towards creating a healthier home environment for me to recover in and enabled us to communicate more effectively and build stronger relationships.

I was discharged from the in-patient program after three-and-a-half of the longest weeks of my life. There were still many struggles ahead as I learned to eat with my family again and to listen to my emotional and physical needs that I had ignored for so long. I still attend individual and family therapy as an outpatient and am learning to love my body, hold on to my constant support system, and discover my own identity and inner strength. The eating disorder program has offered me every service I could have asked for in my recovery. The professionals I was connected with through the program (which included a pediatrician, a psychiatrist, psychologists, nurses, dieticians, physical therapist and occupational therapist) wouldn't let me fall even when that was what I so desperately wanted initially. It was the program, which I so deeply hated in the beginning, which ended up saving my life.