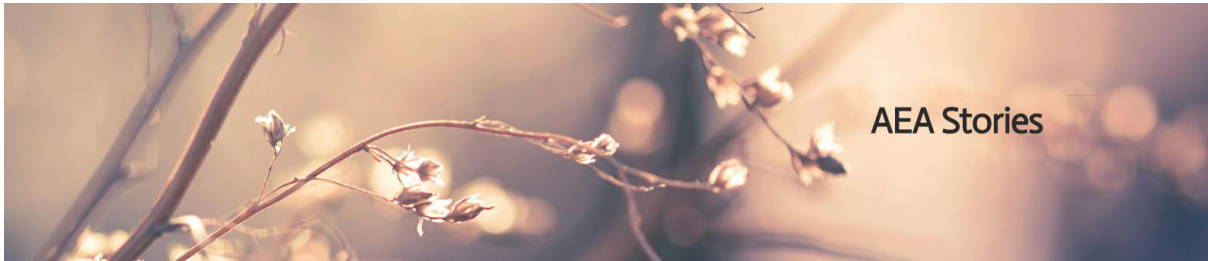


A LIFE BEYOND FOOD & ADDICTION

I don't remember being obsessed with food when I was very young, the way I was to become. I remember starting to eat at any opportunity I could get. I would arrive home early at meal times to check what was in the pans. Saturday afternoons were spent baking, while my friends were out shopping. I went on to develop a love for raw cake batter and butter icing and I would make it up when I was desperate for food. Once I started getting money, I would buy sweets and secretly eat them. Meal times were awful, I never felt fulfilled. My brothers would pass their leftovers to me, laughing as they gave me their plates. I hated that they did that, but I couldn't stop myself from eating. My Mum would get on at me about being fat. My Dad offered to buy me a new wardrobe of clothes if I lost weight. I just couldn't do it.

By the time I was 18 I was so fat and miserable. I read an article in a magazine about bulimia. It was probably warning against the dangers, but I just remember getting excited at finding a way to eat and not get fat. I couldn't do it at first but I persevered and in time I became chronically underweight. By this time I was also using alcohol for that sense of ease and comfort. Life became a living hell. Psychologists and counsellors, nothing helped. Drinking, eating and bulimia were escalating. My life was in chaos, my relationships were suffering, work was suffering and I was obsessed with food, throwing up and drinking. I was a mother of a young child, with two stepchildren and in a senior position in an alcohol rehabilitation unit with associated homeless projects. None of these responsibilities stopped me.

I was losing control of my life. I ended up in prison as a result of a blackout and when I was released I swore I would sort my life, stop drinking, eating and throwing up, and yet there I was that night drunk, eating and throwing up. I didn't know how it had happened. I had lost my home, my job and my son was removed from my care while I was living in a bail flat. My brother came looking for me with a Social Worker as I hadn't met my son, to find me drunk with food all over the flat and burn marks on the carpet from dropping hot trays of food. He stayed with me until I woke up and shouted at me "you are one step away from a bag lady". I had some sort of spiritual experience because I had a realisation and knew he was right. That day trembling I got myself showered and I knew I had to do something. I was scared. I couldn't stop. I knew people from AA through my job and I decided to go to a meeting.



What a relief to admit I was an alcoholic, even though I didn't fully understand what it meant. Over time I was able to share that I couldn't stop eating and throwing up and was directed to another fellowship. I opened a meeting, sitting on my own for years keeping the doors open but had no recovery. I knew what was wrong with me, but I didn't have any kind of solution. I wasn't drinking but I couldn't stop eating or throwing up. I was throwing up several times a day and still getting fatter. I travelled around Britain attending conventions, looking for the solution. I went to meetings abroad looking for the solution and nothing worked.

Almost five years ago, I travelled to England for another convention and met a woman I had met several years before when she was just a regular woman in the fellowship. This time she was very different, she was slim for a start and I was attracted to that. When she spoke there was something about her, she was so different. I wanted what she had. She asked me to call her. Two weeks later I was heading for my kitchen to take my life, my partner told me she was so scared and for the first time, thought she would need to call for psychiatric help. Walking to the kitchen I screamed at God "if you are there, help me". A thought came into my head "phone that woman". I phoned her, she became my sponsor and she showed me how to live in the solution. She asked me if I was ready to go to any lengths and I was. She helped me to understand about addiction and helped me to put down other things, not just food. It was a relief. I started taking actions that I had never previously done, including phoning sober people in this fellowship and attending 12 step meetings every day. I was forty six and for the first time since I was eighteen I wasn't throwing up or binge eating. It wasn't easy to start with, but over time everything has got better.

What I have discovered is that I came to believe that my sponsor was a power greater than me and over time I have come to believe in a God personal to me. This belief could only be found when I started incorporating the 12-step programme into my life and doing what was suggested. I have come to understand that food is not my problem; my problem is that I feel and think too much. Take away the food and I feel miserable, until I have to eat again. I needed to find a power greater than me and I do that through the 12-step programme of this fellowship and taking the actions suggested. Every day I am thankful that AEA has given me a life I could never have imagined.