

A MAN FREED FROM OBSESSION

I was born in 1976 to working class parents in Birmingham in the United Kingdom. As far back as I can remember, I always felt like an alien, and I always worried. This worry took the form of incessant and obsessive repetitive thoughts. I thought and worried about everything. I thought about how much I hated living in a volatile and frightening household. I was worried about the Cold War. I worried about my father losing his job. I worried about my younger sister's anorexia. As her older brother, my constant teasing must have played a part. I worried about the universe and if it was infinite or finite. I worried a great deal about school and exams. I worried that I wasn't good looking enough. I worried about how people perceived me. Of course, none of this compulsive worrying actually helped me, or any of the situations I worried about. It just made me a fearful, nervous wreck. Terrified of life.

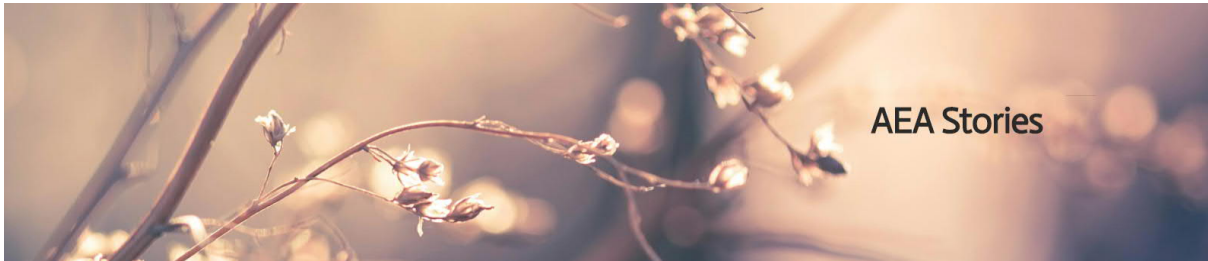
So, having decided that reality was very scary and not up to much, I decided to create a new reality, in my head, and live there instead. I also discovered that substances removed the fear and social awkwardness I felt. So I plunged into a life of fantasy and substance misuse. Chaos reigned. I stopped worrying about whether universe was infinite and I decided that whatever it was, I was the centre of it.

My ego was enormous, but I felt terrible. I didn't understand this paradox. And then there was the food. Always trying to control the food. Obsessed with my weight. Horrendous body dysmorphia. But the drink, drugs and sex were killing me faster than the food was.

So, after a failed marriage, multiple lost jobs, attempts at therapy and religious conversion, I surrendered to the fact that I was an alcoholic, sexaholic and drug addict. I went to a Twelve Step fellowship to get help.

I cleaned up and put down the mind-altering substances and behaviours. I got a sponsor and worked The Steps. I felt better. But there was still the food. My eating was not insane. I had balance externally around food, the programme had given me that. I knew I couldn't binge or purge, that wasn't sobriety, but I was still obsessed with my weight and body shape. I talked to my sponsor and worked out a food plan with him. I stuck to it. The obsession did not lift. My sponsor was not an addictive eater, and he recognised that this problem was beyond him. He suggested I go to a Twelve Step fellowship for eating disorders.

In this fellowship I met a group of people that follow a very simple programme of recovery, based on the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous, or the Big Book, as members fondly refer to it. At first, I found this a little confusing. Surely the Big Book was obsolete? Important at the time of writing, and as the springboard for other Twelve Step fellowships, but now superseded by more 'sophisticated' texts. Besides, how could this book help me with a food problem?



Keeping a slightly open mind, but with much apprehension, I began to attend a Big Book study meeting. It changed my life. I had spent years learning a complex therapy 'jargon' that I believed helped me 'understand' myself. This jargon was, in fact, keeping me in chains.

The solution was simple; Find God, Clean House, Help Others. I am freed on a daily basis from the bondage of self and, through this, my obsession with food is removed. I am freed from the obsessive thinking that dominated my life. Through taking direction, becoming teachable and living the programme as a way of life, I have been given a life beyond my wildest dreams.

Each day I do a few simple things: Pray, meditate, read, call my AEA sponsor, work with other addictive eaters and go to meetings. Around this structure, I live life. And life is good.