

## I'VE HAD TWO LIVES

I was 37 years old when I found our 12-step fellowship. All my life I had a number of secrets of which I was very ashamed. The first was my eating and another one was the spiritual hunger that I always felt.

My obsession with food always seemed to be there and I started dieting at about 10 years of age when someone said I was fat. However I remember stealing food behind my mother's back from a very early age and feeling very guilty. So from primary school age I battled with staying on the 'current' diet. I believed that when I got thin I would be happy. I was either on a diet perfectly or I was off it - and off it for me meant large scale bingeing. I would eat all and everything until I couldn't hold any more during the day. Then I would go to bed and sleep off the hangover. The next day I would start again.

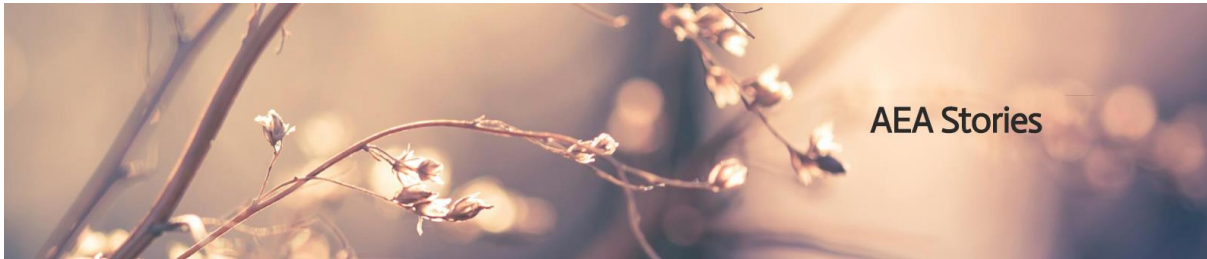
I was always convinced I would beat 'it' tomorrow. But tomorrow never came and I just got worse and worse as the years went by. As my eating got more out of control, the more secretive I became. I thought I was the only person in the world who did what I did with food. I was very ashamed and was filled with guilt and this became despair as time passed. I had had an easy time at school and at work as learning came easily to me. In fact if I wasn't best at whatever I did then I wouldn't pursue it.

I was into exercise, playing representative tennis and squash. My secret thought was that the more I exercised then the more weight I would lose.

I married a good man and we had four children and we had a nice home and were comfortably off. I knew I had every reason to be happy but I never was. In fact I always felt different and really cannot recall a really happy or free time in my 37 years.

Another secret of which I was ashamed was my spiritual hunger. I was a Presbyterian and went to Sunday School, Church, bible class etc and very much picked up on the sin, guilt and fear aspects. At least that is how I interpreted the teachings - it wasn't necessarily what I was taught. I always prayed to God for Him to get me thin. And I hated Him because he didn't get me thin. In fact I used to hand my will and life over to God regularly and just kept on eating. I did a lot of searching - mainly in the Christian Church but I never could make any connection with this God.

When I went to my first meeting of our recovery group there was one person off the food and she talked about having the disease of addiction. At that time I didn't believe that I had a disease but this girl was free from guilt and shame and she had been off the food for over a year. So I listened and I was very attracted to what she had. I went to Alcoholics Anonymous as well and identified very much.



I had always secretly believed that I was the same as an alcoholic but that I used food rather than alcohol. And there on the wall were the Twelve Steps with the word God. I knew I had somehow found the answer. For the first time in my life I felt the same as other people - the other people in the group and in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I bought the Big Book and knew I was the same as these people. I also knew that I wanted what they had. I abandoned myself to the programme as I believed that in order to get well I would have to do just as the first recovering alcoholics had done. My sponsor (this girl who was off the food) also was going to these same lengths to get well. And I soon came to see that my Higher Power had been food and not God. In order to get well I had to give up the food and trust in God just as is set out in the Big Book. I am now 74 years old and have been off the food for more than 36 years.

One of the first things I learnt when I joined the programme was that in order to get well I had to give up the food. My original sponsor explained to me that she had to give up all food, not just binge foods or foods with sugar in them. I actually didn't have any problem with this concept as for me it wasn't any particular types of food that I particularly binged on, rather the first one off the current diet which would set me eating ie a physical as well as a mental response.

In fact I needed to give up all food, all alcohol and all pills and medication (also exercise) as she explained to me that addiction changed from one form to another. This all made some sort of sense to me and I was willing to follow a food plan (which had to be weighed and measured) and which I committed each day to my sponsor and asked my Higher Power to give me the ability to follow. This has worked for me and I continue to "food plan" today.

It was a couple of years before the obsession or craving left me, but even though it was very hard it was a blessing in disguise as it drove me to work the steps harder and to go to countless meetings of both our 12-step recovery group and AA.

In the years that I have been in recovery I have had a very different life from my first 37 years. In fact I feel as though I have had two lives. One before I found out that I was a compulsive overeater and had a disease, and the present life I have today which is a life of acceptance of what I am and the freedom that comes with this.

The most important thing in my life today is to be sober and to carry the message to other addicted eaters. For me nothing comes before this. Everything I have today and, most importantly, the freedom comes from finding this 12-step programme and way of life.