



I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE

From an early age I knew I was different with food. I only have one sibling, a brother, and we were brought up just the same, but I could tell I was very different from him with food. When we were given lollies, I would eat mine straight away. He would put his in his bedroom drawer and make them last, until eventually they would drive me crazy and I would have to eat them too! Whenever food went 'missing' at home, I would flatly deny it was me who took it. I used to take food out of the tins when Mum wasn't looking and was always trying to 'get rid' of people so I could eat. If I got home from school and Mum was outside gardening, I would be on top of the world, as I knew I could race inside and quickly eat. If I got home and she was ironing in the kitchen, I would be furious because I couldn't eat what I wanted. Mum never knew how I would be (or why!).

I was overweight but my weight was always a mystery because I didn't eat much (that people saw!). I started going to Kilo Club in my early teens and, by rigidly sticking to my plan, I lost weight for 20 weeks, finally reaching my goal weight. I thought my life had begun! Even while I was going to Kilo Club, I had the feeling of being different with food. The other members would talk about the 'naughty' thing they had had off their plan, but I knew if I had even one thing off my plan, I would be away and would not be able to stop eating.

After reaching my goal weight, my mother took me away for a celebratory weekend and I started eating. I kept going to Kilo Club for a while, but could not get back on my plan again and the weight started piling back on. I gave up, as I couldn't bear to keep going along when I was gaining weight. For the next few years I struggled on by myself, regaining all the weight I had lost and totally obsessed with food. I thought I was the only one that ate like I ate and it felt like my dirty dark secret, that I never told anyone about.

When I was 18, my father died and I ate my way through his death. I was getting more and more miserable and increasingly unable to pretend my life was normal. I had done it all my life to hide my eating and it was just getting harder. That same year I read an article in an Australian magazine entitled "Are you a Food Addict?" I was stunned. It was talking about people that ate like me and did the same things with food that I did. I wrote to the address in the article and, for the first time in my life, I was honest about my eating.

Eventually I got put on to a member of a 12-step fellowship in Christchurch and she came and visited me in my home. The first thing that I noticed, and most important to me, was that she was slim. She told me the story of her eating and I could identify with everything she said (except I didn't think I was that bad!). She took me to my first meeting and there was a room full of people talking about their eating. It was so good to be able to identify with other people that were like me, after having kept it a secret my whole life.



It was the identification with other people that kept me coming back. The Twelve Steps were on the wall, but I wasn't really interested in a recovery programme or a Higher Power, only in losing weight. I kept coming to meetings and the regular bingeing I had been doing stopped. Consequently, I lost weight and thought I was fine. In reality, I was still very obsessed with food, especially the 'healthy' food I was now eating. Today I can clearly see that the weight was just a massive red herring and not actually the problem at all.

I decided to spread my wings and moved to a new city, where I found alcohol. I had the same compulsion to drink that I had to eat, and my life started spiralling downwards. Eventually, I returned to Christchurch and to my old meetings. The girl that had come to see me at my home was still there and two other members were now in recovery. I started to feel increasingly uncomfortable at the meetings and began to see these members had a freedom and a happiness that I didn't have. It seemed to come from knowing they were powerless over food (Step 1).

I got to a point where I just couldn't go on and didn't know what to do, so I turned to the members in recovery, was totally honest for the first time in my life, and began to follow the actions they had taken to get well. Something in me knew that I would need to put down not only the food, but the alcohol and pills as well, as addiction can manifest in many different forms, as I had already experienced. I didn't know how to do this, but just had to put my trust in the members who were in recovery and follow the direction I was given.

It is a long time now since that girl first came and saw me. I have continued to go to meetings and have found a life I would never have dreamed, a life actually free of the food – free of thinking about it all the time and free of having to eat it. I don't have to keep busy or not have the food in the house in case I eat it. For me, my pantry and my fridge are like my pot drawers or my linen cupboard. They don't drive me crazy all day, they just serve a purpose in the house and I go to them to get the food I need for my family.

I have not become a normal eater. I have never been a normal eater and I don't believe I will ever be a normal eater. That is fine with me. I have found a Higher Power of my own understanding that gives me the strength not to pick up the first one on a daily basis and helps me in all areas of my life. I didn't like the idea of a Higher Power when I first came into the programme, but as my eating got worse and I became more desperate, my mind was forced open to trying it.

Today I definitely know there is a Higher Power, working through the fellowship, that is stopping me from eating and that has removed the obsession to eat. It is not hard for me to do what works. The people in AEA are just like me and we are all in the same boat. I love coming to meetings and I need to try and give away what I have been given in order to keep it. I never want to forget what it was like because I never want to go back there. I have a great life today, all due to the 12-step programme of recovery and the AEA fellowship.