

THAT FIRST MEETING PLANTED A SEED

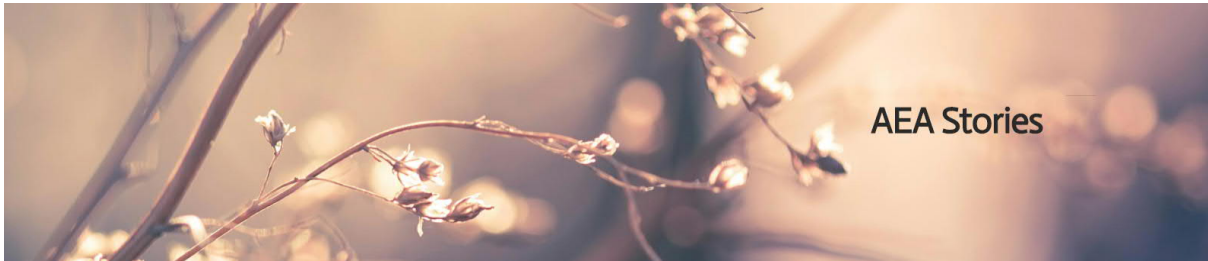
My obsession with food was present from a very early age. I remember competing with other family members to eat as much as I possibly could and I almost always ate until I felt uncomfortable. I would be secretive about eating the foods I thought my parents would probably not approve of me eating. I was always aware of the presence of food and was often asking myself 'how can I get more without others thinking I'm greedy?' or 'how can I avoid food altogether because everyone is watching me?'.

More importantly though, from a very early age I remember the feeling of being extremely irritable, of having uncomfortable feelings inside of me that I could not get rid of. At the time I blamed these feelings on my mother. I also liked to link any problem I had to being sexually abused. By the time I reached 15 years of age, I felt that this irritated feeling inside of me could be controlled with different diets, usually some kind of health-fad cleansing diet. Of course these never worked and they always ended in me splurging on food that I 'shouldn't' have been eating, until I started the next round of 'healthy' eating.

Exercise became an important part of my obsessive behaviour too - it made me feel great. I placed a high priority on my appearance, becoming overweight or even having a round tummy, I believed, was to be avoided at all cost and so I began my obsession with exercise... like the diets I tried all kinds of different things and at all times of the day and night. Laxatives were also my 'friend', coffee drinking and other more extreme forms involving drinking epsom salts!

Throughout my childhood, my family life centered around our Christian faith. I spent a lot of time with others in my faith and bible study was a regular activity for me. I had a deep hunger for spiritual things and felt that I had a connection with God. As life progressed, it was very clear to me that my belief in God, my prayers and my attempts to fix my life with more Bible reading and praying were not making any difference. I thought 'why would God care about my eating or exercising?' or 'What's the big deal with 'sin' anyway?'.

Over time, my life became increasingly more unmanageable. The irritability I felt as a child had increasingly become a raging beast. It reached a point where I was becoming uncontrollably violent with my children, against my own will. I could no longer bear what I was doing to others, ten years of counselling had eased some of the burden that was 'me', but it had not prevented my life from spiralling downwards. It was suggested by a friend that I might try a 12-step programme for food addiction, so I went to a meeting.



That first meeting planted a seed in my thinking that I could not shake. This seed was the beginning of a realisation that I was suffering from the disease of addiction, a spiritual sickness paired with an obsession of the mind. I realised that I needed to begin attending meetings regularly and at those 12-step meetings I saw people who had a way of life and thinking that I found attractive. I asked one of them for help.

I started to listen to the experience of others and follow simple directions, including going on a food plan. I began to experience some freedom from the obsession around food and it felt as though a fog was lifting from my mind. God, who I had been trying to reach for so many years, gradually came into focus. I can now see that food was what I had worshipped. It filled my thoughts and was what I turned to when feeling high, low or nothing at all. My experience has been that, when the food was put into its proper place through this programme, I was finally able to reach God...or maybe God was finally able to reach me! I began to understand a God who really cared about me, who cared about how I treated others and how I treated myself - He became a very real and tangible being. My practice of the 12 steps has deepened my faith and my ability to serve others within that faith. I have not had to choose between AEA and my faith. I feel that I live a double blessing and could not live without either my faith or the 12 steps to guide my life.

As a Type One diabetic, I believe this programme has also given me a new lease on life, as my blood sugars and general health have improved. This health has come from both a better way of eating and also from a more serene and peaceful way of living.

As I continue to attend meetings and hear others share about their food addiction, I understand more and more about the extent to which this disease has affected all areas of my life. My daily surrender of what I eat is a reminder of what I can do in every aspect of my life. When I am willing to let go, God can begin to work with me to shape me into something that He wants me to be.

Today, food does not possess my mind like it used to. Other than preparing meals that fuel my body, and meals for my family, I rarely think about food. This is a freedom that I never thought was possible and hope I never take for granted.

I have found more than freedom from my obsession with food. I have been gifted, through the 12 steps, a way of life that guides my thinking and actions. It is with gratitude that I thank AEA for leading me to a loving and powerful God, who sustains me a day at a time.