



Amy's Story

I was 18 when I was first hospitalised with anorexia and 30 when I entered the last treatment centre, and I hope it is the final one. I am 8 and a half years in recovery. Recovery means more to me than simply abstinence; it's my ability to participate in my life – to take life as it comes and not how I wish it came. This contrast between abstinence and my lifestyle, shows I own my recovery. So often I heard how abstinence is only 10% of recovery...I used think "I'll take the 10% in that case!"

I was chubby kid, outgoing and self-assured but by the age of 15 the messages I'd received from those around me took all that away. I'm not aware of the speed my illness set in but by the age of 17 I had full blown bulimia which quickly progressed to anorexia. For the remainder of my teens and all my 20's I suffered predominately of bulimia. I was caught in a cycle of binge eating and purging. Sometimes binging for days only stopping to purge and sleep. I'd binge in work, on family occasions and disappear on nights out looking to find somewhere to buy binge food. On weekends I binge drank and spent the following days stuck in bulimia marathons. I couldn't even manage going to town on the bus or turn up to college without being sucked into another binge.

Everything I had, I drank, binged and spent on laxatives. To fund it I worked fulltime and stole. I'd steal money, food and anything I could get cash for. I stole from family, friends and even from bags in work. My family kept all the food in a locked box, which I eventually took an axe to.

So often I thought "this is it" and I'd go to a treatment centre. I'd bare my soul and I'd try so hard. I wanted it so bad but I'd relapse within 2 or 3 days upon leaving. Relapse was usually relating to alcohol (I'd binge drink and as my senses dulled I stood no chance to fight), or to the loss of how to fill the large gaps of time where once I'd drink or binge.

Following a stint at The Rutland, history repeated itself. I relapsed and though support was there, I was too far gone within a matter of days to take it. Treatment centres did help, in fact every treatment, every fall and every loss was 100% what I needed to bring me to my final treatment there.

The final time I entered treatment it was with the absolute knowledge there was just this left in me and there were no more chances. No more chances with my family, who were barely speaking to me, nor my now fiancé, and I had lost all but two friends and even those relationships were strained.

I managed to not purge or drink with massive effort. This followed with a lot of anxiety and fear of what was to come. But I never could imagine what was to come. In the beginning, simply the joy of

just getting a bus to town without bingeing would bring me to tears, just as the shame of the memories of the lies I'd told, and the people I stole from.

The fear of everything was tough. I feared relapse, I feared letting others down, of letting myself down. I feared what was needed to get my own life. I feared seeking work, being responsible and reliable. I had never had a penny to save, paid a bill or planned beyond the next day or next binge. I feared all the work I would need to show people I was going to change. Previously others could never believe me. I'd rarely showed up to a date and if I did I would be cagey, on-edge and waiting to be able to leave and binge.

Then there were "-isms", I didn't make allowances for alternative crutches I'd seek, there was habitual behaviours, prescriptions, cutting back on foods and basically anything as a backup. I would catch them early as I recognised the patterns, but I'd quickly move to the next. I have had to use my gut a LOT. If I'm hiding it, or justifying it....forget it!

Moving countries was terrifying but I did only because I was not bingeing and drinking. As fast as I'd fallen sick without noticing, I recovered in the same manner. I did not realise when I learned to drive, or bear the responsibility of owning 2 dogs, entering college, beginning to paint, selling my art, getting engaged, passing my exams - all without bingeing or drinking.

I now use my body in ways I never knew I could, I do weight lifting and workouts every day and I get stronger and stronger. I feel I now have an identity. I'm not sick Amy; I'm not ill or messed up Amy. I'm strong, clever and talented, I'm lucky and blessed, I'm living borrowed time as I never thought I'd make it, but I'm making it every day. Things aren't perfect or always ok, but I work hard and I don't worry and watch over my shoulder or live life in fear anymore.