

## Recovery

Anorexia nervosa first took its hold when I was ten years old, and by thirteen I began the relentless journey of inpatient treatment programmes, outpatient therapy and monitoring and, it seemed, consistent relapses.

I felt trapped in a hellish existence that was ruining not only my life, but creating misery for my family and friends too who had to sit back and watch me slowly destroying myself.

However as I am sitting here writing this, I can't help feeling this exploding happiness and pride swelling deep inside of me, clichéd as that may sound. Because I have recently just celebrated a two-year hospital-free stretch, of which 18 months was spent independently at university with recovery ultimately down to my own hard work (though I couldn't have done it without the love, support and understanding of those around me). This is something that was once just an impossible dream; even my doctors had written me off as incurable. So never let anyone tell you that hope is lost, no matter how bad things get or how long you are ill for. Things are never so broken that they can't be repaired!

So how did I finally find the spirit to fight back against the anorexia? Well, I finally found two big incentives that were more important to me than my illness. I wanted to go travelling to Ghana to do volunteer work. To do this though, I had to be a healthy weight to work in the school, helping to teach children everything from science to English, sports to cultural and religious studies! I had an absolutely amazing, life-changing experience working with the local people in a very-underprivileged school where I was the first ever volunteer. I guess for the first time I felt completely appreciated as a human being, and that I could make a worthwhile difference to a person's life. It helped put things into perspective as I realised that my weight etc was irrelevant, in fact it only held me back from having fun and growing as a person. It stopped me from contributing in such positive ways rather than living in my numb, self-involved miserable anorexic existence.

My other motivation was my desire to go to university. Being ill has fired my passion to study medicine, through experiencing some awful doctors and some truly inspirational ones. I wanted the chance to be able to touch people's lives in the way some of the fantastic healthcare professionals who had kept me going had with me, and help fight to change attitudes so that less people have to endure the slightly less helpful doctors! Yet I know I had to be healthy myself in order to take the battle on.

I'm not saying recovery was easy; it was full of ups and downs (and occasionally still is) but it was definitely worth it! I found writing a list of all of the reasons to get better, no matter how small, really helped me, which I pinned up around my house to remind me to keep going when I found things tough. I also tried to involve everyone in recovery instead of shutting people out, and just got involved in life instead of dwelling on my past and my illness.

The future may seem bleak, but please never give up. Recovery *is* possible. You didn't give up the first time you felt hungry when you were ill did you? Well, there is your strength for getting better! You just need to use it in a positive way. As my family and my doctors have said, if I can do it, anyone can. You just need to believe in yourself.