Let Myself Go

It was my junior year of high school and I had so much going for me, a good home, two loving parents, a close knit family, and was doing well in school both academically and socially. I had a bright future ahead of me and a strong support system so the sky was the limit. My life should have been carefree but it wasn’t!

The only gray area of my life at this time was my so-called boyfriend. I say so- called because he seemed to forget he was in a relationship with me or what I called a relationship but I was only 15 at the time and hindsight tells me, what did I know about relationships. I knew that what I felt for him was real and I had invested a great deal of time into the relationship, or at least the time my father would allow me to spend. When I look back on the whole situation, I can hardly believe that I allowed a guy who had such a dysfunctional lifestyle himself to determine my self-worth, willingly.

I think I was caught up in the social prestige of our relationship at the time. He was a pretty good football player and my hometown is one of those, “football- is- the- have- all –be- all- towns. You know the kind, on Friday nights the town becomes a deserted ghost town and all the town folk are at the high school football field watching their homegrown boys pass some pigskin, deflated or not, it didn’t matter to these folks.

I, on the other hand, was not athletic and didn’t play sports, and I was a member of the FHA, which stands for Future Homemakers of America. Physically, I wasn’t ugly and I wasn’t overweight nor was I tall. Now mind you, I wasn’t a beauty queen by no means but at 15 time and gravity are on your side as I now realize in my seasoned age. I like to think God created me in the likeness of my Granny Garrard. She was a short spunky little gal who slept every night with a sawed off shotgun under her featherbed and she wasn’t scared to use it. The poor rooster lawn ornament learned that the hard way when it met its demised soon after finding itself at the wrong end of that barrel one evening when granny thought those Bowles boys were stealing her chickens again. After that, no one came close to Granny’s house at night unless they yelled their arrival from on the other side of the road.

That’s a whole other story in itself so I’ll get back to my original story.

It was around Valentine’s Day of my junior year that I discovered my boyfriend had been, as we would have said back then, “seeing” a friend of mine behind my back for several weeks. I don’t know why this shocked me so, for he wasn’t known for his loyalty nor his honesty. During a heated shouting match between us, he told me the reason he wasn’t interested in me was that I had let myself go. I guess I didn’t meet his Barbie Doll expectations and so I wasn’t his type anymore. What about my inside, didn’t that count for anything. All my friends tried to console me and eventually my family found out and my mom and dad shared many words of wisdom with me and basically told me to move on. You know the speech, you are too young to be thinking about long term relationships and if he can’t love you for who you are and not what you look like then it’s his loss and you need to part ways.

Regardless of the support and encouragement I received I began to sink into a deep depression. I felt so betrayed and beaten down for I replayed his words to me over and over and decided I would change my physical appearance because if he saw me as unattractive, then others would as well. I tried to trick myself and say I was doing it for me and no one else but that was a big fat lie if I ever told one.

As weeks went by and I continued to hear lie after lie from him as he was leading me on and everyone could see it but me. My life began to spiral out of control, I wasn’t sleeping and I wasn’t eating. I began to loose weight, at first, many people gave me many compliments about how good I was looking but good wasn’t what I saw in the mirror, I still saw the girl who had let herself go. As the weight continue to vanish, people began to ask if I was sick, my reply would be no I feel fine. Wow, I was lying as much as my boyfriend but I couldn’t stop. In my young mind, I thought the only way to lose weight was to simply reduce the amount of food I consumed which I did until I wasn’t eating anything. I can remember eating only once a day and that was a Reese cup and at that, I felt sick. I would lie to my parents about eating and pray they would believe.

My parents didn’t notice my problem right away because they were occupied with my uncle’s recent bout with cancer that was slowly taking his life. My mom and dad were away from home with him as often as possible so I stayed with my sister who at the time had two small children of her own and a full time job so she wasn’t over attentive to what was happening in my life but she was very good to me and seen I had my needs met, at least what she could see on the surface.

I can remember a time when we were eating together at the table one evening because back then the whole family sitting down at the table wasn’t a rarity but the norm. During this particular time, I knew she was watching what I was eating and would report back to mom and dad, so when she was interrupted and had to leave the table, I hid the food and later threw it in the ditch across the road when I took my little nephew to play in the creek.

The thought of food made me sick to think about and I knew everything I put into my body would cause me to gain weight and I had to loose weight so that others wouldn’t think I had let myself go. Eventually, the lack of nourishment got the best of me and I collapsed in my sister’s bathroom. The next thing I remember was waking to the rhythmic beep, beep, beep of the heart monitor beside my scratch white, sterilized hospital bed and my momma laying in the cot beside me. Although my mom and I didn’t have a close relationship during this time, we argued daily and I was very disrespectful and sarcastic to her every chance I got, she never left me until they told her she had to go home. To this day, my mom is the strongest woman I know and I want her in my corner every time, no matter the obstacle.

Soon my dad entered the room and shortly thereafter a man in a white lab coat entered and began to discuss my condition with my parents. He was speaking to them as though I wasn’t in the room and that I couldn’t think for myself. After thinking about it, look where thinking for myself had gotten me, maybe it was better for me to not think and let others do it for me until I was back on my feet. The doctor told my parents that my condition was graver than they could treat and I would be transferred to a larger hospital so they could treat me. He spoke of kidney failure and beginning dialysis as well as damage to other vital organs. My mom ask with sheer desperation in her voice, “What does she have?” The doctor coldly replied, as though he was saying a stranger’s name, anorexia nervosa. I can still recall the heat that ran through my body, as though my heart was an erupting volcano spilling its hot lava into my veins. I remember looking into my dad’s eyes and asking, “Daddy am I going to die?” His response was, “No, worm, as he affectionately called me from time to time, we are going to do everything we can to save you but you have got to eat. At that moment I was no longer a know it all, take matters in my own hands teenage girl, I was my daddy’s little girl hanging on to his every word.

I stayed in the larger hospital for a month, two weeks on the medical floor where I wasn’t allowed to burn any energy so they could fatten me up and my body would quit eating itself. I had by this time lost all my hair and looked like those skeletal remains you often see on those crime shows with a layer of skin pulled across it. My eyes had sunken into my brain and all the color had left my body. I looked like death, I had let myself go, almost to the point of no return. I endured endless days of testing to determine the havoc the malnourishment had wrecked on my body then I was transferred for two weeks to the rehabilitation floor. The rehabilitation floor addressed my problem from a mental stand point and I endured much therapy for myself and with my family. I can remember nights of sobbing and longing for my home with my family and the anger I felt toward the one I had let catapult me into this situation. I had let his point of view, almost kill my mind, body, and soul. Thankfully by the grace of God and my momma’s many nights and mornings of prayer, I survived.

I eventually came home and continued therapy, I finished my junior year on homebound and never rekindled my relationship with the football player. He was dealing with issues of his own for while I was fighting to survive he was fighting with the law and doing some really bad things and was eventually sent off and I don’t know where. As the experiences in life have made me the wiser, I have forgiven him for the pain he caused me and I hope he is living a happy productive life and hasn’t let himself go.

Finally, I am no spokesperson for anorexia, I can only tell you my story in hopes that if you know someone, maybe in your classroom, or in your personal life that may be suffering from this disorder, that you reach out to them and stay persistent in their lives. Don’t accept,” I’m fine or I will eat when I am hungry”, share my story with them for I would say those very words when someone would reach out to me. Oh how I wished they hadn’t accepted those words, maybe just maybe the disorder could have been stopped and would now be a distant memory and not something I live with daily. This eating disorder almost ruined my life and I live in its looming shadow every time I take the medications for the osteoporosis that now resides in my framework and the heart medication that must be taken to control anorexia’s lasting grip on the core of my being. I am so grateful my heart is filled with love for so many, and beats so strongly for my son, its these things that keep the anorexia at bay and not allow it to control my heart or my life anymore. To anorxia, I say I have let myself go of your distorted version of myself and embraced the body God wanted me to have.