

Rachel's story



Christmas 2013

I've chosen this Christmas picture for my story because it was Christmas 2005 that I truly made the decision to recover. That December I had been under ED services for 18 months; I had spent a lot of that time trapped in my own bedroom because of how ill I was. Due to no beds I was in effect an inpatient in my own home. I had managed to gain a little weight - enough that I was no longer considered 'weeks from death'. In fact even though I was still a low weight I had been allowed to start university and had a part time job in a bar. And yet these two things made recovery harder.

Why should I eat and gain weight when I was already succeeding at my job and studies at the low weight I was? And so by December 2005 I was actually losing weight not gaining. I was challenged by my psychologist with discharge unless I fully dedicated myself to beating my anorexia. So that Christmas I thought long and hard.

Was I really living? The truth was I wasn't. I wasn't like other 18 year olds. I hadn't had Fresher's Week; I wasn't having carefree fun at university or going out with people from my bar job or even doing normal teenage stuff. No I was still having daily battles with food; being told what and how much to eat; I was escaping at lunchtimes at university so I could attempt to eat on my own; I was still stuck in the house a lot of the time; too scared to be out of my anorexic bubble. If I wanted to achieve things, I was going to have to gain weight.

I had also started to see myself in mirrors for what I actually looked like. It was as if by realising I wasn't trying hard in recovery, the mask had slipped. I wasn't this huge monster I thought I was. It was a shock to see how ill I really was. And so that Christmas 10 years ago I sat down with a pen and paper. I began to write down all the things I wanted to achieve with my life. In the end I had 3 pieces of paper and at the bottom I'd signed off with "I WANT TO LIVE NOT JUST SURVIVE". This was when recovery started for me.

And I gave it my all. I challenged myself with fear foods; I ate in front of friends; I went to restaurants and friends' houses for tea; I went on holiday without my parents; I worked hard in therapy and by September 2006 I was at my target weight!



Christmas 2015

Of course recovery didn't end then. I challenged myself more and more; I threw myself into living - I lived in France; I travelled to New Zealand on my own; I passed my driving test; I got my degree and an MA; I dated; I kissed; I had boyfriends; I fell in love; I became a Beat Young Ambassador; I gave presentations on my anorexia; I had adventures and took risks. I was finally discharged in June 2009 ☺ and I consider myself fully recovered in February 2011; a time when I was living in Australia!

And now I'm currently working 3 days a week; 2 days a week I do counselling placement – I've just become a qualified counsellor; have amazing supportive family, friends and boyfriend and continue to speak out about my mental health issues. I'm recovered but I'm continuing to challenge myself with new foods, learning to relax and just liking my body for what it is. I never ever forget what I've been through - in fact every year I celebrate my Being Alive Day. I hope by sharing my story I can help show recovery is possible and absolutely amazing!

Rachel

December 2015