

WE SHALL BE HEARD: RELEASING THE SILENCE OF ANOREXIA NERVOSA AND
ACHIEVING HEALING THROUGH CREATIVE NONFICTION AND MEMOIR WRITING

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Dedicated to Dr. Alexander H. Sackeyfio, with much gratitude. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

WE SHALL BE HEARD: RELEASING THE SILENCE OF ANOREXIA NERVOSA AND ACHIEVING HEALING THROUGH CREATIVE NONFICTION AND MEMOIR WRITING

by Angela Elain Gambrel

In 2008, at the age of forty-two, I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa is one of the most common eating disorders, and is characterized by an irrational fear of gaining weight and a refusal to maintain body weight at or above the minimally normal weight for one's height and age, coupled with severe food restriction and/or purging behaviors. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, between 0.5 and 3.7 percent of American females suffer from anorexia nervosa, and a smaller percentage of males also have this disorder. NIMH estimates that more than five percent of these females will die from anorexia nervosa each decade. According to the National Eating Disorders Association, anorexia nervosa has the highest premature fatality rate of any mental illness. Anorexia nervosa is an often-misunderstood illness, plagued by media and societal distortions. In writing this thesis, I sought to illuminate the varying aspects and manifestations of this disorder, along with providing a personal account of my struggles with and triumphs over a potentially fatal illness. There are two parts in this thesis: the literature portion reviews creative non-fiction and memoir texts about anorexia nervosa and other subjects, and the creative non-fiction portion employs creative nonfiction and memoir writing to tell my story of more than four years of struggling with anorexia. The two pieces tie together to bring light to a disease that is often surrounded by silence and shame, and opens a dialogue that is useful to those studying anorexia nervosa and its various manifestations.

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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

The very nature of anorexia nervosa creates a life of lies, secrets, and silence. There is the silence created by stigma, both because anorexia is greatly misunderstood and it occupies that area known as mental illness. There is the silence created by family and friends, who often are at a loss about what to say and how to help. Then there is the silence created by the person with anorexia.

At its core, anorexia nervosa is not about being thin. Instead the behaviors inherent within the disorder are a means of coping with an often confusing and frightening world, a means to speak of deep pain when there are no words. As my life collapsed around me, I found refuge in starving and comfort in the obsession with calories and weight. I could not speak, therefore I could not eat. Did I want to be thin? Yes—and no.

This thesis has two parts. The first part covers the genre of creative nonfiction and memoir writing, and reviews and analyzes seven works against the backdrop of my own piece. The second part is a creative non-fiction piece about my descent into and ultimate triumph over anorexia nervosa.

An Unsympathetic Protagonist — *Thin*, Grace Bowman

"If I share a secret with you, do you promise to tell everyone?" Thus begins *Thin*, a coming-of-age memoir by British writer Grace Bowman. Bowman releases the silence of anorexia through memoir writing and creative nonfiction. Sometimes Bowman hits the mark. Sometimes she doesn't.

Bowman employs a variety of techniques to present her story about her descent into and ultimate freedom from anorexia. She creates a game scenario in some chapters, in which she, as

the player, utilizes various strategies to keep from eating, such as lying, cutting out foods, and most importantly, remaining silent: "You need to be quiet now. Don't make a fuss and don't let the opposition know what you are doing" (Bowman 29). Bowman presents some of her history in play form, in which she talks to herself using inside and outside voices and being two different girls. I found these techniques distracting from the real-life struggle Bowman must have faced when struggling with anorexia. This created a distance between myself and Bowman, and left me wondering why I should even care what happens to her. By revealing intimate details about my struggles with anorexia, I sought to bring the reader inside the inner world of an anorexic in the hope of creating a sympathetic protagonist that could be related to. There is a fine line that writers of creative nonfiction and memoir must traverse between creating empathy and creating pity. I want readers to empathize and connect with me and my struggles; I do not want them to pity me. In Bowman's case, I neither pitied nor empathized with her. I was simply bored by the whole thing.

Bowman paints a picture of a well-loved and quiet little girl growing up in middle-class England. At first, she had a lovely childhood, complete with buggy rides and the complete attention of her parents and the familiarity of family and home: "The little house on the hill squeezed in its occupants, sheltering them from the outside, wombing them in its warmth" (Bowman 3). Then things changed. Bowman's world was disrupted by the birth of her younger siblings: "Her quietness was undisturbed until the birth of her siblings, when texture and colours previously unseen appeared and showed her new possibility" (Bowman 3). Bowman's focus on her upbringing perpetuates the myth of the stereotypical anorexic: young, upper middle-class, educated, white female. I was forty-four when I developed anorexia, and I come from a working-class background; the child of two Southerners without a high school diploma. I also write about

my encounters with a very young anorexic—twelve-year-old Emily—and several males, which belies the stereotype Bowman writes about.

I could speculate whether Bowman's early childhood contributed to her anorexia. After all, she first learned about control and good foods and bad foods within her home. However, Bowman has a younger brother and twin sister; none of whom developed an eating disorder. Bowman exhibited an inordinate amount of anxiety as a child. She is frightened of many things, "dogs and roller coasters and most animals and strange places" (Bowman 5). She learns early on to avoid unpleasantness, and becomes an expert at running away and pretending to be ill (Bowman 5). I also was afraid of many things as a child; escalators and German Shepherds and bathtub drains. I also learned about good foods and bad foods as a child, my mother emphasizing the need for fresh vegetables and fruits and strictly relegating sweets to special occasions. I have been described as a moody child, one who would not even speak to most people until the age of four—a condition known as elective mutism. My father's alcoholism colored my entire childhood with fear, anxiety, and a longing to escape by any means available. But did any of this *cause* my anorexia? I deliberately chose not focus on my own background simply because I do not think it is relevant, even though the stereotypical image of an anorexic persists. The causes of anorexia are unknown and speculative as researchers continue to seek answers to an often-deadly disorder.

Bowman's competitive streak is dominant by the age of nine: "Grace likes to be the top girl" (Bowman 6). She constantly implores her parents to test her to prove she is smart, and insists on being the first in her class at everything. Her response to the praise she receives for being a top student is telling: "It gives her a buzzy feeling when she is the best" (Bowman 6). Competitiveness and anxiety are hallmark traits of anorexia, and indeed I exhibit both of these

traits. Changes are hurling at Bowman; she has a new body and new friends and contemplates a new life at the university. All this combines to create the perfect storm, which Grace steps into, developing anorexia, which holds her for years. Bowman is perhaps most truthful when she writes, "As an anorexic, my senses were numbed, nulled, and restrained" (Bowman 240). In writing about my experiences with anorexia and how it contributed to the destruction of my marriage, I attempted to show how my emotions and anorexia were intertwined. I was unable to be a real partner simply because I gave everything to starving and tight control of my very small world. Recovery also is harder than Bowman puts it: "Anorexia just lost its appeal" (Bowman 259). Bowman makes it seem simple, when my reality that I convey in my story is one of ups and downs, relapses and small victories. Even though I can relate to some of the things Bowman writes, ultimately I failed to connect with her.

A Strong Narrative Voice — Things I've Been Silent About: Memories of a Prodigal Daughter, Azar Nafisi

Azar Nafisi, author of *Things I've Been Silent About: Memories of a Prodigal Daughter*, effectively employs the use of the first person and has a strong narrative voice, engaging the reader and creating a sympathetic protagonist. As a creative non-fiction writer, Nafisi draws the reader in by painting pictures of pre-revolutionary Iran. These techniques can be found in the best writings about anorexia, creating awareness and openness about a subject long thought to be taboo.

Silence permeates the narrative, encompassing everything from her parents' stormy marriage to the sexual abuse that she suffered at the hands of a supposedly religious man. The very title of the work indicates that silence is a theme threaded throughout Nafisi's piece. She comes of age in a culture that encouraged silence: "It is such a strong part of Iranian culture to

never reveal private matters" (Nafisi xv). Silence also is a strong part of the culture of anorexia. I show that silence within my narrative; the silence of unspoken words to my husband and family, in which I could not speak about what drove me to starve myself. I had many opportunities to speak, but I chose to shut others out. However, I question whether I did actually *choose* to be quiet, or did anorexia succeed in silencing me? I feel I could have explored this concept further within my own text; the silence driving the anorexia as opposed to the silence creating the anorexia.

Nafisi begins by detailing her father's affair, obstinately indulged in so he could "have a happy family life" (Nafisi xv). This was the white elephant in the room, and a source of the couple's troubled marriage. Nafisi was both daughter and confidante to these two narcissistic people, and expected to keep their secrets. Her father kept a diary addressed to his daughter, and filled with complaints against her mother: "He writes that, although I am just a child, I am his only solace and support" (Nafisi xvi).

Nafisi maintains her silence throughout her childhood and as a young adult, much to her detriment. Nowhere is that more evident than when she was sexually abused as a young child. Haji Agha Ghassem first takes notice of Nafisi when she was six, when he suggests to her mother that she should be dressed more modestly (Nafisi 52). Nafisi's mother has the grace to act surprised; however, she does not offer any further protest and assure him that Nafisi knows how to protect herself from strange men. Except that she doesn't. Ghassem continues to show an interest in the young girl, leaning over her as she does her homework, "his hands casually brushing my thigh" (Nafisi 53). Then one night, Nafisi is woken up by irregular breathing next to her (Nafisi 53). She is unable to either speak or protest this violation by Ghassem: "I try to keep very still, almost holding my breath, and press my eyes shut. Maybe if I keep them shut and don't

move, he'll go away" (Nafisi 53). Nafisi's first-person narrative creates a sense of immediacy and connection with the reader. I was with Nafisi, alone and afraid in that bed as Ghassem presses against the young girl and creates a lifelong fear of the dark within her: "Ever since that night I cannot sleep alone in the dark" (Nafisi 53). Many people with anorexia and other eating disorders are victims of childhood sexual abuse; however, the subject remains taboo. Nafisi is honest about her childhood in a way I was not, because I chose not to reveal nor explore my childhood and the painful experiences in connection to my struggles with anorexia. Each writer of creative nonfiction and memoir must decide on how much to disclose, and whether such disclosure is relevant to the text. One might argue that *everything* is relevant; however, there is the danger in appearing melodramatic, particularly when writing about a topic such as anorexia.

An Engaging Tale—*Hollow: An Unpolished Tale*, Jena Morrow

Jena Morrow's *Hollow: An Unpolished Tale* is compelling, drawing the reader into the mind of an anorexic and the torment she faces each day. Morrow creates a sympathetic protagonist: likeable, engaging, and one that ultimately faces her demons and triumphs.

From the age of three, Jena Morrow believed she was fat. The way she looked in a pink jacket started her downward spiral into anorexia: "When I decided how that stupid pink jacket made my belly look, I decided then and there it would have to go. . . . From that day on, I was at war with myself" (Morrow 21, 22). Morrow started restricting early; delicately nibbling her butter cookie and bemoaning the fact that she could not fit into slim-sized jeans and longing to be "gentle and feminine and quiet" like her friends, twin sisters Keri and Katherine (Morrow 22, 24). At first, I questioned the reliability of Morrow's account of her early years. Is it really possible that she remembered feeling fat at the age of three? Like Morrow, I had to recreate scenes and dialogue from my life that contained the *essence* of truth, if not the literal account of

truth. Was it important for Morrow to convey her feelings at three-years-old? I am not sure, since the rest of her narrative would still be compelling and engaging without recreations from earlier times.

Morrow's obsession with her weight grew after her parents divorced. Unable to admit to any anger about the divorce, Morrow began hating herself for "being fat" (Morrow 25). She writes:

Being fat seemed an efficient catch-all. I needed to be mad at myself, because I couldn't be mad at anyone else. Early on, I came to equate being angry with being mean and believed only mean people got angry. And since I needed a reason to be made at myself, my self-imposed handicap of imaginary fatness seemed very convenient. (Morrow 25).

This set the stage for Morrow's relentless self-loathing and self-abuse, including a continuous internal dialogue that tormented her for years. Morrow struggled back and forth with eating until it occurred to her, "if I can put food in, I can take food out" (Morrow 28). She failed at her first attempts at purging, but later would find herself caught in a downward spiral of restricting and vomiting. Anorexia and bulimia are often interlinked, and I write about my attempts to purge my food. It is an act borne out of desperation, when the urge to eat becomes too strong and threatens to overcome the need to be empty. As a writer of creative nonfiction, I knew early on that I would have to disclose things that made me feel uncomfortable in order to create an engaging narrative.

Morrow was literally silenced: "I was a mess, didn't know why, and had too few words to express what was going on inside my head (Morrow 30). Junior high brought a multitude of changes, and Morrow recalls the terror she felt at having to undress and show her burgeoning

figure to her fellow classmates (Morrow 30). Her self-loathing increased when she reached her lifetime high weight of one hundred and thirty-eight pounds (Morrow 34). In spite of all the praise she received for her singing and acting, all Morrow could focus on was her weight: "I would grab the flesh of my belly, or inner thigh, and pinch until the tears stung my eyes, leaving bluish-yellow bruises the following day" (Morrow 35). Self-abuse is inherent in those struggling with anorexia, and I decided that I needed to disclose my struggles with self-harm through cutting. A lot of speculation surrounds this symptom; some clinicians say it is caused by an all-pervasive hatred of one's body, while others believe it is an attempt to feel *something* through the fog of anorexia. I remember being very angry with myself, angry that I could not overcome anorexia and, therefore, was creating chaos within my home. I did not realize then that the chaos was inside me, and anorexia and self-harm were my maladaptive behaviors to combat it.

Morrow also began to develop a deep relationship with Jesus Christ: "I needed to know that God loved me, that because of Jesus and the cross, we're cool, God and me. I needed to know that nothing I had ever done was too much for him to forgive" (Morrow 36.) Morrow experienced that love and was able to accept herself; "then life happens" (Morrow 37). Religion and God are threads throughout my narrative, as I write about my internal struggles and fears, and how I turned to God to help me.

Anorexia makes you do desperate things. One day, Morrow succumbs to a box of Raisin Bran that her roommate left out, eating each flake one by one and then shoveling handful after handful into her mouth. Panicked, desperately trying to add the calories in her head, Morrow's mind latches onto something—syrup of Ipecac. She quickly swallows the entire bottle. The results were disastrous and potentially lethal: "I gasped in horror and then fell face first into the sink, my body jolting with each ripping heave" (Morrow 54). I remember thinking during my

worst anorexic moments that I should use syrup of Ipecac, even though I knew it was poisonous. I searched every store and online for this drug, but I was unable to purchase any because it is no longer available without a prescription—simply because anorexics and bulimics have abused this drug.

Morrow spent years mired in self-hatred, examining her body for any imaginable flaw or fat. She slipped into laxative abuse, routinely blacked-out, and sunk lower and lower into depression and self-abuse. This was my story, a story of self-abuse and dangerous acts while enmeshed in anorexia. I connected to Morrow's account because it was believable; I had lived it.

Morrow acknowledges that anorexia and its behavioral traits are addictive, much as my husband had tried to convince me of the addictive nature of anorexia years before (Morrow 69). Finally, Morrow makes a *conscious* choice to stay sick: "Although circumstances may have contributed to my descent into anorexia, I knew good and well that I had the ability—at least at this early stage—to make the right choice. . . . I chose to be both 'in treatment' *and* sick" (Morrow 80-1). This is a controversial idea because the prevailing wisdom is that eating disorders are *not* a choice. This was a tough call for me, but in the end, you will read that I did *choose* to finally get well. No one else could choose for me.

Finding Oneself Through Writing — Black, White, and Jewish: An Autobiography of a Shifting Self, Rebecca Walker

Rebecca Walker was an enigma growing up, the child of a black mother and Jewish father who came together during this country's civil rights era. Walker lived an erratic childhood, living a life of extremes as she was shuttled between the middle-class world of her father in Brooklyn and the artsy and permissive world of her mother in San Francisco.

The confusion starts at Walker's birth: ". . . Next to the boxes labeled 'Mother's Race' and 'Father's Race,' which read Negro and Caucasian, there is a curious note tucked into the margin. 'Correct?' it says. 'Correct?' a faceless questioner wants to know. Is this union, this marriage, and especially this offspring, correct?" (Walker 12). Walker's writing reflects the sporadic quality of her journey, as she takes the reader through her earliest years through the present day. Walker relies heavily on introspection and internal dialogue, scattering dialogue, description, and interaction throughout.

Walker brings alive her early childhood, remembering her father watching for the Klan, rifle propped up on a wall while he plays cards with friends and her mother tries not to worry (Walker 21). She peppers her story with anecdotes of her life, learning to walk by herself with her father's encouragement, eating black-eyed peas and sweet potatoes at nursery school, and bathing with Tone or Dial soap; taking the readers into the early seventies of Roberta Flack and Al Green songs (Walker 15, 18-9, 21). This created a sense of place, something I strive to do in my creative nonfiction and memoir pieces.

The narrative constantly shifts from Walker's early childhood to the mid-sixties, when her parents defy the law to marry, to Walker's first year at Yale. The constant shifting gives the reader an idea about how erratic Walker's life was, and yet it also makes it difficult to sustain a real connection with her because of the distance it creates. Walker also uses letters to her parents and friends as part of her story, writing about her new home and friends, time staying with her Grandma Miriam, and when her father was mugged and her mother attempted to comfort him: "Mama wrapped her arms around his head and made him tell her what happened. Daddy tried to pretend like it was no big thing, but I could tell her was scared" (Walker 32). But could she? And

even if she could sense her father's fear, would she conveniently write about it as a child, only for those letters to be found and used later in her autobiography?

Memoirs and autobiographies can both be creative non-fiction pieces. One working definition that I have found for the difference between memoir and autobiography is that a memoir typically captures a period of time in the writer's life, while an autobiography encompasses the writer's entire life up until the last page. By its nature, capturing the subtle nuances and conversations of one's life is tricky at best, and those of us writing creative non-fiction pieces often find ourselves having to recreate conversations and scenes to the best of our ability. However, not to call Walker out, but I think it is doubtful that she wrote such letters as a child, and it would have been more realistic for her to fold that into a narrative-style account instead of a true-to-life letter. Walker also creates an entire chapter from these letters, and that simply does not work for me because the narrative needs dialogue and interaction among people.

Some readers believe that Walker's writing is both narcissistic and too blunt: "We lay down on the mattress on the floor and then he climbed on top of me and pushed his penis inside of me" (Walker 132). And indeed, accounts of her sexual proclivities color the book and often make the reader weary, questioning how someone so smart could make so many wrong decisions. Were her childhood and adolescence really that bad? Were the world and her family and those who loved her really abusive? And why did she drop her father's name, Leventhal, to take her mother's name of Walker, when her father genuinely cared about her and her mother genuinely ignored her to pursue her writing career?

It is that last decision that Walker, née Leventhal, unsatisfactorily explains in this work, only offering banal clichés: "I believe that if I am not part of the solution I am part of the problem, and I am determined to be on the right side of any and all equations having to do with

social justice" (Walker 312). It is in ignoring a part of herself—the Jewish part—that causes Walker to be an unreliable narrator at best. I embrace all parts of myself, writing about my Southern background, while taking the reader into my world of writing and academia.

A Cautionary Tale? — *Slim to None: A Journey Through the Wasteland of Anorexia Treatment*, Jennifer Hendricks

Jennifer Hendricks' memoir *should* serve as the ultimate cautionary tale, a veritable and gripping account of a young woman so enmeshed by anorexia that it was impossible for her to imagine any other identity. She was twenty-five when she died, weighing forty-five pounds and having spent her last five years in hospitals and nursing homes. That frankly terrified me, and caused me to set aside this memoir for several years. I finally read it for this thesis, and was both horrified and relieved afterward. I was horrified that someone could become that ill with anorexia, and that I had the unbidden thought that I also could have reached her low weight. I was relieved that I did not.

Jennifer's father, Gordon Hendricks, pieced together this book from his daughter's journal writings, remembered and reconstructed dialogue and interactions, and imagined internal dialogues. Jennifer's writings are set apart by italics, an eye-numbing technique that made it very difficult for me to read and focus on after one or two pages. He also fails to note the dates of her writings, a failure that might have been deliberate, an attempt to make the writing timeless and thus more accessible to a wider range of readers. But all this does is confuse the readers, as we try to ascertain when Jennifer lived by the few cultural references and hints that are offered. One glance at the copyright page shows this is not a recent tale, as it was published in 2003; instead, it concerns a young woman who lived in the seventies and eighties, when her father is far removed from the scenes of his dying daughter, ravaged by anorexia.

Jennifer's descent into anorexia started with an idle thought to lose some weight (Hendricks 4). That is unfortunate because a common misconception about eating disorders is that these illnesses arise from vanity and the desire to remain slim. However, the truth is more complicated. I daresay that Jennifer's anorexia developed as a maladaptive coping mechanism in response to her chaotic inner world. Jennifer was fourteen when she first developed anorexia, when she was trying to both retain connection with her parents and simultaneously exert her independence. She also experienced an uneasy relationship with her horseback riding coach, something that Hendricks never clarifies and indeed, allows the reader to make her own assumptions—was Jennifer sexually abused by the coach? If so, did it contribute to her anorexia? And if not, did her guilt over accusing him become too much, until self-hatred took over and drove her to abuse and starve herself? (Hendricks 4, xx).

Slim To None opens with an intimate view of Jennifer's last days and her relentless wish for death: "The razor blades are hidden in my dresser. . . . God give me strong fingers and the courage to use them. There's no time left for me" (Hendricks xxiv). I question how her father knew these private thoughts—did Jennifer convey them to him? Did he cull them from her seven hundred pages of written journal entries? Or did he surmise that these were her last thoughts based upon her interactions with him? In my own writings, I strive to stay truthful to the *spirit* of each account. I realize it is impossible to remember every word spoken and every action taken, but Gordon Hendricks takes far too many liberties. As the editor and narrator of this piece, Hendricks had a responsibility to be more open about the creative non-fiction aspects of the work. But he chose not to be, and instead I and other readers can only speculate on what is truth and what is embellished.

Hendricks is on safer ground when he recreates the conversations and events that occurred within the office of Jennifer's highly confrontational psychiatrist, Dr. Bertha Weintraub. Dr. Weintraub comes across as a real-life Nurse Ratched, driving an insurmountable wedge between Jennifer and her mother and often exploding in anger at her patient and parents when they dare to disagree with her draconian methods of intimidation and manipulation. Dr. Weintraub delves into the murky waters of recovered memories, convincing Jennifer that she was sexually abused by several people, even when she expresses her doubts: "I don't truly believe anything bad happened to me" (Hendricks 137). Dr. Weintraub insists that Jennifer has chosen to be sick: "Why do you always assume it's my choice to be sick?' 'Because it is, and it's time for you to make a final choice'" (Hendricks 144). As a recovering anorexic, I was appalled by Dr. Weintraub's viewpoint. The truth about anorexia and individual choice is much more complicated; the illness destroying Jennifer's capacity for choice as starvation ravaged her intellect and free will.

Jennifer's relentless march toward death is laid bare through unsparing prose, leaving the reader exhausted and sick by the utter waste of this young woman's life. Anorexia had completely destroyed her: the last five years of her life were mainly spent in hospital, she never had a romantic relationship, and she was able to complete only one year of college. Her illness also exacted a high financial cost, with the total bill exceeding one million dollars. The financial costs of my illness are something I failed to touch upon in my own account, simply because I did not feel it was relevant. I chose to focus on the human costs, including the destruction of my marriage.

Then Hendricks decides to spin a fantasy of his daughter's last minutes: "In her dream she is a child again, growing younger instead of older" (Hendricks 309). The dream portrays a

younger Jennifer racing her horse and surfing with a dolphin, ultimately riding on its back toward a peaceful death (Hendricks 310). I understand that this is what Hendricks must have wished for his daughter, but the reality of death from anorexia is much harsher. Hendricks did a great disservice to both those who have died from this relentless eating disorder and those who are still struggling. I almost died from anorexia, and I did not feel any peace.

Reliving the Horrors of the Holocaust — *The Girl in the Red Coat: A Memoir*, Roma Ligocka with Iris Von Finkenstein

Roma Ligocka weaves the present and past to create a harrowing tale of survival as a young Jewish girl caught up in the maelstrom of Nazi-occupied Poland and the aftermath as she comes of age amidst Communist rule. The memoir opens in present-day France at the Hotel Negresco along the Promenade des Anglais: "The room smells of chocolate and raspberries, of coffee and perfume" (Ligocka 1). Ligocka transports the reader to each place and scene that has touched her life through the power of descriptive writing. The reader smells the coffee, hears the lilting waltz, and tastes the chocolate and raspberries on the tongue. The gentleness of the beginning belies the harsh reality that lies within the narrative: "It is always cold in the Ghetto, ice cold, inside the house as well as out" (Ligocka 3). I could feel the cold; I was the young Ligocka bewildered by the evil all around: "They shoot at who they want to, maybe at me too. We're the others. The Jews" (Ligocka 3).

Like most memoir writers, Ligocka recreates whole scenes and conversations, drawing upon her oldest memories and piecing together what *might* have been said. The nature of memoir writing raises questions of credibility; as a reader, I constantly wonder how true a fifty-year old memory can be. However, I—like other writers of memoir and autobiography—also had to piece

together old memories and conversations to create what is hopefully a compelling account of one person's struggle with and ultimate triumph over anorexia and addiction.

Certain threads are woven throughout this book, such as invisibility and a certain connection with rabbits, animals known to quickly scurry away and hide and often hunted, as coping mechanisms to remain safe, particularly during her childhood: "I try to make myself invisible. Sometimes it actually works" (Ligocka 3). The realities of being Jewish amidst the Nazi occupation are harsh: "For the first time in my life I scream, as shrilly and as loud as I can. It is also the last time I ever scream. They pounce on me with a thousand arms, grab my arms and legs, hold on to me" (Ligocka 25). The young girl reacts in fright during hiding, as any young child would do—but the consequences of her innocent cry might have meant death to those hiding with her. Anorexia is also an attempt to make oneself invisible. I write about how as I became smaller, my world became smaller. I can relate to the silencing of Ligocka, and remember how I often felt silenced both by my illness and by various clinicians that attempted to treat me.

The nightmare does not end with the liberation of Poland from the Nazis. Ligocka and her family must endure another totalitarian, anti-Semitic regime—the Communists. Life under Communist rule is dark and drab and dreary, and Ligocka's narrative reflects this. The family's apartment is small and crowded, the sky always seems to be gray, and the Jewish children have difficulty adjusting to real life with school and books and learning: "Each is trapped in his or her own story and his or her own fear . . . We are like frightened animals" (Ligocka 122). She ends up starving herself, almost achieving the invisibility that she so yearned for as a child: "I've turned everything inward, always felt that I had to make myself small, silent, and invisible" (Ligocka 252). Then she becomes addicted to prescription drugs (Ligocka 275). Ligocka

recounts her addiction and recovery with honesty, relating how she depended on the pills to function in everyday life while a young married woman with a child: "Any real job is out of the question. I live from one pill to the next" (Ligocka 275). I try to do the same in my narrative, recounting when I slipped into alcoholism and addiction when starving alone was not enough to still my fears. Ligocka acts out the behavior of an addict, similar to the way I describe when addicted to starving, alcohol, and prescription drugs, making excuses and going from doctor to doctor to obtain the drugs. She begins to raise suspicion after hitting up the pharmacists in her area for more pills. She also becomes thinner and thinner, although it is not clear if she has full-blown anorexia or is merely reacting out of grief and depression borne of her difficult life. One of her friends, a physician, suspects anorexia and points this out to her when the two are vacationing together and he sees Ligocka again sending back a full plate of food. One day, she reaches an impasse, and I can relate to this because I, too, also hit rock bottom: "It suddenly becomes clear to me that I have become a slave" (Ligocka 279). Hitting rock bottom was my way to freedom.

A Vivid Portrayal of Eating Disorders . . . And a Potential Guidebook to Them, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*, Marya Hornbacher

Wasted is a vivid account of Marya Hornbacher's struggles with two eating disorders, first bulimia, then anorexia. Hornbacher is honest and unflinching in her portrayal of anorexia and bulimia—and that is the problem.

Like many other anorexics, I purchased *Wasted* with the insidious thought that it could help me. A sick and twisted thought, yes, but one that is intricately connected to this text. Hornbacher describes what she ate, how she purged it, the ways she starved herself while doing such glamorous things as attending an art school in Interlochen, Michigan and writing for a

university paper in the heady atmosphere of Washington, D.C. Hornbacher has been sick for most of her life; she first started struggling with bulimia at the age of nine and anorexia when she was fifteen. She often writes about her illness with an underlying tone of pride, often sharing with the reader intimate details that may—or may not—be pertinent to the purpose at hand.

Hornbacher, like any writer attempting to describe the ravages of anorexia without triggering those who are sick, had to walk a fine line between relaying what happened and *glorifying* what happened. I faced the same dilemma when writing my account, questioning if at times I was too graphic when writing about my attempted suicide or the several times that I tried to purge. Hornbacher often errs on the side of disclosure, which is not a bad thing in itself, but can be potentially triggering: "My weight has ranged over the past thirteen years from 135 pounds to 52" (Hornbacher 2). At the surface, this may not seem triggering. But to an anorexic, whether recovering or actively engaged in her illness, that number—52—can turn into a goal. I struggled with disclosing my lowest weight of ninety-one pounds, but ultimately decided that the number conveys, in part, how sick I was, particularly the fact that I felt proud to be that weight.

Hornbacher begins her account by detailing the abrupt beginning of her bulimia, which she was an "average nine-year-old" who becomes someone who makes herself throw up until "I spat blood" (Hornbacher 9). However, Hornbacher admits that she is not clear what made her start purging her food. The answer becomes clearer as Hornbacher's life unfolds; she clearly feels out of control, and starving, binging, and purging give her an odd sense of *control*. The issue of control continues to be debated in the eating disorders community, with some people attributing the need for control as one possible cause of eating disorders and others vehemently denying control has *anything* to do with these disorders. I ascribe to the first viewpoint, and relate how

anorexia gave me an illusion of control. I controlled my food intake and I controlled my weight, while everything else—the Iraqi war, my marriage, and life in general—spun out of control.

Wasted generated mixed feelings within me. I could relate too much of what Marya Hornbacher wrote, and perhaps that was the problem. Hornbacher was unflinching honest, even graphic, in her account. But I questioned the need for some of the details she conveyed.

CHAPTER II
CREATIVE NONFICTION

I Needed To Be Empty So Bad
Midland Daily News

My feet were freezing, the snow soaking through my brown suede boots. I shivered as I glanced over at the body partially covered by an orange tarp, the cold wind blowing and lifting the plastic to reveal the young man's face. I imagined his last thoughts as he stuck the gun to his head and then pulled the trigger. Had there been one minute, even one second in which his finger hesitated and he thought, wait, I am too young to die? If so, that thought did not win out. He indeed pulled the trigger and was now stretched out on the cold parking lot of Midland's H. H. Dow High School, with me staring down at him and wondering, why?

I was so sick of death. It was March 2007 and I had already reported on the funerals of at least seven soldiers who had died in Iraq in the past few months. I was once asked why the caskets were always kept closed during the visitations and funerals. Incredulous, I tersely said the soldiers came home in pieces, torn apart by homemade bombs.

Now this. The call came across the newsroom scanner just as I was ready to eat the lunch David had dropped off for me.

"Shooting at Dow High," Jack said. "Who can go?"

Several reporters, including myself, dropped what we were doing and started running outside as Jack, the editor, yelled out instructions. The scanner traffic indicated a boy had tried to kill his ex-girlfriend and then shot himself.

"Kelly, talk to the cops. Angela, try to get into the school and talk to some students," he yelled at our receding backs. "Amber . . ."

I gave David a quick wave and ran out the door, holding with one hand my ever-loosening pants. I had been steadily dropping weight for months, but my doctor had yet to find an answer. I also was experiencing a wide range of physical problems that didn't add up: sky high blood pressure in spite of the fact that I was at a normal weight, twitching muscles that made it difficult to write, type, or hold onto anything, and excruciating migraines that sent me to the emergency room five to six times monthly. I was in the midst of undergoing tests for every disease my doctor could think of, including adrenal and other types of cancer, Epstein-Barr virus, ALS, and multiple sclerosis. Each test: negative. It occurred to me that perhaps I was a hypochondriac, except blood tests with issues don't lie.

The night after the high school shooting incident—the shooter died and his ex-girlfriend lived, only to find out later she was pregnant by her dead ex—I landed back in the emergency room, unable to stop throwing up and clutching my head as if I could press away the pain. In between puking and wishing I could die, the nurse asked the required questions. Why did they need to ask me the same questions over and over? I'd been here a million times; hell, I could get frequent flyer miles at this point, and the pattern never changed: I go to the emergency room and puke several times, a nurse shoots me up with Demerol and Nubain, and I go home in a drug-induced fog that stays with me for the rest of the day. Repeat as needed.

I said I was a reporter and recently wrote about the suicide and attempted murder at Dow High.

"I wondered if we would see anyone come through ER because of that," the nurse said as she prepped my thigh for the shots. "You are the first."

That figures. At least four reporters, hundreds of students, and most of Midland's police force were all there at the high school, but I was the one who got sick over it. I couldn't stop

thinking about the young man's dead eyes and lifeless body, hair brushing across his forehead when the cold wind blew the tarp off his face. I envied him. He now had the answers to questions I had been asking for decades. What was it like to be in God's presence? Did the love of Christ really surround you, and did all the hurt and pain of life leave you forever? I refused to believe he had gone to hell because he committed suicide and tried to kill another person—I needed to believe he had asked for forgiveness at the very last second and made it to heaven. I needed to believe in redemption, for this troubled kid and for myself.

I paced up and down the sidewalk outside the newspaper offices, trying to understand what the nurse was saying to me on my cell. Hyperparathyroidism? It was July 2007 and the summer heat did not even touch me; by now, I was so thin I could hardly keep warm and the newsroom joke was that I practically hugged my desk heater all the time. This was the first hint of an answer after peeing gallons for tests and being crammed on a regular basis into MRI and ultrasound machines and having my blood drawn so many times I was afraid my inner right vein looked like a junkie's with its multiple tiny pinholes. I forced myself to focus on the nurse's words.

"What is a parathyroid?" I asked. I sounded a bit exasperated. It seemed that I now had another strange illness. I jokingly called myself the queen of weird diseases after having scarlet fever and Bell's palsy, not to mention a two-millimeter brain aneurysm discovered during the past year's search for answers.

Parathyroids are typically four tiny innocuous dots nestled within the thyroid. But when a parathyroid becomes diseased, it can wreak havoc on just about every system in the human body and often mimics other illnesses, which is why I was sick for almost a year before my team of

doctors—family physician, psychiatrist, neurologist, neurosurgeon, and endocrinologist—discovered what was wrong with me. After some debate about the cause and possible solutions, my family doctor realized it was caused by the lithium that was prescribed to stabilize my moods. I stopped taking the medication, and within two months, the majority of problems were gone and I was considered cured.

But it was too late. I was very thin and wanted to stay that way.

"How much do you weigh, ninety-five, ninety-six pounds?" the emergency room doctor asked me.

"About ninety-five pounds," I said. I sounded proud. I felt proud. Proud that I was so tiny I could be measured in only double digits. Proud that my hipbones stuck out and my stomach curved inward. Proud of arms that looked like carved marble, stripped of fat; runner's arms, one person said one day when I was working out. I didn't have a clue how emaciated I looked, although the compliments on my weight loss had stopped months earlier and now I only heard, you're too thin.

"You know you're too thin, don't you?" the doctor asked.

No, I didn't know. I was in the emergency room because of some problem with my heart, not because of my weight. Or so I thought. I later learned terms like brachycardia and tachycardia and how many anorexics die of cardiac arrest. First my heart would start racing and start skipping beats, and then it would slow to a crawl like an old-fashion clock winding down. I had been to the emergency room several times during the first half of 2008, and I remained convinced I was going to have a heart attack.

"Do you also purge your food?" he asked.

I was offended. I didn't throw up my food; that was extremely gross. I used laxatives at times to get rid of unwanted food, but I didn't count that as purging.

"No," I said.

"Well, I want you to eat something before you leave. Turkey or ham sandwich boxed lunches, your choice," he said.

I didn't want to eat anything. I wasn't hungry. But I had the feeling I wasn't going to be released until I ate a sandwich, so I said turkey and he turned around and left. The nurse returned with not only a sandwich, but also cookies, juice, a piece of fruit, and a small can of Coke. Plus a package of mayonnaise. I stared at all that food in horror.

"David, please eat some of this food," I said. I started tossing most of it at him, as he was hungry but hadn't been offered anything. He caught the chips and the cookies, my biggest fears.

"Angela, you are supposed to eat," he said. I couldn't tell if he was angry or sad. He looked tired, dark circles on his long face, his brown and gray hair hanging in a curtain.

But he was hungry and eventually began to eat. I could see that my illness was wearing him down.

I ate the sandwich plain and drank some of the Coke, then the doctor came in to check and see if I actually had eaten what usually constituted about three days worth of food for me. I smiled, indicating most of the food was gone. He said I was free to go, but that I needed to do something about my "weight problem."

I knew what I was going to do—I was going to lose more weight. I still wasn't thin enough, and I loved how great I felt each time I stepped on the scale and the number was lower than the day before. I was already the thinnest woman at work, and I constantly heard I was too thin or I needed to eat something or shouldn't I gain some weight.

I had said years before that no one would ever be able to say I was fat again. And now they couldn't.

* * * *

Mary Lou was trying to run our weekly meeting; our news editor's delicate, perfect size-four-looks belied her complete lack of empathy toward anyone who was different or stood out. Like me. I was the cow of the female reporters. I had been slender most of my life, but now weighed in at about one hundred and sixty-eight pounds after years on an antidepressant that caused me to gain weight. Kelly was talking about how she couldn't fit into her size two "Satan" pants anymore. She called them that because supposedly every time she wore them, something bad happened like a murder or a fire, and she had to drag herself and her small toddler to the scene no matter what time of the day or night it was.

"I want them. Maybe I'll get some good stories wearing them," Kathie said.

"I don't think they'll fit you, Kathie," I said.

"What? You think Kelly is smaller than me?" Kathie yelled.

"I wouldn't talk about size if I were you, Angela," Mary Lou added.

Jesus, I thought. *I was just joking*. I was well aware that all of them were thin and I was fat. My fellow reporter and friend Stacy looked over at me sympathetically, but didn't say anything. Mary Lou had already browbeaten her about other things, mainly for dressing too sloppily for Laura Ashley's taste, and Stacy had a tendency to burst into tears whenever she was confronted about anything. *Besides, she's also thin*, I thought resentfully.

I went to my doctor's that week, asking for tips to lose weight. He suggested the typical low-fat diet and maybe I could squeeze in some exercise. Blah blah blah was all I heard because it sounded like I would lose about one pound a year on his plan. It was August 2001 and the

Atkins Diet was getting a lot of attention, so I ditched my antidepressant and my doctor's advice and embraced low-carb eating with the same fervor that I would later embrace anorexia. I was excited watching the scale register lower and lower numbers, not realizing then I would eventually become a slave to the scale and restricting food. Atkins was the bullet that eventually exploded within my brain.

I had recovered from hyperparathyroidism and been well—well enough to go into work regularly and to stay out of the emergency room—for about two months during the fall of 2007. But I felt strange, almost hypomanic, and nothing had been given to me to replace the lithium even though I had been diagnosed with bipolar illness years before. For the first time in decades, I was completely medication free. I also couldn't shake off this strange fear of food and eating that I started developing in the summer, when I was still sick and dropping weight.

"I can't believe how tiny you are," one lady in the front office said. I thought I could hear envy in her voice. Later on, much later, I realized her tone was one of pity, not envy.

My co-worker, Ashley, had a bit more unique way to put it.

"You don't need to go to Curves, you need to go to Ponderosa," she shouted one day, half the newspaper's staff laughing as her voice carried through the room filled with cubicles. My mind flew back to when I was fat and the newsroom joke; now the jokes were about being too thin.

Except I didn't think I was too thin. In fact, I couldn't get rid of the obsessive thought that I must have been fat before because so many people were mentioning my weight loss. I became scared I would gain the weight back. The fear took hold and wouldn't let go, so I started cutting down on the food I ate. First it was a little bit here, a little bit there. I didn't ever feel hungry, so I

would cut a little bit more. The thoughts were coming stronger, beating at me, convincing me I was still too fat and needed to lose more.

One night, David was in the kitchen, cooking rice, chicken, and green beans for dinner. He usually made our meals because I never learned to cook, even though my mother tried to teach me. I remember times in the small kitchen at my parents' house in Pontiac, when she would make cornbread with real butter and bean soup with ham. I wasn't afraid of food then. I wasn't afraid. I shook my head to bring myself back to the present.

"No butter!" I snapped.

He looked at me, eyes clouding over. Something passed over his face. Sorrow? Regret? Anger? I couldn't tell, and I didn't really care.

"Angela, I can't cook like that," he said.

"Please," I said, as fear started to grip me. He *couldn't* put butter in the rice.

"But Angela," he started to say. Then he sighed in resignation.

"I'll add butter to mine after it is cooked," he said.

David and I were already arguing over food that fall, not just the amount of butter to put in the rice, but everything: the fact that I would only eat two slices of deli turkey for lunch, exactly how many crackers I would eat with my soup, and my insistence that everything be exactly measured when he cooked. Each night I would obsessively add up the number of calories I ate, praying it wasn't too much. The eating disorder voice was growing louder inside, admonishing me for eating and whispering that more than one or two bites of food would make me fat. Then came Christmastime 2007 in all its feasting glory. David and I had friends over for a pre-holiday meal of roast chicken, mashed potatoes, vegetables, bread and butter, and pumpkin pie with whipped cream. I struggled to eat; everything had too much fat and I was too afraid. I

finished the meal, wanting to appear normal in front of our friends. But even before they left, I went into the bathroom, closed the door and swallowed a handful of laxatives to get rid of the food.

Addiction is a strange thing. No one sets out to become addicted, whether it is to cigarettes, prescription medications, alcohol or any other substance. I had watched my father battle alcoholism for years; his drunken rages ruined my childhood and adolescence, making me hate Christmas for years because what I most remembered was decorated trees being torn down in anger and hiding in the bedroom as my mother and father would yell at each other, as if they couldn't stop some sort of weird dance they had to perform every holiday. I swore my life would be different; I swore I would be different. Then I went away to college and drank my way through two years at Michigan State, losing the full-ride scholarship I had earned for being such a great student in high school. I was drinking one night at the bar when I was offered a cigarette, and then I became a full-time smoker. I eventually ditched both these habits after graduating with my degree in psychology and working as a social worker, and I began to think I had escaped the family curse of addiction.

Then I developed anorexia. At first, I didn't think of it as an illness of addiction. David and I argued about this one night. I had already started the cycle—restrict, starve, purge with laxatives as needed, repeat every day.

"You're addicted to starving," he said.

"Anorexia isn't addiction. Anorexia is totally different," I said. "If you would read some books or something . . . You don't know what you're talking about, you don't understand at all."

"I did read that one book, and anorexia is an addiction. Just like alcoholism."

I felt as if he had slapped me in the face. I was not an addict. My father had been an alcoholic and he had made our lives a living hell. He had been addicted to alcohol and cigarettes and gambling, practically ignoring his children and wasting almost every damn dime on his addictions. That was not me. I couldn't believe that was what my husband thought of me.

"You're addicted to starving," he repeated. "You can't seem to stop, no matter what. You know it will kill you, but for some reason, you still starve yourself. That's addiction."

"You're dying," said Dr. Alexander Sackeyfio.

I was sitting on a black leather couch in a room lined with bookshelves filled with books about eating disorders. Many of those same books sat on my bookcase at home, unread. I didn't think I was dying. I had just worked an eight-hour day, chasing down people so I could write articles about declining school budgets and dead soldiers. I thought he was being a bit melodramatic, and my eating disorder voice whispered that he just wanted to make me fat like everybody else. There were times anger would flare up inside of me—*All of you thought I was too fat at one time, and now you complain I'm too thin? Can I ever be good enough?* But I was much more withdrawn after about eight months of anorexia. I just sat there and stared at him.

I had finally agreed to see Dr. Sackeyfio, a Farmington psychiatrist who specialized in treating people with eating disorders, after I had continued to hover around the ninety-two pound mark for months. I also had been experiencing dizziness and blackouts from lack of food, and made several more trips to the emergency room. It was August 2008.

"What do you think about the idea of being hospitalized?" he asked.

Dr. Sackeyfio had a very gentle, quiet manner about him, and I instinctively trusted him. I didn't trust many men, both because of my father and my horrible choices in men before I got

married. Men who were emotionally abusive and told me I was too fat at one hundred pounds and decided to dump me at 2 a.m. with the cliché, let's just be friends. One of these men had beat the crap out of me late one night when I was nineteen, kicking me in the stomach and punching me in the face before I could finally get away from his rage. I had written about all this on Dr. Sackeyfio's stack of intake forms, and couldn't quite stop thinking about all the stupid choices I had made throughout the years.

"Anorexia is a real illness, you know," Dr. Sackeyfio said. "People die from it every day."

"What would they do at the hospital?" I asked.

I was a little worried about work, but didn't think taking time off would be a problem. Several of my co-workers at work were concerned about me, especially after I was seen almost passing out in front of the local real estate office. I swear Jack and Chris must have said to me every day the same litany: you need to gain weight, Angela; please eat something, Angela. Jack started bringing in muffins he said he made especially for me. I would sometimes feel guilty and take the smallest one I could find and either eat it all and then panic over the fact I couldn't figure out its calorie count, causing me to cut my food intake further that day, or else eat a bite and give the rest to Scout. Scout was my co-worker's Leader Dog, and had often been my accomplice when I needed to get rid of food at the office. Scout would eat just about anything, and I felt guilty when I realized what a fat dog he had become. Feeling guilty had become my predominant emotion that summer.

"You would get the nutrition you need, go to groups, and relax. You could bring some books with you," he continued.

I wasn't sure if two weeks in a psychiatric unit sounded very relaxing, but I had promised David and my family and friends I would agree to whatever treatment this doctor recommended. I had already failed before.

Earlier that summer, I flew to Wisconsin and Rogers Memorial Hospital. My dietitian—who ended our sessions when I failed to gain one pound after four months of treatment—had recommended Rogers and its inpatient eating disorders program as a possible option. She felt I needed a higher level of care, and I hadn't yet been able to find a psychiatrist who specialized in eating disorders who would take me as a patient. It was really too funny, most specialists only saw patients who were thirty-years old or under and I was forty-three. I felt like an oddity even in the eating disorder world.

I was scheduled to stay at Rogers for two weeks; that was all my insurance would pay for. The hospital's lobby was wide and spacious and complete with little touches typically found in a luxurious hotel, such as fake white lilies in a large vase and overstuffed couches and chairs scattered throughout. A twelve-year-old girl named Emily¹ with a feeding tube who had been battling anorexia since she was ten was sitting on one of the overstuffed couches, her small frame leaning into the protective embrace of her mother. Her mother stroked her arm, both of them trying to reassure each other that this would be the place to cure the little girl. I felt sad to see a little girl connected to a feeding tube because of anorexia, and I felt oddly ashamed that I was struggling with the same illness as a child.

¹ The names of all patients with eating disorders have been changed to protect their privacy.

"There is a separate place for children here," her mother said, her Southern drawl quiet and soothing. I found myself wishing that I were little like Emily, with my mother's arms around me, protecting me.

"It feels safe here," Emily said, snuggling closer to her mom.

Then I met my psychiatrist—a tall, thin woman who reminded me of a young Katherine Hepburn and frightened me by her iciness and intellectual demeanor.

"Angela Lackey," she said, crossing her long, lanky legs that were encased in flare trousers, and looking at a slim chart containing my admittance record and half-filled out questionnaire—I didn't know what to write, and I had already started feeling uncooperative about this whole hospital—containing my background and history of anorexia.

I just nodded.

"You are here for treatment of anorexia," she said. It was not a question. She said that ugly, terrifying word calmly.

What could I ever say to this woman? How could I explain to her how fat I felt, how I wanted to diminish into nothingness to escape the world around me? How could I tell her I was a complete failure, at college, at marriage, at every single thing I ever attempted in life? I definitely *didn't* feel safe here, and I instinctively drew away from her and said as little as possible.

"You seem to have little insight into your illness," she continued.

"Yes," I said. I wished she would quit talking. My head hurt, and the eating disorder voice was roaring in my head.

"You saw a dietitian in Michigan who originally diagnosed you with anorexia," she said.

"Yes," I replied.

"She terminated with you after about four months because you were uncooperative with treatment," she continued.

"Yes," I said, drawing out the word and inhaling my breath. I was tired and I just wanted to go home. Disappear. I felt numb.

"Well, your insurance has approved you for two weeks treatment. That is all," she said.

I fled from the room, pulling my size three jeans—the belt had been taken away—and wondering how I could get the hell out of there.

I was taken upstairs, and it was clear I was in a hospital, not the Hotel Hilton. For one thing, it was painted a drab yellow and smelled of a mixture of urine and cleaning solution. A nurse's station sat in the middle and the unit was divided into two areas: one for people with eating disorders and one for people who were addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Having grown up with an alcoholic father, I was frightened by the presence of the substance abuse unit and the fact that at times the two groups of patients had no choice but to intermingle.

I was taken to my room. It had two regular single beds, with a mesh screen attached over the tiny window and a locked bathroom. It was locked because of people who purge, my roommate told me. But I don't purge, I said. Neither do I, my roommate said, but the bathroom was still opened only for morning showers or if you could convince an aide that you wouldn't throw up your food. There was no chance to use laxatives; our luggage was thoroughly searched before our belongings were returned to us. I hated the sense of violation, knowing strangers were pawing through my underwear, even possibly looking at the journal I had brought with me.

The hospital's program made no sense to me. The eating disorder patients spent every day in a small room, working on workbooks and eating each meal together at a long table. There was a bathroom next to this table, and each time we had to go, we went with the door opened a crack

and a nurse standing outside to make sure we weren't throwing up our food. Not that it really mattered, because we could eat as little or as much as we wanted. This seemed counterproductive to me: let the anorexic choose what she would eat. I could have continued starving at home and saved the cost of plane fare. The rest of the time the patients paced the room, looking for something to do. Several patients were severely emaciated men connected to feeding tubes, and this was the first time I realized men also suffered from anorexia. There was Greg, the ex-Marine who had served in Iraq and came home with medals and memories, only to repeatedly starve himself for the next several years. There was Susan, who used crutches to get around. She had lost part of her leg because of her eating disorder, although she never did explain exactly why it had to be amputated. Susan was determinedly cheerful all of the time, and often spent hours scribbling in children's coloring books. Then there was the young man whose name I never learned, who remained still and silent all day long. I thought of him as "the ghost boy," a wisp of a person who had so diminished himself with starvation he only half-existed.

I begged to be released that day. My pseudo-Freudian psychiatrist told me once again that I had little insight into my illness and that if I didn't pull it together soon, I would be dead within the year. She wanted to keep me there for three more days—Wisconsin law gave her that right—but finally released me twenty-four hours later after I threw a fit, crying and swearing I wouldn't cooperate one bit with treatment.

Flying home, I leaned my head against the plane's window, looking at the clouds and wishing I could jump out of the plane and be free. Free of my thoughts. Free of my body. Free of my bones. Free. Free of anorexia and the ever-pervasive anxiety that it brought with it. I was so afraid and I believed that psychiatrist from Rogers who said I would die of anorexia. My discharge papers were a dismal declaration of how ill I was. Prognosis: poor. I didn't care. I was

ninety-two pounds and quickly heading for the eighties, and I just wanted it to be done and over with. Take me home, Jesus.

"This is not your fault, you know," Dr. Sackeyfio continued. "It is an illness. You didn't cause it, and you deserve to get better and live a full life."

"Okay, I'll go to the hospital," I said.

The thought of rest was the carrot. I was so tired. Tired of being thin. I hadn't realized I was actually emaciated and not just thin until I saw some pictures from a medical mission trip to Haiti I had gone on a few months earlier, in June 2008. When I saw those pictures, I remembered Samendia and Elmise and other little girls speaking a mixture of Creole and English, tiny fingers stroking my arm and whispering, *too thin, too thin*. They were fascinated by my naturally curly hair and would stroke my head and braid my hair in tiny, intricate braids as I sat and waited as the Haitian patients came up to our little prayer station, asking one of us to pray for their salvation, their children's health, the ability to understand God's will in their lives. I felt like a fraud as I held each person's hand and bent my head, praying through a translator, knowing that they really believed God heard them and I felt as if God had either deserted me or didn't exist at all. Then the mission pictures came back and I saw my gaunt face, accentuated by the cornrows pulling my hair back, and arms stripped to the bones, one hand holding a large cup of Starbucks coffee I bought after we landed in Detroit. I cried and asked my husband, do I really look like that? He said yes, and every once in a while I will still look at the picture to see what I couldn't see in the mirror. That I was too thin.

The Call of Haiti

I settled back into the comfortable couch in the home of Lynda Varner, a Midland nurse-midwife who had recently lost her teenage son, Aaron, to colon cancer. I was interviewing her for an article about her recent trip to Halos Medical Mission in Petionville, Haiti, just outside of Port-au-Prince. The mission had been dedicated to Lynda's son.

"You should come with us on one of our trips," Lynda said. I didn't immediately respond. I had to think about it. I had never been on a mission trip.

"You could write about the mission, and also be part of the team," she said. There was an opening on the April 2008 team.

But what could I offer? Then I remembered the verse from the Book of Isaiah: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" I knew I had to go.

There was only one problem. I agreed to go when I was still well. I did not know that I would soon develop anorexia, and that I would literally be struggling to save my own life. The mission trip was postponed until June 2008 because of ongoing riots and the instability of the Haitian government that spring. I was fully enmeshed in anorexia by then.

But in the end it didn't matter. I felt as if Haiti was calling me, so I went.

The tap-tap—Haiti's version of a taxi that is often painted in bright colors and intricate designs—and van carrying the twenty missionaries, including myself, and our luggage and supplies pulled up to Three Angels. Three Angels is the umbrella organization that includes Three Angels Orphanage, Three Angels Christian Academy, and Halos Medical Mission.

Dusk had fallen. I could see in the dim light a concrete building, its shadows falling across a concrete courtyard with one lone tree growing out of an opening. Halos was to the right, a one-room yellow building about the size of a master bedroom.

Almost immediately the children were jumping into our arms. They so wanted to be hugged and kissed and held. I had three little boys just cling to me, pressing their sweet little chubby cheeks against mine, and chatter away in Creole like I understood. My heart melted and it was then I felt at my best and most needed. Almost immediately my tiredness fell away as I lifted up Armon, holding him against my chest and touching my lips to his cheek. The warm, damp baby smell of him touched my heart.

That night we drove to St. Joseph's Home for Boys, where we would be staying for the week. This multi-layered building was a delight, with its extensive collection of Haitian folk paintings and sculptures scattered throughout the home. This was one of the many buildings that would be destroyed years later in the January 2010 earthquake. It housed about twenty Haitian young men, taken off the street and given a chance at schooling and a better life. Michael Geilenfeld, of Algona, Iowa, is the founder and director of St. Joseph's, one of several homes that are part of the Hearts of Haiti.

"I feel a call to be here. A call from God," he said. "Faithfulness to that is what's kept me here. And prayer is what sustains me."

Geilenfeld was a brother in community with the Mother Theresa of Calcutta order in Haiti before leaving to start the home in 1985, and truly believes he was called by God to live his life teaching and guiding Haitian street boys to another life. He plans to stay in Haiti for life, and he already has had his burial tomb built in the mountains. He also is a man of determination, and

an example of the spirit of his adopted country—the Hearts of Haiti website shows pictures of the home being rebuilt out of the rubble of the old building after last year's earthquake.

We climbed several flights of stairs, dragging our luggage with us, to get to our living quarters. The women slept in one room and men in another. Each room was filled with bunks and the shower and bathroom—but no flush toilets; water buckets were available to dispose of solid waste—nearby. The women's side actually had a working shower and I jumped into the shower before I went to bed and quickly discovered there was only one temperature of water—cold. However, it felt wonderful after the hot and windy day and evening, and I almost immediately fell asleep as I landed on my bottom bunk.

Each morning we had prayer and a brief devotional before walking about one mile to Halos Medical Mission. Not knowing what to expect, I had brought only ballerina flats to wear. I regretted my choice of shoes after the first day because I could feel each rock and stone on the gravel road as I walked, and some evenings I would limp back to St. Joseph's. We were constantly inundated by Haitian vendors selling everything from small sculptures to Made in China beaded bracelets. I rarely could resist buying something, and I refused to barter with people who were that poor.

I was one of two people assigned to the prayer team. Each patient would first go through registration and then was asked if he or she would like to pray with one of the missionaries. Not one patient turned down prayer. We prayed with the patients through a translator, although a surprisingly number of Haitians understood at least some English. I was touched by their prayer requests. Many patients wanted prayer for spiritual protection, while others wanted to become closer to God and Jesus Christ. Their focus was definitely on the spiritual, and I don't think anyone asked for prayers for material goods. I later learned that voodoo still had a definite

presence in Haiti, and that many Haitians were fearful of it and wanted prayer for protection from voodoo's malevolent influence.

At this point, I was restricting my eating to basically nothing and ended up giving away most of my lunch to my translator every day. I had also increased my intake of Xanax and Tylenol with codeine to combat my anxieties about food and weight and being surrounded by people while in Haiti; during the trip, I ended up taking the combination, along with Benadryl, about four times daily.

One day, my translator wasn't able to be there and Steven was my translator for the day. Steven was only twelve, but had picked up English from hanging around the missionaries each time they came and he was incredibly bright. Each time he would translate a prayer, he would bow his head, close his eyes, and scrunch up his face in concentration. I found it amazing that a young child could do the work of an adult, sitting there for hours in the heat while other children played all around us. For him, though, it was a thrill because he was able to practice his English and he wanted to know as much as possible. I was happy to find out that Steven was finally being adopted, and would soon be going to America.

Each night we would gather upstairs in an open air room—almost all rooms at St. Joseph's and other Haitian buildings are open to allow the cooler breezes of night to come in—and talk over the day, asking what we could have done better and how the Lord worked in our lives that day. I felt shy, and often said little. My illness was starting to take over my innate outgoing nature.

Three Angels and St. Joe's are located in Petionville, which is considered a suburb of Port-au-Prince. This was the suburbs—concrete apartments on top of each other, built with no

codes and often out of materials Americans would discard as junk, topped by blue tanks holding the precious water that had to be shipped in. Three Angels sustained some damage during the earthquake, and the children had to sleep in tents in an open field nearby until repairs could be made. It still saddens me to think that many of the places I went to, including the place where I slept and mingled with young Haitian boys full of hope, are now gone. I walk through these places in my mind, and I am back again in the dim kitchen at St. Joe's, struggling to eat at least part of my peanut butter sandwich and drink my Coke. I am again in a large upstairs patio, alone at 6 a.m. when there was still coolness to the air, watching the white-hot sun bathe the concrete buildings.

The 'burbs were lively from about 4 a.m. through midnight and beyond. Roosters crowed, acting as a natural alarm clock. People shouted back and forth in Creole, gossiping and chatting and laughing well after the sun went down. "Bon jour" (*good morning*) and "Bon swa" (*good evening*) was heard constantly as people moved through their days.

Haitians made Sunday the Sabbath: a day of worship, rest, and time spent with family and friends. Everyone dressed in their best, and the churches were packed with little girls in frilly frocks and little boys in miniature suits. "Jesus loves me, this I know, because the Bible tells me so . . ." rang out from everywhere, a melodious blend of little children and adults singing this familiar childhood hymn.

The mission team also gathered for church and fellowship on Sunday. There was a little chapel amongst St. Joe's many levels, and a simple wooden altar was spread with a white cloth and the offering of bread and wine sat upon it. We sang and prayed for a successful medical mission, that all the patients who needed to be seen could be seen during the week, and that we could also offer spiritual sustenance to the Haitians. As I soon found out, the Haitians often

offered us spiritual sustenance, with their strong belief in God and His protection. I sometimes felt like asking them to pray for me.

One day an elderly Haitian woman arrived at the clinic with her left breast eaten away by cancer. The wound was deep and intricate, the skin torn away to expose a patchwork of bumps, some oozing pus. She couldn't afford to go to the doctor's when the cancer first developed—Haiti's medical system is strictly pay when services are rendered—and the disease literally exploded inside her breast. I was in the clinic when she came in, and saw Michel Fenel, the Haitian manager of the clinic, dress her wounds and cover them up. I asked him later how he was able to sustain his faith in God, his faith in his work, when some patients were simply given painkillers and gently told they only had so long to live.

"When I see someone who is suffering, like the lady with the big hole, I'm feeling sad inside," he said.

"I don't let them see that," he said of his sadness. "I say words of comfort. I do what I can."

Then, he said, he goes somewhere quiet and prays.

The van drove higher and higher, moving away from the crowded streets of Port-au-Prince with its scattering of United Nations soldiers and debris left over from the April riots. Many of the stores and buildings still were in various stages of disrepair months later. The streets were filled with vans, older model cars, scooters, pedestrians, and tap-taps, so named because the rider "taps" on the vehicle side to indicate that the vehicle was near his or her stop. Many of the houses were behind concrete walls topped with barbed wire, and corn grew in every available

spot between buildings. Traffic signals and lanes seemed irrelevant as the traffic moved forward haphazardly amidst the throngs of people and bicycles.

The mission team was going to provide medical care for the residents of Wings of Hope. The home was founded by some former residents of St. Joseph's, who wanted to provide better care for children with disabilities after seeing how such children were crammed into dark rooms and spent their lives in cribs with little attention and no hope for change. Wings of Hope houses children and adults with a range of disabilities from Down syndrome to autism. Most of the residents were brought there as children, and lived there the rest of their lives. They were considered fortunate, for many Haitian children with disabilities either do not live long or live in inhumane conditions of filth and lack of human contact.

The home was spacious and airy, with cobbled stairs and sloping hallways and a large dining room and kitchen. I wasn't able to help with the medical part of the trip into the mountains, so I wandered around the building and talked with the staff who could speak English. I am a former social worker who worked with people with developmental disabilities, and I was interested in how they were treated in Haiti. In the United States, most people with developmental disabilities now live in their own homes or apartments and are assisted by staff. They attend school and then are prepared for some type of work. The Haitian home was different. The staff provided the basics, such as physical therapy and individual attention. This home might be considered "warehousing" by people in this country, a throwback to the institutions of the fifties and sixties.

However, I could tell that the residents were well cared for and loved by the staff. They were not living their lives by our standards, and yet they seemed happy. I fell in love with one young lady who would continuously look up at me and grin. I had a fleeting thought that I could

take her home and take care of her, but I think I knew even then I was struggling to take care of myself. I've never forgotten her and I still wonder what her life is like, if she is happy and still smiles when hugged.

I wondered if Samendia and Elmise could sense my sadness. Late one afternoon, the two little girls started stroking my hair. I knew I was somewhat of an anomaly amongst the children. First, they were not used to seeing such a thin American and often some of the children would stroke my arm and whisper, "Too thin, too thin," in their soft voices. I said nothing, picking them up and smiling down at them. But I wondered what drove me to starve myself while I was surrounded by children who had been starving and had seen starvation everywhere they looked. I had been told about how Elmise and Armon had lived in Cité Soleil, a makeshift city built on garbage piles and considered by the United Nations as one of the most dangerous places in the world. Elmise had seen her older brother shot and killed, and their mother could no longer afford to feed them and out of love brought them to Three Angels, leaving them with a note to the staff to take care of her children. I felt confused and ashamed, and it took years to realize and accept that I was struggling with a real illness that kills many people and isn't easily treated.

My thick curly hair also fascinated the children, and they often would touch it and gently pull a few strands to watch it spring back. Elmise was the leader and directed Samendia to make seven tiny precise braids on each side, counting, "En, de, twa." I normally do not like my hair touched, but I found it did not bother me when the children touched it. I actually became quite relaxed during this impromptu hairdressing session.

It was time to go home. I had mixed feelings. I missed my husband and my church, and many times I had longed for home. But I also knew I would miss Haiti.

I left Haiti with three dollars in my pocket, having spent six dollars on two cross necklaces made of dark brown cocoa beans. Both necklaces are carefully placed in my jewelry box, and sometimes I will take one of the necklaces out and sniff the beans, sure I can still smell the sweetness of the cocoa.

On the plane ride home, I thought, *tonight I will wash Haiti off of me. I will undo my cornrows, I will scrub my head and body, I will clean under my fingernails and brush my teeth properly. I will return to myself.*

But even if I never return to Haiti, I will never be able to wash it from my soul. It is now in my blood, in my mind and in my heart.

And in my dreams will be Michel, Clothide, and Gabriel. Elmise and Samendia will braid my hair again, and Elmise will sing her song. Armon will hold up his arms to be picked up and Mia will dance her flirty dance.

In my dreams, I will sleep on a sticky mattress and wonder if the power will go out. I will hear the rooster crow to wake me up. I will see the people of Haiti as the sun goes down and they come out and say, "Bon swa."

Behind Locked Doors: William H. Beaumont Hospital

I panicked the minute I walked through those locked doors. I insisted I had changed my mind and wanted to go home. The urge to flee was very strong. David tried to calm me down as I sat down on the hospital bed, but I begged him to take me home, that I would eat, please just don't make me stay here.

"But you have to stay," David said. He sounded exasperated.

"I can't do this," I said. I felt panic rising up inside me. I tugged down my short black mini-skirt, and looked around at the bare room like it was a prison cell.

"The doors are *locked*," I continued. Was that really my voice? I sounded frightened. I sounded like I wanted to flee.

"Angela," David began.

"Angela what," I snapped, breaking apart inside.

"Do what you want," David said. "But you can't come home in this condition. I've had it."

It was an ultimatum. For the first time, I felt fear that my marriage was ending. That anorexia was going to succeed in destroying everything.

Then Dr. Sackeyfio came into the room.

"I understand you want to go home," he said. "I won't force you to stay here, but I think you know you need to."

The look of concern on his face is what did it. He genuinely seemed to care about what happened to me, and that feeling has never left me through years of treatment with this kind and gentle doctor. I stopped crying and took several deep breaths, and decided to stay.

"When will I see you next?" I asked him.

"Why, every day," he said, sounding surprised. "We will meet every morning here, except on Wednesdays. I'm not abandoning you."

"You are so much more than your body size," Dr. Sackeyfio said to me one day.

I sat there quietly, thinking about that remark. *What does he mean? Who am I? Who was I?* Unwanted tears—God, I hated being weak; I used to be so strong—threatened to spill as I thought about what I might be besides my body size.

"You have so much to give to the world," he continued.

I felt confused. *What do I have to give to the world? The world demanded that I be thin and I have become very good at accomplishing that. What more does the world want from me? How thin do I need to be to be thin enough?* But I knew that's not what he was talking about.

"In spite of everything, you are still reaching out, trying to help others," he said. He mentioned my gift for writing, and how I try to help people understand anorexia and those who suffer from it with my words, such as with my public blog about my struggles with anorexia that I had been writing for years.

"But what about helping Angela?" he asked.

Sadness filled me, and I whispered, "I don't know."

I was supposed to be a shining example of recovery. Everyone said so when I entered Beaumont Hospital in August 2008. I had only been battling anorexia for about a year. I ate everything they put in front of me, and after my first-day meltdown, I kept my mouth shut and adopted a passive-aggressive approach to treatment. I didn't know then that I wasn't helping myself; I was just marking time until I could get out of the hospital and start starving again. Several nurses and fellow patients were very impressed by my supposed motivation, not realizing I felt as if I were dying on the inside. One nurse, Ron, said I would go home and continue to eat and put anorexia behind me. Audrey, a patient who had been battling anorexia for about fifteen years, said most anorexics don't fully recover, but that I was different because of the short duration of my illness and that I would be Dr. Sackeyfio's success story; the one who made it, the person who recovered and made all his hard work and dedication worthwhile.

I quickly discovered two things while I was in the hospital the first time—I was not the thinnest girl on the block and anorexia was one hell of a competitive illness. All the eating

disorder patients had to sit together at meals. That meant we discussed everything we weren't supposed to talk about.

"Exactly how low did you go? Oh, 92? God, I'm 60 pounds right now and they say I am losing more," Ava said.

"Do you take laxatives? The whole box or just the normal amount?" asked Jennifer.

"Syrup of ipecac, anyone?" I said sarcastically.

How much you were or were not eating was hungrily scrutinized.

"You're not going to eat that muffin, are you?" someone else threw out. Why, yes, I had thought I might—until now. I was trying to follow Dr. Sackeyfio's advice, and allow myself to eat while in the hospital.

"You're not worried about those two creams in your coffee?" Ava asked with a slight incredulous lilt in her voice.

I thought, *A teaspoon of cream has only about twenty calories; forty calories can't hurt anything, can it?* And then someone, usually thinner, pointed out how brave you were, how well on the way to recovery you must be if you could tolerate those two creams, how she would like to be like you but just can't imagine it. Your blood tests came back bad? That anemia and bad kidney functioning might have you worried, but damn, at least you aren't a walking heart attack waiting to happen. Your clavicle protrudes? But why do you still have so much hair? Any self-respecting anorexic would have lost most of her hair by now.

"Why do you have a TPN?" Amanda asked one day.

"I don't know. Dr. Sackeyfio ordered it," I said.

A TPN is a type of feeding tube that is inserted into a vein and hovers over your heart. I wasn't pleased when he ordered it, because it meant I had to wear a hospital gown at all times so

the nurses could easily get at the entrance site to check for infection, and it also meant ten days without a shower because the site couldn't get wet. He didn't tell me I would be connected to a TPN when I came into the hospital, although I suppose my low weight—I was about ninety-four pounds—and my low potassium, making me a candidate for cardiac arrest, probably made it necessary.

"I knew it! You are thinner than me," Amanda said, crying. "I'm fat, too fat for the tube. Fat!"

I was confused. I had pointed Amanda out to David when I went into the hospital, swearing she had to be at least twenty pounds lighter than me. I thought either she's blind or I am. Or we both were.

I couldn't live up to anybody's expectations, and I started failing almost from the day I walked out of Beaumont. I was restricting my food intake again within a week. I truly did want to get better. And yet I didn't want to get better. I wanted both—to be thin and yet recovered and back to myself.

I remained confused throughout the fall and winter, fighting to recover and sabotaging every effort I made. I would eat a sandwich, only to take laxatives. I would write, hoping the words would help save me. Then I would throw away my lunch.

And I often thought of what everyone said and believed; that I was supposed to be the one who recovered. My mind was swirling all the time; the words recovery and anorexia and failure taunting me until one December evening in 2008, I couldn't stand it any more. I was looking at the Christmas tree, its lights of blues and greens and purples and reds blurred through my tears. Suddenly I became very angry, so very angry with myself. I hated myself for having anorexia. I felt I was spoiling yet another Christmas for David and myself. I got off the couch,

went to the bathroom and took a small razor, slashing it against my skin several times until I saw blood and finally felt the anger leave me.

I had failed. I was less than one hundred pounds again. I was still afraid of food.

I was hospitalized at Beaumont five more times between December 2008 and February 2009. After the last hospitalization, I started taking several anti-anxiety medications. I also went on indefinite sick leave from the newspaper, and was treated for severe anemia. I set out to gain weight during those months of sick leave, though I hated food, I hated feeling full, and I hated every pound I gained. But I also began to feel as if I was returning to life, and that maybe recovery was possible. I returned to work after almost three months sick leave. I took a buyout from the newspaper in August 2009 and started a new life as a graduate student in English studies.

But I was still fighting demons. I was still struggling with anorexia.

Everything fell spectacularly apart in January 2010. I couldn't get the thought out of my head that I didn't deserve to eat. I cut my calories down to about three hundred each day. I threw away food my husband made for me, and began to engage in some really strange behaviors, such as eating one or two grains of rice at a time and ripping my lunch meat into tiny shreds.

I checked myself into Beaumont in February 2010 at the advice of Dr. Sackeyfio, realizing the downward spiral was only going to continue. I was tired of my starving brain screaming at me that I could not eat, I must not eat, and I did not deserve to eat. The medical tests didn't lie—my ketones were at the level of a diabetic's, and Dr. Sackeyfio said any higher and I might have slipped into a coma.

I was placed on a feeding tube for several days. The technician tried to be gentle. A nurse stood by one side of the bed, holding my hand as I anxiously eyed the hollow tube that would soon be placed inside my nose and down my throat, snaking its way through my body and into my stomach, ready to continuously feed me 24/7 until I was able to feed myself.

It was the throat part that broke me.

Slowly the tube was inserted into my nose. Then it hit my throat, and gagging and retching, I threw up on the floor, the nurse's shoes, and in my hair. I thought, at least I know bulimia is not in my future. I hate to throw up.

The tube was again pushed down into my throat and I started crying as I again retched, leaned over and puked. Third time. The tube again was gently pushed down into my throat—it had to go in there; it needed to reach my stomach to feed me. This time I didn't move quickly enough to throw up on the floor. The bile—there wasn't much in my stomach, anyway, after a month of starvation—landed on the pillow. Shaking, I wiped my lips with a tissue. I swallowed hard and breathed slowly, nodding that he should continue to push in the tube. Gulping, gulping, I ignored the gag reflex, albeit with a lot less ease than I am able to suppress hunger.

The tube finally made its way to my stomach, but a certain part needed to open to allow nutrients to flow through the tube and into my stomach. It wouldn't open. They said I needed to relax in order to allow the tube to enter its final destination. Relax? I had just puked three times, I was shaking and crying, and I was still trying to cough up the tube like a cat coughs up a fur ball.

The nurse and the technician started using imagery, as in imagine I am in Tahiti and there is this handsome man with a tiny small bathing suit and I am being fed some luscious tropical fruit . . . *Stop! Fruit? Food?* I hadn't eaten more than about three hundred calories a day in more

than a month, I was still terrified of food, and the thought of anything luscious made me want to hurl a fourth time.

Poke with the tube. My stomach wouldn't open. Wiggle the tube and poke some more. My stomach still wouldn't open. Threaten to leave me to go watch the Super Bowl and come back tomorrow . . . I grabbed the technician with both hands, pulled the front of his shirt and dragged him toward me, saying through a gagged throat, "We are staying until you get this damn tube in my stomach, I don't care how long it takes. Forget the Super Bowl!" Finally, forty-five minutes later, he placed a thinner wire through the tube, nudged and prodded, and the tube slid in. I could be fed and he could go watch the Saints triumph.

The tube continued to gag me and it made my nose run constantly, trying to dislodge this foreign object out of me. But for some reason, it gave me an odd sort of permission to eat. I was told that happens to many anorexic patients. Maybe it's a breaking down of defenses; maybe it's just a sheer desire to get the damn thing out.

I was still eating what most people would consider minimal amounts. The dietitian on staff told me that they didn't want to shock my system with too much food too soon. It took me one hour to eat a simple meal. Small bites, chew until very soft, swallow and gag it past the tube. Then repeat about a thousand times. And that's eating anorexic-style.

Then, one night as I was standing in the unit's lukewarm shower, I thought to myself—
This is not really what I wanted out of life. Spending days, weeks on a psychiatric unit, a feeding tube down my throat. I don't want to have to ask for piece a piece of dental floss or permission to go to the bathroom after every meal. I am tired of sleeping in an empty bed in a strange room. I am unable to move about as I wanted. I make bracelets to pass the time. It is embarrassing to explain to everyone that I am here because I had starved myself for a month.

After I was discharged, David left for a two-week trip to Florida. The trip was less than a week after I got out of the hospital. Dr. Sackeyfio told us the trip was a bad idea, but we did not listen. I sensed David's growing distance from me, that he was tired of it all and needed to escape. But the self-hatred and restricting flared up once I was alone. One night, I found myself carving, "Hate me," in my upper left arm. As I watched the blood seep to the surface, I couldn't believe I did that. I felt faint. It seemed like it was someone else's arm, that couldn't be my arm, I couldn't have done that.

For the first time since I'd developed anorexia, I tried to make myself throw up my food. This wasn't just a fleeting thought or a quick, halfhearted attempt. This was twenty-five minutes bent over the toilet sticking my fingers down my throat as far down as I could. I was desperate; I felt so full, I was so angry with myself for drinking four glasses of wine and eating chips and salsa and homemade brownies made by my sister-in-law.

I couldn't get the food up. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't make myself throw up. I got up, disgusted with myself and immediately called Dr. Sackeyfio and left him a message about what I had tried to do. I didn't wait until our appointment on Wednesday. I'm sure he was thrilled to get a drunken message from me on a Sunday night, but I knew I would dance around it during our appointment and I knew I had to expose this latest trick *as soon as possible*.

I told David and he said, "This is bad." He sounded frightened of this latest manifestation of my illness. He reminded me that throwing up had been taboo, that I hated to throw up and this attempt spoke of increasing desperation.

I started lurking around several blogs written by women recovered from anorexia, in which they post pictures and describe the foods they are now enjoying. I feasted my eyes on the pictures, drinking in the bowls of fresh oats, almond butter and bananas mixed together; the fresh bread spread with avocado and topped with crumbles of hard-boiled egg, Romaine lettuce and tomato; the long, tall smoothie blended with yogurt and cream and fresh fruit, the young woman leaning forward to take a sip; the cookies-and-cream drumstick, the ice cream slightly dripping as if it had just been delightedly slurped.

I was obsessed with food. Seeing it. Wanting it. Hating it.

I thought about when I was first diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. It was by a dietitian whom my family doctor referred me to around February 2008. I agreed to see the dietitian although at the time I didn't feel anything was wrong with me. But when she diagnosed me with anorexia nervosa, I reacted first with surprise and then a little anger. It wasn't like I didn't know anything about anorexia or other eating disorders. And I didn't have an eating disorder, in spite of the fact that I weighed about ninety-five pounds, was very restrictive and rigid in my eating, and had an intense fear of gaining weight and was actually losing more weight.

But I didn't engage in any of the bizarre anorexic food behaviors or rituals at that time. I didn't cut my food up into miniscule pieces. I wasn't afraid to eat in front of my friends or co-workers, because I didn't really care if they thought two thin slices of deli turkey meat did not make a complete lunch. I wasn't collecting recipes, reading food magazines or cooking large, elaborate meals for anyone.

So therefore, Ms. Dietitian, your diagnosis was wrong wrong wrong. I am not anorexic, I do not need to see an eating disorders specialist nor go to Renfrew, Remuda, or Rogers Memorial Hospital. I do not have a problem. I am just thin and what's wrong with that? Even if I

am depressed and anxious, even if I am yanking up my size zero jeans and fighting with my husband about food and eating and hearing from everyone that I need to gain weight and my niece's nickname for me has become "Skelator"?

I was just fine. Other than being severely underweight, of course. There was the daily counting of calories and weighing myself. And the fact that I was becoming quite popular at the office for the weekly doughnuts, scones, and other forbidden foods that I brought in. But I wasn't doing anything else except restricting.

I remained unconvinced I had anorexia.

I remembered my times in Beaumont Hospital, sharing a table with other patients who had eating disorders. They did strange things like cut their food into tiny pieces, hoard sugar and salt packets, and get angry because they weren't allowed to have no-calorie sweeteners for their coffee like the other patients. One woman carried around a notebook filled with recipes and pictures of food, another continuously chewed on ice and a third would not eat her food without loading it with salt and pepper and mustard and whatever other condiment she could get her hands on. Since I didn't care what my food tasted like—the blander, the better—I was happy to give her my packet of condiments each day.

I had read about these and other behaviors and decided there was no way I could be anorexic because I didn't do such things. I became a bit annoyed by these behaviors and seriously wanted to tell one girl to *Please please please stop pressing your grilled cheese sandwich between five million napkins before I lose the last shred of sanity I have left!*

But that was years ago, and I noticed I had my own little food rituals. I couldn't eat foods that touch each other and I had to eat one food at a time. I couldn't tolerate foods with sauces or gravies, unless the food came in a box and I knew the exact calorie count. I couldn't pick up a

sandwich and bite into it; I had to either cut it up or deconstruct it. I ate slowly, and I realized I actually did cut my food into tiny pieces, thus taking more than an hour to eat a meal most people can finish in twenty minutes.

I usually had to take a tranquilizer before I could eat out with friends. Restaurants felt like torture unless there was some type of salad I could order. I was positively thrilled when Bob Evans, David's favorite restaurant, came out with its light menu and listed the calories and fat grams on the menu. I weighed ninety-seven pounds and felt exhausted, and yet often couldn't go to bed until 4 or 5 a.m. I had trouble concentrating on anything—class work, magazine articles, watching a television show, holding a conversation. I was afraid my graduate studies were going to be hurt by the fact that I was often too starving to think very clearly.

But despite all this, I said to my husband one night, I don't think I have anorexia. I think I am just thin and everybody is making too big a deal out of it.

We were in bed, the blankets pulled up because I was always cold and my cat, Aliena, was curled up on my feet. It was my favorite time of the day. The time I could rest and forget everything. The time I'd forget I was too thin; the voices lessened in the drowsy warmth of being half-asleep while I read a book. But my problems came crashing through, and even this refuge was destroyed by anorexia.

"I am not anorexic," I said.

David started to cry—the first time I had seen him cry in about ten years—and struggled to catch his breath before speaking.

"We almost made it this time," he said. "You were so close to getting better."

"Please don't cry," I begged. I felt incredibly guilty about bringing him to tears. I thought, Why don't I just kill myself and release him? I started to think about what would finally make him leave, what would finally cause him to say, Enough, I've had it.

Then I started dreaming about those food blogs, the abundant richness taunting my sleep. I could almost smell the cinnamon sprinkled on the oats and taste the creamy saltiness of the almond butter. In the morning, I opened my small container of yogurt, which was not mixed with granola or sprinkled with fruit, and wondered why I would ever question that I had anorexia.

My grandfather died in April 2010. David and I traveled to south-central Kentucky, to my mother's hometown, to the place where I spent many summers. Elbert Mounce lived a long, well-loved life filled with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He loved to tease people and he enjoyed the home-cooked meals of his second wife and my step-grandmother, Dean. He was a Southern boy who fought in World War II and Korea and worked on the railroad as a conductor. He tried his best to let those around know he loved them, and he accepted our love in turn.

Memories flooded me of summer days visiting him in Kentucky; summer nights filled with thick air and fireflies and sitting on the porch swing. Breakfasts of biscuits and sausage gravy; dinners of thick cornbread and bean soup. The yearly treks to visit Mamaw in Ohio and Grandpa in Somerset; the time spent with my father's family in the hills of Pineville. It was a world of cognitive dissonance, one I have not processed to this day. A loving grandpa and step-grandmother. My maternal grandmother, Mamaw; one of the most beautiful women in the world who didn't care for but one of her six grandchildren. The strangeness of my paternal grandfather

and step-grandmother, alcoholism all around and church on Sunday complete with snake handling and speaking in tongues and a mantle filled with pictures of the dead in their coffins.

Several people took pictures of Grandpa before the funeral started. I wanted to scream, "He's not here, damn it! Can't you see Elbert Mounce has left us?" I knew he was gone when I kissed his icy forehead and touched his stiff hand as I placed a small rosary in the pocket of his jeans. I wanted to say his soul was gone, as the soul of each one of us will fly upward when the cord is cut, when God decides that is it for us, when the Grim Reaper comes to carry us home.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound..." As soon as the first words floated through the funeral home, the wall I had built around myself with Ativan and Xanax broke down and my heart twisted and I again was a child, playing on the green, green lawns of Kentucky, dancing with the fireflies as my Grandpa, Dean, and my mother softly spoke to each other on the long, wide porch. I was again a child; a confused little girl who felt both loved and lonely, a child who dreamed of a life far in the future where I would spend each night with someone who loved me and have a life filled with books and learning.

After the funeral, I was surrounded by food. So much food it frightened me. I carefully placed a roll, some green bean salad, and a teaspoon of mashed potatoes on my paper plate. When my sister, Samon, started walking toward me, my left eyelid started to twitch. I was afraid.

"Is that all you're going to eat?" she asked, looking at my plate. Her own plate was pretty sparse, too, but she had an excuse—she had been having stomach problems for ages and had trouble digesting food. Well, I had an excuse, too. Anorexia.

"You shouldn't worry Mom about this," she continued.

Why was it all about Mom? Why wasn't anything, including my own problems, about me? I was unable to speak. My head hung down like a whipped dog, and I wanted nothing more than to become the smallest dust particle, the most miniscule piece of matter in the universe.

I wanted to disappear.

Later during our visit to Kentucky, I tried to. I had been drinking my coffee black to avoid the plethora of sweet creams filling the house. I ate very little that morning, panicked because I couldn't keep total track of my calories or weigh myself. I had a very small lunch, avoiding the rich soups and creamy dishes, the apple and cherry pies, the brownies thick with frosting. This complete rigid control made me feel safe in a place where I felt simultaneously like an adult and a child, with no control over who I was or what was said about me.

I tried to eat more at dinner, as I was feeling weak. Some chicken with the skin left on, some cheesy pasta salad. It was the small pieces of desserts, a bite of spice cake and one of almond bread that broke me. I tried to make myself throw up all that food inside me, feeling dirty, needing so badly to purge and be clean. The fingers wouldn't do it, but I found something else to gag up some bile and some of the pasta salad. Then my husband walked in.

"What are you doing," he asked.

What does it look like? I thought. I have my head in the toilet and a tampon applicator stuck down my throat.

"Angela," he said. Again that exasperated tone in his voice. Staring at me like he didn't know me. Which he probably didn't, not the person I had become. I was a stranger to myself, and often felt as if I was staring at myself from far above, unrecognizable.

"Angela," he said again, and reached to pull me up. Except it felt like a yank.

"I talked to your mother this morning," he said.

"I'm in the shower," I shouted.

"Okay," David said.

I heard the door shut behind him.

David walked into the living room and asked where Joyce was. My uncle, Clay, pointed him toward one of the bedrooms down the hall from where we were staying.

"Joyce," he said. His mother insisted that I call her "Mom" after David and I were married, no matter how uncomfortable it made me. My mother didn't believe in that.

"Joyce," he said again, trying to get her attention.

"I don't think what you're doing with Angela is right," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked, a hint of aggravation creeping into her voice.

"You have to encourage her to eat," he said. "Not get mad at her. Sort of like you would do with a child."

"But she's a grown woman," my mother said. "I'm not going to treat her like a child."

"But that's what her doctor tells me," he said.

"I don't care," she said. "She's forty-four years old and I'm not treating her like a child."

Their voices were getting louder, and I could hear them.

"Furthermore, don't tell me how to treat my daughter," she said, walking out and leaving David standing there.

"It didn't go well," David continued. "She got mad and said that I shouldn't tell her how to talk to her daughter."

"You shouldn't have talked to her. You know how she is," I said.

I just wanted him to leave, quickly, so I could get more food up. But he didn't budge. Instead, he waited for me to smooth down my gray pencil skirt, brush my teeth, and take a shaky breath before I finally followed him out of the bathroom.

Failure again. I needed to be empty so bad.

The end of the funeral came with a 21-gun salute and thanks for my grandpa's service to his country. *Taps* played from afar, and then we gathered some of the flowers and walked to our cars. As I held two roses, one white and one red, I was both a child and an adult. I wanted...I wanted things to have turned out differently. I glanced back, one of the last people at the cemetery as they prepared to lower my grandpa's body into the ground. I wanted to scream at them to stop, and then I remembered he wasn't there anymore. What I really wanted to say is, *Goodbye, Grandpa. I've always loved you. Maybe in spite of myself, I will see you again someday. I remember a song, one about a dance. Maybe we will dance in heaven, and you will be with your beloved Dean and I will feel whole and not fragmented anymore.*

River Centre Clinic

"I used to be as small as you," Lori said the minute she saw me. "Then my body turned against me and now I can't stop gaining weight. You should be careful, it could happen to you some day."

My anorexic heart's worst nightmare was to become obese, like Lori. Fat hung in folds from her arms and her thighs bulged in her Victoria's Secret Pink sweatpants. I had checked myself into the River Centre Clinic's partial hospitalization program in May 2010, weighing ninety-four pounds. I already regretted the decision to come—I did not want to become like

Lori—and I was beginning to think recovery, at least for me, was impossible. My long fight with my insurance company had drained the last of my energy.

I had been at the clinic for only a few days. It was evening, and I felt as if enemies surrounded me. Abbi sat perched on the edge of one chair, while Meghan sat cross-legged on the countertop. Sheryl, a sweet girl who believed in the power of the universe and the power of recovery, sat on the floor, dressed as usual in a long, flowing tie-dyed shirt and skirt. Lori, Lauren, Samantha, and Jan, my roommate who was sixty-four and had just decided to get treatment for anorexia for the first time, sat on the scattered couches and chairs. They were trying to convince me not to give up on recovery, not to pack my bags and go home. But a strong part of me wanted to flee, and I know now it was the part of me that was anorexia fighting back and trying to keep me from becoming healthy.

"You need to think of yourself first," Abbi said. "If you run away, you are the loser."

I glared at her slim figure, kept that way by throwing up her food.

"You speak the talk of recovery well," I said.

"But I don't walk the walk. I know," Abbi said.

Fear Anxiety Depression Self-Hatred . . .

Each rock was a strange mixture of velvety softness combined with rough bumps and indentations. I wrote each word — feelings and actions that had weighed me down for years — on four rocks in stark black ink.

A fifth rock was reserved for the terrifying and addictive disease that has been trying to take over my body and soul for years.

Anorexia

I started to feel both fear and relief as I traced that word in blood-red ink on each side of the rock. I feared letting go of anorexia because it had become so intermingled with my identity. But I knew I needed to let go of this disease in order to live.

The word looked so powerful. My mind flew back to when anorexia first crept into my life, chipping away bits and pieces of me until I sometimes felt there was nothing left.

Each one of us wrote down the things that had weighed us down throughout the years. We then could choose to hold onto these rocks that symbolically represented the traits that had held us down for years.

Or we could choose to toss these rocks into the river running past the clinic. The choice was ours.

I went first. I was determined to throw everything that had weighed me down for years. I had struggled through almost six weeks at the clinic. The road to recovery had been rocky and I often had been my own worst enemy as I fought to get better.

But through all the struggle and pain, through the tears I cried and the loneliness I often felt as I longed to be with my husband and friends back home, through the ambivalence I sometimes felt about letting go of anorexia, there remained a mustard seed of hope that I could be free, that I would be free.

I stepped down the grassy, sloping path to the river, dodging overgrown bushes and hanging tree branches, balancing my rocks in my hand. I stepped close to the edge, the river's dark waters churning just a few feet away from me. I threw the first rock, angry as I remembered life before my eating disorder developed. I threw more rocks as far as I could, willing each one to sink deep into the water.

The rock with one word—anorexia—remained in my hand. It felt soft and cold in my hand. The word seemed to mock me, saying that I would never get better; I would never be free. I hurled it as hard as could, feeling a strong sense of release as it landed into the water. I felt as if I had been buried under a ton of rocks and I had finally climbed my way out. At that moment it finally hit me—*I want to recover. I want anorexia out of my life forever. I want to be free.*

Each one of us took our turn. Some women were able to release all of their rocks, while others chose to hold onto one or more until they felt ready to release their burdens. The words each one had written stood out like bas-relief sculptures: bulimia, binging, addiction, hatred, rape, abuse...and anorexia.

I started to cry as I walked back up to the clinic. I'm still not sure why. I was feeling a mixture of release and relief, mingled with fear about the work I still need to do in order to get better.

Later that night, I thought about all those rocks we threw into the dark waters. I could still see the words we had written. I imagined the water rushing over the rocks until the words disappeared through the ages, the ink worn off and everything which had weighed us down mingled together into nothingness, becoming meaningless as we move forward into recovery and life.

In the end, I gained ten pounds and lost all self-esteem after six weeks at the clinic. I kept trying to distinguish between that inner voice which guides each one of us through life and the eating disorder voice that attempted to lead me down the path of self-destruction and death.

The two voices were clamoring within me. For four years, I battled anorexia nervosa and its voice. My fingertips touched recovery only to have it slip out of my grasp and spiral

downward, dead as a withered brown leaf in the fall. Hope would rise and fall, and the roller coaster ride of anorexia would continue even as I screamed at God and Heaven to let me off.

It wasn't the most positive of discharges. My therapist there privately told me she had concerns about my ability to continue in recovery, particularly in the area of meal planning and eating. And frankly, I had concerns about that, too.

Several fellow patients had kind and encouraging words to say during the graduation ceremony held on my last day. I was grateful to hear that I had helped several people and that others had enjoyed getting to know me as a person. There had been a lot of drama for several weeks in our small living space and I was led to believe much of it was my fault.

"Angela, I want to thank you for all your kindness and help," Samantha said. She had had a rough start at the clinic. First she binged, then she purged, and then she went home for a visit to her fiancé, who gave her laxatives and forced her to go running. Then her roommate, Lori, attempted suicide and she blamed herself for it. We had talked about how we were the only ones in a relationship at the clinic, and that other people didn't understand what a balancing act it was to try and recover from our illness while still being a full partner, which included intimacy—something several people had admonished us while we were in treatment to stop, not realizing it was not that easy.

"You have been a great help to me," Meghan said. "I've enjoyed getting to know you."

Meghan was a sweetheart. An aspiring actress and singer, she had been struggling with anorexia for years. She was picked to perform at a Florida amusement park, but had to cut it short when she relapsed and was sent home. She had been at the center the longest, almost four months, and seemed to be doing well. I was saddened to run into her several years later outside

of Dr. Sackeyfio's office, all of the gains she had made gone, looking gaunt and sad and a little lost.

"You have come a long way, Angela," Julie said. She was the head of the adult program and had been my therapist at first. Then we had a falling out and I requested a change of therapists, only to regret it later when my new therapist had little time for me. I had come to the clinic hoping to work on some of the abuse issues that I felt contributed to my anorexia, and was disappointed when that was repeatedly ignored.

I know I struggled with wanting recovery, and I'm sure my ambivalence was not helpful to others who were struggling. I know each one of us made mistakes and was gratified that for the most part, we were able to move past the problems and support each other. Hearing others speak about me so kindly helped me see the truth through their eyes.

Still, I drove back home in silence. No singing along to the radio and rejoicing in the fact that I did stick with it. No happiness that I ate everything, except one snack, and gained some needed weight. Just confusion about the future and the fear I would never escape anorexia.

I met with Dr. Sackeyfio the day after I was discharged. I was unusually quiet. He kept asking me about my treatment there; the things that happened and how I felt about it. I felt weighed down and oppressed, unable to talk. He gently confronted me, asking me why I was afraid to express my opinion. I started to cry. It felt like it had been a long time since my opinion really mattered and didn't seem to cause trouble. It felt like it had been a long time since I was more than just a set of symptoms and urges to be fixed.

I opened up and my fears began to ease. He asked me to consider what I learned during the past six weeks and write about it. Our session ran over because he wanted to make sure I

heard something before I left: "You have the right to your opinions. You have the right to your voice." Immediately I felt the crushing weight lift, my spirit already feeling freer. I felt relief.

David

We shared a love of writing and books. I was a frustrated writer, working as a social worker with the homeless mentally ill. David had worked at General Motors' Flint plant for decades, forced to stay there when his first wife threatened to take his children away if he tried to pursue his dream of being an artist and teacher. Then his daughter and two grandsons died from a kerosene heater exploding within their home. The boys died that day. Lisa lingered for three weeks, shredding the tatters that remained of her parents' troubled marriage. David fled, leaving Joan with a note and no real goodbye after twenty-six years of marriage.

We met at a writers' group, where I critiqued his poems and secretly envied his fifties childhood, complete with two parents and a dog. I wrote poems about the pain of growing up and the abuse that I had endured.

We dated and shared pumpkin rolls slathered with cream cheese at Young & Welshan's bookstore in Flint during the monthly poetry nights. He came to an exhibit I had organized; I was clueless that he was interested in me until he called and asked me out.

One evening, we made love to the sounds of Celtic music.

"Don't ever leave me," I said, my fears of abandonment running deep.

A pause.

"I won't," David said. "Will you marry me?"

I didn't stop to think.

"Yes," I said.

Just three months after I had thrown the stones in the river, my weight was back down in the nineties and David had left me.

I stood, looking around, stunned. Paintings, pictures, a handmade wooden chair—all missing.

The house was raped of everything that made it a home. Stripped down, bare of almost everything David created with his two hands; my tears echoed through the emptiness after I saw a white sheet of paper sitting on my computer.

I didn't need to look at it. My husband had left me. Because of my struggles with anorexia. Because he couldn't handle it after more than three years of dealing with a starving wife who seemed hell-bent on dying. Because it was too much for him. It was August 2010. I was again eating very little and dropping weight after six weeks at the River Centre.

I understood. It was too much for me. Already I missed him so much. I couldn't think of how I would live there without him.

It hurt so much. I felt destroyed.

Anorexia destroys everything. I realized this too late. I hated anorexia with all my heart.

I missed him . . .

A week later. My hand pulled back the bowstring, the arrow securely attached and my eyes aimed at the round circle in the middle. The circle represented anorexia. I wanted so badly to hit this circle and to kill anorexia. I was swearing under my breath, cursing anorexia for all it had done to my life. After David left, I decided I needed a hobby that would free my mind. So I took up archery, imagining I was Maid Marian in the forest, an equal among my companions, my bow and quiver of arrows slung over my shoulder, a huntress with no fear.

It was early evening. The time when the day is ending and twilight begins to meld into one. The sunshine held that peculiar autumnal quality, a mixture of warmth washed with pale yellow. A reminder that summer was dying and soon this part of the world would be covered with snow and ice, and the sunshine would hold light, but little warmth.

I thought of all the things anorexia had stolen from me as I aimed at the target. It had taken away my husband, the love of my life. I had not been a full partner for years. I had been too busy counting calories and plotting ways to lose weight. I had been obsessed with the number on the scale.

Every morning it was the same thoughts, hammering at my brain. Is my weight low enough? Please God let it stay in the double-digit. Let it be lower today. Tell me when it is exactly the right number so I can finally relax and do something else, anything besides think about my weight one more second! Free me from this obsession, because I will never be thin enough. God, are you listening? Am I thin enough now? Can I eat something without feeling guilty or punishing myself? God why won't these thoughts leave my brain? Free me from this slavery!

My first attempts at letting the arrows fly were pathetic. The arrows hit the grass, the side of an outbuilding, the garage. Everywhere except one of five round circles printed on a piece of paper and attached to a large square of Styrofoam.

Suddenly . . . Bang!

The arrow hit the top right circle. The mark was so very close to the round bull's eye. It was just a hair's length off. Damn!

Still, the arrow did hit the target and a circle. I felt very proud of myself and shot off a few more arrows just for fun, enjoying the weakening sunshine and slight breeze in my long hair. I had hit the target representing anorexia, and told myself it will die.

David was staying at his brother's house on the lake. I went to talk to him the night he left and I wanted to die when I realized he wasn't going to come back home. However, we did talk of reconciliation and how we both still loved each other. That night I slept on and off for about two hours at a time. I kept listening, thinking he might change his mind and still come home. It was the loneliest night of my life when I realized around 4 a.m. that his van wasn't going to pull into the driveway and he wasn't going to come through the back door.

But a stronger feeling took over. I wanted to live, really live. Live as I hadn't lived for years. I couldn't stomach food that first day, but I could drink six Ensures (three regular and three Plus.) And so I did and it was a beginning.

I knew what I had to do the next day. I had to eat and get healthy. Three regular meals and three bottles of Ensure Plus.

As I went into the house, I looked at the scratches on my left thumb and the red marks on my left arm. My hair was in my face and there was dirt on my boots and dust all over my black dress. And I didn't care. Because I realized I hadn't just hit an arrow on a paper target. I was beginning to hit the target when it comes to recovery.

I truly believed I would finally live.

I sat and thought that in ten days, David would be home and real life could begin again. It was September, beautiful with its leaves of red and gold and the autumn sun streaming down.

But I was half frozen without David. I was cold and lonely, and I had cried many tears while on my knees begging God to bring him back to me.

But I survived. I did not sink into despair nor did I turn to anorexia for solace.

At first, I railed against our separation. I was angry with God. I didn't really understand and I was caught in a maelstrom of emotions and pain as I contemplated a future without my husband.

Then hope was offered. We began to know each other again, laughing as we spontaneously made love on our small couch, rediscovering joy in each other we long thought was lost. I began to believe we would have a future together. I didn't know when, and that was hard, but with each kiss I felt David's love and longing, and remembered his promise that if I continued to eat regularly and really worked on recovering, he would return to me on his birthday at the end of September, ending a month-long separation.

So I ate as normal people eat. Real meals with three to four hundred calories each, plus several supplements to ensure weight gain and health. One meal represented my daily intake during my relentless quests for thinness. Anorexia, almost as if it were really a malevolent force, tried to fight back, chiding me for eating so much food. I told the eating disorder voice to shut up and that I was not going to listen. This was recovery from anorexia. This was recovery from addiction. I knew I would want to give up at times, but if I did, I knew I would eventually die of anorexia.

Then I wondered about the separation, and if it was the catalyst needed for my recovery. I had been battling anorexia for almost four years, and I tried several times before to recover and become healthy. Maybe God wanted to make sure this is my recovery. Maybe He wanted me to believe in myself, that I was strong and capable and able to do this on my own.

Our reunion didn't last. David and I reunited on his birthday—Sept. 26, 2010—only to see me relapse immediately throughout that fall.

I couldn't seem to sustain the strength and commitment to recovery when I was with David. I didn't understand how I could claim to love him and yet refuse to eat as soon as we were back together. The month of October was filled with anxiety and constant voices in my head, first whispering, then screaming at me to stop eating and go back. Writing again became my only refuge.

*You don't deserve to eat. You are a gluttonous pig and should be ashamed of yourself.
Look at how you have let yourself go!*

Every pore of my being is filled with anxiety. I am frightened to get out of bed and start the day. Each class assignment taunts me, reminding me that I am stupid and unable to grasp the concepts of English rhetorical theories, literary elements, and critical analysis. I can barely decide what to put on my fat body each day!

Each day feels like a treacherous journey through a threatening landscape. I feel as if I could literally crawl out of my skin, the raw bones and veins exposed and scrapped against the sharpness of life. I want to hide, become invisible, burrow under the covers and never come out; anything to be safe.

Anorexia keeps telling me there is a way out. Just eat less. Anorexia promises that the thinner I become, the less I will feel. I will be free again. Free of this anxiety which has become my constant companion, and that tempts me with a permanent way out of all this.

I tried to fight these lies, fueled by a lack of nutrition. Even the thought of doing things to combat the anxiety, such as yoga, brought me to the edge of panic. Then one day I drank two bottles of Ensure Plus. Dr. Sackeyfio had been trying to get me to increase my calories for some

time, assuring me that full nutrition and reaching my healthy goal weight would lessen the anxiety and make things easier for me. Easier to get up in the morning. Easier to do things. Easier to study. Easier to just be.

Of course, in spite of my earlier vow to do whatever Dr. Sackeyfio said to get better, I often ignored his advice. I started acting dangerously, not really caring what happened, by mixing different tranquilizers with alcohol, sometimes throwing in one of my migraine painkillers. It got to the point I wasn't sure what kind of cocktail I was ingesting; anything, anything at all to stave off the anxiety and pain.

I liked these options because, of course, none of them involved weight gain (I just factored in the calories from the alcohol.) But a tiny part of my brain told me I was behaving stupidly, and I was quickly going down the yellow brick road of addiction to tranquilizers, painkillers and alcohol, or else putting myself at risk of doing something stupid that could "accidentally" kill me. I thought about how alcohol almost destroyed my father, and *did* destroy any hope of a normal family life for years.

Then I did something terrible while filled with anxiety and despair. I stood on a chair, wrapped my favorite red scarf around my neck, and then wrapped the other end around the dining room chandelier. I left this terse note: *Too much strain. Too many failures. Never better. Never good enough. I can't handle it anymore. Sorry. I love you. Angela.* I pulled the scarf tighter and tighter, shivering in the cold room as I prepared myself to kick the chair out from underneath me. Then I stopped and thought of David and our love for each other through all of this. I thought about my hopes for the future, to write and learn and reach out to others. I thought about my upcoming presentation at an English conference and how proud I was to have been chosen as

one of the participants. I was really looking forward to reading my paper about anorexia, and perhaps educating people about eating disorders while sharing my writing.

Finally, I thought about Dr. Sackeyfio. I thought about how hard he had worked with me and his infinite patience and belief that I would recover, even when I didn't believe in myself. I thought of his words: *You are more than your body size, and you have so much to offer the world.* I unwound the scarf and carefully stepped down from the chair.

On Thanksgiving Day, I took a tumble down our staircase and landed headfirst into the wall. I didn't know whether I should feel grateful I wasn't more seriously hurt or pissed that I didn't die. Did I want to die? On some days, yes. The anxiety was so all consuming, I felt as if I could crawl the walls and scream at the moon. I wanted to shut myself away into the box of anorexia, slam the lid shut, and tell everyone to leave me alone.

Other days, I wanted to live. I felt I could pull myself through this and turn it around. I just had to do one simple thing: eat. Eat. Eat. Eat. Eat. Eat. Eat. It was the simplest thing in the world, really. Billions of people daily lift food to their mouths, insert and then chew and swallow.

I knew what I had to do. I didn't need a different medication or more tranquilizers. I needed full nutrition. I needed what anorexia constantly told me was bad for me—food and calories. Even though I had been eating, my body was so depleted by anorexia, my brain was still starved and I was not thinking clearly. This created the cycle of anxiety and eating less, and eventually ongoing weight loss. I already had lost two pounds, and it was hard to break the mindset that I should lose more.

I kept hearing Dr. Sackeyfio's voice, telling me to eat more, that food would heal me.

"Why are you trying to destroy this young lady?" Dr. Sackeyfio asked me one December day.

I sat silent, not sure how to answer his question.

"I don't know."

"Can you try to be a little nicer to you?" he continued.

"I guess so," I said. I felt encased in a block of ice. Maybe that was why I was again starving myself. I didn't want to feel, and if I blocked off my emotions by starvation . . . There it was. The box was there and I crawled into it more and more. And I didn't know if I could crawl out of it again.

David left two days after Christmas.

We had celebrated Christmas together, and the house was still filled with signs of the holiday. The Christmas tree with its brightly colored ornaments and lights stood in one corner. A string of lights hung over the window of my study. There were crumpled pieces of wrapping paper on the floor for our cat, Aliena, to play with. Christmas cards were scattered everywhere, and my special Christmas card from David, signed, "I will always love you," was standing on my small bookcase in my study.

On Christmas night, I finally succeeded in making myself throw up food. We had spent the day with my family, and my sister-in-law gave each couple a small bag filled with homemade cookies and cakes to take home. David and I dived into it and started to watch our favorite Christmas movie, *Scrooged*, when I was suddenly filled with complete disgust with myself. The voice in my head wouldn't shut up; it kept telling me I was a fat pig and I needed to get rid of the food *right away*. I started to panic as I suddenly thought of all those calories inside

me. I didn't have any laxatives, and of course I couldn't go to the store that night. I remembered something I read, and taking a container of salt and a glass, I went into the bathroom and mixed up a thick mixture of salt and warm water. I then forced myself to swallow it, and I was throwing up within minutes.

I had always promised myself I would never lie or keep from David anything in connection to my eating disorder. To this day, I wonder if we might still be together if I had only just once kept my actions to myself. But I didn't.

"David."

"Hmm," he said, engrossed in the movie.

"David, I just swallowed a glass of salt water," I said.

"You did what?"

"Swallowed a glass of salt water. To throw up those cookies Charlotte gave us."

He put his arms around me.

"It's okay," he said.

But it wasn't.

My hair appointment was always on Mondays at 10 a.m. We woke up, and I jokingly took a picture of David and Aliena while we were still in bed. But he didn't smile, and he actually looked angry in the picture. That frightened me, and I begged him to forgive me for what I did on Christmas night and promised it wouldn't happen again. I asked him to smile, saying he and Aliena were my family and I wanted a picture. I look at that picture today, and wonder what his thoughts were, if he was already planning to leave me. I'm sure he must have been, because his brother came to help him load up his van while I was across the street getting

my hair colored and cut. I could see our house from where I sat, but nothing looked unusual and in fact, David had said he had some work to do for a friend and I figured that was why the van's back doors were open and things were being loaded. What I didn't see was David placing his clothes and belongings into the van while I sat across the street and watched.

I kept trying David's cell over and over, but throughout the long day and late into the night, he never answered. But then again, I suppose that is what running away means: you don't want to talk to the person you are running away from.

I paced back and forth in the house, and then I suddenly grabbed my car keys and started racing toward the highway with the crazy idea that maybe I could catch up with David, get him to pull over, and talk to him.

I drove down U.S. 10, heading for southbound I-75. I couldn't think of anything except finding David. Panic bubbled up in me as I peered into each white van I passed; hoping for a glimpse of my husband's long, gray hair and slight build.

I was on the edge of panic, and I struggled not to cry or break down.

I fiddled with the radio, twisting the knob, hoping to find something that would distract me. First an oldies station...then rap...next was NPR, and my heart twisted as I remembered that was David's favorite station...Christian contemporary...classic rock.

I couldn't think. The music was too loud. I switched the radio off and tried to concentrate. A white van...no, it wasn't David's. My palms felt clammy in spite of the fact that it was about thirty degrees outside.

I saw the sign for Mackinac Road, and suddenly I realized how foolish I was. There are probably about a million white vans in mid-Michigan alone, and they all looked the same to me. I turned around, returning to the-now empty house.

My cell phone rang.

"Yes, this is Dr. Sackeyfio," said a voice on my cell phone. I twisted and untwisted my hands, wondering what I should do. I had forgotten I had called him.

"Dr. Sackeyfio, David has left me again," I said. I was embarrassed that I had called him for the same thing I did exactly four months ago. He asked me if I was alone, and it hit me I was going to be by myself that night.

"Can you get someone to stay with you tonight?" he asked. He knew from the last time I would be frightened and afraid to sleep in the house by myself, and I agreed to call my sister, Samon.

Samon stayed with me several nights, and brought her work to do by computer during the day. It was almost fun, two sisters hanging out and staying up and talking. Except all I could talk about was David.

He finally called me the day after he left.

"I still love you, Angela," he said.

"Then why did you leave?" I asked. "Again."

"I can't stand to sit there and watch you die," he said. "I need to go where people laugh and have fun."

I thought about how much fun I had had the past few years. It was really fun to starve myself and hate myself and almost kill myself.

"Are we going to talk?" I asked.

He was quiet for a moment.

"Yes, but..." he started.

"But what?" I could hear panic rising in my voice.

"But if I'm busy, I won't answer. You'll just have to wait for me to call you back," he said.

What if I don't want to wait?

The very next morning I woke up and made myself a full breakfast, eating it through bouts of crying. I kept thinking I would have no life if I kept starving myself, and even though I had little hope that David and I would reconcile, I knew the only way out was to eat. That entire January I felt like I did nothing but eat, but I was determined to reach a healthy weight and one month after David left, I weighed what Dr. Sackeyfio said I should weigh. I was so proud, I wrote about it on my blog . . .

I found out today that I have reached my healthy goal weight as set by my doctor.

And now I move onto the next stage of recovery. I am already doing some things that I think are healthy for my recovery. I have stopped my incessant reading of articles about anorexia and all things related. I have left some Facebook groups that posted articles and other items of information that I still find triggering.

I am slowly extracting myself from the world of anorexia.

It was my whole world for a long time. I am now thinking clearer and feeling more positive than I have for years. I thought this fall I was done with anorexia, but I had a few more months to wrestle with it. I am determined that this time I will continue on the path to health, knowing it will lead to a joyful life filled with love and happiness. I am beginning to believe I deserve that, and I know all of you out there do too.

So what does this mean? I believe it means I am still in recovery from anorexia. To say I am recovered would be premature. I still have thoughts and fears, although not as many as I thought I would at this stage. I am not experiencing any significant body image issues. Of course, it has helped that I have banished People and other magazines like it from my life. It also helps that I no longer look at pro-anorexia sites. Yes, I know super skinny women will always be part of life, but now I just feel sorry for them and what they are missing out on.

Life.

I was missing out on life for so long. Now I can think clearer and I find the anxiety is lessening. I am still nervous about many things. I miss my husband, and I still pray constantly that we will eventually reconcile. We are having some really great, fun conversations and right now we just plan to have fun with each other and get to know each other now that the fog of anorexia is lifting and I am becoming healthier. I am going to be dating my husband—how many women can say that!?! LOL!

I am looking forward to getting to know myself again. These things I know: I am a loving and caring person with a good sense of humor (hard to have when you are starving) that can be borderline sarcastic. I am intelligent and interested in many things, and feeling better has made graduate school less stressful and more fun (I have had great online discussions about technology and its effects on learning and literacy, and the whole idea of the ownership of text.) I am beginning to think I am beautiful, but that my beauty inside is what is most important. Most importantly, I feel closer to God and am forever grateful for His grace and love.

Oh, and I am sooo looking forward to the day I don't have to drink another damn Ensure Plus and can just enjoy food.

Four days before David planned to come back, he called.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello, Angela," David replied.

"How are you?" I asked.

"Good."

"Great. Listen, there is spaghetti and garlic bread and your favorite ice cream," I said, thinking about the pint of Häagen-Dazs butter pecan ice cream in the freezer.

David was finally coming home. It had been a long two months, this last separation, and I was lonely and often cried. But he was finally coming home and I could begin the rest of my life.

"Angela," he said. An edge of fear began to rip through me.

"Angela, I'm not coming home."

"What?" I said, drawing the word out, incredulous.

"I've decided to stay in Florida. I don't want to try again. I don't want to try anymore."

"But what about our date."

"I'm not coming back," he said. "I still love you, but it's not going to work."

I should have listened. I should have decided then to move forward. I should have decided that enough was enough, that I was healthy and becoming more comfortable with myself and that it would only hurt to try and revive this dead marriage.

Instead, I traveled to Florida to see him.

Florida

Perhaps the real question was what to do about our wedding rings. We both promised to wear these simple round rings of gold, symbols of when we were alive with love and hope, for the next few months as we again tried to work things out.

But I looked at my ring and felt as if it was choking me. Choking me with broken promises and broken dreams. I went to David to give him hope for our marriage and it worked. He decided he wanted to continue working on things, and he wrote a short note saying that, "Hope never dies." He decided.

But in the process, I lost my sense of strength and hope. I was drained and confused.

I was stunned after his phone call, in which he said he did not want to try again, that there was no hope. What the hell? We had been talking for months about new beginnings and new hope, and planned to see each other in four days. We had talked about our dinner date the day before, how I bought spaghetti and garlic bread and Coca-Cola and his favorite butter pecan ice cream for dessert. Now he decided he wanted to stay in Florida? I sensed his real fear. He was still afraid that I would relapse and again dive back into anorexia.

I was determined to prove to him that I was better, that recovery was for good this time. So I decided to go to him. More than 1,200 miles away. I was energized by the thought that if he just saw me, he would know. He would know that I was better and we could put all this behind us.

The sun was shining and I was happy as I drove down I-75 at the start of my trip. I was happy because David decided he was actually looking forward to seeing me, that he did miss me and that he was glad I was coming. He decided.

I only told a few people I was driving down to Florida. It seemed like a crazy thing to do, something a woman in her twenties would do, not a married woman of forty-five. But I had missed David, and I had spent many lonely moments wondering what I could do, how I could stop crying, become free from my emotional paralysis and move forward. This was my chance finally to try and make things right again. I had to push aside some responsibilities, change

things to fit his needs and fears. I also knew many people would be afraid of my taking such a long trip so soon after reaching a healthy weight. It was not that long ago—about three months—that I was less than one hundred pounds and struggled with blackouts.

But I knew I would regret it if I didn't go. I don't believe you end a fourteen-year marriage by cell phone. That is for teenagers and idiot celebrities who think marriage vows are as disposable as Kleenex. I knew David wasn't really like that. He was just afraid.

I ate cheap on the road, glad the dollar menu is the norm at every fast food restaurant. I ate cheap, but I tried to eat enough. The last thing I could afford to do was lose weight. Lucky for me that fast food is typically higher in calories. I missed the time when I didn't worry about every pound, when I was healthy and being thin meant nothing to me.

I was proud and elated when I hit the Florida state line traveling US 319/98 that snakes around the southwestern coast. The two-lane highway was deserted. I pulled over to take a few pictures of Florida's welcome sign. There was nothing else there except trees and sunshine and an eerie quiet as I stepped out of my car. I could stand in the middle of a United States highway and nothing would hit me. What did hit me was that I was alone. And yet for once, I did not feel lonely.

I pulled into the tiny port town of Carrabelle about two hours later. I stopped at the first place I could find—a seafood shop—to calm myself after two days of driving. I also wanted to make sure I looked nice; we hadn't seen each other in more than two months. I was wearing a summer dress, and my hair was full and curly and slightly windblown. I definitely looked different than the last time we had seen each other. I looked good. I looked healthy. I felt hopeful.

David was amazed when he saw me. He told me how beautiful and healthy I looked, and how proud he was that I had overcome anorexia. We spent the days walking hand in hand on the beach, collecting seashells and dipping our feet in the cold water. It was cool along the coast, and David loaned me a flannel shirt for one of our beach walks. It was like old times, and at night he played his guitar and sung for me before we went to bed, the two of us a snug fit in one of the boat's bunks.

But many of the songs David knew were folk songs from the sixties, and they spoke of loneliness and goodbyes and endings. I asked him not to play those songs. I already knew that although my visit had given David hope—he now wanted to work on things again—he wouldn't be returning to Michigan any time soon. He said he wasn't ready. My anxiety increased, and I fought to hide it. David said several times one of the things he wanted was for me to be strong and independent. I wondered how much stronger I had to be.

I was struck by heartbreak the day I needed to leave, and I hugged David's pillow tight as I struggled to stop crying. I was going to miss him, and the sunshine and the wind and the walks along the beach. David said he was going to be lonely without me, too. But these weren't the words I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear that he would be returning to Michigan, to start over as we originally planned. But he said it was complicated. I said it was simple. David assured me we were going to be talking a lot over the next few months, and that the door was open to reconciliation. He said he still loved me very much.

It felt as if we both just didn't know how to say goodbye. I didn't know why I was feeling this way. I got part of what I came for, bringing him hope and re-opening the door to getting back together.

Then why did I feel sad the minute I pulled onto the highway and drove away from Carrabelle?

The Hotel 6 sign in Athens, Tennessee flashed "\$33.99." A cheap place to sleep to end an exhausting day of fighting traffic in Atlanta and rain all through Georgia and Tennessee. I had hoped to reach Kentucky this first day driving back north, but suddenly I was too tired. The owner, a man of Indian descent, kept stressing that the hotel's wireless Internet could go down because of the storm and I was not to complain about it if that happens. I thought, *Christ, I have more important things to worry about, shut up already.* But I'd gotten used to keeping my mouth shut, and I said nothing.

I called David to let him know I arrived at the hotel. Suddenly he was worried about me on the drive back, and wanted me to call him when I arrived home the next day. I thought, *I have been driving and taking care of myself for months; you no longer know what I do day-to-day.* Still, I was gratified that he cared. Gratified by this indication that maybe he cared more than I thought he did.

I took a shower and dropped into bed, and felt the depression and anxiety creeping back into me.

I was driving on I-75 north of Flint when it occurred to me I hadn't eaten dinner. It was the second day of my trip home. I didn't want to stop. I was tired and I just wanted to get home. I argued with myself, thinking, *I can just drink my wonderful nutritional supplement of Ensure Plus when I get home.*

But I knew I wouldn't do it. I forced myself to pull into a KFC, crying to myself that anorexia had already destroyed so much of my life and I was not going to allow it to destroy me. I choked down two chicken fingers and the mashed potatoes, and then made myself eat the

biscuit. I have to eat. There was no option. Other people had the option of not eating during grief or sadness. I didn't.

I crashed literally and emotionally almost the minute I pulled into the driveway at home. I did nothing for days except balance the checkbook, watching our money drain away, in part because of my trip to Carrabelle. The rest of the time I spent on the couch, calling people and crying to anyone who would listen. Everyone had different advice, and my brain felt hammered. I lost it the next day when I had to call Consumers Energy and found out I couldn't pay the electric bill online because it was in David's name and I didn't have his social security number. The bill was due that day.

I called David in near hysterics, finally undone by the Consumers Energy bill. He soon called me back, and he was so calming and sweet and understanding it was like we were back together again. He assured me that nothing was wrong with being that upset, that I was still trying to recover from anorexia and my emotions were on edge. He decided this. I didn't know what to think.

Days later, I was feeling more calm. I needed to do laundry, so I started loading clothes into the washer. I checked the pocket of the jacket I wore while in Florida, and pulled out a tiny seashell, muted grays and blues, the color of the ocean, grains of sand still clinging to it. And I thought that was all I had left of David, this seashell that he picked up for me as we walked along the coast. I was so scared of losing the seashell; I quickly put it in my purse.

Every once in a while, I pulled it out and held it in my hand. So tiny and perfect and reminiscent of our time together. And yet sometimes I had the urge to throw it away, smash it with a hammer, do something as I sensed we again were unraveling; the promises made in

Florida were washing away like the cold waves of the sea washed away the beach, until all that was left was broken shells and half-torn starfish.

I removed my wedding band and carefully placed it in my jewelry box, next to the engagement ring David gave me fifteen years ago. I could breathe again.

David decided to come back to Michigan in April 2010, and we started dating and seeing each other almost daily. We also went to marriage counseling, which felt terrible for me because each week it seemed like David brought up something else that was wrong with me. I was too anxious. I didn't have enough confidence. And of course, I had anorexia and even though I was a healthy weight, I still tended to eat less when I was upset or stressed.

I began to feel as if every day was a test, and my anxiety climbed and my weight started to drop. We celebrated our anniversary by spending it overnight in Toledo, visiting the zoo and aquarium. I tried to convince David that since we were seeing each other, there was no reason we couldn't spend our anniversary together in our own home. But he said he was not ready.

He finally allowed me to spend some time with his family. He was adamant about keeping our relationship separate from our families. There were a million clues that he really wasn't serious about reconciling, and I ignored every one. Dr. Sackeyfio tried to gently warn me throughout the spring and summer that he did not think my marriage was good for me nor my recovery from anorexia. He felt it was a bad sign that we weren't living together, and he was not happy that I seemed to be taking the lion's share of blame for the problems with our marriage. Finally, he felt I was starting to relapse as I struggled with eating in a way I hadn't since David had first left in December.

David told me early in September that he was leaving me and returning to Florida. I thought we would make it this time. It looked so very promising. But in the end, he decided that he didn't want to be married to anyone. He said he wanted to be single and alone, and said he will never marry again. He said I am the love of his life, and that he will always love me. But he felt we couldn't stay together and still maintain his freedom and his art.

I am left with the question: "Did anorexia destroy my marriage?" I ask that because I don't completely believe he reached the decision to be alone without the strain of four years of anorexia. But he continues to stress that is the real truth.

I cried the day my Social Security Card arrived with Angela Elain Gambrel clearly printed on it. It was the final break of our 15-year marriage. We no longer shared the same name, and instead of feeling empowered by that, I only felt a heavy ache in my heart and I wanted to take it back, take it all back, because I knew that it meant the true beginning of the end, that I would some day no longer be his wife. The dream was truly over and I had to move on.

I spent days drinking wine and pouring over photos of us, happy and smiling and Mr. and Mrs. Lackey. I prayed at times, God, please return me back to those happier times, before I got sick, before I developed anorexia, before everything imploded and happily ever after became lost. There were wedding photos and vacation photos and photos from this summer when we attempted to reconcile.

And I thought I could erase him, erase all the pain, by a mere name change?

I was grieving; the death of my marriage as autumn started to fade and life itself died; knowing soon the cold would be here. I was reminded of the chill of the Florida coast, so

unexpected in the springtime, and the strong winds that blew through me as we gathered up broken pieces of starfish and seashells.

Destruction, and Redemption

I wrote a frantic message to a friend of mine, Carrie Arnold, who was also a recovering anorexic, on Christmas Eve:

To be blunt—since right now, I am drunk—I have basically been sucking down alcohol like water since September when my husband and I separated. It has been so bad the past two months that Dr. Sackeyfio is basically admitting me for detox and refeeding—my daily caloric intake from food has averaged about 300 to 600, because I am substituting alcohol for food. It started out as a glass of wine once or twice a day to relax, but given the addictive nature of my personality, it quickly snowballed and soon the train was driving itself and I had lost complete control. Dr. S. has assessed my alcohol intake—and lack of food intake—and believes it would be too dangerous for me to stop cold turkey, particularly since I have been mixing alcohol with the Ativan he prescribes and the Lortab my neurologist prescribes. (Does this doctor really believe I need 50 Lortab within less than two months? If my migraines are that bad, why is he not asking me to come into his office? Does he not realize I am abusing this drug?) Dr. S. has said to me several times that, to quote, "I don't want to get a call that you are in the morgue" and asks why am I so intent on destroying myself when I have so much potential. He is concerned about seizures and other possible effects if I stop drinking abruptly. So I agreed to go to the Hotel Beaumont because I think it was getting to a point that if I didn't, he was going to petition me into the hospital. Which I completely understand as a former social worker; he does have a liability issue here if I manage to kill myself off by mixing Ativan with alcohol. I am within my

weight range, but at the low end of the spectrum, so I will still be treated as an eating disorders patient. Plus I want it all to stop.

But the bottom line is that the drinking was NOT going to stop at home, and it was causing me to behave in ways not in line with my morals, i.e. I have been having an affair with a married man, and sex with another friend, and Dr. S. wants to rein ALL of this in before it continues to spiral out of control. This is not really me—it is a combination of alcohol and little food. But I am terrified to go into inpatient, and I am terrified at the thought of seizures. Dr. S. says he has a plan to make this as painless as possible...but I am still terrified of when Monday comes...No alcohol, no Lortab, and Dr. Sackeyfio in complete control. But I do trust him very much and feel I wouldn't be still alive if it hadn't been for him. I am very lucky.

The reason I am telling you all this—besides the fact that I know that you understand—is that a post by you about cross addictions might be a good idea. I didn't realize how many people with anorexia slip into alcoholism and/or addiction to tranquilizers and/or painkillers—until I did.

I hope you are well, and I wish you Happy Holidays!!!

Angela

On Christmas Day, I drove to my brother's home in Clarkston to spend the holiday with my family. I couldn't get the idea of having a few drinks out of my head, so I stopped in Flint to buy some alcohol. But I found it was not easy to buy wine—they didn't sell it until after noon on Christmas Day. Aggravated because I thought that the archaic blue laws had been repealed, I drove up and down Corunna Road searching for another store. Finally it was noon, and I pulled into a liquor store. But they couldn't sell it to me because it was illegal to sell alcohol *all day* on

Christmas Day in Flint Township. I needed to find a store in Flint. I found a store and rushed in, practically salivating as I thought about the wine. I wanted to drink it there, but I still had about a half hour to go. I was late—I said I would be there by 1 p.m., but I was still in Flint.

I drove the rest of the way to my brother's, pulled over, and poured about two glasses of wine in a small cup. I had promised myself I would never drink and drive, but no matter how I try to justify it, I *did* drink and I did drive two blocks to my brother's. I am still ashamed of that, and I had the smell of alcohol for weeks in my car to remind me of how dangerous I had become.

Arriving home late Christmas Day, I became depressed and broke another rule—I had several drinks that evening even though I knew I would be taking Valium that evening. Then I just said the hell with it and drove myself, most likely still intoxicated, to the candlelight vigil being held by AA. I finally admitted I was an alcoholic, and I was both relieved and saddened by that.

I came home. The depression still wouldn't abate, so I had a few more drinks. I was becoming very reckless, and suicidal thoughts kept hammering at me. I wanted to kill myself, but I had promised Dr. Sackeyfio that I would go to Beaumont the next day. Around midnight, I sent another frantic message to David:

Merry Christmas. I am sad this first Christmas we are apart; it breaks my heart into millions of pieces. I will always love you, and I won't completely give up hope. I wish you would open your heart and see the possibilities for joy that still exist for us. We had it once, and for fifteen years we have been intimate in many different ways.

I looked at the ring you made me today; sad that I could not wear it. I was so very proud when you made it, just for me. You once cherished me beyond belief, and I can't believe that is completely gone. You used to care about everything to do with me, from if I was sad to if my

elbows were dry (remember you used to rub lotion on them. I never knew why you stopped doing that; I missed it.)

Oh God, I don't know if a life without you in it is worth having...I just don't know. On Tuesday, it will have been a year since we separated. But your mother and father separated for more than nine months, and in the end, they came back together. I guess part of me dreams that it can still happen for us.

Please pray and really think about what God wants for our life. Maybe we have stopped listening to God, and we should seek His will instead of just ours.

I don't know. I just know I still miss you every day, and I can't pretend otherwise. I can barely write this, I am crying so hard right now.

I was always so proud to be your wife, and now I'm not and I feel like I am nothing unless I drink and then I feel calm and better about myself. I might cancel my hospitalization, because I don't know if I am ready to give up the only thing that brings me some measure of peace, a feeling that I am okay and that I might get through life without completely falling apart. I just don't know if I can give that up; it feels like all I have left. I feel abandoned by you, by God.

My heart may be free, but I lack courage.

I was once Angela Lackey, and I so regret at times that I am no longer her. She graduated cum laude, she won the awards for writing, she was the assertive journalist, she was the one who went to Haiti, she was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. Angela E. Gambrel is nobody, had done nothing except drink and sleep around and is now a failure by going into the hospital. Angela E. Gambrel hasn't accomplished a thing except to make a wreck out of her life so quickly.

Again, I don't know if a life without you is worth anything. I was always so proud to be your wife; more proud than I can ever describe. Now I am no one. Nobody.

Love, your wife,

Angela

On December 26, I drove about two hours to Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak for refeeding and alcohol detox. Dr. Sackeyfio asked me to admit myself because I had been restricting my food intake and drinking excessively for about three months. He was also concerned that I was mixing alcohol with the prescription tranquilizers he had prescribed for me. Finally, he suspected I was taking more tranquilizers than I had been prescribed—which I was, but didn't confess until I was in the hospital.

The hospital resembled a self-contained world of its own with multiple levels, Starbucks and food places, and several small boutiques. I was headed for the ninth floor for my eighth psychiatric inpatient admission in four years. I over-packed as usual, cramming cosmetics, personal care items, and enough outfits to last several weeks into my small suitcase. The airline tag from my 2008 mission trip to Haiti was still hanging from the case. I looked at the tag, sad that I was not returning to Haiti but instead needed to go to the hospital yet again. At the insistence of my insurance company, I had to go through the emergency room for blood tests and rehydration of fluids. My original plan had been to drive to the hospital and have my last drink in Beaumont's ER parking lot. However, the hospital social worker warned me on the phone that morning that even one drink would mean I would not be able to be admitted until I was medically cleared. Sighing, I placed my alcohol in the garage as I left and realized I had taken my last drink on Christmas Day.

I was admitted to the ER, where I was asked to change into a hospital gown and surrendered my belongings to the staff. I hated the indignity of going up in a hospital gown on a gurney because I would look like a patient. I didn't like that, but soon I would lose all pride and not care about how I looked or what people thought. I was taken up to the ninth floor after several hours. It took so long, Dr. Sackeyfio called and asked the social worker if I had ever arrived. I appreciated his concern and told the social worker to tell him, no, I hadn't backed out even though I panic and try to leave every time I check into a hospital. However, I wanted to get well and I did not try to leave during this admission. I think that is just one sign that I also knew how sick I was. Another sign was what I said when the social worker called up and said my insurance was questioning the need for inpatient admission.

"Why can't you go through outpatient treatment?" an anonymous voice asked me.

"If you send me home today, I will kill myself," I said. I had had enough. She didn't say anything more.

It was a routine I knew well. Eating disorders patients were woken up around 6 a.m. to be weighed and I was woken up again—if I managed to get back to sleep—at 6:30 a.m. for my thyroid medication. Dr. Sackeyfio is an early riser and surprised me that morning by arriving at my hospital room at 7 a.m. I quickly told him from behind the curtain that I was still getting dressed. I rushed to get ready and went to the cafeteria to breakfast and a tray filled with food that I knew I had to eat.

Next came groups, including crafts and self-care, group therapy, and relaxation. I had made many beaded bracelets during the craft group and decided to do something a bit more relaxing. I picked out a picture and started to fill it in with colored pencils while others around me sanded wood or painted boxes. I looked around and felt slightly bewildered by being back yet

again, and worried about all the unfinished work on my master's thesis at home. I find group therapy one of the most useful parts of hospitalization because each of us gets to talk about our feelings, and it helps to hear that others understand what I am going through even though they might have a different mental illness. Each time, I rediscover people are just people, each one struggling at times to get through life and find joy. I am able to open up and process the multitude of feelings that come up inside me. I talked about my struggles to eat and maintain a healthy weight, how I was still afraid of food, and the sadness within that caused me to start drinking too much and eating too little.

That first morning, I realized that Dr. Sackeyfio had almost completely changed my medication regime. Gone were the tranquilizers that I had been taking. First, I was placed on Celexa, an antidepressant. Then I was given Dilantin, a seizure medication, and the Catapres patch, for high blood pressure. Both of these medications were given as precautions during the detox part of my hospital stay.

I should have known that Dr. Sackeyfio was going to discontinue my tranquilizers. When we discussed admitting me to the hospital, he said that he had a plan. Of course, I didn't ask what his plan was because I was afraid I would talk myself out of checking in. I didn't yet realize that the tranquilizers were a major part of my problem, but I admitted that morning that I had gotten hold of some extra and was mixing Ativan and Valium with the alcohol and restrictive eating.

I had led Dr. Sackeyfio, whom I had promised not to lie to or keep things from, to believe that everything was fine. I finally disclosed how bad things had become just prior to reaching my breaking point. Later, I told him that I didn't blame him for taking me off these medications; *I* would have taken me off of them in his place.

However, I did struggle with several symptoms of withdrawal from tranquilizers, such as a headache, nausea, sweaty palms and feet, and incredibly restless legs that wouldn't allow me to sleep. The combination of facing more food each day, lack of sleep, and withdrawal made me irritable and I had to stop and think that everyone there was facing their own demons. I started to feel better mentally even though I wasn't feeling so hot physically. I ate and was able to think more clearly about where I wanted to go in life. I knew that I needed to make a lot of changes in order to have any sort of life. That life couldn't include anorexia, drinking, or taking tranquilizers. Nor could it include the self-destructive behaviors that I was doing while I was drinking.

I had a lot of time to think since there were no computers on the unit and I typically don't like to watch television. I struggled with feelings of shame and embarrassment. I remembered the affair I had, and the strange sexual encounter with a former editor.

Dr. Sackeyfio sensed that I was struggling emotionally. One day, he waved me over and introduced me to Father Chris. I had hinted that I wanted to talk to someone, anyone about what I felt were my sins. I wasn't Catholic, but I was Episcopalian and the two churches share many beliefs and rituals—including the rite of confession.

I needed to confess. Father Chris and I walked to my room. I was grateful to see that my roommate had already gone to dinner.

"I feel so ashamed," I said.

He asked me why. I sensed that he was non-judgmental, and therefore I could share with him the things I had done.

I explained to him that I had been hurting because of my broken marriage, and that I lost it and started drinking and starving myself. Then I came to the affair with John. I thought about his wife, Jeanette, and cringed inwardly.

"I had an affair with a married man," I said. "I am still married."

I thought about David. No matter what had happened between us, he still didn't deserve to be treated so badly.

Father Chris made the sign of the cross over me, and then told me that God forgives. I wanted to believe in a forgiving God. But all I felt was ashamed.

It was 3 a.m., January 1, 2012. I had been struggling to sleep for hours. All I had done though was constantly shift around in my hospital bed and throw covers on and off, as my head throbbed and waves of heat flushed my face. It left me hot and then freezing cold. It was the last night of my hospital stay and I had gotten progressively sicker in the past few days. The nurses simply told me I must have the flu or something since I had a slight fever and struggled to eat — not a good thing for a recovering anorexic. I pushed the call button for the night nurse, hoping for some relief, but knowing I had just taken a painkiller a few hours before and, therefore, there was nothing anyone could do. He brought me a box of tissues as I started crying and tossing around, saying, "I guess this is what they call hitting rock bottom, huh?" He told me to go ahead and cry.

I packed my bags and prepared to go home on New Year's Day. My sister and brother came to pick me up, as Dr. Sackeyfio felt I was still too shaky to drive myself home—a two hour trip. I did feel shaky and nauseous, and was amazed at how well I actually did do on the way home. My family quickly took action when I got home, searching my refrigerator for any alcohol

and dumping my bottles of tranquilizers in the toilet. My sister and brother went to get food for me while I sunk down into my couch and talked with my sister-in-law, Charlotte. I was grateful for their help, but embarrassed by the fact that now my whole family knew. I was still trying to pretend everything was okay when everything was far from okay. I was tired when I came home, so I rested on the couch while they helped me with things. My head was still pounding and I was frightened, but I was home. I thought, *Now what?* as I looked around.

The day after I came home from the hospital, I woke up in a cold sweat, terrified. My heart was racing and I was fighting nausea. I was still wearing the clothes I had come home in the day before. I reached for my cell phone and quickly called 911. I was panicking and it was difficult for me to talk. I explained what was going on while the dispatcher tried to calm me and get me to take my pulse. Soon the paramedics and police were at my home. I was freezing as they wheeled me out to the waiting ambulance. At the hospital, I told them that I had been in an area hospital for seven days for refeeding and detox from alcohol and prescription drugs. I noticed a slight change in their attitude as they listened. Soon, I was told that it was caused by withdrawal from benzodiazepines, or tranquilizers.

I was afraid and I had finally reached out for help, but I wasn't happy with how I was treated in the ER.

"What were you doing?" the ER doctor asked. "Smoking pot?"

"No," I said. I was offended. I didn't smoke marijuana.

"Well, under the circumstances, I can't give you any narcotics for your headache," he said. "Benadryl or Toradol?"

I thought, *What the hell is Benadryl going to do for my headache?*

"Toradol."

The ER staff discharged me at 1:30 a.m. I arrived home, confused and wondering if I would ever get better. I was determined. And I slowly did get better and was able to make my follow-up appointment with Dr. Sackeyfio that week.

Then the twitching started.

I could barely hold my hands still. There was a burning sensation in both extremities. I began to stumble into walls as my feet twitched and I couldn't walk. I also dropped things because my hands couldn't hold onto them. I was very frustrated. I called Dr. Sackeyfio and he told me to half the Antabuse dose that I had been prescribed in the hospital. Antabuse is medication given to alcoholics to help them stop drinking. By Thursday, I was taken off of Antabuse because I could not handle the side effects. I felt discouraged. I still couldn't eat much because I had lost my appetite and food tasted weird. I couldn't hold my hands still, my legs and feet felt numb, and worst of all, I couldn't read or type. I wondered how I was going to complete my graduate studies. I didn't think it could get worse, but it did.

I started hearing music.

I first noticed it when I came home, but dismissed it as background noise. As I started thinking more clearly, I realized I was hearing music but there wasn't a radio or anything else playing. This frankly terrified me as I knew what was happening—auditory hallucinations. Keeping in line with my new policy to keep no secrets, I let Dr. Sackeyfio know even though I dreaded telling him. He reassured me that it was a normal part of alcohol withdrawal.

Dr. Sackeyfio likened my experiences to being in a war zone. At first I had trouble seeing it that way—war seems so much worse and terrible. Now I am beginning to see it is a pretty apt analogy. Many of the feelings are the same, even if the experiences are different. And I realized

that we all go through our own wars and our own private hell, and I am grateful that this experience has created more empathy within me.

Now I am searching for balance. I am getting better every day and slowly recreating my life. I am still confused and bewildered by many things, but that's okay. I know that I am my own worst enemy and being aware is the first step. Most days it is enough to be healthy and whole again. I am grateful and I stay with that.

Sometimes it gets to be too much, thinking about David and the love we shared, now destroyed by anorexia. I look at the jewelry box David made for me, marveling at the miniature wooden shingles glued to the box's roof. It is painted yellow and has three small windows, two downstairs and one upstairs. Two carved wooden columns frame the house's porch. It is almost an exact replica of the house David built years ago, the house that we lost because of money problems; another dream dashed, another dream destroyed and thrown on the junk heap of our ruined lives.

I often take the silver ring carved by David out of the box, looking at its Celtic knots and raised cat's body, placing it on my left ring finger to see how it looks. I am sad that I can't wear it anymore because it tells a lie of love and devotion, and I wonder if David ever really felt that way about me. It sits next to my gold engagement ring and wedding band.

One morning, I decided it was time to let go. I took the tiny seashell he had chosen for me on the beach in Florida and carefully placed it inside the box. Its muted grays and blues reminded me of the cold sky cupping the vast ocean, and I could almost hear the waves crashing on the sand as we walked, hand-in-hand, past debris and scattered angel fish.

Much later, I realized David was right. I am addicted to starving. Every time I come close to a healthy weight, I pull back and start cutting back on food. To this day, I crave the feeling of starvation, the emptiness I feel inside after purging with laxatives, the lightheadedness and dizziness and the way my head swims if I stand up too quickly. I crave the feeling of bones and a concave stomach and thighs so thin they don't touch. I crave thinness the way I imagine my father had craved a cold beer after a day at the factory. I am addicted, and there are times I still don't want to recover.

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