# STARVING FOR ACCEPTANCE

## Staffer describes her struggles with eating disorder

It took me a long time to realize that I could only find satisfaction in myself. Others will always find something negative to harp on, especially when it comes to the way people look. It does not require much looking beneath the surface at who someone really is.

Growing up, recess was my daily nightmare. While playing on the playground, the boys I had childish crushes on and girls I considered my friends called me fat. I carried sweaters around constantly to cover up every inch of myself, even just to walk across the classroom. I never ran around with the other kids. I became aware of my every movement. I felt insecure of myself to the point that the farther away I was away from everyone else's eyes the better.

My family placed intense pressure on me, especially my mother. Her health kicks and passion for exercise only made me wish to lose weight more. She would take my siblings and I to exercise with her at the gym, but I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself. When I ran, I would break down and begin to cry due to my anxiety towards exercising in front of others. However, I still felt the need to impress her and the rest of my family by becoming thin. When I compared myself to my other siblings who were much more athletic and in shape than I was, I felt inadequate and like I needed to change in order to gain my family's acceptance.

When I entered middle school, my insecurities only became worse. With more exposure to the Internet, I would come across pictures of beautiful and thin girls, only making me more self-conscious. Other students continued to call me names at school: fat, gross,

and annoying. It only deepened the hatred of my body and myself.

I restricted my meals until they became almost obsolete. I went the entire school day without eating and only ate a small dinner in the evening. The idea of eating repulsed me, and sometimes when I would eat I would force myself to throw it back up. Eating only gave me anxiety, my fear of weight gain and need for weight loss took over. I remember eating and instantly regretting it, rushing to the bathroom to alleviate the weight in my stomach. On top of that, I began to exercise daily in effort to speed up my weight loss.

I shed 50 pounds in three months. I became weak and even felt faint throughout the school day. Sometimes while walking down the hall I would think that doors were opening in front of me when nothing was there, causing me to flinch. Even though weight was coming off, I was miserable and did not love my body any more than before.

Those around me began to notice my weight loss, but I never felt satisfied with my changes. I still saw fat on my body, so I still had more weight to lose.

My friends went from calling me fat to calling me anorexic. Rumors spread throughout school about my quick weight loss. Even though they were true, it still hurt to hear it out loud, and from the people I thought cared about me. Even after losing weight, people still weren't satisfied with the way I looked and only made me feel bad. I felt exasperated. How could I make people happy with the

way I looked? Nothing I was doing seemed to work.

After about six months I began to incorporate more food into my diet, my stomach had to adjust to the new intake of food and it took a while. Sometimes eating meals would result in painful stomachaches, which sometimes made progress difficult. But eventually I ate two meals a day, and then three, and even the occasional snack.

My focus shifted from losing weight to becoming a healthy weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I changed my diet and exercised daily. I began to like my body more and more. However, this process did not happen overnight, only after a couple of years did I get to a stable weight and eating schedule, but I am still a work in progress.

I feel more confident about myself than ever before, I

run every other day, eat healthy, and feel at peace with my body most of the time. Some days my self-consciousness comes back and it feels to easy to relapse and fall back into my old habits, but I know insecurity just happens as a part of daily life and I do not allow my negative feelings to get the better of me. I feel comfortable enough with my own body now and know the importance of loving yourself without needing the approval of others.

I wish I could visit my eighth grade self and tell her what I was doing did not benefit me physically or mentally, and that I was beautiful just the way I was. The mean things my friends said only meant they were not my real friends, and one day I would find people who lift me up instead of tear me down, it would only take time.

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