

## The Chains That Bind

I have an eating disorder. There, I have said it. Which might seem an unremarkable statement in an age of frank and full disclosure now acceptable as a socio-cultural norm. However, one must take into further consideration my age, and the fact that my generation tend to be reluctant to share things about ourselves publicly.

I was born in 1950 and my childhood was a far from happy one. Indeed, it could only be described as acutely dysfunctional. Abandoned as a foundling at the age of 15 months by my mother and orphaned shortly thereafter, in the most tragic of circumstances. Followed by periods spent in various orphanages/children's homes, separated from my younger brother until my late twenties, then adopted by my maternal family, wherein I was plunged into a nightmarish world of habitual physical, emotional, and racial abuse.

Oh, did I neglect to mention before that I am of mixed-race heritage, growing up in a society markedly less tolerant than now.

This, without appealing for sympathy, but just merely understanding the facts that reveal a brief snapshot of my early life and act as the defining catalyst and origins of my eating disorder condition.

Denying me food for unjustified reasons or for the most minor of transgressions was a routine punishment employed by my foster mother against me but it was not until I was a service user undergoing Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) that I was finally able to understand the causal link for my disorder, which has periodically afflicted me, most notably in later life. Fundamentally, the early life trauma I suffered as a child routinely would manifest itself in a 'denial of food' whenever experiencing difficulties in my life: this was, for me, revelatory.

After all I do love food, but my relationship with it is somewhat contradictory. And therein for me lies the dichotomy about my condition.

I have been known to drop what is for me 'serious amounts of change' at M&S and Waitrose, and Borough Market. In idle moments, I fantasise about life as a lottery winner dreaming of food shopping exclusively at Harrods or Selfridges food halls. But such idle musings hardly go to explain why at times I wilfully deny myself food or mentally berate myself over the 'wicked' amounts of food I throw away, having consciously allowed it to elapse its sell-by date. This may sound somewhat odd, but I can examine my fridge, or food cupboards, and the contents literally become invisible, until, that is, it becomes unfit to consume. And there's the very real matter of my cooking skills, which are all but eroded and forgotten, which means that my diet is not as healthy as **it** once was.

When I first heard about this worthy initiative, this opportunity to share my story, it instinctively felt right to do so. I recognised it as a potentially life-defining moment. My willingness to volunteer intimate details outlining my own eating disorder and early life, is in the hope of encouraging others who suffer with similar mental health issues to consider how

best they might utilise that which may well already reside within, and thereby effect positive change upon themselves, as well as others. I am hopeful of hearing other voices with their own stories to tell, those of you who also want to speak up on behalf of the people who suffer in silence just as I once did.

To conclude I say: 'you have nothing to lose but the (eating disorder) chains that bind!'

Paul, Tower Hamlets

