

Already Perfect

Everyone can identify with the need to fit in. Each one of us **struggles** with self-esteem and self-worth to some degree. I spent much of my time **striving** to achieve perfection in every aspect of my life. What I did not realize was that in my desperate need to be perfect, I sacrificed the very body and mind that allowed me to live.

10 I was a happy kid with lots of friends and a supportive family. But **growing up** was really hard and even scary sometimes.

During my childhood, I was constantly **15** involved in something that included an audience viewing my achievements or my **failures**. I was into acting by age seven, and progressed to training for and competing in gymnastics, horseback **20** riding and dance—all of which required major commitment, discipline and strength. My personality **thrived** on the high energy required to keep up. I wanted everyone's **praise** and acceptance, but **25** I was my own toughest critic.

After I graduated from high school and moved out on my own, my struggles with self-esteem and happiness increased. I began to put pressure on myself to **30** succeed in the adult world. Meanwhile, I was feeling very inadequate and unsuccessful. I started to believe that my difficulties and what I perceived to be my "failures" in life were caused by my

35 weight. I had always been a thin-to-average sized person. Suddenly, I was convinced that I was overweight. In my mind, I was **FAT!** Slowly, my inability to be "thin" began to torture me. I found **40** myself involved in competition again. But this time, I was competing against myself. I began to control my food by trying to diet, but nothing seemed to work. My mind became obsessed with **45** beating my body at this game. I slowly cut back on what I ate each day. With every portion I didn't finish or meal I **skipped**, I told myself that I was succeeding, and in turn, I felt good about **50** myself.

Thus began a downward spiral of my becoming what is known as anorexic. The dictionary defines it as "suppressing or causing loss of appetite, resulting in **55** a state of anorexia." When taken to an extreme, anorexia can cause malnutrition and deprive the body of the important vitamins and minerals that it needs to be healthy.

60 In the beginning, I felt great—attractive, strong, successful, almost super-human. I could do something others couldn't: I could go without food. It made me feel special, and that I was better than **65** everyone else. What I didn't see was that I was slowly killing myself.

People around me began to notice my weight loss. At first they weren't alarmed; maybe some were even **70** envious. But then the comments held a tone of concern. "You're losing too much weight." "Elisa, you're so thin." "You look sick." "You'll die if you keep this up." All their words only reassured **75** me that I was on the right path, getting closer to "perfection."

Sadly, I made my physical appearance the top priority in my life, believing that it was the way to become successful and



80 accepted. As an actress, I am constantly being judged by my appearance. The camera automatically makes people appear heavier than they are. So I was getting mixed messages like, “Elisa, you

85 are so skinny, but you look great on camera.”

I cut back on my food more and more, until a typical day consisted of half a teaspoon of nonfat yogurt and coffee

90 in the morning, and a cup of grapes at night. If I ate even a bite more than my allotted “crumbs” for the day, I hated myself and took laxatives to rid my body of whatever I had eaten.

95 It got to the point where I no longer went out with my friends. I couldn’t—if I went to dinner, what would I eat? I avoided their phone calls. If they wanted to go to the movies or just hang out at home,

100 I couldn’t be there—what if food was around? I had to be home alone to eat my little cup of grapes. Otherwise, I thought I was failing. Everything revolved around my strict schedule of

105 eating. I was embarrassed to eat in front of anyone, believing that they would think I was gluttonous and ugly.

My poor nutrition began to cause me to lose sleep. I found it hard to concentrate

110 on my work or to focus on anything for any length of time. I was pushing myself harder and harder at the gym, struggling to burn the calories that I hadn’t even eaten. My friends tried to help me but

115 I denied that I had a problem. None of my clothes fit, and it was hard to buy any, since I had **shrunk** to smaller than a size zero!

Then one night, like so many nights

120 before, I couldn’t sleep, and my heart felt as though it might beat its way out of my chest. I tried to relax, but I couldn’t.

The beating became so rapid and so strong that I could no longer breathe.

125 The combination of starving myself and taking pills to get rid of anything that

I did eat caused me to nearly have a heart attack. I stood up, and immediately fell down. I was really scared, and I knew

130 I needed help. My roommate rushed me to the hospital, beginning the long road to my **recovery**. It took doctors, nurses, nutritionists, therapists, medications, food supplements ... and most

135 important, a new sense of what was really true about myself to get back on track with reality.

Recovering from what I did to my body and reprogramming the way I think about myself has been a very slow and extremely painful process. I still struggle with the effects of anorexia every day. Although it has been a couple of years since that hospital visit, it is by no

145 means over for me. I must be honest with myself and stay committed to being healthy.

I had used my anorexia as a means of expression and control. I used it as my

150 gauge for self-esteem and self-worth. It was my identity. Now I realize that the way to success lies in my heart, mind and soul, rather than in my physical appearance.

155 I now use my intelligence, my talents and acts of kindness to express myself. This is true beauty, and it has nothing to do with the size of my body. With my experience of trying to be “perfect” on the outside,

160 I had sacrificed who I was on the inside. What I know now is, we are—each and everyone of us—already perfect.

