

# You Are Not Alone

## Monthly Recovery Support Letter

Filled with eating disorder recovery stories, exclusive guest interviews, inspirations, recovery and body image tips, poems, artwork, healing information and more.

*January 2011 Edition*



"Please stay strong and keep on believing in yourself!  
I know how you feel, I have been there!  
Recovery really IS possible!"

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**Trigger Warning:** Please note that the content in this newsletter may trouble some people.  
If you feel you may react negatively to the content, please don't continue reading.

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**All this hard recovery work really IS worth it!**

Dear Friend,

Earlier this month, I came back to Canada again after spending Christmas and New Year's with my family in Austria (which is where I'm from). And I had a wonderful time in Europe—it's always nice to spend some time back home with my family and friends.



*My husband and I celebrated New Year's in Vienna :-)*

And now that I am back in North America again, I have jumped right into work again with visiting schools and support groups to talk about eating disorders, recovery and how to develop a positive body image (yes, that's possible!)

And whenever I visit a support group or treatment center, the following point gets raised....

**“It's so hard to fight every single day...  
... and sometimes I wonder 'why bother?' ...  
... often it seems easier to just give up....”**

Yes, I know what it is like to feel that way. I have been there myself. Many nights, I would cry myself to sleep, wondering if recovery was really possible for me. It often seemed that I would go three steps forward in my recovery, and then two back. It was so discouraging. Sometimes it felt that my hard recovery work was for nothing—that I was not getting anywhere....

Eventually, though, I learned to accept that **recovery is a process... it takes time**. And setbacks are normal; they are part of the journey. I had so many setbacks, and every time I fell, I would beat myself up. I felt like a huge failure, every time. And I had to learn to be kind to myself, to have patience and also to be persistent—three very important lessons recovery taught me. Sometimes, I was able to get back up again by myself... and sometimes, it was too hard for me to continue on with my recovery and I was ready to give up the fight....

**And this is where a good support team comes in place.**

Whenever I fell and was too weak to continue with my recovery journey, I had people in my life who helped me get back up again. Even though I was close to giving up, my support team was not... they helped me back up so I could continue my way forward....

**“If we did all the things we are capable of doing we would literally astound ourselves.”**

There is hope. All this hard recovery work really is worth it. Whatever happens, don't give up.

All the best,

*Andrea*

The Winner of last month's "Goodbye Ed" Journal is...

- ❖ Blaine, 29, from VA. "I have been struggling with my eating disorder for 15 years but I finally believe that I am worth it and I can recover. Thanks to the words of encouragement and hope in this newsletter, the *You Are Not Alone* books and the supportive environment MentorCONNECT offers, I am learning how to use my voice and I believe that I truly am not alone."

**PS. If you want to share** your poetry, artwork, recovery story and tips with the Support Letter community, email me at [andrea@youarenotalonebook.com](mailto:andrea@youarenotalonebook.com) - I am looking forward to hearing from you! ☺

**PPS. If you'd like me to visit** your school, treatment center, support group, special event, to talk about eating disorders, recovery, how to develop a healthy body image and share my personal recovery story, send a message to [speaking@youarenotalonebook.com](mailto:speaking@youarenotalonebook.com) - for more information and to read **what others are saying about my presentations**, visit [www.youarenotalonebook.com/speaking.php](http://www.youarenotalonebook.com/speaking.php) - I am looking forward to meeting you in person! ☺



You can also connect with me through **Facebook** ([www.facebook.com/youarenotalonebook](http://www.facebook.com/youarenotalonebook)) and my **recovery blog** at <http://andrearoe.blogspot.com>

## Inspirational Quotes:

*Words to help you on your journey.*

**“People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.”**

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

**“Happiness is not a station you arrive at, but a manner of traveling.”**

- Margaret B. Runbeck

**“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”**

- Winston Churchill

**“Your current safe boundaries were once unknown frontiers.”**

- Anonymous

**“The best motivation always comes from within.”**

- Michael Johnson

**“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.”**

- Ambrose Redmoon

**“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.”**

- Confucius

**“If you do not hope, you will not find what is beyond your hopes.”**

- St. Clement of Alexandra

**“Fall seven times, stand up eight.”**

- Japanese Proverb

**“Again and again, the impossible problem is solved when we see that the problem is only a tough decision waiting to be made.”**

- Robert H Schuller

**“A wise man makes his own decisions; an ignorant man follows the public opinion.”**

- Chinese Proverb

**“To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.”**

- Anatole France

## Inspiring Woman – Making a Difference in the World



**Karla**

This month, I have the pleasure of introducing you to actress and NEDA Ambassador Karla, who talks about her experiences with eating disorders and recovery, and what she is doing now to make a difference.

*Thanks so much, Karla, for your time and for sharing your story with us! ☺*

### ***Tell us a bit about yourself.***

My name is Karla. I am a New Yorker (from upstate originally, but a NYC resident for the past 11 years). I am a film/TV/stage actress. I was on a children's show for several years, I was on the *Guiding Light* as a member of the final cast and I've been doing theater since I was a little girl. In the past few years, I have also become a member of the National Eating Disorders Association's (NEDA) Ambassador Council. We help raise awareness about eating disorders and provide help and hope to those still struggling.

### ***Tell us about your own experiences with eating disorders.***

I have always had a disordered relationship with food. I remember sneaking into the kitchen as a young girl to eat butter out of the refrigerator. I used it to soothe me when I felt confused by or didn't know how to express my emotions. This habit grew into an obsession as I got older. I felt constantly hungry, but I also began to feel shame for feeding the hunger as I started gaining weight. So, I began "fasting" and using exercise to control my weight... but I continued eating to stuff down my emotions.

I continued on this emotional and physical rollercoaster thinking there was something terribly wrong with me. I didn't understand why other people seemed perfectly capable of eating without it consuming their lives.

### ***How did you get started in your recovery?***

The turning point came for me in college when I was talking to a friend who said she had been diagnosed as a compulsive overeater. I immediately felt a sense of intrigue and relief. It was as if I went from feeling completely hopeless and alone to suddenly feeling human again. I had heard about anorexia and bulimia and though I related to aspects of those eating disorders (and would, unfortunately, go on to struggle with bulimia in the next few years) I had never heard something that so perfectly described the way I was using food.

Though it would take another few years for me to get into recovery, I believe that my recovery started on that day because I was no longer alone.

### ***What helped you most in your recovery?***

The thing that has helped me most in recovery is learning to be honest with other people. I struggle with perfectionism—I wanted everyone to think I had everything under control and that I didn't need any help. Today, I ask for help all the time! I have a huge support system and I rely on them not just in times of crisis, but during wonderful times as well. They were there when my father died and they were there on my wedding day. I used to think that bad things happened to me because I was bad, so I would feel embarrassed and punish myself for those things. Now I know that bad things happen and good things happen because I'm alive, but I am learning to acknowledge my feelings as valid and perfectly ok no matter what they are and when I feel them.

### ***You're now a NEDA Ambassador and part of the documentary "Someday Melissa"... What made you decide to share your story publicly and was it a difficult step for you to take?***

It's not hard for me to talk about my eating disorder because it helps me to remember how much I've learned and how much I've grown. But, before I begin, there is always that perfectionist voice that makes me think I won't have anything to say or that no one will care. I am always amazed at how much I have to say and I constantly humbled (and saddened) by the number of people who seem to connect to my story.

### ***Tell us more about your goal to continue raising eating disorder awareness.***

One of my goals is to work with NEDA to host a panel for people in the entertainment business to talk about the pressure to "be thin" and how we can promote a trend toward healthy body image, both within our community and on a larger scale.



Karla shares her story in "Someday Melissa"

One of the Lessons that Recovery teaches us...

## *Be Kind to Yourself*

*You deserve to be loved and treated well—especially by yourself!*

With Valentine's Day just around the corner...

❖ **Do something nice for yourself—your body and your mind!**

Take some time off and treat yourself! Take a nice relaxing foam bath, turn the lights off and put on some scented candles. Treat yourself in other ways, like with a facial or a massage, get a manicure or pedicure. Pamper yourself. Take time to meditate. Do something nice for yourself so you can feel good. Today, **YOU** are the most important person – and treat this person well and show this person – *yourself* – how much you care. Celebrate yourself!

❖ **Buy a gift or write a Valentine's Card for *yourself!***

Take a break from your negative thoughts... Focus on the positive things in your life—your achievements, what you are grateful for. And reward yourself for being this strong, amazing, and beautiful person! Treat yourself with some lovely flowers, a cute teddy bear, or write yourself a kind Valentine's Day card, filled with affirmations, positive things about yourself and life, forgive yourself for past actions, acknowledge achievements and be proud. And whenever you feel you are having a rough time or stressful moment, have a look at this card, and remind yourself **you are beautiful, you are loved, you are worthy, and you deserve to be healthy!**

❖ **Thank your friends and dear ones!**

Instead of feeling depressed and ashamed for struggling with an eating disorder, express your gratitude and love to the people in your life who support and believe in you, who make a difference in your life. Pick up the phone and call someone who is important to you, or send them a letter, card, or kind email. It will brighten their day, and yours as well!



## **Karen's Healing Column:**

### **Live Life, Not Death**

Let's make healing simple for a moment.

You are mind, body and spirit.

One area of neglect can drag the other two down. Changing even just one area can begin a new season of well-being for you.

Are you giving your mind what it needs? Are you reading materials that you love, and that create growth in you and stimulate your mind? Do you look at nourishing and life-giving things? When you do, allow the emotion to come with it. Pairing a thought or belief with an emotion is powerful. Your mind comes alive with the right thoughts and feelings it is fed, and it generates well-being.

Do you care well for your body? When you are physically healthy, you feel better emotionally. Are you getting the right nutrition, enough water, a healthy amount of physical activity and rest?

Is your spirit in communion with God? Research continues to prove faith in God aids recovery. Journal your thoughts to him or talk to him. Also, we have to do something with the things we have no control over. Try putting the things you cannot control into a "God basket." Leave them with him to work out. Work on the things you can control.

Working this out:

Step 1: Write down any area you need to add into your lifestyle.

Step 2: Create a plan to add it into your life.

Step 3: Take the steps to implement the plan into your life.

Step 4: Create accountability if will power is not enough. What kind of accountability works for you?

**"Don't let the fear of the time it will take to accomplish something stand in the way of your doing it. The time will pass anyway; we might just as well put that passing time to the best possible use."**

*~Earl Nightingale, 1921-1989, Author*

Have a beautiful month,

*Karen*

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*About Karen Cook, M.A.:* Karen, who is an eating disorder survivor herself, has over fifteen years of counselling experience in private practice working alongside women in a variety of their life's concerns and difficulties, including eating disorders. She is a professional counselor serving the Langley and Vancouver community in BC, Canada. If you are interested in getting in touch with Karen, please send an email to [kcservices@shaw.ca](mailto:kcservices@shaw.ca) or visit her website at [www.karencookcounselling.com](http://www.karencookcounselling.com)

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# Writing Tools for Compulsive Overeating

By Dr. Annette Colby, RD



Do you keep a journal? Many people don't because they would not know what to write or perhaps they don't see the value of writing down their thoughts. Why bother taking the time to write when life is so complicated already? Maybe it's time to take another look at just how much you will gain by this simple process. The very act of regular writing allows us to tap into ourselves, regain our sense of identity and regain power in our lives. Writing allows us to see ourselves in a new light and begins to answer the question "Who am I?" by noticing "What do I regularly think about?"

Journaling is the practice of regularly connecting with thoughts, feelings, frustrations, and real life experiences. It is a valuable and powerful means for personal growth and self discovery. Reflecting upon personal experiences, and our relationship to our thoughts, emotions and experiences, can help us uncover hidden strengths and passions.

Writing provides a way to put thoughts down on paper where they can be seen, read and reflected upon. A journal provides a place to express and explore innermost thoughts, feelings, ideas and concerns, and later return to reminisce or re-examine. It can be a place for you to talk and be honest in a way that may be difficult under other circumstances. The practice of journal writing can allow us a safe place to get in touch with parts of ourselves normally hidden from view.

## Journaling and Addictions

Many people turn to food to cover up a tugging of the soul. We become convinced that there is nothing really wrong. Just this thing with the food. If only our bodies were just right, then somehow everything else would be joyous and wonderful. We try diets, programs, and in the process release and regain countless pounds. Or we just stay in a place of numbed out nothingness, not knowing any other way to take care of ourselves. We condemn ourselves, filled with self-loathing at our bodies and our inability to get a grip on this food thing. We can sometimes spend our entire adulthood being angry at ourselves because of this food issue.

Keeping a personal journal can be a very effective tool in learning to make peace with food or other addictions. If you are the kind of person who habitually turns to undesired coping strategies, addiction, eating or food restriction in response to stress or emotions, you might start simply by reflecting on what seems to stress you. No need to give up the coping strategy just yet. Instead, become curious. Investigate.

### ❖ A journal provides a safe avenue for anger.

Sometimes we find ourselves trapped in compulsive goodness, unable to speak what is real. We may encounter situations in which we have difficulty standing up for ourselves and respecting our inner truths and feelings. We may act compulsively good because we are unskilled at the practice of expressing effective, appropriate anger. A journal gives us a place to vent and to explore new possibilities for self-growth, worthiness and self-expression.

### ❖ A journal relieves stress.

A personal journal is a marvelous tool for releasing emotions stuck in your body. In terms of spiritual growth, a journal can be a place where we explore our doubts, where we confront our perceived character defects, where we address resentments. A journal can help quiet a racing, out of control mind. It can calm emotions. Writing has the power to put things into perspective. We can focus thoughts, release anxiety, soothe ourselves and perhaps even prevent a major binge or other undesired coping strategy. Instead of immediately suppressing a wild mind or chaotic feelings, try sitting down first and expressing what is being felt at the moment: "I feel . . .", "I need . . .", "I want . . ."

### ❖ **A journal affirms the reality of your life.**

Learning to have compassion for self, without judgment, is a difficult task to undertake. Journaling aids in the journey toward loving self as it allows us the courage to acknowledge who we are, where we have been, and where we are going. This journey is about looking into the shadowy secrets deep within. It is about facing inner feelings about who we are. It means letting go of blame, and no longer agreeing to play victim. Writing allows an avenue to see self in a different way. We can confront the often less than empowering thoughts we hold about ourselves. We can “see” the self-critical thoughts are not motivating... will not create peace or happiness... and will not go away by themselves. Writing about life adds purpose, power and new direction.

### ❖ **A journal will help recover a lost sense of identity.**

Using food or additions to cope with life separates you from yourself. Exploring with pen and paper allows a process to unfold of reconnecting with hidden aspects of ourselves. It helps us speak out, allowing ideas to become tangible words. It allows vague ideas to take shape in the safety of a journal. Writing is a power tool that allows what is often locked away inside to have access into the world. It allows us to feel into our physical body and connect with intuition, creativity and imagination. Writing allows the time to find precisely the right word or the most powerful image to express self. It takes fuzzy or confusing images and brings them into sharp focus.

### ❖ **A journal will clarify dreams.**

For many of us, what is missing is a relationship with ourselves. We need time to get to know ourselves, time to nurture our spirits, and time to create. If we take the time to write a few thoughts each day, our ideas about what is important and meaningful will become much clearer. We will begin to discover what we really want in life.

### **Simple Journal Exercises**

- 1) Start a journal in your daily organizer. At the end of each day, write one word to describe your day. Then jot down one word of how you want the next day to be. At the end of month see the words you wrote and review your month.
- 2) Write while you wait. Get a small journal to keep in your briefcase/purse. This can be a place to keep a success list, write down an inspiring affirmation, or write down a goal. Use it when you find yourself waiting in line, waiting at a long stop light, or waiting for an appointment to begin.
- 3) Ask others to write something in your pocket journal. Hand it over to your friend at lunch and say, “Could you write something in my journal?” Or perhaps ask your significant other for some words. You may be surprised at the written words that come to support you, inspire you, and give you valuable information.

### **Positive Notes**

As I write and listen, I will come to know myself.

Writing leads me to my inner truth and love.

It is safe to open myself and explore my emotions, thoughts, and feelings on paper.

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*About Dr. Annette Colby, RD:* Nutrition Therapist & Master Energy Therapist. For more information, visit [www.LovingMiracles.com](http://www.LovingMiracles.com) – and subscribe to her FREE content filled newsletter.

Helping people let go of self-destructive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors has been the life work of Dr. Annette Colby. Her fascination with the power of the mind, emotions, spirituality, and physicality has led her to become a leader in the field of personal growth and consciousness. She is a valued counselor, and an inspiring teacher, as well as an independent writer, mentor, and guide. She is a highly sought-after trainer with a unique ability to inform and inspire individuals to open their hearts, love more openly, and pursue their dreams.



## Strength Lies In Talking About It

By Troy Roness

NEDA Navigator and member of the NEDA Junior Board

As many as one million men in the United States struggle with an eating disorder, and it is critical that we start talking about it to encourage males who struggle to reach out for help. As a survivor, my message to other men is that recovery, without a doubt, is possible!

This National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, February 20-26, 2011, you can be one of the thousands of people across the United States educating your community and directing those who struggle to potentially life-saving information.

After years of telling myself I was not "good enough" to ask for help or reach out to those around me, I finally opened my mind to the fact that every challenge can be met with a more progressive stance on what strength and masculinity really mean. Masculinity is not achieved by holding on to all of our pain and struggles; it is often the process of letting go and accepting the support and help of others that really makes us stronger.

Strength can come from insight—drawn from within ourselves—that we need help to recover. Fear of a reaction from loved ones can be a barrier to getting help, but with treatment and a strong support system, the march towards healing is definitely within reach.

Contributing factors to an eating disorder in girls/women also affect males. Issues such as family struggles, trauma, perfectionism, self-doubt, anxiety or depression, unrealistic aesthetic standards and the interaction between environment and genetic predisposition can affect us all.

Did you know that 1/3 of males use unhealthy ways to control their weight, such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives? A study of 131 football players conducted by Cornell University in 1994 revealed that nearly 40% of players engaged in eating disorder behaviors to control their weight. Eating disorders often develop from what begins as an attempt at weight loss, or for many men, a drive for muscularity. 11 years down the road, statistics continue to be alarming. For males, hospitalizations with eating disorders increased 37 percent from 2000 to 2006.

Our culture continues to place a high premium on superficial standards of attractiveness for both men and women, and recent scientific studies have documented the negative impact of the lean and muscular ideal on boys and men.

Eating disorders are complex illnesses that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors. While eating disorders may begin with preoccupations with food and weight, they are most often about much more than food. People with eating disorders often use food and the control of food in an attempt to compensate for feelings and emotions that may otherwise seem over-whelming. Help is available and recovery is possible.

Recovery is a beautiful thing. It encompasses who you are, what you will learn about yourself and it can allow you to process and deal with the roots of your illness. When we decide to reach out, we may realize that we have not been fully living while in our eating disorder. A life ruled by calories, numbers on a scale, how muscular we are or the hours at the gym, does not leave room for what life could be.

Oftentimes, the decision to simply say, “I need help,” can be terrifying and can be one of the hardest hurdles to jump over, but reaching out and committing to recovery can be the best decision you will ever make.

Recovery is an opportunity to appreciate each moment in our lives and finally come to a place where we can build our life from a house into something we call home. Recovery is hard work, and at times it can seem much easier to go back to old ways of thinking, but I encourage you to remember that you are not alone in your journey, and with support and treatment you can live a full and healthy life.

My experience taught me that knowing yourself can be one of the hardest things to figure out. Who am I? Where am I going? What do I want from life?

George Bernard Shaw once said, “People are one of three things: What they think they are, what others think they are and what they really are.” Recovery, to me, is accepting ourselves for who we really are and knowing and appreciating our unique strengths.

I believe there is hope for everyone affected to recover. This National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, remember that It’s Time to Talk About It. Join the thousands of people across the country doing just one thing to start the conversation in their communities, schools and families. To learn more about the many fun and easy ways that you can be a part of this national movement and to register today, visit the NEDAwareness Week homepage under “Programs & Events” at [www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org)



For more information about Troy Roness and his work, visit <http://yourjourneyback.webs.com>

You can send him an email directly at [Troy.Roness@gmail.com](mailto:Troy.Roness@gmail.com) or connect with him on Facebook

Troy is also available for speaking. For more information, please contact him directly.

## Eating Disorders and Recovery: What's Your "Full Time Job"?



When I started my recovery process from eating disorders, depression and body image issues, I had no idea what to expect...

I only knew that there were a lot of changes ahead for me. I was really scared of the unknown that the recovery process would bring. Yet, my desire to get my life back again was much stronger than my fear of change.

So I made that important decision to "change jobs." Before, my eating disorder was my full time job. From that point forward, recovery would become my full time job.

**"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."**

*- Thomas Edison*

Of course, it wasn't a smooth process, as it isn't for anyone recovering from an eating disorder. Trial and error. 2 steps forward, 1 step back. But at least there was forward movement.

This is where the right support team, tools and resources became so important. They helped me keep my resolve to stay on the road to recovery.

I did my best to keep an open mind to everything out there that could help me—an inspirational book, a supporting website, and especially direct contact with people who cared about me.

As for most people, my recovery was a rollercoaster ride. Lots of ups and downs. But with my support structures in place, I made it and ***you can too.***

That's why I encourage anyone struggling with an eating disorder to build that support team asap. It's critical for recovery. It's the theme of all the work I do in this field—you are not alone. Help and support is out there. It just sometimes takes a while till we find the support that's right for us.

So, if you haven't already, start creating your personal support team now—people who are by your side to help you through the struggle, hold your hand, comfort you, celebrate your successes and most importantly, believe in you enough to help you break free from the chains of the eating disorder.

Recovery is hard work. But it's all worth it. Whatever happens, don't give up. Eating disorders can be overcome. You can learn to love yourself and life again.

All the best,

*Andrea*

Want to read more of my recovery focused writings, visit <http://andrearoe.blogspot.com>

*"Choose to love—rather than hate.*

*Choose to smile—rather than frown.*

*Choose to build—rather than destroy.*

*Choose to persevere—rather than quit.*

*Choose to praise—rather than gossip.*

*Choose to heal—rather than wound.*

*Choose to give—rather than take.*

*Choose to act—rather than delay.*

*Choose to forgive—rather than curse.*

*Choose to pray—rather than despair."*

# The Religion of Thinness

By Amanda Bloom

IT IS ALMOST A GIVEN that the modern-day female is unhappy with her body. Perhaps it is her thighs or her belly, her nose or her build. Whatever the imperfection, she is likely to devote a great deal of energy to worrying over the problem area and making efforts to change it throughout her lifetime.

A new book by Michelle Lelwica, Th. D., offers new insight into women's body blues. Lelwica's research has shown her that the female's goal of a perfect physique is dogmatic in nature, that the prospect of being thin and beautiful is equivalent to a degree of salvation and spiritual fulfillment. In *The Religion of Thinness*, Lelwica traces our values of thinness and beauty all the way back to the first lady, Eve.

Lelwica was featured on *MentorCONNECT—an online eating disorder mentoring community*—in a teleconference in December (to listen to the recording, visit [www.mentorconnect-ed.org/teleseries/](http://www.mentorconnect-ed.org/teleseries/) – scroll down). Shannon Cutts, the founder of MentorConnect, interviewed Lelwica about her book, and both shared their insights into eating disorder recovery.

Cutts first asked Lelwica if she felt that images in the media were responsible for Lelwica's bulimia earlier in life. Lelwica said no – the root of her eating disorder was an inability to cope with feelings of pain and suffering, yet images in the media did serve as a powerful trigger.

"I used to read *Seventeen* magazine like a bible," she said. "And I had no critical consciousness; I had no real ability to look at what the messages were. And I made no connection whatsoever between the kind of profound self-loathing I had for my body and the images that I was studying all the time."

Lelwica asserts that the way women and men are portrayed in print and on the screen goes beyond entertainment, that there is an underlying message in their bodies and the roles they play. She said that the images speak to us on an existential level, that they offer "an answer before the question."

"So many of us know that of course [the images] are computerized," she said. "Many of the women in magazines aren't even real anymore [...] We can kind of know that intellectually, even really strongly intellectually, but those images still get under our skin [...] They're speaking to a different part of us, they're not speaking to our intellect. They're speaking to the part of us that really is looking for something, the part of us that wants to feel like there's some point to it all, that we have something to strive after or that we have a meaning or a purpose."

**"It's not about individual women. We are carrying in our bodies this whole legacy that is much bigger than us."**

- Michelle Lelwica, Th. D.

"They tell us, 'This is what it looks like, this is what you could be', before we've even been allowed to explore whatever unpleasant feelings or whatever emptiness or anxiety or stress or edginess or depression, whatever it is that's going on inside of us," Lelwica continued. "We don't have to deal with it if we could just look at those pictures. They kind of tell you right away before you even have to ask the question. So in that sense, they kind of preempt the spiritual journey we need to have to transform that pain."

In a follow-up email interview, I asked Lelwica what she felt these images are specifically saying.

"I think one of the most repetitive and ubiquitous messages women receive from mainstream/popular media images of women is that their happiness depends on being thin, and that thinness is also the ticket to success in other areas, such as romance, beauty, career, health," she said. "If I had to give a 'conversation bubble' to any given model in an advertisement, I would have her saying something like: 'Look how pretty, I mean slim, I mean healthy, I mean thin, I mean happy, I mean slender I am. Surely if you buy this product you will be pretty-happy-healthy-thin too. And surely being happy, healthy, and pretty are impossible without being skinny!'"

To continue reading, visit [www.themercurial.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=435:a-model-religion&catid=21:news&Itemid=33](http://www.themercurial.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=435:a-model-religion&catid=21:news&Itemid=33)

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Amanda Bloom is a 26-year-old journalist and musician based in Danbury, Connecticut, and is a recovered bulimic. She is the founder of TheMercurial.com, a Greater Danbury-based web magazine, and is devoted to exploring the issues of body image and eating disorders through journalism.



# Mom It's Not Your Fault

By Jenni Schaefer

I am sitting here eating a piece of cake my mom made for my birthday. I am enjoying it. Zero guilt. Why is eating cake a matter of discussion? Because eating --- for me --- used to be a matter of life or death. For much of my life, I was afraid to eat cake and everything else. I struggled with anorexia and bulimia.

For those of you wondering --- and I have heard it many times before --- my eating disorder was not caused by my mother. My mom was not overly controlling or absent from the home. She was not abusive in any way --- no, not even a little. My mom did not put pressure on me to be a perfect student—I did that to myself. My mother is loving, nurturing, and supportive. She is the kind of mom who encouraged me to believe in myself and chase after my dreams; the kind of mom who supported my decision to pursue music in Nashville. She is a mom who will drop everything to celebrate her child's birthday.

However, my mom and I are different in many ways, and she encouraged that too. Like most mothers, she wanted her daughter to find her own voice even if that voice opposed her personal view. As a result, I am not much of a birthday cake maker, and she would never submit an Op Ed to a newspaper to make a point, this point: **Historically, mothers have been falsely blamed for eating disorders. This must stop.**

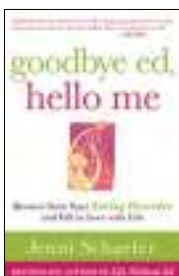
Remember when we thought that autism and schizophrenia were caused by moms? We were wrong to blame mothers then, and we are wrong to blame them now. My mom did not cause my eating disorder, but she did a whole lot to help me get better.

Eating disorders are complex, biopsychosocial illnesses. Leading researchers agree that “Genetics loads the gun, and the environment pulls the trigger.” Researchers don't believe that there is a specific eating disorder gene. People inherit a latent vulnerability in the form of traits like anxiety, compulsivity, and perfectionism that can lead to the development of an eating disorder. I definitely have all of those traits, and I believe the environment that pulled the trigger for me was a Western culture that glamorizes thinness. To answer another common question: No, my mom never dieted, never owned a scale, and never talked about her weight. She has always been a normal weight and had a healthy body image.

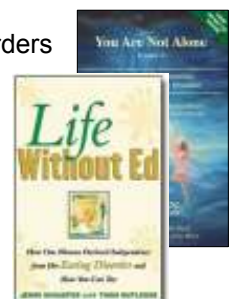
Of course, there are other aspects to the “environment” that doctors reference --- life experiences, peer relationships, and yes, even familial components. But this does not mean that families (moms included) cause eating disorders. In my work as a speaker and writer about recovery, I have met individuals with the illness who came from dysfunctional families and suffered unspeakable abuse. But the majority of people --- and I have connected with thousands across the globe --- have loving families who did their absolute best with the information they had at the time.

To fully recover from my eating disorder I found professional help. My mom and dad supported me emotionally and financially. I changed my way of thinking in almost every aspect of my life. I learned to love my body in a culture that doesn't. I learned the value of rest and relaxation in a workaholic's world. I learned that food is just food and does not have a moral value like “good” or “bad.” And, my mom's cake tastes very good.

Let's all do less blaming and more thanking. To the moms out there, thank you.



Appointed to the Ambassador Council of NEDA (National Eating Disorders Association), Jenni Schaefer is a singer/songwriter, speaker & the author of *Life Without Ed: How One Woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder and How You Can Too* (McGraw-Hill 2004) and *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me: Recover from Your Eating Disorder and Fall in Love with Life* (McGraw-Hill 2009). She is also a contributor to the recovery companionship book *You Are Not Alone, Volume 2* (plus Companion CD). Jenni is a consultant with the Center For Change in UT. For more info, visit [www.jennischaefer.com](http://www.jennischaefer.com)

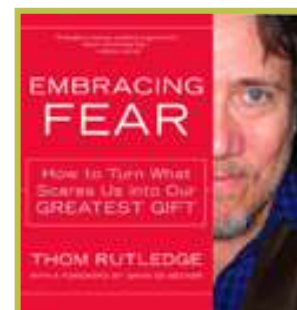


MentorCONNECT Teleconference Series Presents:

## Recovery Ain't for Sissies: What You Must Be Willing To Do

You are invited to attend a **FREE** teleconference with Thom Rutledge, eating disorder expert, therapist, author of “Embracing Fear” and co-author of “Life Without Ed”

In this teleconference, Thom will once again be joined by Jeanette Henriques, PhD (on the MentorCONNECT Board of Directors) and Cheryl Kerrigan (author of *Telling ED NO!*), this time to discuss the importance of understanding **how to set realizable goals for your recovery**, and how to **develop a plan** that will ultimately release you from Ed's control. Among other things, Thom will cover his *Five Points of Confusion* about eating disorder recovery. Thom's teleconferences are always informative and always entertaining.



**Thom Rutledge** is the author of several books, including *Embracing Fear: How to Turn What Scares Us into Our Greatest Gift* and co-author with Jenni Schaefer of *Life Without Ed*. His INTRApersonal Therapy methods are used extensively by out-patient and residential eating disorder treatment programs in the U.S. and Australia. For more information about Thom and his work, visit [www.thomrutledge.com](http://www.thomrutledge.com) – you can also connect with him on Facebook.

When: Wednesday, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

Time: 9:00pm Eastern / 8:00pm Central /

7:00pm Mountain / 6:00pm Pacific

RSVP at <http://mentorconnect.eventbrite.com>



**MentorCONNECT** is the first global online eating disorders mentoring community. Membership and all services are always free to members, and certain events are also opened up to the larger community. In addition to offering one-on-one mentoring matches, membership includes access to a password-protected, moderated, PRO-recovery community forum with two live weekly e-support groups and one Houston-based book study support group, periodic retreats and special events, a wide variety of online themed support groups, recovery blogs, personalized profile pages, the ability to upload photos / video / songs / artwork, and moderated chat / email services. To volunteer your services as a caring mentor, be matched with a mentor, or find general support, visit us at [www.mentorconnect-ed.org](http://www.mentorconnect-ed.org)



*"Relationships Replace Eating Disorders" with Shannon Cutts:*

## Where Giving and Receiving Meet

I have had many mentors over the years.

And I have never been what you might call a particularly patient person.

This means that each of my mentors has logged their fair share of time listening to me whine.

Especially in the earlier years of my recovery journey, I couldn't tell the difference between whining and working, and I often thought that if I was talking about it, I was working about it.

My mentors took a slightly different perspective.

One day I went to see my mentor at the time and immediately launched into a diatribe. My efforts weren't paying off. I wasn't seeing the results I wanted or expected. Life wasn't fair.

You get the idea.

Very patiently, my kind and wise mentor waited for me to finish. Then, very kindly and patiently, he began to speak.

He asked me to remember the last time I went to the bank to take out a deposit. I said okay. Then he asked me a simple question, "Shannon, when you went to the bank to take out your deposit, did they give you back the exact same dollar bills you had put in?"

I said, "Well, no, of course not. How would that be possible?"

"Exactly", he answered me. "When you go to the bank, you don't get back the exact same dollar bills you deposited into it. But you DO get dollar bills back."

I considered this. He was right. But I still didn't get his point.

He continued. "When you make effort towards a goal, you don't always see the result right away. And you don't always see the result in the manner you expect to see it. But giving effort ALWAYS equals receiving results somewhere down the road."

Or in other words, hard work ALWAYS pays off....eventually.

We can't know how long it will take, when it will happen, or what it will be like when we finally achieve our recovery goals.

But we can be sure that it WILL happen, one day, in the right way, in the way in which we need for it to happen, IF we continue working hard every day towards something we believe in and dedicate ourselves to.

My mentor was right, by the way. It took me fifteen years (which was about fourteen years and 364 days longer than I thought it should have taken, or wanted it to take) to achieve full recovery from my eating disorder.

But it did happen.

And it was – and is – worth the work.....and the wait.

With great respect and love,

Shannon Cutts is the author of ***Beating Ana: How to Outsmart Your Eating Disorder and Take Your Life Back***. She is also the founder of **MentorCONNECT** ([www.mentorconnect-ed.org](http://www.mentorconnect-ed.org)), the first global mentoring community to connect those in strong recovery from eating disorders with those who need recovery support. For more information about Shannon and her work, visit [www.key-to-life.com](http://www.key-to-life.com)



**Eating Disorder Recovery Event in Houston, Texas:**

# Reaching Out on the Road to Recovery

...a MentorCONNECT event

**You are invited to a special eating disorders outreach event designed to raise awareness, provide education, and offer mentoring and professional resources to support eating disorders recovery.**

## Special Guests:



**Jenni Schaefer**, nationally-known speaker, singer, songwriter, author of “Life Without Ed”, “Goodbye Ed, Hello Me” and contributor to “You Are Not Alone” (Volume 2). She’s also a consultant with the *Center For Change* in Orem, UT, and NEDA ambassador.



**Dr. Berrett**, internationally-known clinician, author, speaker and co-founder of the *Center for Change* eating disorders treatment center in Orem, UT.



**Shannon Cutts**, singer, songwriter, author of “Beating Ana: How to Outsmart Your Eating Disorder and Take Your Life Back”, contributor to “You Are Not Alone” (Volume 2) and producer of the *You Are Not Alone Companion CD* (included in the book “You Are Not Alone” Volume 2). Shannon is also the founder of MentorCONNECT.



**When:** Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011  
**Time:** 4:00pm – 9:00pm Central  
**Location:** Rice University, Keck Hall 100  
(Rice is located at 6100 Main Street, Houston, TX 77005)  
RSVPs: First come, first served—seating is limited.  
For more information, contact [mc@mentorconnect-ed.org](mailto:mc@mentorconnect-ed.org)  
*This is a free event!*  
To view the event flyer, visit:  
[www.youarenotalonebook.com/ReachingOutFlyer.pdf](http://www.youarenotalonebook.com/ReachingOutFlyer.pdf)

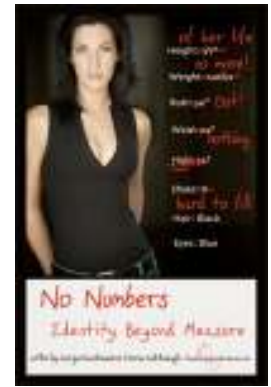


Hosted by *MentorCONNECT*  
([www.mentorconnect-ed.org](http://www.mentorconnect-ed.org))

Sponsored by *Center For Change*  
([www.centerforchange.com](http://www.centerforchange.com))



# "No Numbers: Life Beyond Measure" Give-Away



This month you have the chance to win a "No Numbers" package, consisting of... (Courtesy of Canadian Filmmaker & Actress Dena Ashbaugh)

- ✓ 2 tickets to the Vancouver screening of "No Numbers" on January 16<sup>th</sup> (see next page for more information about the event)
- ✓ "No Numbers" DVD
- ✓ "No Numbers" T-shirt

## About the documentary "No Numbers"

Not wanting to exploit the spectacle of illness or promote the doom and gloom too often associated with the topic of eating disorders, we wanted to offer a new story, one of hope and possibility. We are living proof there is life beyond anorexia and bulimia. We tell our stories of recovery, sharing what worked to escape disordered eating. Each story is unique, but the common thread is how creativity not only allows for a greater connection to self, but creates space outside of and away from the self-destructive practices of disordered eating. From these points of resistance, one can begin to find identity beyond measure; thus, the title of our film. For more information about "No Numbers", visit [www.nonumbers.ca](http://www.nonumbers.ca)

### *How to enter the contest....*

Simply send an email to [giveaway@youarenotalonebook.com](mailto:giveaway@youarenotalonebook.com) and put "**No Numbers**" in the subject line.

The draw will be held on **February 5<sup>th</sup>** and the winner will be contacted via email.

*Feel free to also include feedback about the Support Letter—what you like the most, topic suggestions, etc. And if you want to share your poems, recovery story, body image tips, or artwork with the Support Letter community, feel free to email them as well.*

*A big thank you in advance from your fellow Support Letter readers!*

😊😊😊 **Good luck!** 😊😊😊

**Eating Disorder Recovery Event in British Columbia, Canada:**



## No Numbers: Identity Beyond Measure **SCREENING & FUNDRAISER**

You are invited to a screening of the  
eating disorder recovery documentary "No Numbers"

### **Special Guests:**

∴ Ryan Robbins (from "Sanctuary") and Patrick Gallagher (from "Glee") ∴

∴ Live Performances by Canadian Idol's Laurell & No Numbers Songwriting Contest Winners ∴

"No Numbers was a film that was going to be made whether I liked it or not. The universe sort of put it into action and driven by my strong passion to share that recovery is possible, I took on the job that was obviously mine to have. I do believe I went through what I did so I could create this film. If this was a film about illness, I wouldn't be inspired to do it. However, the joy I get from talking about life beyond disordered eating and the immense possibility in living beyond measure is something I can get excited about. The more I share this film the more messages I get from people who are empowered by the film and their own lives change for the better."



– Filmmaker and Actress Dena Ashbaugh (*for more information about Dena and her personal experiences with eating disorders and recovery, check out her "Inspiring Woman" interview in the December 2010 edition*)

**When:** Wednesday, February 16<sup>th</sup> 2011

**Time:** 6:30pm Pacific

**Location:** Rio Theatre

(1660 East Broadway, Vancouver, BC, Canada)

Tickets: \$15

For more information, visit [www.nonumbers.ca](http://www.nonumbers.ca)

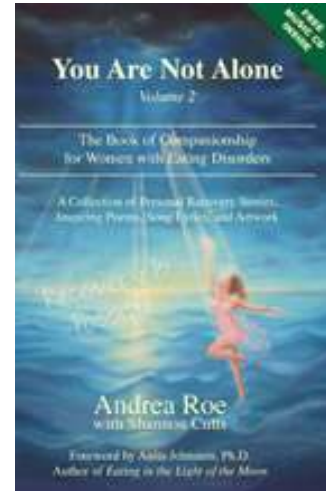
All proceeds from this event  
will benefit the BC Looking Glass Foundation

For information about upcoming "No Numbers" screenings  
in Canada and the US, visit [www.nonumbers.ca/SCREENINGS.html](http://www.nonumbers.ca/SCREENINGS.html)



**FREE Gift Included:** Included in the book is the *You Are Not Alone Companion CD*, (produced by eating disorder survivor and award-winning singer & songwriter Shannon Cutts) which is filled with healing songs by women who are either fully recovered or in strong recovery from an eating disorder (**value of \$9.95 - yours for free with *You Are Not Alone Volume 2* book purchase!**)

## What People Are Saying About *You Are Not Alone Volume 2* (plus *FREE Companion CD*)



“To know that others have struggled just as much, and that they cannot ‘only’ survive, but **thrive and live a better life**, is truly inspiring.”

—**Ashley P. from BC, Canada**, is in recovery from anorexia.  
*She encourages others to find their voice,  
and never give up on themselves.*

“**This is a powerful collection of hopes, dreams, despair... and victories!** They are all war stories, written by survivors. Thank you to Andrea and to each of the people who share their journeys with eating disorders. **I started this book and read it all the way through.** It reminded me of so many of the stages that I went through for thirty years, struggling with my eating disorder all alone. Back then, no one talked about it, and I had no role models to know that recovery is even possible! Well, now I am living proof that it is... and that life can be fabulous once you give up “Perfect!” If you or someone you know needs help, please speak up and tell someone. **Don’t settle for less than wonderful in your life. And don’t give up five minutes before the miracle!**”

—**Barbara Niven. Actress, Speaker, Coach, and Eating Disorder Victim turned Warrior.** ([www.barbaraniven.com](http://www.barbaraniven.com))

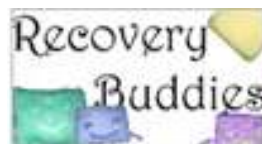
“I believe many people suffering with eating disorders ask one question in common: ‘If Recovery is Possible.’ Seeking an answer is somehow easier than taking the necessary steps towards recovery! Over the last four years I have been a constant reader of Andrea Roe’s work! Her writing and knowledge of Anorexia, Bulimia and other associated eating disorders are not only useful but also inspirational. Now with Andrea’s second book *You Are Not Alone, Volume 2*, comes more inspirational readings; perfect for anyone suffering, recovering, or supporting someone with an eating disorder. I personally recommend Andrea Roe’s work, as she has been a shining star in my own personal battle with Anorexia. Andrea, I am forever grateful to you for helping me find the right path on my road to recovery and reminding me that I am, in fact, **Not alone!**”

—**Kara R, 20, from Australia.**

***You Are Not Alone Volume 2 + Free Companion CD is available online at***  
[www.youarenotalonebook.com/youarenotalonevol2.php](http://www.youarenotalonebook.com/youarenotalonevol2.php) (***FREE shipping to anywhere in the world***)

**Profits are donated to eating disorder help and support organizations to help raise awareness and help others in their recovery.**

***You Are Not Alone Volume 2 is a proud sponsor of:***  
MentorCONNECT, The Recovery Buddies Project, The Joy Project



# Do You Want To Contribute?

I am always looking for submissions for the monthly **YOU ARE NOT ALONE Support Letter**. If you are interested in submitting any material for future editions of the Support Letter, please feel free to send your submission to the following email address: [andrea@youarenotalonebook.com](mailto:andrea@youarenotalonebook.com)

Submissions will be considered for future **YOU ARE NOT ALONE Support Letters** and I will get in touch with you as soon as possible.

## ***What can you submit?***

Personal eating disorder stories, inspirational moments, poems, artwork, articles, helpful tips, resources and book submissions, inspirational quotes and meditations, inspirational short stories, important information, nominations for the “Inspiring Woman” segment, and so on. **Feel free to send me whatever it is you want to share!**

**I'm looking forward to hearing from you! 😊**