

You are not broken. I was 1,317 miles away from my parents for a long time, I suffered and cried and screamed and fell apart, but I was never broken. I was never meant to be fixed and neither are you. Fixing is an easy solution. Nothing about this process is easy. I remember telling my mom "I am in so much pain." I wanted the pain to be taken away from me, to be shoved in a box deep so I could never feel it again, what I didn't realize was the pain was like a forest, you can't get to the other side by standing, you can't walk around it, you HAVE to go through it. If I decided to take the easy way out and go home on a feeding tube I would never be in the place I am in now. I am happy, I am with my parents again, I am with my pets and am able to live and travel and see everything the world has to offer. Not to say that everything's perfect now, life is messy, life is hard, having an eating disorder is exhausting, and its taking that hardship and being honest about it, shame thrives in secrecy and in order for you to push past hard thoughts you have to voice it a thousand times over. Vulnerability isn't easy but it's what connects us to ourselves and others it's what gets us through life.

I wanted to tell you a story. A girl was stuck on a mountain she called out "God please hear me! Save me before I freeze to death!" Minutes later there was a helicopter and a ladder sent out, they called out and said "Do you need some help?" But she refused saying that god will save her. When she froze to death she awaited heavens gates and asked god why he didn't save her, he looked at her and said "I sent you a helicopter and ladder what the hell were you waiting for?!"

Now I'm not religious but I want you to think of this place as your helicopter and ladder as much as you hate being here you could get a lot out of ERC, let the staff, the groups, your team help you. To grab this opportunity for what it is and make meaning out of pain. Instead of looking at this saying "Why is this happening to me?!" say "Why is this happening for me?" reach into your knowing, be still and let yourself talk, just take a moment and sit and let the thoughts come as thoughts without labeling them as good or bad and let yourself say what you truly want to say. Because I know you're in there beneath all the eating disorder, and sadness, and hopelessness you are still there you just have to breathe into the pain and let your voice talk.

When I was little my anxiety would often swarm and cover any love that could come out. Experiences like petting my cat I would think *one day this cat will die*. Or when I would go into treatment anxiety would creep up saying *you will never be this pretty again*. I was so insanely scared of these things happening that I blocked off connection and did everything I could to make sure I abided to my eating disorder. When I got weight restored I was so unbelievably upset, I was sad and guilty but I sat with the pain, I let it pass over me and I was able to laugh again, I was able to smile and hug my parents. And I thought to myself *maybe what I'm so afraid of happening isn't as bad as I put it out to be*. I had to say this over and over, but that's living losing beautiful things is the price of love and the cost of living a brave, openhearted life. It is a pain we need to feel and the pain is unavoidable. And I want you to ask yourself something, do you ever stay with someone just based on their looks even if they're a jerk?

It is the heart that makes you stay with someone.