

Press On

I have learned to be grateful for my eating disorder, for it has been one of my greatest teachers. No, I'm not grateful for the suffering that accompanied this illness or the heartache that it caused my family. I'm not grateful for the toll it took on my health or my relationships. I'm not glad that I spent many months in treatment centers over the course of years, missing key events like my college graduation.

However, the lessons learned through suffering are usually the most profound and most important. Going through the recovery process yields its own fruit, a harvest of gifts, so to speak, that many people may never acquire: an understanding of one's values and ideals and what is most important in life, learning how to assertively say no, the ability to identify and express emotions. These are essential life skills that one might not learn otherwise. One has to do the hard recovery work, though. Robert Frost wrote, "The best way out is always through."

It is in coming to a place of surrender that one finally has to look up and humble himself and allow God to do His transforming work. "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved **these** things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me." Philippians 3:12.

What I want my clients to learn is that we don't want to hate this eating-disordered part of ourselves. The eating disorder developed as a way to help one survive—to cope. It's a maladaptive way of coping, to be sure, but when we look back on the purpose it served, we find that it was taking care of the person who knew no other way. In recovery, we learn new ways to get needs met. We learn to respond to old triggers in new ways. We learn to have our feelings and not be ruled by them.

Author Karen Koenig has said, "The irony is that if you give them half a chance, your deepest heartaches might just pave the way to your greatest happiness."

I would not wish this disease on anyone, but if we believe Romans 8:28 (that God brings good out of every bad situation for His children), then we must seek to uncover the tapestry God has woven together. This is the most important lesson of all: in the darkest of days, God never left me or forsook me, just as He promised. And because of that, I can live out what is taught in 2 Corinthians 1:4: "He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us."

-Susan Landry, LPC