

Eating My Way Towards Strength

By Sharon Ostrer

Eat smaller portions. Drink a glass of water before and after every meal. Make sure you drink water between each swallow. Go to bed hungry. Never eat past six. Take cold showers so your body burns more calories trying to keep you warm. Before moving to college, I filled my head with these commands and phrases. Everyday they viciously swirled around in my head because I had a fear--I had the most horrendous fear of gaining weight and being judged for my figure. And thanks to these overlooming fears and worries of criticism about my appearance and body, I was led to take many precautions for myself.

My hometown only encouraged this fear. They supported it, they nurtured it, they watered it, they did the best they could to make it blossom-- of course, unintentionally. I was surrounded by friends who all shared the same seed of fear. We all grew our fears in our own way, focusing primarily on having them grow higher and turning them into towers of fear. We fed each other our insecurities, so that there was no way of coming out, unless you literally got out.

My days were filled with "Guess how much I didn't eat today!" "All I had all day was coffee and a handful of trail mix. How bout you?" "I puked last night but its cool because I lost 6 pounds now, so hell ya." As much as I love my gorgeous, intellectual, diverse group of babes back home, their hidden words put me down more than they knew. I spent my days counting calories, fighting urges, and chugging water.

It got to the point where my tense thoughts clouded my head and were so packed in there, it felt as if nothing else was relevant at times.

Allllllll, that handful of almonds was good. OK, maybe another handful...But another handful is an extra 190 calories..mm but I didn't eat lunch and that can just count as a lunch...Oh shit, wait I already had a protein bar for lunch...Okay 2 more almonds, no handful, and I'm done!!

Everyday I would write in a notebook to keep track of EXACTLY what I ate. At times I would wake up and write things like:

That's it, you're done eating for the next 3 days. Your fatass days are over!!! This unhealthy, dumb mentality brought out my worst. When I began forcing myself to vomit up some of my meals. At this harsh stage, college was always in the back of my mind, and I was the biggest threat for it. I was constantly hating myself for wanting to ruin my body. It scared me that I would bring these emotions and thoughts into college. I scared myself the most, thinking that I wouldn't be able to balance my life once I left, that I would just drop out because my nemesis, food, was the only thing on my mind.

Nerves, frustration, tears, and fear of rejection, fear of not enough strength, fear of being unhappy continued to grow. But luckily, I met my roommates.

“You better eat that damn pizza or we’re kicking you outta this dorm, Shar!!”, Keely said.

It was almost godly hearing those words. Being pushed to eat? Someone actually saying that I needed to eat more?

“You skinny loser, you better not have just a salad tonight...Imma go get some more pizza, so NO JUDGING,” Bloo would say to me, as she finished off her plate that consisted of a burger and slice of pizza already.

How could I judge you Bloo? For doing exactly what I wanted to be doing? No judgements here!! None at all. Instead, just thankfulness.

Spending more and more time with my roommates has caused me to grow, but not out of fear this time. They showed me ways of loving myself that I didn’t know were possible. Their positive vibes and energy, brought out mine, and without them realizing it, they helped me fight my secret battle. Bloo and her glowing, beautiful self, her lengthy, ocean-blue hair with her olive skin tone. Keely and her freckled, bubbly, purely pale, white body with her long auburn hair that was always accessorized with green jewelry. Meeting these gorgeous loves took the seed of fear out of me and gave me courage like none before.

So, on the coolest night in Santa Cruz, we were all huddled in the dorm. Starving, broke college kids, as usual. Luckily though, with a large half pepperoni, half spinach (For Keely’s vegetarian ass) pizza from Woodstock’s Pizza. The cheesy smell drifting in and out of the room. Me, trying to fight my urge to succumb to the greasy goodness, and thinking in my head over and over, “*No no no freshman 15 freshman 15 freshman 15 freshman 15..*” But all of a sudden, hearing that larger, more powerful voice than the one in my head: “You better eat that damn pizza or we’re kicking you outta this dorm, Shar!!” And it won. I ate a pizza that night with my roommates. I ate 2 and 1/2 actually, and even had one the next morning for breakfast because I deserved that beautiful slice of cheese and bread and greasiness. I deserved it and I’ve never had so much fun breaking my own rules.