



Emma's Story

a journey to self love

by

Emma

* * * * *

Published by Zingdad.com
Copyright (c) Zingdad, 2011
All rights reserved

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

* * * * *

License Notes

It is the author's express wish that this ebook be made freely available to all that might benefit from it. This ebook is therefore available on request for free from Zingdad.com. You may also freely share this book with others with the following provisos: that it not be altered or repackaged in any way and that it not be resold or offered as a part of anything that is sold.

* * * * *

EMMA'S STORY

This is the story of my personal journey from self-loathing and abuse to self-love and acceptance. It is also the story of my 13-year battle with anorexia and bulimia. Writing and sharing this story has been a way for me to create meaning out of my darkest hours. In so doing, I have discovered, to my surprise, that the weakest, most vulnerable and “ugliest” parts of myself can actually be transformed into my greatest gift to the world. If I can find the courage to own, love and finally, integrate, those seemingly least loveable parts of myself, I free myself forever from guilt and shame and I become a truly sovereign being, fully capable of creating my own chosen reality.

It has been a very long, hard struggle for me to find a way to establish a healthy relationship to food. During my struggles I have come to realize that most people, women in particular, share this difficulty. It is a love-hate relationship in general and most people judge their worthiness, their morality even, by whether they have been “good” or “bad” with respect to the food they have eaten in any given day. I hope that by sharing my story I can assist in co-creating a new path through this jungle of recriminations, fear, self-hatred, punishment and reward that constitutes the relationship most people have with food.

Please know that I hold the truth for no one but myself and that the route I found to healing and self-love may not work for everyone. I would certainly advocate seeking professional

assistance if you are suffering from an eating disorder or any other self-destructive behaviour. Each person must find her own way back to Self, but sometimes we can allow ourselves to receive a little encouragement or inspiration along the way. It also helps to know that you are not alone. When I was in the grip of my deepest guilt, shame and fear, I craved connection, human touch, a few encouraging words. It would have made all the difference to me. However, I was so locked into my personal hell of self-disgust that I could find no way to reach out and ask for help.

So perhaps I'm writing this story for the me that I used to be, or for the you that you currently are. Perhaps reading about my experiences might make you feel less alone, less desperate, to know that there is someone who really understands and to realise that it is actually possible to cross the chasm of despair and to find ongoing growth and learning on the other side.

And so I tell my story in the hope of bringing a little light, a little love, a little compassion...

I believe that, before we incarnate into this place, we choose the perfect circumstances for our lives that will allow us to experience "not-self" so that we can discover exactly what "self" is all about. For me this included choosing a dysfunctional, abusive, conflict-wracked home, a depressed mother who was incapable of expressing love to herself or to anyone else, and a father who was absent in every sense of the word. We never "told" anyone what happened in our

family and were effectively trained from an early age to turn our rage inward upon ourselves. I often felt as if I were picking up hand grenades lying on the ground and putting them inside myself where they could “safely” explode and thereby harm or inconvenience no one else. The unspoken message was to keep your problems to yourself, take up as little time and resources and space in this world as you could and to be silent and unobtrusive so as to avoid violent conflict.

As an adult I can understand how difficult life was for my mother. She was “trapped” in a loveless marriage and her self-esteem was simply non-existent. My father regularly told her that she was fat and useless and disgusting. Their relationship was desperately abusive. She became morbidly obese and chronically depressed. She felt unloved, isolated and disconnected and this was the legacy she passed on to her children.

I grew to believe that if I could only achieve enough, do enough, be enough, then I would win the love and approval I so desperately sought. I think this was a way in which I gained an illusion of control over the out-of-control world of my childhood. I pushed myself to achieve in every possible sphere of endeavour. And achieve I certainly did.

I won prizes galore and constant approbation from everyone except from whence I desired it the most - my parents. When each new achievement failed to elicit the words, “well done”, “I love you” or “I’m proud of you”, I simply tried harder and harder. I developed a fantasy in my head of “Golden Girl”,

who was me, but perfect in every single way. I would spend hours imagining her in the greatest detail, from the tips of her toes to the hair on her head and every part of her was absolutely perfect. She was my goal and my taskmaster - a perfectionist tyrant who drove me relentlessly forward.

My biggest fear was of becoming fat like my mother. I associated being fat with loss of control and feminine weakness and vulnerability. I feared growing up and becoming weak, passive and fat, which was how I had internalised my father's judgements of my mother, and I dreaded the day that I too would grow up and warrant his censure. So, unlike other little girls, I did not want to grow up at all and, when my breasts started developing, I wore a tight belt around my chest every night in a vain attempt to prevent them from growing...

Food became my greatest enemy, my deepest fear and my secret obsession. It was a way to exercise control, to give and withhold love from myself; a reward and a punishment, at the same time. I developed an aching void in my middle that desperately yearned to be filled. All that filled it, however briefly, was food. In feeding myself I gained temporary comfort and a respite from the demons in my head.

I became bulimic at the age of 20, which is uncommonly late. Before then I had been a dancer, and naturally slim. But, by the time I was 20, I had stopped dancing and had realized that I was starting to develop a feminine figure. This was, of course, my greatest fear, as it symbolized my "descent" into

weakness, loss of control and vulnerability. My eating disorder was a way for me to maintain a sense of control and a sense of personal power and thus my silent war commenced.

My darkest hours - 1

I'm lying awake at 3am, fighting the compulsion to binge eat. I feel so empty, so lonely and there's a gaping hole in my centre that I'm desperate to fill. I can't fall asleep because my mind keeps going over-and-over the actions of quietly getting out of bed, tip-toeing to the kitchen and shovelling the entire contents of the bottle of chocolate peanut butter into my mouth. It's a constant itch that I can't scratch. It's driving me crazy. I have no choice but to action my compulsion. I sit on the kitchen floor in the dark, greedily wolfing down peanut butter. I keep the light off so that my actions will remain a secret, even to myself.

After the first mouthful I feel intense release and relief but after the third spoonful I start to feel disgusted and angry and ashamed and guilty. And very, very afraid. Dark feelings well up inside of me and start to overwhelm me. I feel like I'm drowning and I need to do something to gain control or I will suffocate, lose myself. I experience an intense desire to hurt myself. At least that is something I can control. I smash the peanut butter bottle on the floor and grind the glass shards into the palms of my hands. I am a sticky mess of peanut butter, blood, glass shards and shame. I silently roar with pain.

My darkest hours - 2

At some point the realisation dawns that I am more afraid of being found hanging dead over the edge of the toilet bowl with vomit on my face than of death itself. I actually long for the merciful release that death will bring. I engage in constant morbid fantasies about my death. I fantasise about an embolism, a heart attack, a rupture of my oesophagus and a slow, quiet bleeding to death. Sometimes it is SO difficult to make myself bring up my food that the blood rushes to my head and throbs in my ears and I feel light-headed and dizzy. It is at those times that I fear having a stroke or a heart attack the most.

Mostly I immediately wash my face after throwing up, but sometimes I deliberately look at my red, mottled, sweaty and vomit-covered face in the mirror and take a perverse pleasure in loathing myself.

My darkest hours - 3

I live in constant terror of my secret being discovered. I plan my binges down to the last detail. I think about food all day. When I go to the supermarket to buy my binge food I am always convinced that people will look in my basket and know what I am up to. I keep my head down and shield my basket with my body and get out of there as soon as possible. I hide the food when taking it into the house or plan to arrive home before my partner does. I eat the food very rapidly and it feels as if I am filling a massive void inside of me. I feel intense relief and comforted and loved for a short while. Then comes the fear and the knowledge that I have to “get rid of it”. I have to

time it perfectly. If I wait too long, then some of the terrifying food will be digested. If I do “it” too soon, then particularly the bulkier carbohydrates are very painful to throw up. If someone comes to visit or detains me when the time is exactly right, I start to feel very panicky and anxious. If I eat at someone’s house, I make sure that I leave within 30 minutes of eating and get home as soon as I can. I will my body not to digest until I can get home and do the necessary.

My darkest hours - 4

I feel like such a fraud. I absolutely hate hypocrites, but I am the biggest hypocrite of all! I tell people that I never diet (which is true) and that I can eat whatever I want to eat without picking up weight (which is also true). Of course what I don’t tell them is that 90% of the food I eat does not get digested. I keep thinking of the ad for a diet product in which the copy goes something like, “*Inside every fat person is a thin person waiting to get out*”. Well, I am the exact opposite. I have a gorgeous, slim, toned body, in which a fat, disgusting, out-of-control person is kept under tight lock and key.

I am constantly afraid that someone will detect the smell of vomit on my breath when they kiss or hug me, so I avoid any such contact. Anyway I have a really sensitive, and sometimes painful, oesophagus and I can’t bear to be hugged, as it really hurts, both physically and emotionally.

Sometimes I experience incredibly intense pain every time I throw up. It feels as if something is tearing loose inside of me and I often find blood in the vomit. It takes all my courage to

actually go through with it. I keep making bargains with myself: *“I’ll only do “it” every second day”* or *“I’ll only eat really soft, fatty foods”*, as these are much easier to throw up than more solid, harder foods, or *“I’ll be really kind and gentle to my body afterwards. Just please keep me alive this one more time or at least let me die afterwards in my bed when everything is cleaned up”*. I experience a constant, nagging pain in my stomach and it is impossible to sleep on my front.

The sense of relief after purging is immense. I feel quite euphoric that I have successfully done “it” again and I have survived and I have not been discovered. But the good feelings don’t last. Often, within an hour I experience an intense loneliness and emptiness, with an accompanying desire to fill it, at all costs. Then the avoidance, the bargaining and the whole merry-go-round start again. I can do it up to 3 times an evening. It is physically demanding and draining. I eat antacids by the handful to relieve my heartburn and to try and save my teeth. Each morning I wake up feeling unbelievably grateful that I haven’t died during the night and I make a new promise to myself to *“just stop doing it”*. But, by evening the darkness has crept back into my heart.

My darkest hours - 5

I go to gym at least 6 times a week for 2-3 hours at a time. I put my body through incredibly tortuous exercise regimes. In aerobics class I become an expert at pushing myself right up to the point just before throwing up from over-exertion. Then I slack off for a few moments and push again. Often I feel as if I might faint from the exertion and all sounds reach my ears as

if through a long, narrow tunnel. My vision also narrows to a thin, focussed point. At these times I feel the greatest satisfaction at having complete control over my body. If, for some reason, I miss a session at gym I become nervous, anxious and fearful and the urge to purge multiplies to a frightening extent.

This was my life for 13 years – a constant battle with guilt, shame, fear and the enormous effort required in keeping my dirty little secret. I have often wondered why I chose this particular form of self-abuse. I could have become an alcoholic, a drug addict or a self-mutilator. I suspect I specifically chose something intensely private and undetectable because I did not want to draw attention to myself. After all, my childhood training very specifically prepared me to turn my fear, rage and self-loathing inward, upon myself. For a while in the beginning I stopped eating, but the problem with anorexia is that people very quickly start to notice that you are getting painfully thin and seem to think they have a right to demand that you eat or that you seek medical care. This was not the mechanism of self-loathing that would work for me. I didn't want attention; I wanted to be left alone to privately inflict my hatred upon myself.

And what have I learnt from it all? Well, I know what it is like to plumb the very depths of despair, self-loathing, self-disgust and fear. I know what it feels like to be utterly alone, isolated and emotionally numb. This is a very valuable place to have been. I can recognise the signposts and indicators along the way so I can never mistakenly take that path ever again. I

truly have compassion and comprehension for others in a similar situation and I feel as if I have some contribution and some hope to offer, as I have been there. And I have returned. Most of all, I really understand and value my sense of Self and my self-love because I know where I have come from.

It has been a very long, arduous journey toward self-acceptance and self-love. I was very fortunate to have a wonderful, patient, loving partner who simply kept filling up my bottomless well of fearful insecurities with love, love and yet more love. But I can also emphatically state that NOBODY else can “save” you – you have to do it for yourself. And it starts with a conscious decision, a choice, to change. That point at which you know that there is no way you can continue on your current path.

The choice is really between living and dying. And, I guess, I chose to live.

I believe that when I was ready to make this choice, I received at least three interventions from my Higher Self or some other spiritual guide. The first was in the form of a dream:

I was in a large country kitchen sitting at a table, chatting. There was a massive stone fireplace in the kitchen in which an animal was slowly turning on the spit over the open fire. I glanced over at the fireplace and with horror I realized that the animal on the spit was my beloved Golden Retriever, Merlin, and the appalling fact was that he was alive! I could

see the most horrifying pain in his eyes, as he was being slowly roasted alive, but he never uttered a single sound. He simply accepted the most agonising pain without drawing attention to himself or asking for any mercy. I woke with a start, drenched in perspiration, my heart racing.

I understood only too well what this dream meant. The Merlin in my dream represented my physical body that I was putting through the most horrific pain and agony. And my poor body just carried on serving me without a single complaint despite my hatred and non-stop abuse. I realised that I could no longer continue on my path of self destruction.

The second intervention was in the form of a mantra, which kept playing over-and-over again in my head upon waking one morning. I had certainly never heard this mantra before so I am pretty certain that this was Divine intervention at play. The mantra was:

“I am a perfect expression of Divine Love”

This is so powerful because it tells me that my constant perfectionism was completely unnecessary – I am already, right in this very moment, absolutely perfect in every way! The mantra also affirmed my connection to my own Divinity.

In addition to the mantra, I also received instructions on how to use it:

I previously had the dreadful habit of looking at myself in the mirror and telling myself how disgusting I was. I constantly belittled myself or berated myself in my thoughts for being “stupid” or “fat” or “disgusting”. Every moment of the day I would review over-and-over in my mind all the ostensibly stupid things I had said or done and, at night, it was very difficult for me to fall asleep, as I could not stop endlessly replaying in my mind all the “mistakes” I had made during the day and hating myself for them. This had to stop. Every time I had a negative thought about myself, I had to replace the thought with my mantra and keep saying it until the negative thought disappeared. In the beginning it felt really daft and I certainly didn’t believe what I was saying, but gradually it started to feel more-and-more true.

Sometime shortly thereafter I stopped acting upon my bulimic urges and did a lot of inner work, both with trained professionals and on my own, and conquered a lot of personal demons. What I have realized is that, even when one successfully addresses the self-esteem issues underlying an eating disorder, there is always the bad habit that still needs to be broken. I guess it’s like a connection in the brain that needs to be rewired.

Giving up the bulimia habit did lead to me picking up a lot of weight (about 15kg). But at least now the body shape I presented to the world was honestly a reflection of what I was eating. I denied myself nothing – I ate whatever I felt like eating and I reached a state of OK-ness with myself. However

I certainly did not like the size and shape of the body I now had.

In the meantime my sense of self-love and self-esteem were growing by leaps and bounds. I started to really think I was worthy and to actually love and trust my body. I was now ready to address the issue of the extra weight I was carrying.

The third Divine intervention arrived around this time. It was a symbol that I received in a dream:



The instruction I received in my dream was to draw this symbol on my inner wrist every morning, which would be my reminder to trust my body and would powerfully signal my intent to stay connected to, and to trust, the Divine spark within at all times. This created a very effective action-based and visual reminder of my intent.

Every time I felt fear or anxiety, I was to look at the symbol and to remember to trust. At the time I had no prior connection to, or association with, the symbol, but when I later looked it up in a dictionary of symbols, a cold shiver ran down my spine.

Apparently this is the symbol representing the sun or the creative spark of Divine consciousness that exists in every individual, linking her to the source and origin of life; thereby making her the creator of her own reality. This was the perfect symbol for me in every way! For months, I drew it on my inner wrist with an eyebrow pencil every morning and every time I looked at my symbol, I was reminded that I am indeed, **A PERFECT EXPRESSION OF DIVINE LOVE!** There is no need for my ego to try and “do” anything, or “force” anything, or “control” anything, least of all my body. My body, this lifetime, my very essence is a creative spark of Divine consciousness. I can create whatever reality I choose to create if I just step out of the way and allow myself to BE all that I am!

I also discovered that this is the symbol of the heart. Furthermore, in the Hindu tradition, this symbolized the integration of the masculine and the feminine. I had always done extremely well in the ego-driven masculine mode, but now it was necessary to love, accept and integrate the feminine in order to become a whole, fully functional being. This would be accomplished by connecting via my heart.

Normally we believe that we have to “take control” of our bodies and “control” our diet and exercise program in order to attain, and maintain, a healthy weight and shape. However, my problem was never lack of control! Rather it was the fact that I didn’t trust either my body or myself and therefore sought to exercise absolute control over every aspect of my

life. My challenge was to have the courage to relinquish some of that control.

I took the decision to trust and listen to my body. I decided that I would eat exactly what my body told me to eat instead of trying to limit my kilojoule intake in order to lose weight. I was going to face down my fear of food. It took immense courage to take this decision, as I was terrified that, should I listen to my body, I would simply eat everything in sight and become even fatter. However, I decided to trust my body for a period of 3 months to see what would happen.

A miracle transpired!

I found that if I really, truly listened to what my body wanted, I actually found myself making very different food choices than what I would have done had my ego been in charge. Sometimes the choices my body made were, to my logical mind, bizarre. At times the amount of fat or protein my body wanted were far higher than I would have allowed and, at other times, I actually required far less food than I would have thought I needed. But mainly I discovered that I was making far healthier food choices than I had ever made before.

As the trust relationship between myself and my body grew, I very gradually lost weight until I reached a constant weight, but, more importantly, became far healthier and felt way better than I had in years. The constant weight I reached is considerably higher than what it had been when I was in the

grip of bulimia, but I guess it is a healthy weight for my body type and age.

I see myself as a recovering addict. Although I was never addicted to any substances, I was addicted to destructive thought and behaviour patterns. I know that it is very easy to revert to both; it is simply a choice that I make every day NOT to. There are times when my self-esteem has suffered a knock or I am tired or stressed and then Golden Girl resurrects herself in my brain and starts to taunt me with my imperfections. I start to worry over my mistakes and failings like a terrier with a bone. The only way to deal with this is to connect with my heart and radiate love to myself. Sometimes I still need to haul out my old mantra to see me through moments of self-doubt or self-hatred, but these moments are fewer and further between now.

The void in the middle of my being is filled now. A funny analogy for how I feel recently came to me: previously I felt like a hollow chocolate Easter egg, but now it feels as if I am solid chocolate all the way through! I feel centred, calm and complete in a way that I could never have imagined in the past.

I have discovered a deep love and appreciation for my body. I believe that I am a partnership between my body and my spirit. I believe that I have a responsibility of stewardship over my body and, in return, my body allows me to experience the amazing wonder of this physical reality. I am certainly not my body, nor does my body “contain” my soul. Rather, my soul

contains and expresses my body in order to fully experience and learn from this three dimensional reality. As an expression of my soul, my body is absolutely perfectly designed and “tailor-made” for the experiences and learnings of this particular lifetime of mine. I believe that the human body agrees to act as a training ground for us, as fledgling creator beings, to learn about creating our own reality. So, if I look at my body, I see a perfect reflection of my thoughts and my intent.

As I grow older I am starting to see changes in my body that would have appalled me just a short while ago. But somehow I can face the wrinkles, the grey hairs and the few extra kilograms with far more equanimity now. The wrinkles around my eyes bear testimony to a thousand laughs shared with friends; the extra “padding” around my waistline reminds me of beautiful food and wines shared with loved ones. Growing older, and eventually dying, is an important part of our ongoing soul-adventure. Once we have learnt and discovered what we came to do in this place, then we must breathe out again and release this body and this lifetime so that we can move onto the next exciting episode!

It’s so ironic for me that when I had a gorgeous young toned body I hated my body and hurled physical, emotional and verbal abuse at her. Now that my body is softer, rounder, older and much further from “perfect”, I love her with all I have! I have engaged in a conscious, ongoing, love affair with my body. She is truly my Beloved and I try to handle her in the way that I would handle the body of my Beloved. This

includes looking at her “faults” through a soft lens! I look with my heart and not with my eyes. Then my body is truly perfect in every way. No precision instrument or the most advanced piece of engineering can come even close to the miraculous complexity and exquisite fine-tuning of the human body.

How can I fail to be endlessly grateful for, and astounded by, this miracle evident in my daily life!

So, in conclusion, how can you find self-love and self-esteem if you don’t have it? The best advice I have to give is the following:

Imagine how it would feel if you loved and respected your life, yourself and your body. Imagine the joy and freedom and excitement of being comfortable in your own skin, confident and truly in love with life and with yourself. Close your eyes and create that feeling for yourself as often as you can every day.

What you need to understand is that it is not the “reality” that creates the feeling; it is actually your feelings that create the reality of your life. So, create the feeling and you will create for yourself the reality in your life that brings about that feeling. In practical terms, this means creating the feeling of loving and respecting yourself and treating yourself as if you loved and respected yourself. Speak to yourself as if you loved and respected yourself. This is the way to create a reality in which you actually do love and respect yourself. I

guess it's a version of, "*fake it until you make it*"! But it really, really worked for me.

Another way is to express love to others. In the words of Gandhi: "*Be the change you desire*". If you want something very badly, then give this thing to someone else. Because if you can give something to someone else, then it means that you already possess the very thing you desire! Isn't that amazing? So, if you desire to experience love and respect for yourself, then give love and respect to others. If you desire to feel connected, then connect with others. You will find that in time you will experience exactly the love and respect for Self and the sense of connection that you desire.

Finally, fill your thoughts with positive, happy things and surround yourself with positive, happy people. Find a new hobby, take candlelit baths, regularly use fragrances and body lotions, and walk in nature. Ask yourself, "*How would I treat this body if it was the body of my Beloved?*" Because of course it IS the body of your Beloved! So, treat your body with the love, care and respect with which you would the body of your lover. Do whatever you really enjoy and love. And constantly work at creating the feelings that create the reality you desire. You cannot fail to create self-love and self-esteem.

And, whatever you do, don't give up. Often we give up just before the turning point, just before we start to see the results. How incredibly sad it would be to do that! It takes some time and a lot of hard work and determination to

change the habits of a lifetime. But this is the most important job you'll ever do and, besides, what are your alternatives...

* * * * *