

Eating My Way Back

written by Andrea Lambert | May 8, 2016



I never intended to become anorexic. I was surprised and wondering if I should be happy or panic when the scale hit 102 lbs. Between breaking up with my on-again-off-again boyfriend of three years, a new social life with my best friend Alicia and the hustle and bustle of AWP, there was a two-month period when food was not a priority. My body withered. I was simply not paying attention to food, groceries, or eating.

A meal if I ate at all was late-night pickle chips and a red bull at Q's, the Westwood sports bar Alicia and I had chosen to frequent in that hectic interval. Tender, acidic pickles delicately breaded and dipped in ranch. I ate pickle chips and only pickle chips in that many flat-screened bar. Swigged my liquefied candy-tasting Red Bull as I held tight to my sobriety amid the shots and pints of lager around me. Walking a tightrope. The slightest waver and I would plummet off the precipice of losing my precious apartment in Los Angeles. I knew that, so I abstained from all temptation. Kept my California sobriety amid all the after parties and bars.

Now that I realize the stress that I was under that was perhaps encouraging me not to eat. This feeling that if I was hanging out with models like Alicia I better hold tight to a slender figure. The pressures of rapidly acclimating to her famous person world that I soon was to see the dark side of.

The awakening came, as these things do, in the shower one morning. I was soaping myself off with a loofah. Bending over, I noticed my thigh gap. I noticed how prominent and gaping it was. I examined my body and realized how emaciated I had become. I am perhaps the most oblivious anorexic. I simply wasn't paying attention. In my customary leggings I realized my formerly great ass had disappeared. Gone without a trace. I was sad.

Immediately I called Alicia. She told me that everyone at Q's had talked to her about how anorexic I seemed. My bony physique had caught attention. That humiliating feeling when you realize that the impression you left at the bar was as that anorexic girl. Alicia told me that she had saved up \$2,500 in a savings account to send me to the eating disorder hospital. I was moved. "That's the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me and you don't have to do that," I said. You can't smoke weed in the hospital. No, thanks.

We quickly decided that the solution was lunch. I needed to eat two meals a day instead of my customary one. I scheduled "Lunch" for 1 pm every day into my iCal. In comforting digital type it screamed back at me, "You will be okay. We will fix this."

That afternoon I drove the eight miles down Santa Monica Blvd to Alicia's apartment in Westwood. As best friends do, she went grocery shopping with me at Sprouts and encouraged me to fill my cart with nutritious, tasty food that I would enjoy eating. Fresh mozzarella, skinny cow ice cream sandwiches, a brick of smoked gouda cheese, Persian cucumbers, strawberries, bulk bin bags of dried apricots, dried chili mangos, and mixed nuts. They rung us up and we were on our way. Shouldering cloth tote bags bulging with groceries that would soothe, heal, fill out my ravaged thighs that with too much yoga had withered down to bone.

I comfort myself with a fantasy of becoming an old woman in this high-ceiling-ed, hardwood-floored Hollywood one-bedroom that I currently inhabit since the death of my wife. I comfort myself with this idea that I will grow old here watching the gentrifying neighborhood change around me like an urban flora and fauna of time. I become the crazy cat lady, eccentric sophisticated auntie of my dreams as I turn 40 this year. I hope to die alone in fifty years in the heirloom four-poster bed that my grandparents slept in. Where my dear Schizophrenic grandfather from whence part of my illness comes laid his head every night and finally died. This bed is haunted as am I but it is an agreeable haunting. A gentle Schizophrenia. Schizoaffective Disorder with anxiety, and PTSD to be precise is my diagnosis.

A diagnosis that is irrelevant and invisible as I shoulder my bags of groceries, fold my vintage cats-eye sunglasses over my eyes and sip my large extra-shot mocha ice blended with whip with red lipsticked lips on this busy Westwood street. Pearl-necklaced white service dog by her side, the red-headed model looks right and left for paparazzi and we advance back to her apartment.

Several bowls later the suggestions of ordering a pizza come up. Pizza sounds like the best solution to inadvertent anorexia. I love pizza. We study the Extreme Pizza menu. While at first Alicia is advocating for a Marguerita, which I would be totes down for, the description of the Mr. Pestato Head pizza on her rose-gold iPhone 6S makes us both pause. "Homemade pesto sauce, roasted potatoes, caramelized onions, feta cheese, fresh basil, oregano and mozzarella cheese." OMFG! We're getting one.

Alicia calls Extreme Pizza. I give them my card information. While we wait she calls one ex in rehab then gets a call from another ex. I tweet, "I feel like the pesto pizza that is arriving soon will be the best thing that's ever happened to me while I am eating it. The way pizza is." Someone I don't know out there in the anonymous ether of the Internet likes my tweet and I feel warm. My codependent need for validation from Internet strangers is a byproduct of the modern age that I, Gen-X-er who remembers when we didn't have the Internet, have taken to like a duck to water.

All I ever wanted as a writer was to be heard by many and understood by some.

Twitter and the Internet gives me that. I am satisfied.

We wait long for the satisfaction of this, the pizza that we both have decided will change our lives. This is the pizza that will rescue me from my anorexia and remind me why I love food again. I have decided this. Alicia makes me promise to eat four pieces. "Twist my arm," I say.

Finally, Alicia calls Extreme Pizza. The gold flecks on her iPhone case glint in the fading sunset out the chiffon-curtained apartment windows. The voice over the speaker phone says, "Your driver had a flat tire, he will be delayed. Your pizza is coming."

"That sounds like bullshit," Alicia says. I agree.

Alicia's white-carpeted one-bedroom is littered with a chaos of makeup, lighters, Parliaments, an eyelash curler, a flatiron, a gram of Blue Dream marijuana, throw pillows and a faint smell of vomit. She has many terminal illnesses and had a bad day a few days ago. Several bouquets of fake peonies pop up on end tables. A cigarette-edged collage of Alicia's modeling photos that I made and gave her for a previous birthday hangs on her wall. In the rubble on the rug I see the Benefit Dew the Hula liquid bronzer that I gave her for her recent 30th birthday.

Alicia has Neuro-Beçhet's Disease among many other diagnoses. Most Beçhets patients go blind by 30. We are on a deathwatch with her. Her doctors have told her she only has five years at the most to live. I know that I will be destroyed by her death yet I throw myself into the friendship.

Finally, Alicia's phone rings. Milano, the owner of the pizza place, is at her door to deliver this fateful pizza that had to be made again after the delivery driver got a flat and disappeared. He charges us \$10 for this, a \$24 gourmet medium pizza, and leaves before I can tip him. This pizza seems all the more magical.

Alicia, as excited about this pizza as I am, opens the lid and displays it before me as I sit on her maroon vomit-stained couch. Immediately the entire gorgeous green pizza falls onto the rug.

"Five second rule!" I yell as we quickly pick it up and set it back in the pizza box. Not to be deterred, Alicia gathers orange Earthenware plates. She loads two of the small potato-loaded pieces onto my plate and takes two for herself. I pick up the first slice and balance the spilling Feta cheese on my tongue before taking a bite.

"How's the pizza?" Alicia says to me from the couch, her mouth full.

"It's changing my life," I answer. I take another bite, and pesto mixes with delicately roasted tender potatoes and flecks of caramelized onion. I wolf down the slice. Nibble pesto from the crust before picking up the second one.

Alicia's phone rings again. It is her ex with information from her lawyer as she is enmeshed in another Hollywood scandal. As she talks to him in the bedroom I am lost in the world of the second two pizza slices that I pick up

from the greasy cardboard box.

I eat. Finally. I eat. Food is delicious. After a long period of deprivation I come back again to warmth, comfort, nourishment. The crust folds into my tongue streaked with garlic and basil. I lick feta chunks from the corners of my mouth.

This pizza is everything I had ever wanted it to be, just as I knew it would be. Just the way a pizza when you are stoned always is. Except this one even more so, I feel. At least for this long golden moment.

After the promised four pieces I am sated. I leave Alicia the last two. She pulls herself away from the phone for a moment to say that she has to talk to her lawyer alone. I tell her I'm going to head home. I'm tired. It is 10:30 pm. I gather my groceries from her fridge and let myself out.

Driving the long nine miles down Santa Monica Blvd to home in the bad part of Hollywood. From Westwood through Beverly Hills. Through West Hollywood to East Hollywood my Black Honda Civic purrs. I play my Spotify Breakup Songs playlist. I look deep without my heart at a West Hollywood intersection and realize yes, I am still in love with my ex.

I resolve to pursue love. To choose life. I decide I will gain this 20 lbs back again so that I'm not anorexic anymore. I resolve to eat my way back to health, love and life.