

Hi there ❤️ my name is Emmy. I'm a twenty-nine year old Ashbourne girl, but whose heart remains in her native Laois and its mountains and woodlands.

I'm a writer, an avid baker; intrepid hiker; a mountain walker of both the literal and figurative kinds. Nature lover, crazy extrovert; and quite possibly the world's biggest fan of Butler's hot chocolate to date. I'm the proud and doting mammy of four mischievous guinea pigs, whose sweet and yet vulnerable presences in my life allow me to channel the maternal and caring sides to my personality. These are just some of the things that make up my identity. These are just some of the things that make me *Emmy*.

But there's also a side to my identity that the world may not see, but which has, quite possibly, been most influential in shaping me as I am.

I'm a warrior and a fighter, of a resilience and a bravery that I know sets me apart. I suffered from anorexia nervosa for a total of sixteen years. The illness was strong, striking hard with a vehemence. It worked softly in the background for the entirety of my adolescence, disguised as friend and ally; wrecking havoc upon my body and mind while I, oblivious, nurtured it closely and shut the rest of the world tightly out.

But ten years ago, when my eating disorder was finally diagnosed, the realisation of the devastation the illness had wrought upon my life was brought into vivid and horrifying clarity. Mortality flashed before my eyes and death looked at me right in the face. It would have been all too easy...and oh, so peaceful...to clasp even more firmly to my eating disorder's hand; to allow it to drag me onwards towards an endless sleep where my pain would finally reach its end.

My pain would end. But, so too, would all that was and could have been, me.

Something deep inside me screamed defiance. A shard of my true identity remained, a spark that I knew, if I could only just nurture it and nourish it...could leap into a roaring and all-powerful flame.

I lit the flame of resistance. And thus began my pathway of recovery; the most difficult and excruciating journey of my life; the bravest and most worthwhile decision I know I have ever made or will ever make. And now no longer do I identify as a girl with anorexia. Now, I possess a new and beautiful identity that fills me with gratitude, wonder, and pride.

For I am a survivor, of a bravery and inner strength which changed my life forever, and which has shaped me into the person who I was always destined to be.

Respecting Identity and Individuality: a key component in reaching true recovery

I believe having respect for yourself and your identity - and all the unique and beautiful traits that constitute it - is crucially important in developing a strong and robust recovery.

I think respect for oneself is at the heart of a solid recovery. Having respect for oneself, the uniqueness of the person that is you; of developing a sense of self-worth and realising that you - yes, *you* - really and truly do matter, and are worthy.

Without those, it may well feel like we are a lost ship in a stormy and hostile sea. With no light to guide us, it's often impossible to find a way.

But it's hard to find something that never seemed to be there in the first place. How to plant a tree, after all, if you don't even possess the seed; let alone the soil? So how, I might well hear you asking, can I grow and nourish respect - if there is no place for it within me to germinate and take root, or if I don't even have anything from it to grow from, anyway?

For me, recovery did not truly begin, until I gradually made a crucial realisation and connection.

That I was worthy and I deserved life and to live. That my presence, my identity mattered. It was only then that the true fight began. It was only then that I was able to light my fire.

An eating disorder can alter our true identity. Recovery, on the other hand, can bring it back to life.

In the early years of my illness, my loved ones witnessed a strange and drastic change in my personality. Gone was the happy, carefree, bubbly and jubilant girl with her ready smiles and easy laughter and endless, brimming positivity and energy. All of that was slowly diminished as I became sicker and sicker, to be replaced with a mere shadow of a girl: a wraithlike Emmy who was present only in body and never in mind.

For my mind was in constant captivity by my eating disorder; my identity, once so big and bright and beautiful, had been reduced to a ghostly shade of what it had once been.

Time passed and years began to flit by me, and gradually, the reality of this tragedy of my own existence presented itself before my eyes. I looked at my life and wanted to weep, for it was like I was looking back upon a life lived by someone entirely else; a stranger. That irritable, snappy, shivering girl who shut out everyone and hid herself away...was me? The reality was like a dark winter's night: merciless and raw and bitterly, bitterly cold. My eating disorder had taken so much away from me. And it seemed that I was powerless to take so much of it back.

And so it can be incredibly hard to build upon something if you feel you don't even have the basic foundations. This was certainly the case for me. Years and years of having been enslaved to the illness' beck and call meant that it felt like there was very little left of my original, true self. I felt like I had fed the illness every single piece of who and what I was. A sort of warped identity, a mere shadow of the Emmy I once was, was who I presented to the world. I was ashamed. So, so ashamed. Though my skinny body barely took up much space as it was, I wanted to shrink myself further and further, to the size of a mite, to the size of a grain of dust. I placed no value

on myself as a person. The only respect I could feel for myself was when I restricted my intake of food, giving me some sort of sick and twisted sense of pride.

Realisation didn't just hit me one day in a sudden and glorious moment of inspiration. It didn't come, suddenly and dramatically, as a sudden blast of lightning from the heavens, to stun me clean out of my depression and self hatred. Rather, realisation and acceptance descended upon me slowly, and gently. Like the early morning sunlight starts to trickle upon the skin as the sun lifts itself up above the horizon and begins to flood the sky with colour.



*You stole so much from me,
But you cannot and will not take away who I am and who I am going to be.*

I realised I had the power to reclaim my identity. And that, with recovery, I would be able to reclaim the true person that was me.

It was a gradual process and a frustrating and disheartening one, at times. I wanted to simply “snap out” of that scared and frightened child who I had become. But I forced myself to be

patient, with myself. I will foster respect for the identity I have now, I thought, in order to allow my true identity to grow and flourish, and establish itself.

I looked at myself right in the eye and asked - demanded! - of myself *why*. Why do I hate myself? Why do I possess not one paper-thin shard of respect for myself? The ED voice loved rushing in to fill in that answer: *Because you are weak. Because you are good at nothing. The only reason you have to respect yourself is when you possess the willpower to deprive yourself of what you really want.*

It was time for me to call ED's answers out for what they were.
Senseless, unfounded, meaningless lies.

I had to, essentially, replace that sick feeling of satisfaction that I derived from restriction - an ED-generated feeling that lured me into a momentary and false sense of respect for myself - with something else. Because that's the thing. That's the irony, isn't it? Restriction and following the dictations of ED only allow you to respect yourself for a sweet but oh so cruelly, short, while. And then we are back to the criticism and self-scathing. Then we are back to the shame and misery. And then we restrict, again, and thus the cycle continues.

I realised I needed to get out of that.
I wanted to live, not live my life a slave of the ED; no dignity, no agency, no respect.

And so I forced myself to look at myself with a detached and constructive eye.

*I say I am weak. Weak! For wanting to eat more food?
No. The only reason I am weak is because I give into my ED every time.*

Gradually the light fell upon me, trickling in through the walls of this cell of shame and oppression. A beautiful and golden realisation.

I have the power to change that.

I thought about the madness of it all. How my identity was all so enmeshed...in pleasing ED, following ED, everything and anything ED; nothing of myself.

I knew the real Emmy was a different person. She is brave. She is fearless. She is the one dancing in a sundress upon the summit of a mountain, while thunder rolls and rain lashes down. She just throws up her head and laughs.

That is the real me! I cried. I awoke, I arose; and turned my trembling yet resolved body towards the light.

***Your identity is that of a hero's.
You were made to beat your eating disorder!***

It can feel like, in this struggle, the odds are completely and utterly unfair. It can feel like you're not equipped with anything to fight back against ED. Particularly given the illness seems to have snaked its way so deeply into your identity.

The cruel irony of having an eating disorder is that all too often what would help us to recover appears to be taken away by the illness. This can certainly be said for having respect for oneself. An eating disorder can erode or completely diminish a person's sense of self worth and self esteem. It can leave us feeling powerless, pathetic, and worthless. It can convince us to feel we are not worthy or deserving of recovery, and that our identity is only to be valued for engaging in disordered and destructive behaviours.

It can feel massively overwhelming, then, to set out on the recovery road and make a stand against an eating disorder, when one does not feel they possess a scrap of dignity or a shred of respect for oneself. It may feel as daunting as climbing a rock face without a harness; or indeed as impossible as trying to swim a rough sea with one's hands tied. But I want to make sufferers realise that recovery is possible. That we CAN foster respect for ourselves again; and nourish a sense of self belief and self worth. It is about being brave, of remembering who we are and always have been, and who we are destined to be. It is about holding on to our values. It is about looking deep within ourselves and embracing our true identity. For me, it was examining, with curiosity and honesty, the traits which make me who I am - and using them in fighting and actively defying the illness.

Never forget that beneath those stifling layers of depression and anxiety, of constant fear and resentment...there is still *you*. You, and all of the amazing, unique, and wonderful traits and characteristics that make you who you are.

No matter how powerful or long established an eating disorder may be, you yourself are never fully gone.

And that means that you do, in fact, possess a very formidable and powerful weapon to use against your ED. That being your own individual and unique traits, strengths, and qualities.

I have always considered myself as a brave and fearless person - and not just because I was born under the sign of Aries 🐏. As a girl, I was the intrepid long-haired rascal always climbing trees and digging for worms - and the odd maggot - to bring on fishing trips with her dad. I was the fearless princess with the shining and proud eyes, always stepping forward unhesitatingly at our school shows without one single baulk at the watching crowd. I was the adrenaline junkie fearlessly legging it for all the scariest rollercoasters at the theme park, heedless and uncaring of their hour-long queues. But most striking of all to all who met me was a beautiful and impregnable confidence. A confidence in myself and my own abilities. A confidence to be able to handle anything life hurled at me.

When my eating disorder took over, this confidence and courageousness was massively undermined, of course. My identity as the fearless, sunny girl with her endless store of positivity and energy seemed to dwindle and wane; to be replaced by a wholly opposing one - victim, martyr, prisoner. Needless to say, this new identity didn't give me much reason to respect myself. And thus when I started taking the tentative first few steps of my recovery journey, I was filled with a sickening sense of foreboding. I felt vulnerable and unequipped. *I've nothing to fight with!* I thought. *What chance do I have in this battle? ED will strike me down with one single blow. I'm a nothing and a nobody.*

But as I floundered and struggled, wrestling doggedly with the voice of doubt which was trying to drag me back down into the depths of mental immobility, a fundamental thought occurred to me and broke through the ED's harsh mutterings. What if there was some part of the "real" Emmy left? The fact that I had decided to even try to recover was an incredibly brave and valiant choice. I had, in a sense, taken the seemingly forbidden, terrifying, but crucial first step. What if my courage and strength were still within me, hidden, somewhere? What if, after all this time, I had something to fight with, after all..?

I didn't know where this was going to go, but I knew I had to give it a try. And this leads onto my next important point; of how one can build respect for one's identity again, by being brave and courageous in their recovery.

Recovery Pride - how pride in my own recovery endeavours enabled me to start building respect for myself.

One of the crucial actions I took in building respect for my identity was developing what I refer to as "recovery pride".

This is taking pride in the courageous actions you take to defy your eating disorder; the brave and anxiety-provoking decisions you choose to make.

Let me tell you something that I want you to believe and know with your whole mind and heart. I want you to know that when you made, or contemplated making, the conscious and daring decision to be brave in your recovery - know that you have reason to be so, so proud. You are a warrior. It takes enormous courage and mental discipline to do that. People like you, who choose to fight their eating disorder and face their deepest and most dreadful fears every day...are the bravest and most courageous sort of people, on this earth.

What, I ask of you now, is more worthy of your respect, than making the terrifying, daunting, and incredibly brave decision of facing your greatest fears and the most overwhelming of your demons?

But that is you, everytime you face your eating disorder down. That is you. You embody and define the identity of a hero.

I remember how it felt for me, the first few times I started, in my half recovery phase, to do the things that REALLY terrified me. I let my fears lead me to what I knew I *really* needed to do. I donned the role of recovery detective. Eating a single dry rice cake for snack and increasing my intake by a single grape was no longer enough. *Err, no, Em.* Awareness of my fears pointed in another direction. At the hard, scary, proper hardcore stuff. Strong hot chocolate? Tick. Toasted sandwiches oozing with mature cheddar cheese? Also tick. Oh, what about a hot chocolate *AND* a slice of homemade cheesecake on the side? The thought of that was enough to make me wet myself. Ah, Eureka!! - *That's exactly what I need to do, then.*

One day, being the baker that I am, I decided to make my boyfriend and his mammy a cheesecake. My boyfriend and I drove round to his mam's house to give her her half, but discovered that she wasn't home. We headed back via the shopping mall and Eddie bought me my beloved Butlers hot chocolate, before disappearing to hunt for some other bits he needed in Halfords and beyond. I remained in our car, sipping my chocolate and watching the world go by.

As I finished the delightful, silky liquid, a soft longing in the back of my head wishfully yearned that my treat wasn't finished; that I could just keep sipping away, forever. That I could eat something...else. I quashed the thought ruthlessly, appalled by such a shocking notion.

Hot chocolate and an accompaniment?? Impossible!

But as I bent down to place my empty keep-cup in my bag, my eye involuntarily settled upon the untouched tub of cheesecake. I looked away again, feeling suddenly nervous, unsettled, edgy. My hands were itching to open that lid. My mouth was watering at the thought of that creamy, silky cheesecake filling and the crumbly biscuit crust upon my palate. *What!!* Ed screamed in horror. *Don't you dare have a single spoonful! That's not your cheesecake, it's Marina's. You don't eat cheesecake, you don't "like" cheesecake (complete and utter lies, of course)...and besides, you just had hot chocolate!! Don't you dare, don't you dare; I will bring this car roof down on your head; I will tear your mind up into shreds before your very eyes...*

But deep down I knew what the right thing to do was. The bravest, most petrifying, but most daring and liberating action I could take. Was to listen to the real me, the brave real Emmy who respected herself, her desires, her cravings, her recovery - to listen to her and look the terror straight in the eye, and have some darned cheesecake. Oh yes!

My armpits were slick with cold sweat. My head was spinning as if I had been picked up by some gigantic hand and sent careening down some depthless, gaping hole. But, yet, I knew I had to do it. I had to try. I was sick of being the weak and subordinate girl. I wanted my old identity back; to respect myself again. But I wasn't going to achieve that by simply sitting there and doing nothing.

I took hold of my hot chocolate spoon...
Opened the lid of the cheesecake tub...
And let the battle commence.

Holy Moly, the fear! It roared at me, as loud and as vehement as the mightiest of thunderstorms; a fire-breathing dragon with its jaws outstretched and knife-like fangs poised to impale themselves. And that's how it felt like facing that fear. I felt like I was going to be drowned by those drenching rains, blasted down by that storm's lightnings. I felt like I was going to be devoured by that dragon, be seared to ashes by its fires, be rendered a broken victim in its pitiless, terrible eyes.

But...

I faced that fear, anyway, and smiled. Suddenly my little stainless steel spoon with its bent handle from when I had stepped on it once...became a weapon. A jewel engraved sword. A spear which I gripped with all my strength, and struck right into the eating disorder's black heart. I took another spoonful. And another. The ED screamed and writhed and set fires burning within my brain; I could feel the heat upon my skin, feel its pressure threatening to burst my head apart. But the real me fought back with ferocity, setting fires of her own that blazed as fiercely as that of my eating disorder. Invisible to the world as it may have been, within that small Hyundai i30 on that drizzly November morning, a battle of fire and blood raged and surged. But I wasn't going to lose this time. I couldn't. I could and would, not.

I am brave. I always was and always will be. ED took so much away from me. But it will never be able to take away my spirit. It will never be able to take away my fire. It will never be able to take away my bravery; everything that makes me, me. It cannot and will not take away Me, and everything which makes me who I am and am destined to be!

And suddenly I realised the fires were abating. I had won. I had won this one. I noticed that suddenly every motion of the spoon from cheesecake to my mouth was no longer a shaky, tortuous effort; that my spoon no longer felt as heavy as a lever made of lead. I realised...thatI was even beginning to *enjoy* this! I realised I could have as much as i wanted!!! I attacked that cheesecake with as much zeal as I had faced down the ED. By the time my boyfriend returned to the car, he found me slumped in an exhausted but wholly exuberant state of disbelief. Disbelief at the fact I had won. Disbelief at the fact that despite the sheer and excruciating agony of facing the ED down...the real me, had won. Ha! And I knew that if I had done it this time, I could do it..again and again. The real me - the brave, perseverant, determined girl that the illness had suppressed - had reemerged, once again. And she was armed and ready to do battle.



I found it really helpful to draw up a little chart of sorts; a physical and proud presentation of my recovery triumphs thus far. My creative side derived great satisfaction from doing this up and decorating it with all manner of hand drawn doodlings and pretty colours. On it, I planned, monitored and chartered my recovery progress. I recorded significant triumphs and recovery wins which I then built upon by adding another more scary, greater challenge.

On my bad days, it brought me great comfort looking back upon my chart, and reminding myself of how brave I could really be. EDs are very good at making us forget just how capable we really are, and causing us to focus solely on our weaknesses. This was why I felt it was important for me to have a physical reminder of my own strength, and motivate myself when I wasn't feeling so courageous or sure of myself.

The hard thing about building recovery pride is that you have to accept that others around you may not quite be able to grasp just how challenging and often completely terrifying these actions are for you. But that's ok. In recovery, we have to recognise that not all our loved ones will be able to understand what we are going through. But realise that you *do not need the understanding of everyone in your life in order to recover*. It's essential that you learn to be ok

with that. Because guess what - you don't need the approval or praise of others in order to be proud, and to develop respect for yourself.

As a recovered individual, it's true to say, like all human beings, I have my bad days too. Days when work leaves me feeling like a wrung out dishcloth; days when nothing seems to fall into place or a misinterpreted message leave me wondering what I did wrong this time. Days when I start to feel those old feelings of shame and self disgust, reminiscent of those so prevalent in my head in my years of anorexia. But then, I remind myself of all I have been through. I remind myself of my own individuality - a complex blend of bravery, strength, determination and rock-solid perseverance. I remind myself I have every right to respect myself and my identity. And know that for you it is no different. You deserve respect. You deserve respect from others. You deserve respect from yourself. And no one has the right to take that respect away from you - especially not that destructive voice in your head.

The role of detachment in allowing your true voice to speak

I think what was also part of establishing respect for myself was the conscious decision to try to detach myself somewhat from my struggles, and look at myself, the place I was at, and my illness and its workings from a more detached and less emotional viewpoint. This was important because in doing so, I was able to grasp for myself what it was my eating disorder was actually making me feel ashamed for, or what it was provoking fear in me for. And when I took myself out of my own head and tried to look at my struggling self with the eyes of an outsider..it slowly started to hit me just how ridiculous it was, that my ED would make me cry in shame over eating more than one cookie, or calling myself a loser for daring not to measure milk for cereal. I had to come up with a new philosophy, of sorts. *I'm not the one who's pathetic*, I talked back to the voice firmly in such situations, *you are. You want me to cry and have a meltdown for wanting to have a slice of toast? For wanting to be human for once and actually give myself the food my body has been crying out for?*

It can be really, really hard, but...you have to replace those harsh, consistently darned nasty, shaming voices of criticism with a voice of your own - one that has dignity, respect, and pride in yourself. You should be PROUD of the fact you are choosing to eat - well and truly proud!! There's not a single reason in the world you should feel shame. Remember, always, if you can - that the only thing holding you back from being proud of yourself, for gaining respect and dignity once again for yourself and your recovery, is a voice in your head. And that voice, no matter how tangible it may seem...doesn't really exist. And you have the power, the strength, and the bravery to defy it.

And so, when you try to eat, or take on a recovery challenge. Try to notice the different emotions you feel right now - give them names. Fear, guilt, shame, self-disgust? Try to realise and grasp the fact that they are purely ED generated emotions. The *real* you would not feel them simply for wanting to fulfil such a basic and vitally crucial need - that of feeding yourself! And with this in mind, try to detach yourself from those emotions, if you can...I'm not practised in the art of meditation, by any means, but the tools one learns in meditation can be helpful here. But for me,

I tried to look at myself through the lens of a *recovered* Emmy, or of one of my key support people. And, having adopted that perspective, I would think to myself...Jeepers Creepers! Look at myself, this poor, bogged down girl! She's feeling as much shame contemplating eating that plate of Fries as she would have if she had just spilt catfood down someone's prom dress! *Why should you feel so much shame for yourself, Emmy? Can't you see just how ridiculous that is - that something that only exists in your own head should make you feel shame for simply wanting to eat? You, of all people; who deprived yourself of adequate food for so long and starved your body and mind? You, who knows full well that you have to eat in order to recover...?*

In adopting a more detached perspective, I was able to draw myself out of these heightened emotions that the ED threw up everytime I tried to take on a recovery challenge. I was able to ground myself, remind myself of why I needed to do this; and ultimately, allow the voice of my real, true self to speak over that of ED's. The ED voice wanted me to feel shame and disgust in myself for taking actions that would help me recover; my real voice was one of pride, respect and dignity for myself; my current and future identity. My real voice was the one I needed to listen to; for it spoke the ultimate truth - that in choosing to eat, I was being incredibly brave and strong; and that strength and bravery were intrinsic parts to my identity. I had every reason to respect myself, and allow my recovery to grow.

Reconnection with your world

I think mental illnesses like eating disorders and depression are cruel in that they can cause us to become extremely preoccupied with our own suffering, our own sadness. It is all that we begin to think about and we become further and further entrenched in our own melancholy as we start to forget the beautiful and wonderful things about life.

Recovery demanded of me that I let go of this preoccupation. Forming respect for the person that was me and, ultimately, wanting to recover for myself, would only be made possible if I essentially drew myself out of these patterns of thinking that were all centred on my own suffering. And in doing so I found I was able to develop respect for myself; for I came to realise that, as opposed to the depressed, self-resentful mutterings that I, trapped in that web of melancholy, had allowed myself to believe...as opposed to that, I was not in the slightest weak, or useless, or incapable, or pathetic. That I was bad at everything, inept at making conversation; a complete and utter imbecile. No. When I forced myself to be brave, and curious, and oppose those thoughts, I began to discover that I was in fact the complete opposite of what these thoughts were telling me.

And so alongside being brave and defiant in my recovery choices, it was important for me to start looking outward as opposed to inward all the time, and become reconnected once again with my world. I thought about what was important to me, what interested me. And let my heart and soul guide me, instead of my doubting, self-critical mind.

I realised that nothing made me feel more fulfilled than being around other people and particularly, helping other people. Bringing a smile and a bit of brightness to people's days. And that's when I started volunteering, working with children, writing my blog, and baking yummy things as gifts for my loved ones. Reconnecting with old friends and making the effort to see and do things with them. And putting myself out there and trying new things, and trusting the blind faith that I would make new friends along the way by doing so.

Doing these things, even though I felt reluctant and nervous to do so at first, were really helpful in helping me to pull myself free of depression's heavy, stifling blanket, and develop respect for myself and the unique person who was me. I began to see myself for who I truly was - not anorexia's helpless, meek, vulnerable victim; but a happy, confident, bright and spirited individual, whose natural energy and bubbly, warm personality was enough to bring smiles and laughter to everyone in her presence.

Respecting identity and individuality: recognise that your recovery is individual, and personal, to the unique person who you are.

A recovery journey is as unique and as individual as every single person who chooses to tread its winding, challenging paths.

Thus your needs in your own recovery journey will be unique and personal to you. In recovery, it's important to figure out what it is you, in practical and realistic terms, need to achieve your goals. To devise your own personalised care plan, of sorts; that is in line with your needs, values, experiences and motivations.

It took a long time for me to grasp and understand fully that what I needed in my recovery was not the same as everyone else's.

As someone who is very much a people person, I noticed I never really tended to do well when I was on my own. And yes, this did mean wasting a good bit of money travelling back and forth to my boyfriend's apartment, and spending an annoyingly large chunk of my time staring out of a bus window...but, do you know what? It was one hundred percent worth it. I accepted the fact I needed support and company in order to do best in my recovery. I had also noticed how it was when I was with my boyfriend that I felt at my most brave, confident, and willing to take on difficult challenges. He was able to truly bring out the best in me, gently encouraging me to see through the challenges I would have chickened out of doing if I had been by myself. (And, might I add...the ice cream parlour adjacent to his house certainly was influential in helping me rediscover my love of ferrero rocher sauce sundaes. 🍦)

Recovery: Reclaiming and Rediscovering our true and beautiful identities

Recovery has brought me more joy, more peace, and more happiness than I could ever have imagined. Out of the countless things which I am now truly grateful for, is the emergence over the past year of what I see as my true and real identity: an identity completely separate to that of

my eating disorder's; an identity which is solely me and only me. My struggles have, essentially, shaped me into the person who I am today.

She is both the Emmy of old; but yet also the Emmy of the new. She is both the same person as she was; but she is different, too - in the most beautiful and extraordinary of ways. I have more respect and self acceptance for myself than ever before. I possess great tolerance, a deeper level of understanding for others in my world: this is something which I am truly proud of, and which I know comes directly from my experiences of mental hardship and how I overcame such struggles. I've reclaimed my former confidence and enthusiasm, and love nothing more now than hanging out with my friends or dancing my heart out - whether that be on a sparkly dance floor, or on the tiles of my kitchen at home with my guinea pigs looking on. And alongside all of this; a store of endless, boundless, uncontainable energy which many a friend and colleague of mine has remarked upon. My response is usually a beam of pride and an avid declaration that it must be all the hot chocolate I consume. 🍫



On our honeymoon in the UK, not only did I get to discover the wonders of the Snowdonia mountains and the beauty of the Cotswold Downs, but also the delights of Mrs Potts chocolate house and the phenomenon otherwise known as cookie sandwiches...

All that I went through, in those harrowing years of pain and loss, taught me a lot about myself. I realise now just how brave I was, am, and always, always will be. I realise just how tough I actually am and how much mental strength I possess. And it is the same for every sufferer out there going through what I did, no matter at what stage of life you find yourself at, no matter how "sick" you are or don't think you are; no matter how many times you have told yourself you can't

or won't recover. Know this. You are brave and you are strong; so very, very strong. It is time to stop belittling yourself, and take action. Take action today. And one of the first steps you can take is to respect yourself. To respect the person that you are today, and to look towards the future and the person you are to become.