

A photograph of a person's legs and feet walking on a path. The person is wearing dark pants and is barefoot. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise, with a warm orange and yellow glow. The person's hand is visible, hanging down.

Annabelle Copenhay

IT TAKES TIME TO FIND YOURSELF

Annabelle Copenhagen

It takes time to find yourself

Wersja demonstracyjna



**Wydawnictwo Psychoskok
Konin 2022**

Annabelle Copenhay

„It takes time to find yourself”

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Editor in Chief: **Renata Grześkowiak**

Cover design: **Robert Rumak**

Editing and proofreading: **Marlena Rumak**

Setting: **Jacek Antoniewski**

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Wydawnictwo Psychoskok Sp. z o.o.
ul. Spółdzielców 3, pok. 325, 62-510 Konin
tel. (63) 242 02 02, kom. 695-943-706
<http://www.psychoskok.pl/>
<http://wydawnictwo.psychoskok.pl/>
e-mail: wydawnictwo@psychoskok.pl

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Introduction

On September 1, 2009, after talking to a psychiatrist, I decided to go to a psychiatric hospital in the neurotic disorders ward of my own free will. After many years of treatment, which still didn't bring the expected results, I came to the conclusion that the hospital was my last hope. I went there because I suffered from eating disorders - bulimia nervosa and anorexia. Then it turned out that it was not my only, nor the most important problem... Probably if I hadn't found out about it and then hadn't started to deal with it, I would still be ill or worse - I wouldn't be here anymore.

Today I know that if you really want to, you really believe that you can be healthy, then it's possible. Faith, the true, sincere faith works miracles. I'm not talking about curing the disease and its relapses. I am writing about understanding myself, getting back on my feet, causes of falling ill and complete, irreversible recovery, curing.

I am addressing the book to everyone. To people who consider this disease to be a whim, an invention of girls who want to get attention. To insecure women and teenagers, to parents, and especially to the same girls and adult women as me. To women who have fallen into the nightmare of this disease and are either undergoing treatment and it does not bring such effects as they wanted to, or to those who do not want to be treated, because they feel comfortable with the disease, or are ashamed to go to a psychologist/psychiatrist. Please don't lose hope, don't say "I can't stop", but finally say "I can", although the road is long, hard and painful, it is worth going

through. It is worth being at its end, because that is where the desired happiness awaits.

Chapter I

From the outside looking in, my life might seem almost perfect. A child from a wealthy, well-educated family. From an early age, my parents provided for me and cared for everything. I grew up in great conditions to play, learn, getting to know the world with holidays abroad. Many people don't understand how it's possible that children, who have everything they want, or even more, and who were never denied anything, can fall ill with such a disease. Many people say it's not real and is only borne out of boredom or on a whim, to be the centre of attention and be talked about... All the excesses are simply caused by "having too much" and being spoiled. However, I didn't like to be in the centre of attention and even when it did happen, it was never intended by me. On the contrary, in such moments, I often felt foolish and ashamed of myself.

The story of my illness started when I was 16. I had just come from a great holiday in Greece, but earlier on I had been working in a pub in my father's hometown (I was not of legal age but was allowed to work there because the establishment where the pub was belonged to my family). It was very sad for me when I had to come back home because I had made some amazing friends and had such a wonderful time living and working there. I was happy until the moment when I weighed myself and I saw that I had gained 2 kilos. I thought I was looking good; I didn't weigh myself often and all was good. I rode a bike because I knew that doing some sport is good for my health. I tried to maintain a proper weight of 55 kg and hadn't had problems with that so far, so when I gained those 2 kilos, I decided not to worry about it, because I was tired of maintaining my correct weight, being careful about what I eat. I started to eat more,

while not exercising and doing nothing but learning and going out from time to time and it happened - I put on weight. I weighed 65 kg with a height of 165 cm. I did not feel good about the new weight, but I also did not feel bad enough to do something about it. However, my dad had a problem with that, he even hit me once, when I ate a bun in my room, because he was worried that my brothers and I would grow fat and become ill, but I didn't care then. There aren't many thin people in my family, most of them, if not all of them, love to eat; my dad included but he was afraid that we would become as fat as our neighbour's children and with the obesity would come the many diseases associated with it as we got older. I could feel his eyes on me when I was eating, but it didn't bother me enough to do anything about it.

Dad was of the opinion that I must do some sport, so he signed my brother, Jurek and I up to play tennis with a friend of his. At first I didn't want to. I wasn't interested in the sport at all. My dad liked it and he still does today, but I didn't, but at his urging I started to build an interest in it. I came to like my coach very much; I could talk to him about practically everything. I didn't mind also that sometimes he said inappropriate things to me. I did mention it to my cousin, who said that my trainer was molesting me, but I didn't care about her assessment of the situation, and I did nothing about it.

A whole year passed and the holidays were coming again. I was very happy because I was supposed to go to work in the same pub as last year, but my dad said one day that if I didn't lose weight, I could not go to work. When he said that, I realised that I had only a month to lose at least 10 kilograms and get to my old weight. I started to exercise. At the beginning I ate normally; breakfast, lunch and dinner and rode a stationary bike every day. Yet every time I climbed on

a scale, the pointer stood still. I realised I was only burning what I ate, so even though I was not gaining more, I also was not losing any weight. I started to eat less; I gave up sweets. For the first three days it was hard, I was really craving them, but thanks to my willpower, I mastered the urge to eat them. Weight began to slowly decrease, unfortunately not as fast as I thought it should. I thought then, "I can't stop eating - every man eats, food is necessary." And then one day I accidentally caught part of a movie on tv where a girl would eat, then go to the toilet to throw up the meal she had just eaten. It seemed like a good way to avoid gaining weight, so I decided to use this method myself.

At first it was not easy because our bodies are not used to vomiting, especially when it is done deliberately. I made a pot of bitter tea because I heard it helps to induce vomit when you are trying to for the first time. I succeeded - I threw up.

It was at this point that the fasting started. I told my parents that I was on a diet, and because I had a few kilograms too many in my hips - no one minded. No one thought it was wrong, because many people choose to be thin. I rarely ate, and if I did, because I had to (e.g., dinner with my parents) everything eventually ended up in the toilet. I would go to the bathroom, saying that I was going to take a bath, turned on the water so that no one could hear what I was doing and vomited. When I started to feel hungry, I was happy, because I knew that I had thrown everything up and had nothing to worry about anymore. I then went on a bike and rode for two hours.

The weight was dropping faster and faster and I was feeling better and better, mentally and physically. Unfortunately, the hunger was getting stronger, sometimes even unbearable. I would very slowly look

through the cookbooks at home, “planning” what I was going to cook and in the future when I lost the weight. I found that after looking through the entire book, I felt satisfied and the hunger drained away.

However, there were times when the food simply appeared in front of me, I came home from school, and it was lying on the table prepared for me and it was tempting. One day I came back from school, was home alone, and snatched at the dinner, not thinking about what I was doing. I did not think about the fact that my stomach was contracted and so I cannot eat much, I simply ate, at a horrifyingly fast pace. While eating, I felt nauseous and felt terrible remorse that I had not restrained myself, that I was tempted and ate. After vomiting I felt good again, I felt happy. I came to the conclusion that I had to allow myself a bit of food to prevent such a gluttony. My choice was a cube of chocolate daily, because I loved chocolate and besides, I read that it contains a lot of magnesium, and it supplements the daily requirement. I let myself have that because it was only a cube - I checked precisely how many calories it has.

I still had a problem with weekend dinners, which I had to eat because I was eating them with my family. Fortunately, I was able to find a way out of this seemingly difficult situation. I realized that I should start cooking, because if I cooked, I could always tell them “I was eating when I was preparing the meal and I’m not hungry anymore”. And so it started. My mum was glad that I wanted to cook because it made her life easier. The dinners I cooked were very sophisticated; I had a collection of sorts of cookbooks and cooking magazines. When I found out that looking at and watching food being made was enough for me to, in a sense, cheat my hunger, I started buying cooking magazines with calories and other nutritional

values counted. Therefore, the meals I prepared were not calorically dense/ high in calories.

I was delighted at how the plan worked out because my family believed that I ate while cooking and that I was full. To be honest, it wasn't difficult, because many housewives know that while preparing meals it's necessary to try it and decide whether it needs seasoning. An additional advantage was that everyone in the family knew about my diet, I ate less, I was exercising, therefore my stomach contracted, and I couldn't eat too much. Sometimes I got rid of my portion of dinner in a different way -I just threw it into the rubbish bin. Occasionally, when I was cooking on weekends, I would put a little bit of food on my plate out of convenience and then I would say, "I'm not hungry now, because I was eating while cooking, so I will eat later". After the meal I cleaned the table, then threw my portion into the rubbish bin and poured the soup down the sink. I was happy because I had peace - nobody was picking on me about not eating. Neither was anyone surprised that I rode a stationary bike for three hours a day; apparently, they shared my opinion that I need to lose weight. The Football World Cup was being broadcast then, so I rode while watching matches on TV.

Cigarettes were another thing that helped me cheat the hunger while I was fasting. They killed the feeling of hunger that accompanied me and I felt better. Smoking killed the pangs which made me feel better. I had already started smoking and drinking during elementary school. No, not because others smoked and drank, I was not susceptible to influence. I started smoking later than others and only because I wanted to. At that school level, doing a prohibited activity like smoking gave us an adrenaline rush. Hiding with my friends from my teachers was exciting. It was the same

with alcohol. I started drinking later than the others and because I just wanted to, I liked this cool feeling.

I also started to steal in elementary school. I stole money from my parents, I also stole from shops. I learnt to steal from friends who had been doing it for some time and I thought that maybe I could try it too. The adrenaline, danger, and fear of getting caught made it fun. The more I stole, the better I got at it. I would take whatever I wanted from shops and was never caught. It started with food and escalated to bigger, more expensive things.

The days flew by. When I came back from school, I was alone at home. I would come and find meals prepared and left behind for me. Some days, I would throw the food away. Others, it would be harder to resist the urge, and I'd eat then make myself throw the food up. Each time, I had terrible feelings of remorse and helplessness, I felt weak. I was constantly going through a range of emotions that I could not shake. All this time, I kept up my bike riding. My weight, as I had hoped, kept dropping until I finally reached 55 kilograms which I was elated about because it meant I could go to work.

Everyone in the family noticed I lost the weight and commented on how nice I looked; I was incredibly proud of myself. Some people were surprised that I was able to lose 10 kilograms within a month, they asked me how I had done it, and I answered briefly that I gave up sweets, started eating less and exercised regularly.

I went off to work, and reconnected with all my friends from the year before. I really enjoyed working in the pub, the atmosphere and the regulars who all got along with each other. I wished I could be there all the time. Throughout this whole period, I ate and vomited, but I had stopped paying attention to it. It became

routine for me and I didn't see anything wrong with it, I did not think about it. Besides, the words of others were still in the back of my mind that, "You are from a family of doctors, and have everything you want so you don't have a right to get sick. You have it too good." I had also heard, "I'm too sane to fall into anorexia or bulimia," so I lived in that assurance that I would not fall ill. I rejected the idea that I could be sick - it absolutely was not taken into account. In fact, I didn't even have time to think about what I was doing. Everything around me was happening very quickly.

Chapter II

The past

Remorse for the bad deeds I had been doing to others since elementary school would continue to bother me and had become even more intense. Even though my parents had given me so much, I wasn't happy. I felt a hellish sadness, even when I smiled, it was forced. I had an internal scream that I was dying to let free but had no idea how. I started to drink alcohol in the mornings before school and attended classes under the influence. I don't know if my teachers were ever aware. It is likely that they were not, because they never said anything. One day I couldn't take it anymore and I cut myself, in order to drown out the sorrow. It gave me a momentary sense of happiness and relief. I did not say anything to my parents because I was afraid of their reactions. From childhood, I was usually screamed at or spanked for bad behaviour. We had been punished in this way many times. When something bad happened, I tried to hide it for as long as possible because I was afraid of the consequences. I remember one moment when I shut down while my mum was beating me. Usually, I didn't cry unless it went on for so long that I could not take it. My brother was always emotional, he was always crying. I was different. I was cold. Most often, the row was about school and learning; occasionally, about a mess but rarely about anything else. Mum was always pedantic.

One memory has always stuck with me, one that did not concern me directly, but my brother. Dad came back from a school meeting very angry at him. Since we got a dog in the house, our parents no longer beat

us with a belt like they did before, but with a leash; probably because it was close at hand.

Except the dog's leash was no ordinary leash, it was a sailing rope with thick loops. My dad then took that rope and started beating him with it. From the second floor, I heard my brother screaming and crying. The dog came to me with its tail tucked up and it was shaking all over, and I started crying myself and couldn't stop. I hated myself for what happened to my brother. Jarek had huge haematomas after that, and it stayed with me. I don't know where my older brother was when it all happened. Once, when I went with my dog for a walk, I took this rope and hit myself. I did it lightly, but it still hurt me terribly, and just to think - my brother was getting hit by my father with all his strength. He didn't get hit just once, but about a dozen times. At that moment, I felt such a terrible pain that I cried, and every time this situation came back to me, tears filled my eyes. I tried hard not to think about it and to convince myself that it was over, and I needed to be strong.

Even now, when I describe the whole event, it is terribly difficult for me. The feelings have remained till this day. That day I also almost got hit with this rope, I don't remember how I managed to avoid it. The weirdest thing about it was that my dad seemed to feel guilty for doing it. He punished in the greatest anger, and then always tried to smooth things over, my mother didn't - or so I thought. Once, years later, in their presence, I brought up this incident. Through tears and while swallowing my bitterness, I recounted what happened only to be asked, "so what?" My father was not one to dwell on the past, but it had been incredibly difficult for me which was why I was still experiencing the pain. Many people who do not believe that events can make you feel so strongly may not

understand this. That a person who, according to some, has no feelings is still brooding on it.

I never told anyone about it. I thought that it was normal for parents to beat their children, that this was how everyone was brought up. I heard that other children were also beaten, so I didn't feel the need to share it even more. Besides, there was a rule of "don't tell anyone what is happening at home" which I thought probably applied to everyone else and their homes.

Then something happened. I didn't have a very good relationship with my brother who was older than me by a year. We had never got along since we were children; we argued, he beat me - like brothers do, but that day he came to me, and we started talking about what was happening at our house. He asked me if I believed that all children were beaten by their parents, because he knew that not all children were beaten and that it wasn't normal behaviour, and even if they were beaten it wasn't that severe. Then something inside me switched. After that conversation, I started to defend myself and threaten my dad that he had no right to hit me anymore because such things are reported to the police. He retorted that if he reported me, I would probably be in jail for what I did. I think he said it because he knew his behaviour was wrong and that it would scare me. And scare me, it did.

I eventually became completely mentally distracted by myself and what was happening around me. One morning, I swallowed sleeping pills and washed them down with alcohol. Unfortunately, a friend came to pick me up that day, the mixture of drugs and vodka had not started working yet, so I went with her, convinced that I would be fine.

But I was wrong. The pills started to work on the way to school. And when we got there, I could barely

stand on my feet. My classmates watched me in surprise and a bit of fear, and the teacher told me to go to the nurse. I vomited there. I was taken to the hospital where I had a stomach lavage, also described as stomach pumping. My parents came and took me home. My mum said to me then, "you had everything - how could you do something like that?" - but what she thought was "everything"? I wasn't sure, - she probably meant material things. I went to the room and cried. My mother and the rest of my family thought that I couldn't be unhappy because - from all appearances - I had a wonderful life.

After this incident, I was told that I had let down my classmates. Why? Because they considered me a happy, carefree person who helped others and yet suddenly I had tried to kill myself?

People always considered me to be that way - worry-free, what could I possibly know for example about life, being from a family like my own, and wanting for nothing.

What is hard for most people to grasp is that even a child like me who had "everything" while growing up, could still have problems. Everything I did was considered just impulsive behaviour - "the princess is doing too well". Such a reaction intensified my remorse and I dismissed the possibility that I might have fallen ill even more. I had to be always organised, nice and happy, even when I wasn't happy. Appearances, however, had to be kept up.

At home I was totally different. I wasn't a nice, good girl. Rather mean, wicked, boorish, rude, saucy, arrogant girl who still made people feel bad. It was no surprise people thought that's how I genuinely was, that's how I acted all the time. If something sad was happening at home, I didn't show my emotions, I hardly ever cried in front of them, so I was considered

insensitive. I didn't show my feelings, because someone once told me that you shouldn't show your emotions nor weaknesses, because others could take advantage of them. In life, you should be tough. I was little when I was told but it stuck in my memory and that's who I tried to be even though I didn't always succeed. Besides, at home there was still pressure about learning. From an early age, learning came first, because it ensured the future. When my mum went to England for an annual scholarship, we went with her for six months. We, that is my brother, grandmother and I. Dad and my older brother stayed in Poland because dad had to work. They only came for holidays.

In England, my brother and I were going to English school. I had no problem with the language because I had learned it since

I was in kindergarten and I knew the basics. The lessons started always at 9 a.m. and finished at 3 p.m. At first it was difficult for me, but then I got acclimatised and even made friends with the headteacher's daughter, who was in my class and lived quite close by to us. The only thing that was a problem at school was the lunches, because they were not the tastiest. When I didn't want to eat my brother was called and he would complain to my grandmother that I was being picky again.

The pressure was not only about school and learning, it was also about going out with friends. I would often have to give up my plans because of emotional blackmail from my family. There were still complaints that I preferred to go out with people other than my family and that family was the most important thing. This is true, but I had the right to my own life and felt they needed to respect that too. Mum always decided for everyone "it should be like this, no discussion". On the one hand, it was understandable, because I was dependent on my parents and had to be obedient to

them, they gave me money, etc., but on the other hand, I had the right to decide for myself as I was becoming an adult. It was often suggested that I had no right to speak, because I hadn't achieved anything in my life yet and I was nobody. Hearing that made me feel as if I was not allowed to do anything. Very often, when I did something wrong, someone suffered because of me, I went back to my room, locked myself up there and cried. I was crying over myself, I was crying over being so mean and not being able to help it, that I get so much good and that's how I was repaying it. Giving bad for good. More than once, I screamed at my older brother, told him that I hated him then went back to room to cry over it. I felt so bad about it, I hated myself for it because I loved my family and I didn't want to be like that, but when I was with them it just happened. My family believed that I had no regrets or remorse; they always thought I didn't care, and it was quite the opposite. I was often reminded of the wrongs I did – like stealing money, over and over. Maybe that's why when I attempted suicide, when I took the pills, they thought I did it to create a sensation, to be the centre of attention. But I did not care about being centre of attention, I hated it even. If I did something, it was because I wanted to, not because I wanted to get attention. Among my friends, I was someone completely different – I was a nice, cheerful, sociable, good, helpful girl, so no one could have imagined that I could be different.

When the movie "The Passion of the Christ" was shown in the cinema, we watched it, I cried throughout the whole movie, I couldn't look at many of the scenes and I covered my eyes. I made myself remove my hands and watch because the voice inside me said "Look, look how he suffered". Nobody saw that I cried, maybe that's why after the movie I was told that I like

to watch such things - these words made my eyes glaze over again. As if that were not enough, I was blamed for everything. When I argued with my brother, it was always my fault. Every time I was supposed to let go, because he is a guy, and you know how it is with guys...

When our dog got sick, my brother also blamed me for the disease and for putting our dog down. Mainly my dad and I took care of it. Unfortunately, when I was in the fourth grade of high school, the dog fell ill. Some kind of tumour began to grow on his neck. It was removed, then it grew back and was removed again. When it grew for the third time, it was tested, and it turned out to be a sarcoma. About that time, the dog stopped eating and became different. It no longer was excited to go for walks, it in fact, showed no desire to. When we went skiing, the man who looked after it called us and said that the dog didn't want to eat. I thought "it's not a big deal that the dog didn't want to eat for a day or two". I became scared when we went back home because it was no longer my beautiful, round headed dog that stood in front of me... but a shadow of it. An anorectic dog. We decided to put it down the next day, so that it wouldn't suffer anymore. I cried all night, and of course no one knew about it. The next day after the dog was put down, and I had stopped crying, my mother came to my room, crying and said: "We had a dog and we don't have one anymore, what about you? Aren't you sorry? Aren't you crying?" I said I was sorry. The only thing I wanted was for her to leave my room. I got the impression that she came just to see if I was crying, she went to my brother's room as well - he blamed me for the loss of our dog. Yes, just me, he only took care of it when he wanted to, he would go for walks with him only when he wanted to, so of course I was to blame for

putting the dog down. It may have been said thoughtlessly at the time, but I took it personally.

There were many situations in which they were surprised that I didn't take things emotionally, not knowing that I was experiencing emotions, just not showing it in front of them. For some reason I was ashamed, maybe because of what I had once heard about not showing my emotions. I turned them off, relegated situations that had happened in my life, bad and unpleasant situations to my subconscious, and dealt with everything around me, ignoring myself.

From an early age, the person I was closest to in the family was always my grandmother on my mother's side. Since I was a child, I would visit her and my grandfather once a week. She was the one I told everything, maybe not everything, but general things with whom I argued or who did what. I didn't talk about these more serious matters, because I was afraid, I was ashamed, I kept my faults to myself, putting them aside and I told her about my relations with my friends (but also not all of them), what happened at school, but only in general, not about what directly concerned me.

I couldn't say anything to my mother, I remember when I went to her and wanted to talk and I was told was not to deal with crap, but with serious matters. I didn't try to confide in her again. For her it was "crap", but it was a serious issue for an eight-year-old me. That's why I confided in my grandmother and I stopped telling my mum anything. I didn't feel the need to do that anymore, and besides, I knew she would tell me not to deal with crap again. Something started to change in her over the years, but I had already learned not to talk to her and felt no need to, which she obviously didn't understand. She felt like I was punishing her for saying that to me once, when she

had not meant it at all. I had other close people to talk to about everything.

Chapter III

Back to the time of illness

Two years had passed while I was living in this pattern. I was still normal to me, and I did not give it much thought. Vomiting became a part of my life, and I didn't see a problem with that.

May was slowly drawing near, and thus the time to take the Matura exam^[1]. Which as anyone who has taken it knows, required a lot of studying. I had heard a lot about amphetamines, so thought I would try to see if it really increased the efficiency and focus of the brain. I had access to drugs because I hung out with the people who took them. When one of my friends got them for me, the other friends were not happy with it, they warned me not to take too much the first time, but I still took as much as I wanted, behind their backs. The first time, I took the whole gram, which could have ended very dangerously. It was fun when I took the speed, but surprisingly, I couldn't learn a thing because all the letters were blurring. Overall, this state was nice, but coming down from the high the next day, not as much. Even though I decided not to take it anymore, it happened to me twice more (in a bid to distract myself for a moment). I started to be afraid of getting addicted, so I decided to give it up and fortunately had no problems.

It was always a plus, I was never addicted to any stimulants; not to cigarettes, nor to alcohol, nor to drugs – once I told myself “NO, ENOUGH” – I would not feel the need to take them again. Even if someone did it in front of me - I was not tempted.

[1]. translator's note: Polish exam, similar to A-levels.

I passed my Matura exam and did quite well. I got into law studies in Toruń. I chose this course because at the time it seemed to me that this is what I wanted to do in my life. A stable profession that would secure my future.

I met a lot of cool people in Toruń. After my arrival, I had a few new friends whom I got to know at the Nicolaus Copernicus University forum. I met them right after I got to town. My room-mate Asia seemed to be nice, but we were like fire and water. Wojtek, who also started studies with us, seemed okay, there was "something" strange between us that I can't really name. He was quite difficult and introverted, so it wasn't easy to communicate with him. Maybe if I had tried harder... Nothing happened though because I met a pretty intriguing guy, Ivo, while signing up for individual courses. When he introduced himself to me, I couldn't believe that it was his real name - I became close to him and to Karol and Maciej, and I spent my time with them. I don't know why, but I've always preferred company that was older than me like they were, I rarely got along with people my own age.

I was especially fascinated by Ivo, he was unusually happy and calm, it was almost as if he radiated it. I'd never met someone like him before. Ivo, Karol and I lived close to each other, so we met fairly often. I wanted to see Ivo because... it's hard to describe why, but I felt like I could learn a lot from him. Several times, he would unknowingly hurt my feelings and make me cry, but something kept drawing me to him. One day I started talking to him about my problems, I didn't include the vomiting. I told him about problems with my parents, that they still blamed me for things I could not control, that they were picking on me, that they didn't like my friends, that they would put incredible pressure on me etc. People who saw the pain

he was causing me found it strange that I still hung out with him instead of ending the friendship. It was difficult to explain to them because I did not know myself why I stayed.

Ivo had a girlfriend that came to him in Toruń. I wanted her to like me, he was my friend and I wanted to "make friends" with her. However, it turned out otherwise. I invited them to my place, along with Karol. We were playing cards. They were not in my favour that day and she said, "at least Annabelle is worse than me." Not a big deal, because these were just cards, but I got the impression that her words had a broader context. I found her behaviour off-putting in that moment. Then I realised that no matter what I did or where I went, I would still be the worst person. It wasn't just about Ivo, but about all people in general. After this situation, I didn't feel like seeing her anymore, I felt bad around her. I didn't care about her liking me anymore; I didn't care about having a good relationship with her. I understand jealousy, but I never tolerated how my friends' girlfriends were jealous of me and therefore mean, because I didn't know why they would be jealous of me. Their boyfriends were just my friends and more importantly, I didn't want them to be more than friends. I was glad that I had such honest, real friends, that our relationship was purely friendly.

Even in Toruń, I would often find myself in strange situations. One time I went alone at midnight to a cash dispenser, located three kilometres from my hall of residence - I lived in a hall because I always wanted a taste of student life and thanks to my dad's friend, I had gotten the opportunity. As I was walking up knee-deep in snow, in the middle of the night, a car suddenly pulled up near me - the passenger door quickly opened. Scared by this invitation, I turned back and went the other way.

This sort of thing would also happen to me when I worked in a pub in Turek . During a break, I went for a walk around the square; yet another strange car pulled up, with three thickset men inside, one of whom opened the door and asked me if I needed a lift. When I refused, they asked importunately "are you sure?". I was scared then because I knew that if I got into this car, I would not be back. I quickly returned to the pub. I would also find myself in difficult situations with drunk men in the pub but managed to deal with them. However, many people were surprised that I wasn't afraid to walk the streets alone at night. I thought then that I was brave and strong and could not get hurt. The same was true in Toruń. Living in a hall had a lot of pros, but also a lot of cons, especially because everyone knew which family I was from. Unfortunately, I found out too late from Tomek – a neighbour from Poznań – that I shouldn't talk about myself too much in the hall.

Over the years, I had various experiences with the homeless, I never really avoided them. During my stay in Toruń, I called one of the homeless people, kneeling in front of the church, a pauper, for which I was hit slightly in the arm by Ivo. I don't know why I said that, it was stupid, because I didn't really think that about this man. In Poznań, I helped the homeless, I even took part in the organisation of Christmas Eve for them in the high school I attended. I had no problem talking to strangers on the street, even the homeless, who were simply avoided by most people. There were several times that I would meet a homeless person and would buy them something. Once, while shopping with my friend, Nadia, we met and had a long conversation with a homeless man during which he offered to show us where he lived. Nadia was afraid, but of course I wasn't. His home was in an abandoned garage, but I thought it was good that he had a roof

over his head. The next day, we accidentally ran into him again. One of the passers-by told us that this homeless man had attacked his wife with an axe, was receiving psychiatric treatment, and that we'd better watch out and not talk to him again. It was difficult because he lived near the road that I often walked, and I was likely to run into him against my will. Eventually, he disappeared. Nevertheless, this story with the homeless man didn't scare me too much, because some time later, while waiting for my friend, Antosia in front of my high school, I met yet another homeless man – Tomek, who had recently got out of prison and ended up on the street because he had rejected help from his brother. He claimed he didn't need any favours or sympathy. I found Tomek intriguing. From the beginning he called me "Doris", which was shocking for me, because until then only my close friends and family called me that. I didn't confess it to Antosia, but I would have liked to continue the relationship, however unfortunately we never met again. Many people have a negative attitude towards the homeless, but in my home, when they came to get food, we always gave it to them. Some people get irritated because they think that it isn't difficult for anyone who wants to, to find a job. I often cried with remorse that I was vomiting, wasting food when others were starving.

My relationship with Karol was quite different from the one with Ivo. He was around me all the time. I talked to him about lots of matters too, but he never consciously, or unconsciously, hurt me. On the contrary, I sometimes treated Karol awfully; not purposely, it would just happen. The fact that he would always remain kind and good to me in spite of this made me terribly upset. We had frequent arguments because of it, and I tried very hard to push him away. When he started to get close to me, I felt disgusted because I

never wanted anyone to get too close. I needed the distance. Eventually, he said he was fed up with this kind of treatment and that we'd better not hang out if it was going to continue. I got scared then because I liked him very much and didn't want to lose him as a friend. I apologised to him and asked him to give me and our relationship one more chance, and he agreed. From that moment on, we got even closer. There were still times when I wanted to keep him as far as possible, but I mentally gritted my teeth and stopped myself so I could hold on to the friendship.

Maciej, Ivo, Karol and I had a good relationship going and we had great times together.

In Toruń, I ate everything and then vomited continued my routine of eating everything and then vomiting so as not to gain weight. None of my friends knew about my illness. I had not spoken about it nor was I acknowledging it as an illness. To me, it was still just a regular thing that I did. Yet I could barely focus on studying because I was consumed with guilt and thoughts about food. Vomiting stopped working because I started eating huge amounts of food in the evening and then falling asleep which led me to putting on weight. I did not pay too much attention to my appearance though, because I felt great. But then I travelled home to Poznan from time to time and during my easter trip, I was told that I had gained weight and looked terrible – there was terror in my parents' eyes when they told me that I had overdone it and needed to lose weight. Back in Torun after the holiday, I thought something was wrong with me and I needed to lose a few kilos. I took up jogging and felt better and better each day. For the first time I heard about slimming red teas and started drinking them. I didn't like the tea, but with time I got used to it. My roommate noticed that there was something wrong with me. She guessed that I was vomiting, or more precisely

she smelt it in the toilet. She asked why I was doing it and explained that I would get ill if I wasn't ill yet. I replied that I wouldn't, that I was reasonable and would not make myself ill; I just didn't want to gain weight. She also had an eating disorder, so she saw what was happening and understood it, but I didn't think I was ill at the time. For peace of mind, I told her I was being careful and then started hiding it from her as well.

After a year at Toruń, I came to the conclusion that law studies were not for me, and I was probably having trouble studying because I just was not interested in it. So, I left and moved back to Poznań. However, my friends had become important to me and I didn't want to lose them. It was easier with Ivo, because his girlfriend studied in Poznań and he used to visit her from time to time. On the other hand, it was difficult with Karol, because he went on holidays to England to earn money for the rest of his studies.

Koniec wersji demonstracyjnej

*Dziękujemy za skorzystanie z oferty naszego
wydawnictwa i życzymy miło spędzonych chwil przy
kolejnych naszych publikacjach.*

Wydawnictwo Psychoskok

