

My drive to write and share my short story with Madeleine was to help people to understand what it is like to be in the depths or grip of something. For me, personally it was anorexia but the story can also relate to other mental health issues such as addictions, alcoholism, depression, ocd and so on. I apologize now if I become tearful at all as I often do when speaking about my past.

I began to see a lot of misconceptions and stigma around mental health and this is one of my main reasons which inspired me to write. Of course mental health is not something physical and straightforward to fix as it would be a broken arm for example!

My grandad would always say to my mother "I just don't get it, how can you not want to eat?" Until he read my story, and actually burst into tears, it had clicked for him. I realised that by using the traditional text of Alice and Wonderland enabled me to convey these messages and feelings that I found so difficult to describe in words when vocalising how I felt. Writing gave me a sense of relief, allowed me to gain back an element of control and steered me towards freedom and life again.

So it all began, one New Years Day when I went for a run with my Dad and Uncle, I surprised myself, finally something I was good at. As I began to exercise more my relationship with food started to change also. To what everyone thought was just healthy eating at first, it soon spiraled into restrictive and unhealthy habits fueled by perpetual thoughts. Day by day as the weight dropped off it became even more difficult to get out of such a black hole. I was hooked. Hooked in a cycle of under-eating and excessive exercise, a cycle of self-destruction. The white rabbit in the story serves as a metaphor for the illogical side of my brain that was driving me to go further and further, deeper into the rabbit hole, so driven by fear, trauma from my past and a feeling of finally being in control over an aspect of my life. Of course I was far from being in control. As mentioned here, 'in a world so separate, so far away from Alice's brother' the other world was so out of reach, for I was unable to cope without the rabbit and could not imagine a life without it anymore. As much as I desired and yearned for that other world where everybody else was, the illogical side of my brain i.e. the rabbit was too strong. I felt trapped in the rabbit hole. I was only existing, not living.

A hole that was not only caving in on me but on my family too. Yet the pain in my family's eyes didn't even drive me to a halt, hearing my mum cry out in desperation. The logical side of my brain knew that I needed to change and as morbid as it sounds knew that I was slowly killing myself, yet I couldn't stop. I felt such pain and ache mentally that controlling my food and exercise was all that was allowing me 'freedom' from such suffering. Of course like the rabbit, food was a metaphor. Don't get me wrong I loved food, craved it! My brain was searching for it as I cooked excessively for everybody else yet deprived myself and only imagined what it would taste like.

I started to become secretive, hide food in my pockets, throw meals away when no one was watching. Wear baggy clothes to cover up my frame. Whilst going for a run I would have to re-run the route if I dare cut a corner, all the whilst my Mum would wait at home in fear of getting a phone call to hear that I'd been found, collapsed. My parents would check up on me in my

sleep to see if I was still alive, I began to leave keys in the door, forget things, my dad would say a joke and it would take ages for me to make sense of it, not only was my physical appearance changing, my brain and other organs were shutting down too. My parents were desperate and my mum describes it as though she felt helpless, against a ticking time bomb.

Admitted to a hospital in London, on a unit for eating disorders I saw others not just my age but in their 30's-40's that had lived like this for so many years. One day I spoke to a lady who was in her 40's at the time. She told me that she had never had a date, a boyfriend, children that she'd always dreamed of having and still wore 12-13 year olds clothes that still hung off her. She told me this; 'You have a choice, I'm in too deep' and I'll never forget that. Something in me switched when she told me.

I asked myself: What did I want from life?

And my answer was to be with my family, to be a mum, marriage, to be truly happy. Laugh but properly laugh when no sound comes out. To be free.

This is when I realised I had two choices. Either continue following the rabbit down the rabbit hole or choose a different path. I knew it was going to be tough, a long road ahead full of ups and downs, but I can't stress to you enough, that is the best decision I have ever made. Without such a supportive and amazing family and finding a counsellor who I really connected with I wouldn't be where I am or who I am today. Speaking out and having a good support network is necessary for recovery. Vocalising, sharing or even writing your thoughts almost gives you a sense of relief. I understand that unfortunately not everybody is as fortunate and that's why I want to connect with others and help others through writing.

The mind is the most powerful thing you have, so powerful that it can cause self- destruct such as what I have discussed. But the mind is also powerful enough that you can change your life. It can get you out of that rabbit hole, you are the creator of your world and you can write it. Through a shift in mindset, perspectives, opening up and giving your thoughts a voice, you can find freedom and happiness from all suffering.

The way I look at the world now has altered massively, I wake up now not with a sense of dread but a sense of joy. Whether it be an addiction to alcohol, depression, anxiety disorder, ocd, the feeling of being stuck in a job you are so unhappy to be in, stuck in a cycle of worry about money for example, your life does not have to continue like this. You have the power right now, and it all starts from within.

I am in that other world now and I'm never going back. Not to say that the rabbit does not always try to rear its head when life brings challenges. The difference now is that it never wins as the logical side of my brain is ten times stronger and I know what the other world is like now. I am now a qualified nurse, achieved a first class honors degree, have travelled parts of the world on my own, and enjoy life and laugh everyday with my amazing family and friends around me. I am living now, not just existing.

Once we begin to say no to the rabbit, we begin to break free from the reins and become truly happy.

I want to help change peoples lives and reassure people who may feel as if they are trapped in a dark hole that there is light, there is a way out and that is why I am currently writing a book based around changing perspectives, habitual mindsets, addictions in hope to inspire a spark in others who may be suffering and those closest to them.

The title of the book is 'A bright light in a dark place' and I wish to be fortunate one day to have it published. Even if it can make a difference to one person's life, it will be worth it.

I would like to take the time here to congratulate Madeleine as I know how hard she worked to bring 'The Mother of floods to life and I feel privileged to have my work included within it so a special thanks to you Madeline. Congratulations, what an amazing achievement.

Thank you everyone for your time.