



Excerpt by Karen Donohue, Ottawa, Canada. This story aired on the Karen Carrington Show -Nov 13/17.

I'm done asking the question: "Why me?"

There are a myriad of possible answers. At 13, I lost my mother to breast cancer, and bulimia became my secret teenage coping mechanism for this profound loss. At 26, I entered law school and the high academic standards in this discipline enhanced my inherent perfectionism. At 27, I entered a relationship with a man so physically abusive the landlord in my apartment would get noise complaints during the beatings he inflicted. By my early 30s, I had lived almost a decade in Japan, where I struggled to belong when my physical appearance defined me as a foreigner.

But at 33, I was lying in a Tokyo hospital bed, my body weight and fat percentage so low osteoporosis had set in and I was infertile. Still I roamed the quiet midnight halls, desperately looking for a scale to tell me if I had gained weight from the hospital food I was being forced to consume. Over 6 years, analysing nutritional labels in the grocery store and caloric output on the treadmill had morphed into eating one meal of steamed vegetables a day and outside runs ending only when I collapsed.

I no longer ask "Why me?", but I do know that it wasn't by choice. Anorexia Nervosa is a mental health diagnosis. And of all mental health diagnoses, eating disorders are the most fatal.

Yet I am a survivor.

In the fall of 2008, in a phone call he must have answered in what would have been the middle of the night for him, my father convinced me to come home. With help from the Canadian Embassy, I boarded a plane destined for Ottawa, a city I had left when I graduated high school. Surrounded by the strength of my father, then in his 70s, I became a patient of the Regional Centre for the Treatment of Eating Disorders, and found myself in the company of family and friends who still cared. One of those friends connected me with the boy who had asked me to prom (in the folly of youth, I said no). Two years later, we were married on the same floor where our high school prom was held. During that time, I was called to the Bar and became a lawyer in Ontario.

Five years after I was told I would never bear children, the scale, once my nemesis, bore witness to the sweet numbers 5 pounds and 14 ounces. 15 months later, I held my second daughter in my arms, whispering to her I would keep her safe. 23 months later, our third daughter lay on my chest and gripped my finger tight.

My values and my dreams had become lost as I sought to become thinner and thinner ... I found my purpose again through recovery. God gave me three exuberant and effervescent girls. The question switched in my brain from "Why Me?" to "Why Us?" and "How Can I?". Why do we live in a society that promotes negative body image, and how can I diminish its effect for my girls - and other girls and boys - as they grow up in it?

I hope by sharing my story today I have given some hope to those who recognize themselves within it. I would like to dedicate my sharing of it to Dad, who passed away one year ago this month in his 81st year, making this world more compassionate right up until the night he left it.