

Relapse

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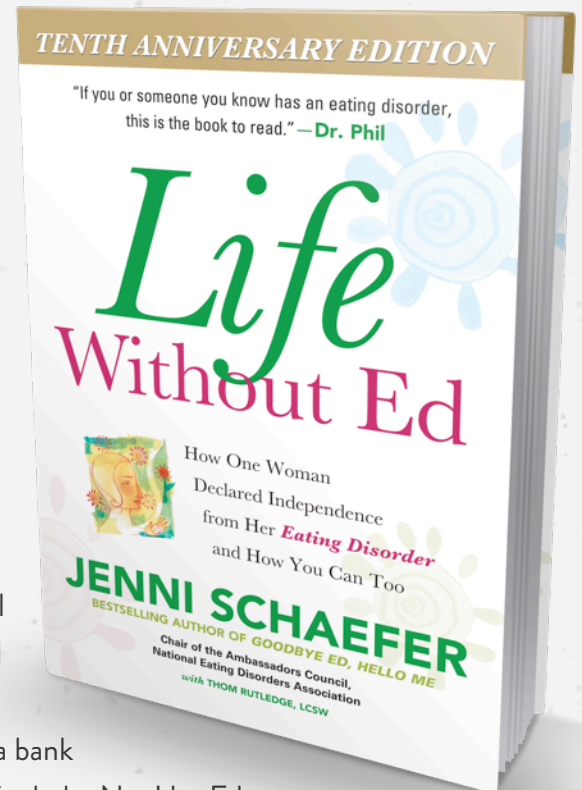
EXCERPT FROM *LIFE WITHOUT ED*

One year. I had one solid year of recovery under my belt (intended or not, the pun is obvious). I had not been under the influence of Ed for one entire year. Then, one afternoon when I was driving home from work, out of nowhere, Ed appeared, put both of his hands on the steering wheel, and took control. Normally, I cannot stand backseat drivers, and I quickly make it clear that I don't need their help. Now, I actually had a front-seat driver, and I said nothing. Absolutely nothing.

It did not take me long to realize that Ed was headed to our old hangout—the golden arches. And I knew that he was not just interested in playing on the playground this time. No, he was ready to do some serious super-sizing. As we were sitting in the drive-through line, my cell phone rang. I recognized the phone number as belonging to Lynne, a girl from group therapy. What perfect timing. I was on the verge of relapse, and Lynne called to save me. It was as if a police officer had walked into a bank while it was getting robbed. But unlike the bank teller, I did not scream for help. No, I let Ed answer the phone. He proceeded to tell Lynne how everything was wonderful and that nothing could be better. Of course, he did not identify himself as Ed and pretended to be me. He said good-bye to Lynne as he grabbed the large bag of food from the lady at the drive-through window, and we were on our way—to relapse.

Even though I had not binged, purged, or starved for a year, the old behaviors came right back to me. I was surprised that the behaviors were even worse than when I had given them up. I spent days feeling bad about having relapsed, and I continued to follow Ed's instructions.

Several days after my outing with Ed, I was sitting in group listening to the conversations going on around me. I was not participating, because I was still enjoying Ed's company too much to want to say anything about it. Furthermore, Ms. Perfectionist did not want me to admit to everyone that my recovery was not perfect. Even when I am not particularly talkative in group, I always keep my ears open and am often amazed by what I hear. On this day, I overheard Lori and Dawn talking:



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Lori: Yeah, I just relapsed yesterday.

Dawn: But you're getting yourself back on track, right?

Lori: Well, um, not exactly.

Dawn: Why not? You should treat your relapse just like a leak in your roof.

Lori: I have no idea what you're talking about.

Dawn: A relapse is just like a leaky roof. When you have one, you have to do something about it immediately. Sitting around feeling bad about it won't do you a bit of good.

It makes sense. A relapse is like a leak in the roof. We do not plan for it. Sometimes we do not know why it started. But we must take care of it as soon as possible. We must make it a priority. Just think about it. If water were dripping steadily from your ceiling onto your leather sofa, you would not sit down and wallow in sadness for a while over the fact that your sofa was getting ruined. No, you would take action quickly. Move the sofa; patch the roof. And that is just what has to be done with relapse.

As soon as I realized that a quick reaction time was the key to overcoming a relapse, I started to get back on track. I called my support team. I disobeyed Ed. I started to eat right, and I felt great again. Sure, since that day Ed took me to McDonald's, I have had other bad days here and there. But I'm not complaining. I used to have bad years.

Now there is a note taped to my bathroom mirror that says simply, "Move the sofa; patch the roof."

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