

## **Anti-Anorexic/anti-Bulimic Co-Research in Action: Upping the anti- and Planned Retreats**

**By Lorraine Grieves, David Epston, Eva, Rhonda and Rebecca**

(12 April 2001)

### **LETTER 1.**

Dear David,

I wanted to let you know that I have read the transcript of your conversations with Rebecca - actually more than once, and have wanted to respond for some time. I found the concept of overtime very interesting and can relate to this concept in myself. I am finding that my periods of overtime are getting more and more intensive the closer I get to going free. It seems that the more I learn about the tricks of anorexia and bulimia, the louder it screams at me to come back to it. I also agree with Rebecca's comments on the romance period. I know from experience that when I am being romanced by anorexia, it is really hard for me to hear the words of those who are concerned. It is important that they are said, however, because I know that after the blush fades, those words are very important.

I just went through a very strange romance period - this time was somewhat different than previous times. I'll tell you a little about it. I had just come back from a trip to Montreal, Quebec where I had been investigating a university I hope to attend and also visiting some dear friends of mine who live there. Needless to say, Anorexia does not want me to continue my education or have a good time with my friends. Before I left, I found myself in a nasty shootout with anorexia - it wanted to come to Montreal - I couldn't decide if I could make the trip without it. Well it came with me, but I managed to dump it at the airport and within a couple of days, found myself challenging myself amazingly with different fear foods and having a pretty good time. Although the voice of anorexia crept in now and again, on the whole, I would say it was a fairly anti-anorexia/bulimic

trip.

But when I got home, it grabbed me. This was not so much a romancing, but an assault. Although I had only been back into a pattern of restriction and purging for a week or two, I felt as if I could not get out of it EVER. And I panicked. It literally felt as if I were heading rapidly downhill and that there was no stopping. It was hard for me to describe my panic to people around me, especially when I seemed so healthy having just returned from a vacation from Anorexia. At the same time as I was panicked, I was unable to hear the words of those supporting me. It has now been about a month and I feel that I am still in this overtime period - although the pace has slowed down some. I guess it makes sense that Anorexia would need to literally assault me after I had made such a clean get-away for a couple of weeks.

The scary part about these periods where it feels so overwhelming is the 'voice' that it steals. I know that I was rendered speechless for at least two weeks. What I found to be useful was something that I have labelled UPPING THE ANTI- that is, the louder Anorexia screams at me, the stronger I am making the ANTI - in my Anti-Anorexia. Specifically, I have structured my time with anti-anorexic research; I have chosen to do any of the things that Anorexia was trying to convince me not to do. This seems to be very helpful. I guess writing you back is another way for me to UP THE ANTI-.

## **LETTER 2.**

Dear Lorraine:

I very much valued your comments. For example, I believe you have come up with several 'research projects' and some very interesting strategies like UPPING THE ANTI- that are in themselves worthy of further discussion. Eva (39) has been recently making a strong case that The League must uncover what she refers to as 'the subtlety' of anorexia (aka bulimia) and she should know. She was its prisoner for 30 odd years and is now just beginning to make good her escape but as she would be the first to say: 'IT

ISN'T EASY!

I discerned an 'anti-logic' in your point that "overtime periods are getting more and more intense, the closer I get to going free". Now under may other circumstances, wouldn't it be logical that the closer you got to freedom, the problem would more and more abate? Not so, according to Eva. Mightn't an anti-anorexic/bulimic attitude to such events be anticipation rather than despair or fear? Do you think this would describe this state of affairs: 'When the going gets tough for Anorexia, expect it to get going back rather than getting lost!?' Shouldn't professional persons be made aware of this 'anti-logic' otherwise they might become despairing rather than welcome such occasions to 'pit' their anti-anorexia/bulimia against anorexia (aka bulimia). What do you think here?

Lorraine, I am interested too by your account of an 'overtime' when you followed your own designs for your life and investigated the possibility of studying and refurbishing your mind and spirit at University in Montreal. On your return, you experienced Anorexia as no longer "romancing" you but rather coming out into the open and "assaulting" you. Is this a bit like 'date rape'? Do you think there is any advantage in the League adopting that 'vocabulary of experience'? Are we on to something here or is it a red herring? And would you consider that it will be to your ultimate advantage to be able to discern between 'romance' and 'assault'? Would it ultimately be easier to resist violation than romance? Would it be a sign to seek support from The League when you are "being rendered speechless"? And also, Lorraine, although Anorexia may have 'gagged' you for two weeks, I have to assume that your mind was operating and ranging freely. Why I say this is that you seem to have both invented and named what I take to be a wonderful contribution to Anti-Anorexia/Bulimia - UPPING THE ANTI-?

I suspect it will certainly assist me when so many women during 'overtime periods' are so despairing and they marvel at why I am so enthusiastic at such times. It may be that I am looking forward to the opportunity of UPPING THE ANTI- whereas they are only experiencing the panic, sense of failure and subsequent despair. What do you think?

You say you may have intensified the nature of your anti-anorexia by writing me about it; whereas at the same time I am being confirmed in not only persisting in UPPING THE ANTI- but now have a way to name it and develop it further. I will start circulating this around The League here with your permission. Once again, thanks for what you have done already fleshing out the UPPING THE ANTI- practice for me and The League here. Yours anti-anorexically,  
David.

### **LETTER 3.**

Dear David:

I had just returned from the hospital where I was having skinfolds done and frankly was feeling a wee bit frustrated by the whole experience so your letter was an excellent anti-anorexic reversal to my day.

I was thinking about your referral of anorexia's plot against me as a parallel to 'date rape' and my first response to your question ("Would it be ultimately easier to resist violation than romance"?) was that it would be easier to resist violation. About two hours later, it hit me! Violation is not something that one can always resist. It is something taken from you without your permission. So, yes, it is accurate that it is to my advantage to be able to discern between violation and romance but I feel that romance ultimately would be an easier thing to resist because although it is masked in the guise of promises, it is a decision that two parties share. In the case of violation, there is a distinct power differential and one party is at a disadvantage. It is however, something that I feel one can protect oneself from. In that respect, I feel that Anti-Anorexia/Bulimia is a sort of self-defense mechanism against the violation or 'rape' of Anorexia and Bulimia. I guess what struck me the most is that I so automatically assumed that I should be able to somehow resist violation and therefore took on the blame for not doing so. This would ring true for victims of assault who find themselves in a position of blame when in fact they have done no wrong. I find that this sort of 'vocabulary of experience' is very useful

in that it really draws some clear parallels in terms of Anorexia and the way it operates in the oppression of its victims.

I strongly agree with your terming the logic of Anorexia/Bulimia 'anti-logic'. It is very true and I don't think that many professionals have conceptualised this part of the recovery process. I don't know how many times I have felt completely invalidated in my struggles when those who have been aware of my process negate the power of that very loud Anorexic voice by the seeming normality (e.g. judgment by numbers - skinfolds, etc) of my body or my success up to date. I guess their logic makes them really want to hear that the 'voice' has disappeared or has become more superficial when in fact the reality is that the 'voice' can take on an extremely abusive tone at this point. Of course, the danger in feeling like the panic is unfounded and unnecessary is that Anorexia is given fuel in its wish to 'prove' how loud a voice it is. I am now becoming aware of this 'anti-logic' and in retrospect realise that I was expecting this last episode of overtime to become quite intense and remember despairing to one of my therapists that it was screaming louder than ever. She was, in a word, 'encouraged' by this latest ploy that Anorexia had implemented and I remember feeling confused by her excitement. At that point, Anorexia took this positivity that she expressed as doubting IT'S POWER. This fuelled it to drive me harder in order to 'prove' its ferocity. I haven't shared my idea of UPPING THE ANTI- too extensively with her but I think that now I can understand that she too was happy to see me UPPING THE ANTI and was probably confident that my strategy would work. In fact, like you, she was probably "enjoying the opportunity to UP THE ANTI-. Of course, if she had had the vocabulary through which to express this then, I would have felt more like she was working with me anti-anorexically rather than interpreting her as simply minimising the severity of my concern or being disappointed in my lack of anti-anorexic conviction. (This sounds to me to be similar to the type of communication gap that was occurring between you and Eva).

Anyway, it is a great pleasure to share these thoughts and to know that the Anti-Anorexic/Bulimic dialogue is not confined to our group here. Please, most definitely share my words with people there; after all, it was

through my reading Rebecca's and your words that made me realise that to have a seemingly bad slip in my recovery is a very normal part of the process.

Sincerely,  
Lorraine.

#### **LETTER 4.**

Dear Lorraine:

Thanks for your quick reply as it chronicles what I take to be some exciting developments in our understandings of the 'near-end', something that we all seem to have come to at long last. I suppose it would have been unreasonable to understand the 'near end' before the 'beginning' and the 'middle'.

I am not at all sure Eva and I have been able to arrive at what the mental health professional might best do in the ambiguity of the situation. By that I mean, Anorexia has launched a counter-assault and temporarily has an Anti-Anorexic woman on the run in panic, despair and eventually hopelessness BUT knowing that this could only have taken place by virtue of an unequivocal anti-anorexic initiative in the first place. From your experience, how might a mental health professional best indicate to you BOTH an appreciation for your experience so they don't "simply minimise the severity of my concern" AT THE SAME TIME AS enthusiastically encouraging you to UP THE ANTI-?

Here are some of my thoughts from a recent experience with Eva which I intend to discuss with her in some detail next time we meet. What I might do is this: firstly, invite her to explain until I seem to understand the severity of the recent assault and consequent fear, panic, and despair. I might say something like this: "Keep talking to me until you sense I have got it!" When she thinks that I have got it, then I would ask her permission to seek revenge either by 1) just going with anorexia - a kind of fake fall-back in order to recoup anti-anorexic strength and/or bring up

some anti-anorexic resources through The League and 2) UPPING THE ANTI- and it would not have to be an either/or as it could just as well be a both/and e.g. mixing fake fall-backs or retreats (Compair: Reculer pour mieux sauter: Retreat to better leap forwards) with periods of UPPING THE ANTI-. One purpose a fall-back would serve might be reconnaissance: by retreating to advance, one would surveil Anorexia and study its movements, practices, etc., in order to better know them in the future. Perhaps then tactics to incite fear and panic would merely be seen as a form of Anorexic 'temper tantrumming' when it can't have its way with your life. What are your thoughts here? Once again many thanks for your assistance.  
Yours anti-anorexically,  
David Epston

#### **LETTER 5.**

Dear David:

This is a situation that has both puzzled and confused me in my search for a formidable answer as to what a mental health professional might do in order to arrive at a place where the appropriate appreciation is expressed for the severity of the situation as well as some encouragement to UPPING THE ANTI-. I think that for me, it was important to express just how much I was being pushed around by Anorexia and just how much it was threatening to take the things that matter to me away. "To retreat to better go forwards" has been very much a part of the process for me. It is something that has been very hard to accept but I am now realising that it has helped me to truly understand the vicious nature of Anorexia and Bulimia.

In those moments when I have felt so desperate and panicked and hopeless, there has not been much a mental health professional could do to get through to me and really have me BELIEVE their optimism. At these times, Anorexia has felt so overpowering that I honestly believed that I was on an unstoppable path. I think that by talking and talking until it is understood for both parties and appreciated, then an Anti-Anorexic plan can be put in place. This is a decision that I reached after countless times of being asked: "What do you need right now?" This question has always

confused me because I am rarely able to answer it, mainly because I don't know what I need. The answer I then came up with this time was: "I need for this whole ordeal to be over!" This ending of the ordeal was something that I realise only I can do. Only one can end it for me, although it would be nice if they could.

This is a scary and lonely concept. After realising that this is my need, I next would have to look at how I might best work towards ending the ordeal, the ordeal being the return of the Anorexic/Bulimic regime. Unfortunately, the answer is not an instant one and the ultimate result being a life free of Anorexic/Bulimic torture makes it a goal worth working for. After realising that people I have known died from this regime and that is a risk for all of us makes it a cause deserving of UPPING THE ANTI-. Recognising that anorexia's ultimate goal is your death, not your happiness or security, makes it clear that to combat such an opponent, a strategy and plan....a very strong anti-anorexic plan that can match the severity of Anorexia is required. Once that plan is implemented and put in place (for example, mine was one that involved creating structure and a strong focus on Anti-Anorexia), it has given me a sort of safety net to counter the amount of time that Anorexia has free reign over me. It has not been a smooth process and even now, I have moments when I wonder if I am really winning.

But when I look at the hard work that I have been doing for MYSELF, not for Anorexia, I feel proud of myself for a) taking myself seriously, b) not succumbing to the idea that someone will have to rescue me in order to 'save me', c) not believing that recovery and freedom are impossible and, d)not believing that this retreat was a repeat of past stories that I have lived.

Another benefit to my really surveilling what Anorexia has in store for me was that I was able to get angry with it - angry for the pain that it is causing me and the betrayal that was occurring. This is a really key point, I think, because Anorexia is so skilled at convincing its victims that they need it and that it will be beneficial in some way. It must be identified as a liar and a manipulator because that, in fact, is what it is. Once you

'see' that, I think that it becomes easier to reject it and accept health as the better alternative. We know the benefits of health and they are not lies but sometimes it feels so far away and unachievable. But with every step away from Anorexia, we move closer to health and with every challenge we afford ourselves - even if it means a temporary drawback that feels closer to Anorexia than to health, we must not allow ourselves to believe it's lie that "this violation is just like the other times" because IT IS NOT. The victim of this violation is not guilty of anything; the violator is. This does not in any way negate the pain of the current violation, nor the pain of past violations, BUT IF PAIN CAN BE TRANSFERRED INTO CONVICTION NOT TO BE VULNERABLE FOR ANOTHER ATTACK, THEN THAT IS OF GREAT BENEFIT.

I hope that this has been of some assistance. This is more of an Anti-Anorexic brainstorm than being concrete.

My Anti-Anorexic Best Wishes,

Lorraine

## **LETTER 6.**

Dear Lorraine,

I have just shown your fax to Eva and we thought it might be a good idea to make our thoughts available to you. For a long time, Eva was under the impression that when Anorexia (also known as Bulimia) got particularly vicious with her that it meant she was an anti-anorexic failure. By contrast, I always understood this as a positive anti-anorexic sign. However, Eva and I then start to be at cross purposes. As Eva puts it, "I thought you didn't hear what I was saying and were frustrated with me". When I asked Eva to help me further understand what she meant by "frustrated with me", she meant that she thought that I thought she "wasn't trying hard enough..or should have been doing it better." From my point of view, I was marveling that she was doing it so well and I couldn't contemplate expecting any more. Eva said: "I find that extremely hard to

comprehend."

We are now both wondering if UPPING THE ANTI- might help us understand each other. After carefully reading your fax, Eva had this to say: "I agree with you that it is important to do those things that Anorexia tries to and often succeeds in talking you out of like going to the movies, going to listen to music in the park, etc. And like you, Anorexia is trying to bedevil my education which I did not expect to happen. But I am still trying to hang in there. David believes Anorexia is trying to subvert my education by trying to have me learn PERFECTLY and EVERYTHING AT ONCE. I am still not sure about it as I see that I need to pass. David asked me this question: "Can you see any difference between 'PASSING PERFECTLY' and 'PASSING IMPERFECTLY?'" Will the former mean that you pass out? I am trying to figure out what he means by this as I know only an A++ pass. Can you help us here in any way? I UPPED THE ANTI over the weekend and did a few outrageous things which I know you will appreciate. I bought a golden delicious apple and had some of it. It was crisp, juicy and delicious. This is the first time I have managed to do something like this without throwing up for three years. Despite the mental assault, I told my boss, Barbara, who provides both support and advice in my fight. She said; "Even if you manage a half or a quarter, it's great. Just start little". Another thing I did was I went and stepped inside 'Women's Space' at the University. It had a nice atmosphere about it. I stayed inside it and walked around for about five minutes. If felt safe. Although you won't understand the full significance of this for me, it was certainly a significant anti-anorexic event. I managed a stint of an hour and a half in the library, the longest stint ever but I paid for it afterwards.

I, who celebrate my third anniversary on the 9th of April as 'Eva', and am listening to her wisdom and she has told me that whatever body shape I choose would be okay. But for me who is becoming 'Eva', it is a bloody hard battle. Having become more of 'Eva', I feel now more in a place to face what I term the 'mountain' and when I climb that mountain, I will be Eva. Scary stuff. I hope hearing from me and how I have UPPED THE ANTI- (thanks to your term) will help you UP YOUR ANTI-."

Yours anti-anorexically,

Eva and David

**LETTER 7.**

Dear Eva and David:

I received your letter this morning and was really interested by what you had to say on perfection. I think that some of the frustration of this battle is that it is very long and seemingly a slow process. Can you imagine if when you were being recruited into anorexia and bulimia, it told you that it would take away 30 odd years of your life? And then told you it might take just as long to recover! Do you think that the deal would have sounded so attractive if it was an honest one rather than one constructed on lies? Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that it will take 30 years to recover but I think we need to be really conscious of how long it does take to be truly free from the grip of anorexia and bulimia. I know that I thought that I could recover perfectly in 3 months and that would be it! Was I ever wrong! I still wish that there was an 'on' and 'off' switch for anorexia and bulimia and that I could just flick it and it would disappear. It really is a "bloody battle" and a tiring one!

On what you were saying about university, etc, I can really relate. I wish that our learning environments were such that we could really be free to learn without constraints of a competitive grade system. In looking at your feeling like A++ is the only kind of pass that you can achieve, I think that for starters you may want to look at what these letters really mean. I've noticed that in our culture, there is a huge fixation with numbers and letters and values that are assigned to us as symbols of worth and value. Now at one point, did you think that an A was a perfect mark? I used to. The nasty thing is that somehow and somewhere the measuring stick moved and A+ became perfect and after that A++. You can see in this game even A+++++ will probably not be good enough because the letter or number will always change.

How do we maintain an Anti-Anorexic/Bulimic stance in this very

pro-perfection system? I have wondered that myself! What I have come up with is that if I am going to re-enter the educational system, I need to do it for Lorraine, not for the expectations of my peers, community, or for anorexia. The learning and expanding of my mind that will occur through my courses will be something that I have chosen and am passionately interested in. Passion, I feel is very important. To have passion is in itself very ANTI-ANOREXIC.

I think we have to judge for ourselves if the system is killing us. And if so, we need to reassess it. I hope that I am not sounding too preachy - it is just something that really bothers me and something that can be a very dangerous set-up. Here's something to think about: if moving away from Perfection means moving away from anorexia/bulimia, then would you rather feel guilty about the move towards health or the move towards anorexia? Honestly, I believe that if you follow your passion (cultivate your spirit in whatever way that may be) that is what is important. I am glad to hear that you have UPPING THE ANTI-. I agree that it is very important to pursue those things that anorexia so wants to steal away.

Yours anti-anorexically, anti-bulimically and imperfectly (get it!)  
Lorraine.

## **LETTER 8.**

Dear Lorraine:

Thanks yet again for your response which is being rapidly circulated around The League to Rebecca (23), Eva (39), and Rhonda (37). Rhonda was greatly influenced and in turn told me of events which themselves are worthy of your interest. However, we audio-taped it and it might take awhile before we get a transcript of it but that we will do. What stands out for me from our discussion so far is the need for a more fuller appreciation of planned retreats (that is Rhonda's name for it). She notes that they "are very much a part of the process for me". We discussed the retreat as a form of reconnaissance in order to provide an anti-anorexic person a

position to 'spy on' anorexia, instead of the reverse. As she said, it yield and up "the truly vicious nature of anorexia and bulimia". Do you think we would be well-advised to 'advertise' those experiences when "anorexia has felt so overpowering" as part and parcel of a fight-back not to be feared but instead provocative of UPPING THE ANTI- mediated by planned retreats. Do you think that knowing that "no one can end it for me...I realised only I can end" could be less "scary and lonely" if that was when League resources were called into play....that that would be the most strategic time for The League to intervene in its inimitable ways? Should we be thinking of tactical intervention?

By the way, did you learn anything about the ways and means of anorexia in your surveilling of it?

Thanks for your Anti-Anorexic brain-storming. I hope you don't mind my persistence here but I just feel that a break-through in terms of Anti-Anorexic practice is in the air. I just feel it!

Yours Anti-anorexically,  
David.

## **LETTER 9.**

Dear David:

I just received your fax and couldn't possibly leave it until tomorrow - I, too, think we are on the verge of something here. In pondering whether or not, I learnt anything about Anorexia and Bulimia in my surveilling of it, I came up with the idea that I didn't really learn anything new but rather re-reminded myself of what I already knew and what others have told me. One of the things that I have learnt of its ways is that, in my case, it seems to get fiercer the further along I go. I guess that goes back to the idea that the more the ANTI IS UPPED, the louder anorexia has to scream in order to be heard. I'm hoping that it will come to the point where I can see this

'anorexic temper-trantrumming' as merely an outburst of frustration, frustration on its part for it not having its way with me. I think that The League intervening at these times of retreat is a very good idea but I also have found that because the nature of anorexia and bulimia is to foster isolation and disconnection, this is harder to practice than to preach. Also I find that other League members occasionally find that it is very difficult to be around someone who is right within the mode of Anorexia because this can feed their Anorexia as well. Communication in the form of letters might be a good way to reach someone in this position. What have you discovered in this regard?

I think that 'advertising' those experiences when Anorexia has felt so overwhelming as being directly connected to an Anti-Anorexic move would be a very positive thing as I know that it is very much misunderstood in many ways. This is something The League here helped me see when I came back from Montreal.

The concept of 'planned retreats' seems so strange and I'm not sure I completely understand what is meant by this. When I look back over some of what I would call my worst retreats into Anorexia/Bulimia, I don't think that I was very conscious of my participation in the planning, although I know that indeed I was involved but that was something that was secret and of which I was ashamed. At those moments, something seemed very appealing about going back and in a sense, it felt like I was making a deal with the Devil. The out of control and panicky part seemed to come a short while after I had launched into the retreat and no longer felt there was any choice involved. What I think I am getting at here is the element of choice. If there was a way to hang onto the element of choice in some way, then it would certainly feel much better. Is that possible? I am not sure. Perhaps that is what happens the closer one gets to being free. What do you think?

When I think of this last time, the plan was in the works before I came back from Montreal. I had written out my Anorexic Regimen and set a date for really starting into it. I suppose that in some regard, this might have been a really positive thing because I was having some forewarning as to

what anorexia had in store for me when I got back. Is that what Rhonda means by a 'planned retreat'? I was planning the retreat and not Anorexia and in that sense, took away some of Anorexia's power. Anyway, you have given me a lot to think about but I think that definitely there might be some merit in tactical intervention - what form that might take I am not sure. The very idea of letting people in on what is happening with the retreat is a way of protecting oneself against the dangers involved. There are dangers after all in this business of retreats and that is the part that scares me most because as I have said, I know people who have been not only assaulted but murdered on the field of battle and that is something that I wish could be completely prevented.

Once again, I am not yet clear but I too think that we are getting close to something of note.

Sincerely,  
Lorraine.

#### **LETTER 10.**

Dear Lorraine:

I have just come in to work this morning as I felt a strong desire to type up our correspondence off the faxes onto A4 so I can circulate it more easily and in addition, to reply to your last commentary which has been very provocative of my thought.

Lorraine, you say that you "re-reminded myself of what I already knew". I guess the question that comes to my mind: "How does Anorexia talk you out of knowing what you already knew?"

I found your proposal of communicating by letters at those times Anorexia/Bulimia put women in solitary confinement. Is it possible from your experience that Anorexia could 'blind' you to the content of the letters? You ask what we have discovered here. Like so many other

anti-anorexic discoveries, up until your question, I really don't think we have asked ourselves. I will be doing exactly that in the weeks to come and get back to you. I suspect Rebecca would be a very good person to consult.

I think what I might do for our League is to build up some accounts of these experiences which may take some of the 'fear' out of them. For example, recently I injured my back and went into shock, shaking like a leaf. The fact that I was able to tell myself that this was 'just shock' allowed me to feel quite calm on the inside although my body would have suggested quite the opposite to an observer. Do you think it would have assisted you to have read and had some of those experiences 'mapped out' in a manner of speaking for you? Would that have alleviated the idea that this was "unstoppable"?

Planning a retreat, it seems to me, might replace the shame you describe with mischief and rebelliousness. Is that a possibility? Also, you could forewarn your friends and colleagues. They might then actively oppose anorexia's condemning you to solitary confinement. Also some League members could be warned that they would need to stand aside for their own safety. But by informing you, you might feel less abandoned and you might be able to more readily reconnect when you/they were out of danger. Could a planned retreat outwit the Devil rather than selling your soul to it? Could it also be a time of some respite by faking suffering? But I suppose your point of 'choice' really is critical. What do you think? Once again, these are very pertinent questions to my way of anti-anorexic thinking and I will be pursuing them with Rebecca, Rhonda, Eva, etc. I am wondering if one comes out of a planned retreat fighting????

I have included with Rhonda's permission a copy of a recent letter to her regarding 'planned retreats' for your anti-anorexic information.

Yours anti-anorexically,  
David Epston

**LETTER 11.**

April 1995

Dear Rhonda:

What an anti-bulimic time we had this morning! I am very relieved we captured the conversation on audio-tape. And wasn't it apposite that Lorraine's faxed correspondence had been on the boil so as to speak, just when your anti-bulimia was doing exactly the same thing!

But let me go over our conversation in some detail so I can appreciate it too and try to make sense of the developments you described so eloquently today. You began modestly and cautiously saying: "It has been a better two weeks", adding "but I am hesitant to say it". Still, you proceeded in speaking against Bulimia undaunted. You summarised these developments by saying: "I feel for the first time a lot stronger in my resistance to it".

I had to admit, even at the time, that my curiosity was piqued but kept in check any enthusiasm I might have felt. You thought it all began by 'unpacking' Rebecca's thoughtful comment: "Self-denial in the guise of a diet". As you informed me, you had previously been of the opinion that "it (Bulimia) was a good thing only". From this, you embarked upon what I referred to as "a policy of self-consciousness". For you had realised that "Bulimia stops me from thinking and feeling". On those occasions when you "had a real desire to eat the house out:", instead of submitting, "I talked to myself and Bulimia: and said such things as "You are not going to get me today!" What's going on?" "What's happening in my life so that I want to eat so as not to feel the distress?" You said too that you brought to bear on this dialogue a sense of "outrage."

Not surprisingly, when you came out of the bulimic anaesthesia, "I felt a lot of depression...." Despite this, you said to yourself: "I am not going to solve this by eating a million things...I am going to just eat A,B,C, and D because that is what I feel like." And this is not to say that Bulimia would not return and "pounce on me that evening". By sticking with your feelings, even though depression is probably not anyone's favourite feeling, you commenced to review "particular incidents that led me to

feeling depressed, occurrences that me feel ugly, incompetent and took away my self-esteem". You not only were able to stick with your feelings of depression but went a step further: "I managed to see it out and wake up the next morning and feel good that I dealt with the onslaughts". I was now permitting my anti-bulimic enthusiasm to show a bit when you went on to describe what you referred to as "a major incident". "I kind of resisted it (Bulimia) for awhile and then I decided to give in and said to it: 'You can have me for awhile'. I was in control and it hadn't taken me over. I had given Bulimia permission. I had not been assaulted". We named this policy one of 'planned retreat'. Despite this, you informed me that "I kept a dialogue up with Bulimia and said: 'This time you can have me'" but next morning, you took your life back and got on with it (your life).

You said that the last letter "was illuminating...you put it in concrete terms". This reading and re-reading permitted you to widen your focus from food consumption to the 'world' around you.. In general, you described how you had been "setting limits and taking control of the boy-friend situation".

And then went on to parallel this with: "I am doing the same thing with Bulimia". Apparently, this came as a result of "much more clearly seeing it (Bulimia) as much more than just a problem around food, even though I had known it had to do with my emotions". When I inquired as to what you considered to be responsible for this realisation, you replied: "IT IS THE DIALOGUE WITH BULIMIA". And you said that you now know that: "if I stop the dialogue, it will take me over". So knowing this, "I just kept talking, talking.....and I have started writing a diary". When I asked if you were in any way surprised by what you are saying back, this came to your mind: "You don't have to make me eat all of this stuff to stop me feeling what is going on". What also came as a surprise was that "I am actually feeling...and verbally addressing it ...I can put my feelings into little boxes. For example, maybe I am feeling incompetent in my job...distressed how I look because a person made a comment". You then went on to, in your words, "cap it all off" - "I am having a constant dialogue with myself about what my emotions are instead of letting them all come in upon me and then Bulimia comes to anaesthetise them. I am teasing out what is going on...the confusion is now less. I always knew there was a

whole heap of distressing feelings but now I am addressing my feelings with my intellect".

You have decided to be "guardedly optimistic" and have decided that your next step is in the direction of "deconstructing it (Bulimia)". When I asked how you might go about this, you thought that "launching out and cooking different things like vegetarian lasagna" would be one means of doing so. And you might even go so far as to consult Julie Buiso's vegetarian cookery book. You had also undertaken some anti-bulimic mischief, if I can be so bold to call it that "by eating sweet biscuits" and had to admit that such anti-s are matters that "usually would launch me into full-scale bulimia". In addition, you have been UPPING THE ANTI- by eating "forbidden foods and going with the flow". As you put it, "I am spending most of my time deconstructing bulimia...getting my armoury up ...THIS IS A FIGHT!"

You informed me that "my boyfriend is a major pro-bulimic factor" and you moved very actively on that front and were surprised that "normally it would have been a hell of a lot worse". You said he was "he has been around a lot more and watching me,etc". Despite this, you had the wherewithal firstly to leave the class at the gym that he took and secondly, "coped". You had to agree with a certain degree of pride that this was a "major break-through", even though "it was hard for me to walk away". I'll bet it was! Still, yet again, "I talked myself through it..I was telling myself that if he has anything to say, he has to do it directly ....and I am not going to solve this by eating..I am not going to give him any opportunity to do any more of his indirectness".

Well, this has been quite a fortnight! Frankly, this matter between you and Bulimia is not over by any stretch of the imagination. But one thing I am confident about is that you have now engaged the enemy, and that enemy is NOT you!

Yours anti-bulimically,  
David.