

The Bullshit of Bulimia

By Annamie, Jo, and David Epston

(via E-mail Exchange)

Dear Annamie and Jo:

Thank you so much for forwarding both a copy of your 'anti-bulimic representation' which I thought was magnificent in every possible aspect. (text continued below image)



I would certainly believe that viewing your 'representation' as well as understanding what your intentions were in doing so could very well be inspiring of others' anti-bulimic resistance. That is why I have taken the liberty of interpolating some questions of you, hoping that my questions would like those of the 'visitors' to our site. It may very well be the case that a particular question might not interest and if so, please treat it like 'water off a duck's back'. However, if you would be willing to assist me and our 'visitors' to have a richer understanding, I for one would be really appreciative.

SEE BELOW IN CAPS.

THE BULLSHIT OF BULIMIA

Annmie & Jo Viljoen, South Africa

After our third conversation, Jo suggested that I prepare some form of artwork to represent my struggle with Bulimia.

DAVID: ANNAMIE, DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHY JO SUGGESTED YOU MIGHT DO THAT?

ANNAMIE: I think she wanted to give me some space to think about the whole thing and to see how badly Bulimia treated me.

At home, I noticed an old disused toilet seat in our garage. It reminded me of the way Bulimia used to control my life, how it forced me to play its nauseating game and managed my life for so many months.

DAVID: DO YOU CONSIDER THAT A LUCKY BREAK FOR YOU IN TERMS OF YOUR 'OBJETS TROUVES'(FOUND OBJECTS) ARTWORK? SAY FOR EXAMPLE, YOU HADN'T CHANCED UPON THE DISUSED TOILET SEAT, WOULD YOUR CREATIVITY BEEN FRUSTRATED? OR DO YOU THINK YOU JUST WOULD HAVE FOUND SOMETHING ELSE? WHY I AM ASKING THIS IS THAT I AM WONDERING IF 'DISUSED TOILET SEATS' MIGHT INCREASE IN VALUE IF MANY OTHERS LIKE YOU PUT THEM TO SIMILAR 'ANTI-BULIMIC' PURPOSES AS YOU?

ANNAMIE: I would have been quite frustrated if I hadn't found that toilet seat. When I saw it all the ideas flowed, because Bulimia's whole story is a toilet seat story.

Bulimia had me head down with my face in the toilet most of the time.

I lined the inside of the toilet seat with black cardboard to represent the darkness, the suffering and the entrapment I experienced at the hands of Bulimia.

DAVID: AT THAT TIME, DID YOU FIND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GO FORWARDS IN YOUR LIFE WHEN BULIMIA HAD YOU LOOKING DOWN INTO THE DARKNESS OF A TOILET BOWL?

ANNAMIE: Yes.

The shards of broken mirror reflect my shattered identity;

David: CAN YOU EXPLAIN TO ME HOW BULIMIA SHATTERED YOUR IDENTITY?

ANNAMIE: I used to be very sure of myself and used to know who I was and what I

wanted. Bulimia made me unsure of myself and what I should look like and how I should behave.

All my emotions were turned to vomit.

DAVID: DO YOU CONSIDER THAT BULIMIA WAS DISRESPECTFUL TO YOUR FEELINGS BY EQUATING THEM WITH VOMIT, SOMETHING THAT ALMOST OF US HAVE A REVULSION TO?

ANNAMIE: Yes!

When I took apart an old clock to add to the artwork, I realised how Bulimia stole my time.

DAVID: UP UNTIL THEN, DID BULIMIA HAVE YOU BELIEVE THAT IT WAS TIME WELL SPENT?

ANNAMIE: Yes, because it told me that I will be beautiful and thin and made me believe, "Oh yes, this is convenient!" But it was a pack of lies.

I had to destroy the clockwork to show how Bulimia tried to destroy me.

DAVID: BY DOING SO, WERE YOU SYMBOLICALLY GIVING AS BAD AS YOU GOT(FROM BULIMIA)?

ANNAMIE: Yes! Now that I think about it; I never thought about it like that before.

I wrapped the toilet seat in steel wool to show how seldom I had the chance to sit on the toilet as Bulimia preferred to have me hanging over the brim.

The scale and calipers show Bulimia's obsession with my weight. It ruled my life, and stripped me naked. I added the calipers to demonstrate how Bulimia reduced me to how many centimeters of fat I lost per day. Kilograms and centimeters lost used to determine my value as a person.

DAVID: HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN TO A WOMAN YOUNGER THAN YOURSELF HOW BULIMIA REDUCES YOU TO NUMBERS EG. KILOGRAMS, CENTIMETRES? WOULD YOU SAY THAT BULIMIA STARTED NUMBERING YOUR DAYS?

ANNAMIE: Look, in life you usually are only a number, an ID number or a number on a list. Bulimia makes you realize how much you are just a number, just one of the hundreds of women who try and watch their figures. It makes you feel you are not unique or special. It makes you feel that you are not only a number but that your days are numbered.

I added an empty tuna fish tin, containing a paper tongue. This represents Bulimia: the food I was not allowed to keep inside my body and the actual act of bringing up, offering up all my food at its toilet throne of waste. Bulimia made me waste my food and it preferred me to use my tongue to get rid of nutrition than to voice my feelings. I decided to exercise my choice and to rather put my tongue to better use. That's why I wrote my poem on the tongue: to tell the world about Bulimia's tricks and deceit.

DAVID: IS THAT HOW BULIMIA TURNS YOUNG WOMEN SPEECHLESS BY APPROPRIATING THEIR TONGUES? I KNOW SO MANY OTHERS HAVE MENTIONED THAT ANOREXIA/BULIMIA GAGGED THEM INTO SILENCE.

ANNAMIE: Yes, it silenced my voice and insisted that I keep secrets and keep quiet about things that mattered. It teaches you to become devious and this makes you feel guilty and that leads to more lies... a vicious circle of deceit.

I wrapped a photograph of myself in old newspaper, and stuck it on the lid. I hid everything for so long; my feelings were shrouded and invisible, wrapped up like fish and chips in newsprint. Now the paper tomb is slowly loosening, and it is the beginning of my liberation from Bulimia's clutches. I can now choose the way I prefer to live. I managed to lift the veil of secrecy Bulimia imposed upon me when I told a close friend. She really cares for me and insisted I see Jo. She told me that she could see I was slowly dying.

DAVID: NOW THAT YOU HAVE YOUR MIND AND VOICE BACK, DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR DEAR FRIEND WAS RIGHT ABOUT HER CONCERNS THAT YOU WERE 'SLOWLY DYING'? DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS WHY BULIMIA WOULD TRY TO 'KILL' A YOUNG WOMAN EVEN BEFORE THEY HAD HARDLY BEGUN THEIR ADULT LIVES?

ANNAMIE: She was right. I was slowly dying. It makes me so angry to think about the devastation Bulimia spreads with its lies.

I thought I was doomed. But when I learnt to look at Bulimia as a force outside of myself, it gave me the courage to fight it.

DAVID: IF YOU HADN'T COME TO SEE THIS, HOW DO YOU THINK BULIMIA WOULD HAVE LED YOUR LIFE/DEATH?

ANNAMIE: I would have lost all my friends, all my contact with people, all my self-confidence, I would never have wanted to step into the light; I would have been alone. It also helped to see Guilt and Fear as Bulimia's team-mates, as it gave me perspective on what was happening to me... I realised that I am entitled to take up my space in this world.

DAVID: HOW DID YOU COME TO SUCH A REALIZATION? WAS IT AN OVERNIGHT KIND OF REALIZATION OR A DAWNING REALIZATION OR SOMETHING IN BETWEEN?

ANNAMIE: I was very angry when I realised what Bulimia was doing to me. I realised how sick it made me. One day I just realised I will leave it; I was not prepared to struggle for days to overcome it; I made a decision to take my life back and I did.

I could voice my feeling in this process, and I felt safe to do so.

DAVID: IN THOSE TIMES WHEN BULIMIA DOMINATED YOUR LIFE, DID YOU NOT FEEL SAFE

TO SPEAK UP FOR YOURSELF, YOUR NEEDS, DESIRES AND OPINIONS?

ANNAMIE: I could not speak about anything., I did not feel confident and I was scared everyone would think I was wrong.

I did not have to keep Bulimia's secrets any longer. My mom and my friends were wonderful. They never judged me; they attended all my therapy sessions with me and formed an alliance with me, against Bulimia. I never felt alone or isolated.

DAVID: HOW IMPORTANT WOULD YOU SAY IT WAS IN TERMS OF YOUR ANTI-BULIMIA THAT

YOU

KNEW FOR SURE THAT YOU HAD YOUR AND DEAR FRIENDS ON YOUR SIDE?

ANNAMIE: Very, very important! They allowed me to feel sure about myself by validating the truth about me in the face of Bulimia's lies.

They did not feel sorry for me, but became outraged at the indecency of Bulimia's tricks and strategies. We were all morally outraged and decided to put an end to Bulimia's effects over my life.

DAVID: I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKING BUT WHAT WERE YOU OUTRAGED ABOUT? WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER OUTRAGED ABOUT? WHAT WERE YOUR FRIENDS OUTRAGED ABOUT?

ANNAMIE: My mom was angry because she loves me and she knew that Bulimia could kill me and she does not want me to suffer. My friends felt the same. That was what outraged us. That Bulimia wanted to kill me and that it was so unnecessary.

We all learnt how to combat this thing together.

My mom searched the Anti-Anorexia Anti-Bulimia League's website, printed many articles and we studied them together. She says it helped her to better understand the problem, which allowed her not to feel guilty or afraid. She no longer watched me all day to make sure that I was eating and not vomiting. We put our strengths together and trusted one another. Bulimia could never convince me that my mom does not love me.

DAVID: TO BE FRANK, DID IT TRY THAT OUT ON YOU?

ANNAMIE: No.

I really

treasured my friends' and family's support. My friends were so positive that I could lick Bulimia, I never felt alone. They encouraged me to stand up for my right to be a strong woman and to resist Bulimia's lies.

They made the journey away from Bulimia and towards my own choice very easy for me.

DAVID: I KNOW THIS IS VERY ARTIFICIAL BUT IF THERE WAS 100% OF CREDIT TO GO AROUND, HOW MUCH WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOURSELF, HOW MUCH TO YOUR MOTHER'S SUPPORT OF YOU AND OUTRAGE AT BULIMIA, AND HOW MUCH TO YOUR FRIEND'S SUPPORT?

ANNAMIE: Myself 100%! My mom and friends 100%. You cannot divide up their efforts from mine.

Sadness, Loneliness, Frustration, Hate and Anger are also on Bulimia's team of evil. We knew we were up against a destructive problem, so we formed an alliance to resist its attempts on my life. Bulimia tried to get me to believe that I had no control over my life and I should gain some control by dieting and limiting my weight. It lied to me, leaving me more frustrated, weaker and ill.

I made some decisions:

- 1) I stopped getting onto the scale every day. Jo never asked me about my weight, and she never measured me. That was fantastic. Not having to worry about weights and centimeters liberated me from Guilt.
- 2) My boyfriend was fantastic. He supported me and was not grossed out by Bulimia. He is crazy about me and never felt sorry for me. He always just treated me like any other normal person. Bulimia could not interfere in our relationship.

DAVID: TO BE HONEST, DID IT TRY TO INTERFERE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

ANNAMIE: No, it never stood a chance.

Bulimia is disgusting. I started to hate it, and it became my biggest enemy ever. All I wanted to do was to get rid of it as soon as possible. And I did!

DAVID: I JUST WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOU, ANNAMIE, FOR DOING EVERYTHING YOU MENTIONED SO FAR BECAUSE FROM WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD, IT IS A MEAN FEAT!

YOURS ANTI-BULIMICALLY,
DAVID.

Regards
Annamie