

“HOPELESS CASE”

KYLIE , aged 19

Dear David

In Adelaide I spoke to you about Kylie, one of our 'hopeless cases', who really turned around thanks to she and her mother reading your book. I had my last appointment with her last week as she is moving interstate. She is now well and truly in recovery. I told her you had expressed an interest in contacting her and she would really like that.

Regards
Warren Ward
Director
Eating Disorders Service
Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

Dear Kylie:

Thank you for allowing Warren to pass on your email address to me. As you may know, I met him very recently in Adelaide at the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Eating Disorders Conference. He attended the pre-conference day long workshop I did which gave me a chance to have some discussions with him. He mentioned in confidence how 'Biting the Hand That Starves You' had played some part in you proceeding to recovery. As you may realize from having read it that this work- 'anti-anorexia/anti-bulimia' has been very central to the 'work' of my life for over 15 years now. And the book itself was the culmination of an eight year long collaboration with Rick Maisel(in Berkeley, California). Thank God for computers and email!

I know it was a hope of both Rick and myself that this book might 'reach out' beyond a professional readership to both 'insiders' and their families/partners/friends. In fact, although we may have started out with the intention to inform our professional colleagues, as the book progressed, we gave more and more significance to our other hoped for readerships e.g. insiders/families/etc. For this reason, I am taking every opportunity that comes my way e.g. through colleagues or through the website to discuss how 'Biting the Hand' works. Obviously in regard to professionals, you can read book reviews and that tells you how your colleagues view the book and 'anti-anorexia/anti-bulimia'.

Would you be willing to have an email conversation with me (and perhaps your mum) so I could find out if Rick's and my hopes have been realized, if only with one insider and one family? I would be really grateful if you would join me in such a conversation. And don't worry as you probably know from the book, I am 'full' of questions and curiosity.

Yours anti-anorexically,
David.

Hi david and rick:

Thank you so much for your email. It is really exciting to be talking to the person who has written 'biting the hand'. And if it is of any interest, it all started when i borrowed the book from the library while i was looking for weight loss books. So yes, you can speak to me and my mum if you would like. I stumbled on to it in the 'health and diet' section. It stood out amongst the books on depression and other eating disorder books. It wasn't the cover that stood out but the title. And it was that it was bigger than the others, which were very brief and this book seemed more in depth. What caught my interest about the title was because 'biting the hand that starves you' is like something is doing it to you; you are not doing it to yourself!

When i first looked at it, i thought it was your typical symptoms and basic eating disorder book. But when i started reading it, it was different altogether. It was as though i was writing it word for word myself. What the book was saying was what i was (and still) think. But now it was as if my mind was written on paper. At first, i felt i was . . . Well . . . Being made fun of . . . Rather like this book was trying to make out it 'knows'. After all, i thought this was my secret and at first i was angry that this book had got into my life.

I had borrowed many such books before and had never been able to read them. When i borrowed 'biting the hand, i just did i because it was an eating disorder book and i could flip through and that would be that. You asked me if anorexia tried to have me put 'biting the hand' down. I think so but i am not really sure for i was in a daze. I

couldn't really read it. The words stood out on the page and this time i wanted to read them. So i got my mum to read a bit to me. But then my mum started reading it and began to treat me differently. She began to read some of it to me and i began to feel differently. Mum started talking to the anorexia and getting it angry. For example, she would ask - "is the anorexia stopping you from eating that?" she told me what she was doing but we did fight a lot over it. My mother is amazing. She is real; she tells it how it is. I have told her every thought that goes on in my head. She knows me and anorexia very well. She is great and knows how to talk to 'me'. But at first, i felt like mum didn't get it. But what she said would sit in my mind and later i would keep thinking about it. Then slowly it was 'why am i eating that? Why can't i eat that etc.?' it took ages and i still go back to it now and again.

But i have been telling everyone about 'biting the hand'. I still want to be thin and they ask me why. And i don't really know. So i am starting to question that. The fighting continued. It was about my mum not leaving anorexia alone. And her thinking she knew what i was going through. But really at that stage, my mum probably knew more than i did about anorexia. She certainly knew anorexia wasn't me.

(Kylie's mum: my first reaction from flipping through 'biting the hand' was the girls' stories catching my eye. They sounded so similar to what my daughter had been telling me, both through her words and feelings. Those girls in the book were saying exactly the same things!)

What thoughts ran through my mind? I was scared. I had never been scared like this before. I was scared that the whole 'you have a illness- anorexia' could be true. I was afraid that others and this book might be right and that i was really sick.

But, this was when for the first time, i was out of my self . . . That might sound weird . . . I was in a book. I felt separate from myself. At the same time, i felt i had betrayed myself. I still didn't think anorexia was entirely separate from me. I had always thought that anorexia

was me! When i first got the idea it was anorexia, i denied it. I still wouldn't really let myself believe it. Then i felt very angry for quite awhile and then(and i am still) a bit hurt.

I had believed i did deserve the torturing anorexia was doing to me. I wasn't good enough and i thought i should be in pain. I was (and still am a bit) very hurt and feel so back stabbed by my so-called 'friend' who was supposed to be looking after and protecting me from bad things. It took me months to realize this. My mind had been so take over by anorexia that it took a while to start to hear myself. But i did take my anger out on anorexia by trying to take control away from it and do what it would not want me to do.

Yes, i am still very, very angry! You asked what would have come of me if i hadn't chanced on to 'biting the hand'. Ahhhhhh i don't want to even think about that. This book was my turning point. I think to be honest i would be dead by now. Anorexia would have taken my life. To be truly honest, the saving of my life was this book. Without 'biting the hand', i am convinced that i would not be here alive. I have had this illness for eight years and had a lot of therapy. But not once had anything ever hit me like the words in 'biting the hand'. It pulled me out of hell. I'm still a work in progress but i have come so far.

Finding myself in a book between two covers, i realized that finally someone understood. I had never ever felt understood before. Thank god for this book! Almost all of the many professionals i had met didn't really know anything. They just didn't understand. But reading the book felt good. It was like anorexia was diagnosed and it had symptoms and it was not just a matter of me losing my mind.

Nothing like this had ever happened before in my life. And it remains unique to this day.

David, this is what happened to me last week. I went to my cousin's wedding and had a three course meal of baked ricotta, potato mash with pesto oil dressing and cashews, then mousse and cream with strawberries in syrup for dessert plus two dinner rolls with butter. And you know what? For the first time in forever, there was nothing-

silence, not a voice to be heard except the happy chatter of my family and friends. Anorexia was nowhere to be seen or heard. I had the best time.

To me this doesn't happen very often but such days are happening more and more- even on an average day. Well, yes anorexia speaks to me but the words are now spoken, not yelling or coercive but spoken in a small, timid and unsure voice. I have to go back a long way in my life to remember when anorexia didn't scream or rant at me. David, it felt so good to hear nothing but my family speak and my own thoughts thinking the food was lovely and nothing else. And that's when my voice is bigger and louder. I win a lot of the time. I am eating well. I am resting when i feel like it. I am thinking about other things. Deep down i do love myself and like what i am. I'm not quite all me yet but anorexia is getting smaller and weaker by the day. And it is a dream come true! I just wanted to share this with you!

David, if i can help in any way please let me know. You have helped me so much. Thank you. And i would like to help other girls in any way i can. 'biting the hand' really did save my life. Mum wants to thank you too. She is of the firm belief that this book saved my life above all else.