

Praise for *Please eat...*

“*Please eat...* is an essential read for anyone trying to understand more about eating disorders in teenage boys. Bev Mattocks describes the story of her son’s anorexia but also provides insight for other families facing this complex illness in a world where anorexia is still associated with teenage girls. Totally recommended.” - **Sam Thomas, Founder of *Men Get Eating Disorders Too***

“Bev Mattocks shares her painful personal story so beautifully that the reader feels a deep connection. She models the tenacity needed by parents to stand up to these deadly illnesses for the long haul. This is a powerful account which health care providers around the world need to read before meeting with their first eating disorders patient.” - **Becky Henry, Founder of Hope Network, LLC & Award Winning Author of *Just Tell Her To Stop: Family Stories of Eating Disorders***

“The world is slowly coming to realise that ‘Boys Get Anorexia Too’. Bev Mattocks writes honestly and from the heart about helping her teenage son to overcome anorexia. Like ours, this is another success story of a family working together with friends, school and clinicians to beat this insidious illness. Many families will find great comfort from reading this story as well as much needed energy to fight the eating disorder.” - **Jenny Langley, Author of *Boys Get Anorexia Too***

“This is a wonderful book. It's quite hard to read because the story is so painful, but easy to read because of the clarity and simplicity of style.” - **Gill Todd, RMN MSc, former Clinical Nurse Leader at the Gerald Russell Eating Disorders Unit, Bethlem & Maudsley Hospitals, London**

“I have just finished *Please eat...* and it such a powerful page turner! Bev Mattocks has captured the complexity of her family’s journey so honestly, bravely and with such clarity of writing. It is a compelling read.” - **Susan Ringwood, Chief Executive, BEAT**

“Cancel your plans for the day when you open this book: the riveting story will have you caring and cheering for a family that the world needs to meet. If only the world knew the truth told in this memoir!” - **Laura Collins, Founder of *FEAST* (Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders) & Author of *Eating With Your Anorexic***

“Bev Mattocks is doing such amazing work empowering other parents and helping to raise awareness that boys get eating disorders too.” - **Leah Dean, Executive Director, *FEAST* (Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders)**

“This book takes you on an emotional journey through the everyday reality of dealing with anorexia. If you're a health professional, read it to understand what parents are struggling with at home. If your friends or relatives think that anorexia is simply a refusal to eat, get them to read Ben's story. And if you believe anorexia is a girl thing, this book will sweep away your misconceptions.” - **Eva Musby, Parent and Writer**

“*Please eat...* is gut wrenching and touching. It captivated me and I could hardly breathe as I was reading it. I read the first six chapters in one sitting. Bev Mattocks has done such a great job of bringing her story to us in a vivid and personal way.” - **Parent**

“*Please eat...* made me very emotional, it's hard recalling those moments when you realise that something is wrong. I am sure the book will be a valuable resource for many parents battling with eating disorders.” - **Parent**

“When I first came across Bev Mattocks' story I was in the depths of despair with my daughter's anorexia which was spiralling out of control. Bev helped me realise that we were not alone, that we could help our daughter to recover and that, as her parents, we were part of solution and not the cause of her eating disorder. This is an empowering book.” - **Parent**

“*Please eat...* is moving and engaging. Bev Mattocks creates a totally convincing picture of what it is like. It certainly educates, so that a parent who's in doubt would recognise the symptoms.” - **Parent**

Please eat...

A mother's struggle to free her teenage son from anorexia

Bev Mattocks

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This book is a true story written from a personal perspective. Therefore it might differ from someone else's perspective of the same events. However, to the author's recollection, all events described here did take place. To protect identities and respect confidentiality, most names have been changed. Any resemblance of these names to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. Please note: this book is written as a source of information only and is not meant to be used, nor should it ever be used, to diagnose or treat eating disorders or other medical conditions. For diagnosis or treatment of eating disorders or other medical problems, please consult your own physician. The publisher and author are not responsible for any specific health needs that may require medical supervision and are not liable for any damages or negative consequences from any treatment, action, application or preparation, to any person reading or following the information in this book.

Find out more about Bev Mattocks at

www.anorexiaboy.co.uk

anorexiaboyrecovery.blogspot.co.uk

www.bevmattocks.co.uk

dedication

This book is for my dear friend, Sue. Thank you for always being there for us despite your own life struggles. You are an angel in the truest sense.

This book is also dedicated to my wonderful son - a young man of remarkable courage, determination and strength.

about the author

BEV MATTOCKS lives in the north of England with her husband and son, and works as a freelance advertising copywriter. She is a member of FEAST (Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders) and writes a popular blog about her experiences of supporting her teenage son through anorexia.

For more information, visit www.anorexiaboy.co.uk,
anorexiaboyrecovery.blogspot.co.uk and
www.bevmattocks.co.uk

author's note

BRIGHT, POPULAR AND A STAR on the rugby pitch, 15 year old Ben had everything he could want. But then, inexplicably, our food-loving teenage son began to systematically starve himself. At the same time his urge to exercise went extreme. In a matter of months Ben lost one quarter of his bodyweight as he plunged into anorexia nervosa.

But back in the summer of 2009 when Ben began to show classic signs of the illness, I had no idea that boys got eating disorders. As a result I didn't recognise the warning signs. I knew something was wrong and that it appeared to be getting worse, but I had no idea what "it" was. As the parent of a teenage boy you don't expect your child to get anorexia. You don't even think about it.

Please eat... A mother's struggle to free her teenage son from anorexia is my account of how anorexia crept into our normal, happy family life completely undetected. This book describes how, once we realised what we were dealing with, my husband Paul and I watched helplessly as the illness threatened to destroy our son on more than one occasion.

As a parent, I know how terrifying it is to discover that your child has a potentially life-threatening illness - and to discover that it's been developing undetected for months, maybe even years. I know what it's like to feel isolated, helpless and totally clueless about an illness that has the highest mortality rate of any mental health disorder. And

I know what it's like to have to wait months for treatment while your child fades away in front of your eyes.

When I sat down to write *Please eat...* I was acutely aware that I wanted to do my bit to help other parents and carers - not only to identify the warning signs of anorexia in boys but to show that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and to describe how we got there.

I also wanted to highlight the importance of early intervention and effective treatment for young people with eating disorders, male or female, not just in the UK but wherever you live.

This isn't a story of despair. *Please eat...* describes how, with our help and through his own determination, Ben slowly began to recover from anorexia and re-build his life.

My son, Ben, has always been one hundred per cent behind this book. He is always nagging at me to "do more" to help raise awareness of eating disorders in a society where the illness is often shrouded in secrecy, shame and misunderstanding - and where there is still too little awareness of eating disorders in teenage boys. He has read through this book and made valuable contributions of his own which are included within its pages.

Even if we help just one family overcome this devastating illness by sharing our experiences then we have done our job.

Bev Mattocks, February 2013

important note

THIS ACCOUNT IS BASED ON a combination of memories, journal notes, blog entries, forum posts and other material which I compiled during the period that my son, Ben, was suffering from anorexia, and the years that led up to his illness.

It is important to bear in mind that everything described in this book is my own personal recollection of events and the emotions I was feeling at the time. It is the sole expression and opinion of its author. Other people's opinions, observations, memories, expression and recollections of the same events may differ. However, as far as I can recollect, allowing for the natural fallibility of memory, all the events depicted here took place as described.

Writing about someone else's life, especially your child's life, is very different from writing about yourself. It needs to be approached with respect, compassion and sensitivity. When people ask what Ben thinks about this book, I explain that he has always been completely behind me. He is as keen as I am to raise awareness of eating disorders in boys and help other families that might be facing a similar situation. However, to protect his privacy, I have given my son a false name. Most of the other names used in this book are false, too.

Over the summer of 2012 as I was putting this manuscript together, Ben and I went through it with a tooth-comb. He made his own comments and observations, many of which have been incorporated into this book. As with my own memories, one has to

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allow for impurities. But, to the best of our knowledge, this book tells our story, as it happened and in the way it happened.

Of course I am neither a clinician nor an expert; I am just an ordinary mum writing about the day to day experiences of living with a teenage boy recovering from anorexia.

As a result, the information provided in this book is not meant to be used, nor should it ever be used, to diagnose or treat anorexia, bulimia, EDNOS or any other eating disorder or medical condition. For diagnosis or treatment of anorexia, bulimia, EDNOS or any other eating disorder or medical problem, please consult your own physician.

Please note: the author does not endorse any specific eating disorder treatment approach or model. Each individual is different and the strategies used and outlined in this book may not be suitable for other families. Also, any references are provided for information purposes only and do not constitute endorsement of any websites or other resources. Readers should also be aware that the websites and other resources listed at the end of this book may change.

wired up to machines

IT'S THE 26TH JANUARY 2010, six months after 16 year old Ben's anorexia first began to emerge. I'm staring at the PC screen in the back bedroom of my house where I work as a freelance copywriter. Or, to be more accurate, where I am fighting a losing battle to keep my business afloat while my only child hurtles downhill to goodness only knows where.

This brief period - the hour or so between dropping Ben off at the school bus stop and the first frantic text I get as he struggles with another day at school - is the only time I really get to myself. But it's not as if I can switch off. Usually I'm reeling from the latest anorexia-fuelled meltdown in the fight to get Ben to school. More often than not I have my head in my hands, tears streaming down my face, hands fumbling for the tissues, wondering for the millionth time when - or even if - this nightmare will end.

By 9.30am I'm already jittery (these days I even take the phone into the bathroom with me). I can expect the first text around 9.30am. Sometimes it's even earlier. And sometimes it isn't Ben who gets in touch first but Sheila, the school nurse, concerned about the latest crisis Ben's got himself into.

Like the day I leave an over-distraught Ben at the bus stop but he fails to turn up for registration. Sheila calls to ask if he's made his way back home because "no-one remembers seeing him on the bus" and he isn't answering his mobile. My blood freezes as I search for my car

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keys, visions of driving up and down every single street in the city searching for Ben whose behaviour has become terrifyingly erratic. But Sheila calls back to say it's okay; they've found him crouching beneath a stairwell in the science block, sobbing his heart out. She's got him in the medical centre and is attempting to calm him down. I breathe a sigh of relief.

Or the time Ben suddenly downs his knife and fork, leaves his plate of food untouched and strides out of the school canteen unable to face eating lunch with his friends. The Head of Year charges after him and intercepts him en route to the river at the foot of the playing fields. A distraught Ben is returned to the safety of the medical centre where he spends the next hour or so talking with Sheila while I make my way into school to pick him up.

Sometimes it's a frantic three-way communication between Ben, Sheila and me. First Ben texts me from where he's barricaded himself in the boys' toilets like a frightened rabbit. I phone Sheila who attempts to entice Ben out. She calls me to say Ben's calmed down and is resting in the medical centre. Or, more likely, he's in a terrible state. Maybe it would be better if I took him home?

Or it might be a text from Ben who can't stop fretting about something I've planned for our evening meal. *The burger's far too fatty... Do you know how much fat there is in coconut milk...?* Worries like this can dominate the whole day until they explode into a mass of screaming, swearing, head bashing and the sound that never fails to chill me to the bone: a low pitched wail, like a wild animal in pain. Or the voice I've come to refer to as "the demon" - the voice of anorexia - the voice that isn't Ben's but which he uses whenever the anorexia is in control. It's slow, chillingly low and completely monotone. It's a voice I'd never heard before Ben succumbed to anorexia and I pray I will never hear again.

Today it's Sheila who contacts me first. Ben's with her in the medical centre. He doesn't look well. His heart is beating at around

half the rate it's supposed to and his pulse is uneven. She'd like the hospital to see him.

I grab my car keys and rush into school. Ben's waiting for me in the car park. Sideways on I'm painfully aware that there's nothing of him: straight up and down, without any definition - a million light years away from the shapely calves and rugby playing thighs of just 12 months before. *Remember when we used to joke that Ben was made from concrete?* Ben hasn't played rugby since October. If he played rugby now he'd snap in half.

He turns round to face the car and I can't bear to look at the dark rings around his eyes set into the skull that looks far too big for his frail body. He climbs into the car silently, staring at the floor, his face expressionless. No greeting, no conversation. The anorexia has sucked every happy, positive emotion from his soul. He is completely numb.

And when he isn't numb, he's threatening to end his life or run away.

I put my foot down and drive the silent Ben towards the hospital on the eastern side of the city. One mention of "heart problems" and "pulse rate of 29" and we're spirited past the usual hospital queue. In a flash Ben's lying on a trolley and being hooked up to an ECG machine. Medical people are striding to and fro, checking the screen. I'm analysing their body language for clues because I can't read the expressions on their faces.

A doctor walks up to me with a clipboard. *Is there any history of heart problems in the family?* Er, my great grandma died of a heart attack back in 1917, does this count? *Is there anything else that might have sparked this off? Sport, maybe?* Well, yes, Ben's very sporty... *Aha, that makes sense. Athletes' hearts tend to be so fit and fine-tuned that the pulse rate can slow right down.*

Well, yes, for the past six months or so Ben has been doing some kind of high-intensity sport or exercise every single day of the week,

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usually several times a day. So I guess in a bizarre way you could say he is an athlete. But, as I tell the doctor, Ben has anorexia. He's had it for the past six months. Or at least that's when the signs of the illness first began to show. All this exercise, together with a massive reduction in food intake, is the reason why he's lost one quarter of his body weight since then. My gut instinct tells me that it's the anorexia that's brought us here, not the fact that Ben is a budding Olympian. His waif-like body looks virtually devoid of muscle these days, and isn't the heart a muscle?

The doctor writes something down and then takes some needles out of their sterilised wrappings to take blood. He attempts to get a needle into Ben's vein. And then attempts again. Soon Ben's arm is like a pin cushion as the stubborn veins refuse to rise to the surface. Meanwhile his pulse is still registering 29bpm. Something tells me it shouldn't be this low. It's ridiculously low, abnormally low, dangerously low...

A senior doctor arrives, rolls up his sleeves and finally - carefully, oh so carefully - manages to get the needle into Ben's arm. It's a huge needle; such a big needle for such a stick-thin arm. By now the tears are streaming down Ben's thin white face. He looks terrified. He's had some pretty hair-raising things done in his time, what with ingrowing toenails, several teeth out and various bone fractures, but this is the first time I've seen him cry in public since he was a small child.

A zillion thoughts rush through my head from *I must ring his dad to this is my only child and this is his only heart...* I gaze at him - my beautiful son looking frightened and bewildered, and so very young, these days much younger than his 16 years.

How the heck did my big burly rugby playing son end up here? How did we get from *there* - charging up and down the rugby pitch, Number 3 in the team, a position given to the biggest, toughest boys - to *here* - a gaunt, waif-like Ben lying weak and sick, his heart doing

“funny things”? Thin Ben who is starving himself to... Damn it, I refuse to let myself go there.

The crazy thing is that I could save his life. I could get all that lost weight back on in a matter of weeks, maybe even faster. And the even crazier thing is that it should be so ridiculously easy. It seems grotesque - criminal, even - that I am sitting here, in England, in the 21st century, watching my son fade away from malnutrition while bucket-loads of food are all around us. Huge, massive, obscene mountains of food. Cakes, ice cream, bread, pies, puddings, pizzas, curries... Up the road are three enormous supermarkets with shelves piled high with every food imaginable. Down the road are restaurants and take-outs specialising in every cuisine on the planet. Yet my son refuses to eat. Or at least he refuses to eat anything other than the bare minimum needed to keep him alive. I want to punch the wall. I want to kick, scream and shout. I want to get the medical staff to force-feed him and insist that he stuffs his face with life-giving food, even pop a funnel down his throat and pour it all into him. *Why the heck aren't they doing this?* No-one appears terribly concerned about the anorexia...

In fact, right from the start, no-one seems to have treated this as an urgent case. Now, at the end of January 2010, almost four months since I first took Ben to see our GP, we are still waiting for treatment. No-one seems interested. No-one has taken this seriously. And no-one has given us any assistance, advice or support.

I feel as if I'm going to faint. Someone must have noticed because they hand me a glass of water. I'm hot one minute and ice cold the next, still in the surreal bubble that has become our normal world over the last six months or so.

I pull myself together and call my husband Paul who's working about two hours' drive away. "I don't think there's anything to worry about, but..." Paul's on his way. It might be a couple of hours before he gets here, but at least he's on his way.

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I make my way back to Ben who appears to be in the process of being moved. I get a fleeting sense of relief. *Is everything okay? Can we go home now?* No, he's being transferred to the other hospital, the one in the city centre - the one with the specialist cardio unit.

Inside my head the dread and panic is unbearable, but I hope it doesn't show. "See you in a bit!" I say with a light-hearted grin as they wheel Ben to the waiting ambulance. I give him a friendly wave, no different (I hope) from the one I'd give if I was dropping him off at the cinema or a friend's house. *Don't want to worry him...*

I dash to the car park, fishing in my bag for my keys, cursing the other hospital for having some of the worst hospital car parking in the country. I decide to call a cab. They can send a car in 90 minutes. Damn it. Eventually I find a cab that can be with me in 20 minutes. It's the longest 20 minutes of my life. Then it takes another 20 minutes to battle through the rush hour traffic. The entire process takes well over an hour but it seems so much longer...

Please let Ben be okay...

six months earlier

WE SHOULD HAVE PICKED up on it sooner.

But it isn't until the early autumn of 2009 that the penny finally drops that our only child, Ben, is developing anorexia. When you have a son, especially a sporty, food-loving son, you don't expect them to get anorexia. Not that my husband Paul and I have ever given it any thought. At this point eating disorders are about as far off our radar as you can get.

So, in the July, when 15 year old Ben's passion for exercise and healthy eating starts to go extreme, and he begins to lose weight, we assume it's just a teenage phase. So far we've got off lightly. Despite joking that Ben would turn into a moody monster at the stroke of midnight on his 13th birthday, the "teenage angst" never materialised. Until recently, that is, when he's become a bit more sullen and argumentative - and increasingly obsessed with his appearance.

Sometimes I find him leaning forward and prodding his washboard stomach claiming he's "fat". Or examining his face critically from every angle in the mirror.

I tell him not to be ridiculous. The idea that our son could be sliding into something far more sinister than just "angst" doesn't register. It doesn't register with Ben, either, because it isn't as if he's sat down one day and said, "I'm going to get anorexia". None of us has the slightest idea what is happening and, by the time the penny drops, Ben is already being dragged under fast.

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IT'S THE BEGINNING OF JULY, just a couple of weeks before the alarm bells begin to faintly ring in my head. Ben is representing his *house* in the school sports day, running in the 1500 metres against his friend Kieran.

Ben appears confident and self-assured, determined to win. Yet I'm aware that there's still a bit of the inner critic inside his head that always manages to rob him of his new-found confidence - a legacy from primary school. The days when Ben would invariably be the one at the back of the race, plodding along reluctantly, visibly heavier than the other boys. The days when Ben would rather play quietly in a corner of the playground with his friend Peter than kick a ball around the yard. The days before Ben took up sport.

How different Ben looks now. I doubt if his former teachers and school mates would recognise the tall, handsome, athletic young man who's about to win the 1500 metres. The whole of his *house* is cheering as he hurtles past Kieran to the finish line, his arms raised in triumph, reminding me of last summer when he completed the gruelling 140 mile Coast2Coast cycle ride with his dad. I remember the photos we took just before this, in France. Little me standing beside a much taller and broader Ben, my whole being bursting with pride as a group of girls walked past pretending not to glance back at the tanned teenager with the awesome physique and good looks. *Is it my imagination or has he lost a bit of weight since then?*

I make a mental note to make sure he doesn't get any slimmer; it doesn't suit him. Last year the rugby coach moved him from Number 3 ("meat-head and fat", as Ben put it) to Number 8 ("meat-head and not fat") as his body got taller and leaner. They'll have to move him again if he's not careful. But there are two months to go before the rugby season, plenty of time for Ben to bulk out again.

Meanwhile I'm so proud of his victory I could explode. You know who I wish was here now? Timothy, the new boy who joined Ben's

six months earlier

primary school in Year 4: lanky, curly haired Timothy who turned Ben's final year at that school into hell.

At first we thought that Timothy was another Peter, Ben's closest friend during the early years of primary school. Both Ben and Peter were quiet, studious and had vivid imaginations. They'd lose themselves in a fantasy world inhabited by exotic creatures. Peter's bed would become a submarine, tank or the gondola of an airship and, on sleepovers, the boys would go late night zombie-hunting around Peter's huge house. As the boys grew older, it was Peter's dad who suggested Ben accompany Peter to Sunday morning mini rugby. Peter gave up after just one session, but - to our surprise - the sports-shy Ben stayed on and quickly became a star player. Then one day Peter moved away and Ben was left on his own.

Not long after this Timothy joined the school. Ben immediately made friends with him. And, as I watched the boys play happily together, I was confident that the gap left by Peter's departure had been filled.

As time went on, however, Paul and I began to notice a distinct change in Ben's frame of mind at weekends. On Sunday evenings his mood plummeted and you could guarantee that he wouldn't sleep that night. He began to drag his feet on Monday mornings and we couldn't figure out why. After all, Ben had always loved school. Then one Sunday it all came to a head when we found him sobbing on the stairs. Ben was being bullied. Snide remarks, whispered insults, unpleasant teasing, pushes and shoves... Timothy was making Ben's life hell.

I remember striding into school and insisting something was done immediately. The Deputy Head promised to have a quiet word with Timothy who, she was certain, had no idea of the effect he was having on Ben, but she'd ask him to apologise anyway. "Then the boys can shake hands and forget about it."

So the boys shook hands. But Timothy didn't forget. He simply

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went underground. The snide remarks and threats became more secretive. The pushing and shoving were done out of teachers' sight. Nothing changed. If anything it got worse. And the staff still refused to believe that the impeccably behaved Timothy was a bully.

We offered to move Ben to another school. But he insisted on staying put. "I've been here since the start and Timothy's only been here since Year 4. I'm not leaving, not now." I had to hand it to him, Ben had guts.

So now, as Ben flies across the finish line, I wish that Timothy could see him: made-from-concrete, rugby-playing Ben, being cheered on by the whole school. Or, rather, I wish Ben could bump into Timothy and punch his lights out.

My mind rewinds back to those unpleasant days at primary school. By the time Ben sat his 11-plus exam in the January of Year 6 (and won an academic scholarship to a fabulous independent secondary school) the bullying had sapped him of every ounce of confidence and self-esteem. Our GP referred Ben for counselling. It didn't work. The counsellor seemed more interested in my background, implying that I'd passed on my anxieties and insecurities to Ben. No wonder, she implied, Ben had allowed himself to be bullied. These counselling sessions, she said, would be used to toughen Ben up to face the bigger, more daunting world of senior school which, she implied, could be a serious shock to the system for the ill-equipped.

But far from being a shock to the system, Ben took to secondary school like a duck to water. No, it wasn't perfect, but at least Timothy wasn't there. Almost immediately, a super group of boys took Ben under their wing. Ben thrived, and - before long - he'd become one of the most popular boys in his social group. I remember thinking how most parents dread their child getting in with the wrong crowd. Thankfully Ben couldn't have gotten in with a nicer bunch of boys.

Ben's new school had a reputation for sport, especially rugby. It

quickly became clear that Ben had a natural talent for the game. He was immediately snapped up for the rugby team and given the position of Number 3, a position given to the biggest, toughest boys. Soon, Ben was playing rugby virtually every day of the week, including local club rugby on Sundays. Before long all the puppy fat disappeared to be replaced with an awesome athletic physique. Over the next four years Ben would transform from the quiet, overweight, bullied boy of primary school into an athletic, confident and popular teenager. We couldn't have wished for more.

Being good at sport carried a distinct kudos and Ben began to revel in the attention he was getting. As "the guy in the rugby team" Ben also had a natural shield against any potential bullying.

"Basically it earned me respect," he'd tell me much later. "For instance if any of the other rugby guys were throwing their weight around in the common room and annoying my friends, I'd tell them to shut up and they would. Instantly. Everyone listened to me."

Back then I remember Ben being involved in a plethora of activities: drama productions, the choir, a band and of course sport. He was also excelling in the classroom, winning various merit awards and a prize on Prize Day. Meanwhile his popularity continued to grow.

Ben's birthday parties were legendary. His birthday is on the 23rd December and so, to avoid having a party right on top of Christmas, a get-together was usually scheduled for the last weekend of term.

Even though Ben's attic bedroom is huge, we had to split the sleepover into two shifts: one set of boys on the Friday night and another on the Saturday. That's how popular Ben was.

The first group would disappear up to Ben's room, only coming down for supplies of drinks, potato crisps, biscuits and cakes and, of course, an enormous evening meal followed by the world's biggest breakfast. After all, they were growing teenage boys, weren't they?

Saturday afternoon was the switch-over when we'd meet up with

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the other group at the cinema, watch a movie and go to a pizza restaurant (the kind where you help yourself to endless ice cream and sprinkles which, of course, they all did). Then the whole sleepover process would begin again followed by more supplies of biscuits, drinks and potato crisps plus an equally enormous breakfast on Sunday morning. No wonder they say teenage boys have hollow legs.

BEN'S 15TH BIRTHDAY PARTY in December 2008 is the liveliest of all. By this time Ben is at the peak of his popularity and confidence. There's so much noise, bumping, crashing and thumping going on in our attic that I'm worried it will bring the house down. The boys are constantly eating as usual. Well, what do you expect? They're teenage boys after all... I dig out yet another family size bag of potato crisps and some packets of cookies for Ben to take up the two flights of stairs to his room.

After Christmas I'm vaguely aware that Ben has put on a few pounds. Not unusual, I figure, considering how much we've eaten over the festive season. But I know that, once back on the sports field, Ben's weight will level out again - and it does. What I don't know is that, for quite some time now, the green shoots of something sinister have been sprouting in Ben's head. Deep down in the inner recesses of his mind, Ben is busy weighing up input and output in a bid to maintain the athletic physique he's acquired in recent years.

Acutely aware that he's put on weight over Christmas, the next six months will be a constant struggle to stay slim. Extra pounds, Ben's convinced, could easily transport him back to the overweight, bullied boy of primary school. Yet he feels driven to binge. Unbeknown to us he'll devour entire packets of biscuits or chocolates in one sitting and then make himself do a lengthy run to burn it off, returning exhausted. Exercise, he believes, is what is keeping the dreaded pounds at bay. But, increasingly, Ben is feeling lazy. He's had enough

six months earlier

of all this sport and he's getting weary of rugby. And I can tell. One Saturday we drive up to Durham to watch his team play against the local school. Ben's lost his enthusiasm. He slouches around, complaining of a tummy ache and eventually gets invalidated off the pitch. I can sense the coach getting irritated.

Meanwhile Ben is convinced there must be a better, easier way to stay slim rather than thrashing it out on a freezing cold, muddy rugby pitch every day of the week. He's already secretly experimenting with food. But Paul and I scarcely notice what's going on. We put the growing fussiness down to "being a teenager". Ben didn't develop an attitude at 13 but, by golly, he seems to be heading that way now...

But on that sports day afternoon in July 2009 Ben is in a euphoric mood. As Paul and I watch him streak across the finish line, all we see is a boy who's thriving in every way. Good grief, at one point last term I even toyed with the idea of writing to the Headmaster to congratulate him on how the school had been the making of Ben.

In the event I will end up contacting the Headmaster about something altogether different... something I could never in a million years imagine we would have a conversation about.

health kick

IT'S LATE JULY, A WEEK OR so after Ben's victory at sports day. We're in France, relaxing around the pool of the villa we've rented near Cognac. Ben is swimming up and down. Up, down, up, down... until he's counted to one hundred. He does this every day; he's a keen swimmer. Or at least that's how it still looks to us. After all, he did the same last summer and the summer before. He's also jogging through the vines to the little crossroads and back every morning. He didn't do that last year. There's a ripple of anxiety somewhere deep inside my mind, but little more than that.

Ben is also on a healthy eating kick - something which I'm vaguely aware began in the spring.

"Give it a break, Ben," I say as he refuses another ice cream. "We're on holiday. Everyone has ice creams on holiday!" I've also noticed that he isn't eating the crisps we always bring on our picnics. "Have a biscuit," I offer, "Or a banana?" "No I'm fine," he replies. This concerns me because I'm aware that he hasn't had very much breakfast: some bread and jam (no butter) and black coffee. *When, I wonder, did he start drinking black coffee?*

Ben's never been fussy about food. Not up to now, at any rate. When he was a baby he drank milk as if it was going out of fashion. As a child he revelled in the home-cooked meals I'd make him: nutritionally packed burgers with "spooky mash", cheesy semolina fingers, vegetable sausages and all manner of other creative meals,

always followed by a pudding. If Ben's tea - which he'd have earlier than Paul and me - wasn't ready on time he'd get quite agitated and, for some time, I remember feeling anxious if his food wasn't on the table by 5 o'clock.

Ben loved school dinners and usually went back for second helpings. He would have had thirds, too, if he could. He also loved to eat out, especially in country pubs where he would Hoover up whatever child's meal was on the menu. I used to look at the meagre child's portion of fish fingers and chips, or whatever, and know it wouldn't satisfy Ben's man-sized appetite. So I wasn't surprised when he graduated to adult portions far sooner than most children. I'd watch with admiration as he'd demolish every single morsel. No fussiness, no pushing the food around the plate like other kids. He'd eat most of my leftovers, too, and an adult-sized pudding.

Dinners at secondary school weren't quite as exciting as primary school, but that didn't stop Ben from tucking in. Then, one summer, the canteen was given a complete revamp and a professional chef brought in to makeover the menu. Gone were the pies, chips and beans to be replaced by gourmet menus and a healthy new salad bar. The food was out of this world. I expected foodie Ben to be in culinary heaven.

But increasingly over the past six months, Ben has been opting for the salad bar. Or a bowl of soup and a roll, followed by fruit. Or - unbeknown to me - even less if he's going to be "sitting down doing nothing all afternoon". I'm convinced he's missing out on the best school dinners in the country. "But, mum," he's always reminding me, "I come home to a huge evening meal every night. Most of my friends just grab a sandwich in front of the telly". Nowadays the three of us eat a home-cooked meal in the dining room every evening.

In a way having a smaller lunch makes sense to me. Personally I'm not too keen on eating a huge meal at lunchtime and feeling sleepy all afternoon. But I have no idea that Ben is cutting back on breakfast,

Please eat...

too. Sometimes he'll just have a quick slice of toast or a banana. Some days he doesn't have anything at all. So he's eating minimally until our evening meal while continuing to do the usual sporting activities. But I don't see this. Not until our French holiday when his tweaked eating becomes more noticeable because we're with him all the time.

As Paul watches Ben complete another run past the vineyards he offers to buy him gym membership when we get home - the perfect preparation for the new rugby season in September. Ben thinks it's a great idea and begins to flick through the men's health and fitness magazines he's brought with him.

On the way back to the ferry port we stop off for a night in the Loire Valley. There's a photo of Ben and me standing on the balcony of a chateau: Ben with his mirrored aviator sunglasses hooked into the top of his tee-shirt, leather thong necklace, hair carefully putted into spikes, hands in the pockets of his khaki shorts. Ben looks cool. But I'm sure he looks a little leaner than he did this time last year. I put it down to natural body changes.

BACK IN ENGLAND Ben embraces the gym with enthusiasm, especially the cardio machines. Every day he jogs up to the gym and back, his face flushed, pleased with himself at his staying power. He's also doing lengthy runs and can be out for an hour at a time. Then he'll flick through the men's health magazines until he comes to the diets and exercises that promise to deliver bodies like the defined muscle men featured in the pages.

I'm not sure I feel too comfortable about Ben reading these magazines. I'm convinced they're making him over-critical as he compares himself to the impossibly toned models.

"You look amazing," I reassure him as he examines his abs, arms, thighs and rear in the mirror. "I beg to differ," he responds, looking back at his reflection critically.

One evening he's sitting on the sofa with his eyes on his belly rather than the TV. I can tell he's preoccupied. It's something that's happening more and more. He pulls up his tee-shirt and bends forward so the skin on his belly falls into natural folds. He pinches it between his thumb and forefinger, and then tries to grab it with his fist. "Rolls of fat," he says, dully, grabbing more skin.

"Ben, that's just skin," I point out. "Everyone's stomach does that, even the men in those magazines." But, for some reason, he can't see it and it bothers me. "And what does it matter?" I add for good measure.

To deflect his attention from the body checking I suggest he invites his friends round, reminding him that he hasn't seen them since school broke up for the summer vacation.

"What the hell would we do?" he asks blankly.

"Meet in town, go to the cinema, a meal or whatever... the usual stuff?"

His eyes are fixed his belly. "They're always busy and, anyway, they're boring - and most of them are on holiday." This summer he seems to prefer the gym to his friends and it concerns me. Not for the first time do I wish Ben's friends lived locally rather than miles away. Get-togethers need to be arranged via mobiles or Facebook.

But recently I haven't noticed Ben rushing to do either.

chopping fruit

IT'S AUGUST AND BEN IS BUSY in the kitchen. Last night we had wine, oil and thyme roasted butternut squash stuffed with Moroccan couscous plus a watercress and tomato salad with horseradish dressing. On Saturday it was melt-in-the-mouth griddled rump steaks with a fiery pepper sauce and mushroom and pimiento side, accompanied by fresh aromatic herb and olive oil bread. There's even a breakfast option of blueberry and apricot muffins with chopped fresh fruit and yoghurt. In fact the only thing that hasn't been a massive success is the evil-smelling sourdough bread that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

Meanwhile cookery books are the new computer games as Ben makes long lists of what he's going to cook next. "You won't need to cook for the next 12 months, mum!" he tells me indulgently.

"Suits me," I say, brain-dead from umpteen years of slaving over a hot stove. I'm a pretty good cook. But, to be truthful, he's better than me.

Ben loves to watch TV cookery programmes. Tonight it's *River Cottage*. We've already watched the *Hairy Bikers* and *Jamie Oliver*, and we never miss *Nigella* or *Nigel Slater*. Then there are all those programmes about what you should and shouldn't eat to stay healthy. Ben particularly loves the ones where they take an obese person and examine a typical week's food intake. The horrified look on Ben's face is a picture as they pour chips, crisps, cakes, cola, sweets,

chocolates, cookies, pizzas and a mountain of other “baddies” into a perspex tube. Or they spread it out on a table for everyone to see and gasp in horror. This kind of programme makes us both feel incredibly smug and self-righteous with our healthy home-cooked meals.

Ben has even started to love aubergines, courgettes and mushrooms, the only foods he never really liked. I am now in the enviable position of having a teenager that will eat anything. Well *almost* anything. He’s not keen on things with too much fat or calories in them. Sometimes I wish they’d ban those darn nutritional labels because Ben seems more interested in them than in the food the packaging contains. *When on earth did Ben become interested in calories?* Good God, the word “calorie” shouldn’t even feature in a teenage boy’s vocabulary.

The more I think about it the more I feel as if Ben’s become a kind of “food policeman”. If I want to treat myself to goodies like biscuits or chocolate I have to literally sneak them into the house and hide them. If he catches me... well... boy, am I in trouble! When he comes shopping with me he whips the offending items out of the trolley and back onto the shelf - choc-chip soft-bake cookies being the latest casualty that never made it to my mouth. (“You don’t need those, mum!” he barks. “Yes I do,” I plead. “I’ve had a bad day...”) I’m vaguely irritated. After all, I’m supposed to be the boss, not him.

He’s already planning what we’re going to eat at Christmas: sushi plus healthy things in filo pastry. Oh and he’s even offering to cook Christmas dinner. But no mince pies, chocolate logs, gooey creamy goodies or Christmas cake as we could all do with going on a health kick. So Ben says.

Meanwhile whatever I need from the cupboard or fridge has vanished, absorbed into the latest culinary delight. Talk about teenage boys eating you out of house and home...

The trouble is... I don’t think Ben *is* eating us out of house and

Please eat...

home; it's Paul and me who are doing most of the eating. Ben is just doing the cooking. But he always seems to be there, armed with another tray of something mouth-watering, insisting we sample it while he looks on like an indulgent grandma. "Try this, mum!" he'll say pushing a spoonful of whatever it is towards my face, refusing to take no for an answer. "Go on, go on!" The laden spoon gets so close I can't focus my eyes on it. I have no option but to open my mouth and taste.

Sometimes I feel so full I can't eat another bite. I especially love the potato focaccia he's just baked. It's fantastic with butter. Any worries I may have about Ben cutting back on food are promptly put on a back burner as he shovels this into his mouth, slice after luscious slice. But what I don't know is that, inside his head, something is already beating him up for getting out of control and "pigging out". It's a voice that is about to get louder. Much louder.

When Ben's not cooking, he's busy re-writing our cookery books. He looks almost saintly in his white apron as he conjures up yet another calorie and fat stripped meal or bake. ("See? You *can* make cakes without fat!"... "Why fry onions in oil when you can dry fry? It's so much healthier, mum.")

I'm reminded of the slimming magazine I used to buy in the 1970s with its Thin Twin recipes: re-worked with clever little calorie saving tricks like replacing half the meat with grated carrot, lightly spraying the pan with oil rather than slugging it in, using corn starch to make a cheese sauce rather than the traditional butter and flour (with half fat cheese naturally...)

"Look!" he exclaims with enthusiasm as we go round the local supermarket. "They're doing an 'extra light' mayonnaise now!" Ping - into our trolley it goes, having passed the fat and calorie content test with flying colours. Sometimes it seems as if he's hijacked the entire supermarket shopping experience. And the kitchen, too. He's making the shopping lists, organising the menus, even re-arranging the fridge

and cupboard contents. (“Don’t you mess it up, mum, or I’ll be furious!”) He’s begun to watch me when I’m eating. Like a hawk. If I leave anything on my plate he comes down on me like a ton of bricks and I’m sick of repeating, “I’m a middle-aged woman, I’m only 5ft 3, I don’t need to eat as much as a growing teenage boy!”

“Don’t eat that, you’ll spoil your evening meal!” Ben snaps as I reach for the biscuit jar. Yet again I feel irritation, but this time it’s tinged with something else that I can’t put my finger on.

Meanwhile the running has become more rigorous and the gym visits more frequent, supplemented by sit-ups, press-ups and crunches, plus a daily yoga session. I’m impressed with his dedication. But something at the back of my mind clicks in with *This isn’t normal...*

Is it my imagination or is Ben losing weight? So I say: “You realise that all this extra exercise means you should be eating much more than you are?” But he just shrugs it off, reminding me of how easily he puts on weight and insisting that he, with his body makeup and “low metabolism”, doesn’t need “loads of” food. And anyway he’s still a teenager, not a grown man.

“I don’t want to get fat,” he says, “You know what I was like as a kid”.

Or the more hurtful “Mum, why did you feed me so much when I was a kid?” to which I immediately snap: “I didn’t; you loved your food and made my life hell if you didn’t get it!”

Then I add: “With all this exercise and healthy eating there’s as much chance of you getting fat as there is of me winning the lottery.” I remind him that lots of young children have puppy fat. “And, anyway, you’re different now. Your body has changed.” I tell him I’m worried he isn’t eating properly and is losing weight.

Ben looks at me aghast, as if I’ve just made the most ridiculous comment in the universe. “Mum, I’ve got a gut! And a double chin! Look!” He prods the offending areas. All I see is skin.

Please eat...

Alright, I think, I'll prove to him how much he needs to eat with all this exercise. I send off for a book - a "bible" of sports nutrition - and point out the calorie-laden eating plans on its pages. "If you're doing weights, running, rowing and bikes you need to be eating at least *this much* every day." I point to page after page of charts. But Ben scarcely looks at them. He knows better.

All he seems bothered about is the damage that high levels of saturated fat can do to his body. It has become Public Enemy Number One. He refuses to eat anything with even a hint of saturated fat in it. And, before long, all the other fats have been thrown into the baddies basket, too. Fat is bad. Fat must be avoided at all costs. I'm painfully aware that Ben's whittling down the list of foods he will eat to the bare minimum: fruit, vegetables, salad and diet foods.

FAST-FORWARD TO THE present day. I'm beginning to put this book together and am talking to Ben about these crucial months between his 15th birthday and the end of summer 2009.

What prompts this is a photo of Ben and his friends taken at that birthday party. There's stuff everywhere; bedding, snacks, games consoles, all the usual things you'd expect in a boy's bedroom. A flushed Ben is standing on the left, smiling, hands in pockets - just a normal boy messing around with his mates. Earlier on, I remember, they'd been spraying each other with the shower hose and making a terrible racket.

"Inside I was feeling fat, flabby and greedy," he tells me. "I'd just eaten an entire box of chocolates in one sitting. Given half the chance I'd eat anything in one go and then make myself do a 60-minute run to wear it off, come back exhausted and have to sit down all afternoon because I was knackered."

He tells me how he began to get depressed, "constantly swinging from a real high to a real low; from eating loads to eating next to

nothing. It wasn't a new thing, though; I'd been like this for years - all or nothing. I found it hard to work out a middle ground. Food made me feel happy. But I began to feel I needed to 'earn' it otherwise I wasn't 'allowed' it. And I started skipping breakfasts, but then I'd mess it all up by having huge puddings in the evening and stuff, which is why - at that early stage - I wasn't losing weight, so you didn't notice anything. I had no idea what was happening to me. I was so mixed up, but I thought it was just part of being a teenager”.

When Ben first took up rugby, he enjoyed it. “It was fun, but as time went on it became like a millstone around my neck. I was fed up with it, but too scared to stop in case I put on weight. All that hard work for nothing; I couldn't face that. Then I began to look at the nutritional content of food and was horrified at the amount of calories I was eating. Heck, back then I didn't even know that whipped cream contained fat - I thought it was whipped milk! So I had a bit of a think. First I'd cut back on stuff like breakfasts and school dinners. Then I figured that, by switching to low fat or no fat options, I could eat the same quantity but do less exercise. What you were seeing over that summer, mum, was me re-writing recipes and producing fat-free bakes so I could stuff my face without getting fat.”

“So,” I say, “it felt like the proverbial ‘magic bullet?’”

“Yep, but the irony was that instead of exercising less I began to exercise more than ever: press-ups, sit-ups, you name it. And it continued to shock me how many calories were in things; stuff I used to eat without a second thought. Ice cream, biscuits, crisps... I began a mental black list of foods I wouldn't eat. Also, one of the reasons I'd stopped seeing my friends over that summer was because I knew they'd often end up in a burger or pizza bar, and that kind of place was a total no-go area for me.”

ONE AFTERNOON BEN ARRIVES back from the gym in a foul mood. I'm getting used to opening the front door and bracing myself

Please eat...

for the latest tale of woe.

“Talk to me, Ben,” I insist as he walks wordlessly past me like a zombie. “Tell me what’s wrong - maybe I can help.”

He rests his head against the hallway mirror, fists against the wall. Gradually he begins to emit a long, low roar, like an animal in pain, flicking his head round to stare me in the face. I haven’t seen him like this before.

“Mum, can’t you see?” he shrieks, flailing his arms around like he used to do as a toddler. “I hate the gym. I hate all this exercise. I hate it, hate it, hate it!” He’s beginning to get worked up, almost hysterical.

I’m taken aback. All I can say is “Then why do it? Stop right now. Just stop doing it!”

“I can’t, mum! Don’t you see? I *can’t* stop! I *have* to do it!” Tears are streaming down his reddened face. I can’t tell if the penetrating look he’s giving me is a cry for help or just hopelessness.

“Right, I’m going to cancel the gym membership,” I say as if this will solve the problem. “And I want you to stop all that running. Go out with your friends instead. Have fun!”

But I have a feeling I’m banging my head against a brick wall. Could Ben be addicted to exercise? Like someone can get addicted to drugs or alcohol?

CHOP, CHOP, CHOP. Ben’s in the kitchen with bags of assorted dried and fresh fruit. These days we buy an awful lot of fruit. He’s been in the kitchen for quite some time, carefully chopping the fruit before arranging it on a small plate. This is his dessert. The next dessert will look identical.

Ben won’t let me go to the supermarket alone; making the excuse that he needs to choose his own fruit. But I’m aware that he’s scrutinising what I buy more than ever. Everything that goes into the trolley is analysed to make sure it passes the fat and calories test, and if it doesn’t, then it goes back onto the shelf. It takes far longer to do

the supermarket shopping than it used to. It's also becoming incredibly stressful.

On the occasions when I do manage to sneak to the supermarket alone, I find I'm policing my own shopping. I'd better not buy this or that, because Ben will refuse to eat it. Things like cheese, puff pastry, ice cream, cookies and cake, even semi-skimmed milk are no-no's. Even bread has fat in it, says Ben, so he doesn't eat very much of that either. Better to buy low fat or no fat groceries because at least I know he'll eat them. I'd rather he eat these than nothing at all.

I also find myself flicking through food magazines, discounting the vast majority of recipes. I can't choose that one; it's got cheese in it. Some kind of sauce? Only if it's tomato sauce, and onions must now be dry-fried. Meat? Only if it is one hundred per cent lean. Pastry? Not a chance. Cream? Who are you kidding? Greek yoghurt maybe? Only if it's zero fat. Won't two per cent fat be okay? One per cent, maybe? Unfortunately not.

What's happened to the Ben who would eat anything? The boy who would clean his own plate and proceed to clean ours too?

In fact, watching him chopping up fruit, I've a sneaking suspicion that he's probably eating even less than we think. And I don't understand why, especially as he's doing all this exercise.

"Don't you think Ben's lost a lot of weight?" my mother-in-law remarks when she visits in September. She hasn't seen him since Christmas and I can see by her face she's shocked at the change. "Don't you think he should see a GP?"

That night we eat out at a local country pub. My mother-in-law is watching Ben like a hawk, noting what he does and doesn't eat, and how he's careful about what he chooses from the menu. He's taking awfully long to choose, too, switching from one choice to another, then back again. He's also silent and subdued.

These days he's like this much of the time.

Once she's gone I can't get her words out of my head - or the

Please eat...

shocked expression on her face. Suddenly I'm looking at Ben with different eyes. Yes we were aware he was losing weight because of the "healthy eating" and exercise. But I think we were also assuming he'd snap out of it once he was back at school, eating school dinners and playing rugby.

A day or so later, Ben and I spend a day in Liverpool. I'm so relieved to see he's back to his normal, light-hearted self. I'm even more relieved when we order a couple of huge takeout subs from Subway and sit on a bench eating, chatting away, just like old times. We visit the art gallery and I have a coffee in the café afterwards. Ben has a fizzy drink, a non-diet drink I notice. Then at the station we buy the latest Good Food magazine which we read together on the journey home.

It's this kind of event that confuses me, that makes me wonder if I'm worrying over nothing. Is Ben developing a problem? Or is it just a passing teenage phase? Will he bulk out again once he gets back to school dinners and the rugby pitch? I know my mother-in-law suggested we visit the GP. But how can I claim that Ben isn't eating when he clearly is? Or at least he is some of the time. I don't know what to do. I can't decide if there's anything wrong or not.

However Ben is still exercising, despite claiming that he hates it. He's exercising more than ever. And he's still revamping recipes and avoiding certain foods, and policing the kitchen and supermarket shopping. He is also getting thinner. So it wouldn't do any harm to have a chat with the GP. Just to be on the safe side. I make an appointment. The GP can't see us for another week or so.

back to school

THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR begins as usual. It's Year 11 - GCSE year - the final year before the sixth form. Ben seems much more subdued than last year. If I thought the hair preening and body checking were bad in the spring, things are 10 times worse now. He seems to be having a bad image day almost every day.

He's spending ages getting ready for school. Everything about his uniform is wrong: blazer too big, sweater too shapeless, shirt too unflattering - and almost immediately we have to buy new trousers as the old ones are far too big. We've been shopping and Ben has bought a girls' school sweater, tight and shaped at the waist, making him look even thinner. Boys' sweaters are too baggy. They make him look "fat", he says.

Every morning I catch him examining himself critically in the full-length mirror, carefully arranging his sweater, shirt and tie, and adjusting his hair which he's already straightened with tongs and messed up with goo.

Please let him be happy with the result, I whisper to myself knowing that if one hair's out of place Ben's mood will flip and he'll take it out on me. Why the heck did I ever suggest buying a bigger blazer so he could "grow into it" rather than one that fitted? He's swamped in it now and, of course, he's blaming me.

Part of me says this is normal 15 year old behaviour. Show me a teenager that isn't rude to their parents, doesn't check their hair and

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clothes one hundred times in the mirror and doesn't hate wearing school uniform.

But the other part of me says this isn't normal. What's happened to the boy whose birthday parties had to be held in shifts because he was so popular? The boy that sang in a band, watched movies and had fun?

Ben is still not mixing with his friends. "Mum, I feel so disconnected," he says. "I just can't relate to them anymore. And they're always annoying me."

This conversation is repeated almost every evening, like a stuck record. Someone always seems to have wound him up in some way and Ben always seems to be on a downer.

He's even less enthusiastic about rugby. It's the first match of the season and the parents are gathered around the pitch hugging Styrofoam cups of coffee. Some of the boys, including Ben's friend Kieran, have been picked to play for the second team with the sixth form boys. Ben has been picked, too, but I'm worried he doesn't have enough bulk. Not to play alongside 18 year olds built like brick outhouses. What is the coach thinking of? Ben's not keen, either, and tries to get the coach to move him back to the less aggressive third team. The coach has high hopes for Ben and isn't pleased. Something in me wishes the coach would refuse to let him play altogether. Can't he see Ben is too thin for rugby?

This season Ben just doesn't seem to have the stamina he had in the days when he would drive down the pitch like a steam roller, flattening the opposition in his path before hurtling himself and the ball over the touch line to loud cheers. I can't help thinking that if someone tackled him roughly now, he'd snap like a twig. So when he breaks his nose a week or so later and is invalidated out of the team it's not a great surprise. In fact it's quite a relief...

AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER I fall sick. Suddenly and without

warning I lose my balance. I feel nauseous and dizzy, as if I'm walking on a ship in high seas. My brain feels like mush. I can't think straight and I certainly can't work. Before long, supermarket shopping becomes a nightmare, too, as the shelves and aisles swim before my eyes. Ben takes over all the cooking and I spend the greater part of each day in bed.

So, in the event, it's me that visits the GP first. But the GP can't find anything wrong. I feel like a fake.

A day or so later I'm back in his surgery, this time with Ben.

"Ben's lost an awful lot of weight recently," I explain. "And he's been doing a lot of exercise over the summer."

The GP looks across at Ben. "Your mum seems to think you're not eating enough. What do *you* think?"

Ben shakes his head and sighs as if humouring me, then smiles and says calmly: "I'm fine. I really don't know what my mum's worrying about." The GP looks over at me, eyebrows raised for my response. I could be imagining it, but I suspect there is a hint of the "over-protective, fussy mother" in that look. Yet again I feel like a fraud.

"Okay, Ben, let's see how much you weigh - and I'll measure your height, too." The GP walks over to the scales and asks Ben to remove his shoes. Ben's weight is low, but not overly so. Not enough to start the alarm bells ringing if you hadn't known him as a big burly rugby player. The GP turns to me for my response. I can't read his expression.

A wave of self-doubt sweeps over me. Does he think I'm making it up? After all, he couldn't find anything wrong with me the other day. And now here I am with my son who doesn't appear to have anything wrong with him either. We're sent away with instructions to "eat sensibly and come back in a couple of weeks". I meekly take Ben home.

A few days later, Ben falls sick with flu-like symptoms and lies in

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bed groaning with sudden bouts of sobbing. I call the surgery and talk to the nurse.

“He’s not eating, he’s lethargic and he’s aching all over,” I explain, telling her that he doesn’t seem to have a temperature. Could it be flu? The nurse thinks it’s probably a virus, but she’s not sure, so I take him into the surgery to get checked over. No fever or vomiting, she writes in his notes, but he’s lost his appetite and is losing weight.

I’ve been busy Googling Ben’s symptoms. “Do you think he could be developing an eating disorder?” I ask, hoping and praying she’ll put my mind at rest. She doesn’t appear to be unduly concerned. Am I fussing over nothing? Is it just one of these mysterious 24-hour bugs that disappear as quickly as they came?

Back home Ben’s moods are beginning to swing quite violently. One minute he’s completely normal and the next he’s sobbing uncontrollably, claiming to be freezing cold, then hot, and aching all over. Cramps in his stomach make it uncomfortable to eat. I notice the skin on his hands, especially between the fingers, is dry, scaly and red. I take one of his hands to have a closer look. It’s ice cold.

I make two more appointments with the GP: one for Ben and another for me, because my nausea and dizziness are getting worse. The GP notes that Ben feels generally unwell, but - like the nurse - he doesn’t think it’s a viral infection. I point out that Ben’s still not eating properly. We’ve had to borrow my dad’s leather punch to add extra notches to his belt and buy new school trousers. Again I ask if Ben could be developing an eating disorder. The GP makes Ben promise to eat more and we’re dispatched off home with some creams for his dry skin. “It’s all in your mind!” a voice shouts inside my head.

“I’m here again!” I say, feeling like a fraud as I walk into the GP’s surgery the next day. But I manage to get him to refer me to a specialist (who eventually diagnoses a problem with my inner ear).

Then, the following week, it’s Ben’s turn. This time I book him in

with a different GP; I really can't face the other one again.

But Ben's weight has gone up. Damn, part of me says as Ben gives me one of his accusing *See, I said you're being silly* looks. That's put a spanner in the works. I feel as if I'm making a fuss over nothing.

"His mood is getting worse - and so is his behaviour," I tell the GP, hoping this will trigger alarm bells. The GP nods, turns to look at Ben and gives him a short pep talk about sensible eating.

"Starving yourself can seriously damage your body - the parts you can't see, the internal organs and so on," she tells Ben, explaining that he mustn't cut back on food. "At your age you need to put on muscle which means you need to eat sensibly." Then she adds: "If you'd like to see me on your own - without your mum - and just talk about things, then I'll be more than happy to do that. How about in three or four weeks' time? Once you've had time to think through what I've been saying?"

I can sense Ben getting agitated. Suddenly and without warning he stands up and shouts: "I'm fine, there's nothing wrong with me!" He glares at me. "You're just paranoid. I don't know what I'm f*cking doing here" and storms out of the surgery. I get "that look" again from the GP.

I feel helpless. Ben is losing weight fast and behaving strangely. Normally he'd listen to the GP's advice. That's the sort of person Ben is. Or the sort of person he used to be, with impeccable manners and respect for authority. But now he's in complete denial that there's anything wrong. I can't get my head round it. What happens if he continues to lose weight? More and more I'm worrying that, if left unchecked, whatever it is could develop into something serious like anorexia. I mean, anorexia has to begin somewhere, doesn't it? People don't just become skeletal overnight; they have to start losing weight first. Is this how anorexia begins? Is it possible to have anorexia, or at least to be developing anorexia, yet not appear to look much different from anyone else? But, surely, boys don't get

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anorexia? Or at least I've never heard of a boy getting anorexia. Yet my gut instinct tells me this could be where Ben's heading if someone doesn't take action soon. My blood freezes at the idea.

But Paul and I seem to be the only people that are worried. The GPs don't appear to be. Ben isn't worried, either. He can't see anything wrong. He doesn't seem to realise how drastically his behaviour, mood and physical appearance have changed over the past few months. This isn't like a normal illness or problem where recognisable symptoms are there for all to see: a broken bone, a worrying lump, blood loss or whatever - the sort of issues that GPs deal with on a daily basis. Here I am with a child who - if you hadn't seen him as a stocky rugby player - looks relatively normal, if rather thin. Apart from that there are no visible symptoms. I mean, he doesn't look like a "text book" anorexic. He's not skin and bone; he just looks skinny. Worse, he insists there is nothing wrong with him.

How on earth can I expect the medical profession to take me seriously when even the patient insists they're okay and alleges their mother is imagining it all? Especially when that mother appears to have a curious, unidentifiable illness of her own.

Am I imagining it? Is it all in my mind? Am I going crazy? I am seriously beginning to wonder...

six pack

OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS our family life undergoes a complete shift from being a normal family to being a family coping with a nightmare. Unless you've been through it, you won't believe how quickly an eating disorder can creep up on a person. The emerging realisation that your healthy, happy teenage child is developing anorexia is like a horror story unfolding before your eyes. And, by the time you realise something is very seriously wrong, they're already ensnared. By mid-October 2009 Ben has transformed into someone we don't recognise. One day it suddenly dawns on me that I am terrified of my own child.

Anorexia has taken over Ben. Anorexia has taken over our family. And anorexia isn't just about eating; it's about a host of other things - like depression, panic, zero self-esteem and much, much more. I don't just mean feeling a "bit low" now and again; I mean deep, dark depression and self-hatred. I mean banging your head against a wall or thumping your fists against your skull, throwing things around and animal howling... that sort of depression.

With anorexia it's as if someone else takes over your mind. Someone that taunts you all the time, telling you you're fat and that you'll never be popular until you get thin.

Anorexia has you pinching the skin on your skinny stomach, taunting you that it's rolls of flab. Anorexia makes you exercise like crazy and examine yourself over-critically in the mirror. Anorexia

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makes you hate what you see. Anorexia lies to you that it can make you ultra-handsome, ultra-popular and ultra-confident. If you get thin. It's the ultimate carrot dangling in front of your eyes.

Anorexia lies that it can put you in control of your life. And part of this control is to control exactly what goes into your stomach, how much of it and when. The minute you deviate from this rigid eating pattern, anorexia lies to you that you're out of control. Just one serving of dinner that's not the "right size" and anorexia can have the sufferer banging their head on the fridge and screaming. I know, because this is what Ben is doing virtually every day by late autumn 2009.

With anorexia, it's as if your child becomes two distinctly different beings: their normal self - the child you've known, nurtured and loved since birth - and "the anorexia" - a terrifying, domineering bully that torments both child and parent. An alternate personality that's hell-bent on destruction, a "thing" that transforms your child's behaviour, mannerisms, facial expressions, even voice tone and pitch. Often in an instant. Like flicking a switch. And, the deeper Ben gets sucked into this illness, the more frequently this alternate personality kicks in.

Many people with anorexia give this "thing" a name. The anorexia is often referred to as AN (Anorexia Nervosa) or ED (Eating Disorder). One parent I read about describes anorexia as like having a goblin perched on his daughter's shoulder. Some people even think of anorexia as a kind of "demon". Yes, I decide, that's what it's like. A demon.

The Anorexia Demon.

Looking at family photographs is a painful, instant reminder of what Ben used to look like and should look like, but no longer does. We used to have a big, burly rugby player for a son. Now we have a ghostly waif whose mood is becoming so volatile I am terrified of what he will do next.

One morning I'm standing in the hallway waiting to take Ben to the school bus. "Ben!" I shout up the stairwell for the umpteenth time. "We're going to miss it!"

My muscles tense the moment I've said those words. It's a physical reaction I will become familiar with over the next few months. I feel like a tightly coiled spring.

Almost every morning I'll hear a sudden crash as something is thumped or kicked upstairs, or a door is slammed shut. Often there's a guttural growling that rises in volume to be rounded off with a string of shrieked obscenities. If Ben makes it downstairs he'll continue swearing and shouting, or he'll break down sobbing - Ben who never used to swear in his life.

Sometimes he'll yell and crash around so much that I feel like slapping him across the face like they used to do to hysterical women in the old black-and-white movies. Instead, I just scream and scream at him to calm down. If, that is, I can make my voice louder than his. I slam the front door closed. It's only 7.15 in the morning and our street is eerily silent. I suspect they can hear us on the other side of town. They can certainly hear us next door. After all, we live in a semi-detached house and share a party wall. I can hear them tinkling on the piano or pushing the vacuum cleaner around. God only knows what they're thinking now... They probably think I'm killing him. By the time I eventually get Ben into the car his distress is agonising. And we're not even at the school bus stop yet, let alone school...

Some days I get the silent treatment where he sits in the passenger seat, staring straight ahead as if in some kind of terrible trance. To be truthful, I'm not sure which is worse, that or the screaming and violence. At the bus stop he slams the car door so viciously I'm frightened it will fall off. I feel as if I'm being punished, but I'm not sure what for. Why is he taking it out on me? But taking *what* out on me? That's what I don't understand. What is wrong with Ben? Okay every parent experiences a bit of hassle getting their children ready

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for school in the morning, but this is a completely different kettle of fish.

Ben slouches off down the hill to the bus stop where he stands apart from the other kids. Sometimes he runs down the hill still in tears. And all the time I'm coiled up like a spring, primed for the next onslaught.

I dread him coming home. I used to look forward to picking him up from school and listening to all the news and gossip. Now he seems to be in a permanently unpleasant mood, returning with tales of how so-and-so annoyed him or everyone's been ignoring him. I say the obvious: "Well what do you expect if you ignored your friends all summer?" No response. I'm beginning to get used to Ben storming up to his bedroom and slamming the door, followed by a crash of some sort as he thumps something.

Is it my imagination or is he exercising more than ever? Broken nose or no broken nose, he still seems to be able to fill up the week with some kind of physical activity.

"I'M JUST NOT HUNGRY," he says, pushing the food to the side of his plate at the evening meal. "I had a massive lunch."

I have no idea that he's only eaten a few lettuce leaves and an apple. I also have no idea that he is so ravenous he could eat a horse, but he's forcing himself to have just enough to quell the hunger pangs and then stop. When the pangs start again, as they do very soon, what I will come to recognise as the "anorexia voice" - the "inner critic on steroids" inside his head - tells him not to be so greedy.

"Aren't you starving after all that running?" I ask one evening in the careful way I'm beginning to master these days. Ben has joined the cross country club which runs after school a couple of times a week and which he's embraced with an almost religious fervour. I have no idea where the new, thinner Ben finds the energy. I feel

uneasy about him doing it. Why are the coaches allowing it? Can't they see he's too thin?

"Mum, I had a big lunch," he says. And for once it's true. If I'd been a fly on the wall in the school canteen, I would have seen him tucking into a proper hot meal for a change - or devouring a large slice of millionaire's shortbread for dessert.

That, he'll tell me years later, is because he knew he'd be running after school and had "earned the right" to eat.

And meanwhile something inside his head is goading him to run faster and further. Yet, because his body isn't getting enough fuel, it's becoming harder to do. But he has to keep on going because if he stops he'll get fat. Or at least that's what this "thing" inside his head tells him.

With a heavy heart I decide it's time to "come clean" and explain to the school that Ben isn't himself at the moment. I call the Head of Year and warn him that Ben's behaving unusually and may begin to do "strange things". We're not entirely sure what's wrong, but he's lost so much weight recently that we think it may be an eating disorder. We're waiting for a diagnosis.

The teacher isn't surprised; he's already noticed the dramatic weight loss and so have half the PE staff. After all, Ben is involved in just about every sport in the school. They are worried. Seriously worried.

IT'S A GOOD THING I came clean. Very soon I begin to get regular emergency phone calls from school asking me to come and pick up the pieces of whatever chaos the emerging eating disorder has driven Ben to create that day. I begin to dread the school's name showing up on my phone. Usually it's Sheila - the school nurse - that gets in touch.

I'm getting used to dashing around for my car keys, heading off to school and rushing into the reception area. "I'm just off to see Sheila,

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she's expecting me." I make my way to the medical centre, climbing the stone staircase, past the library and through the fire doors. "Knock, knock," I announce, pushing open the door. Sheila greets me with a hug. "Come in, dear, and sit down," she says, asking if I'd like a coffee.

Instantly I feel safe. I glance up at the mantelpiece above the boarded-up fireplace. There's an assortment of trinkets, teddy bears and thank you cards. Behind me is a squishy sofa and through the archway are four iron bedsteads made up for emergencies. Through the tall sash windows with their old hand-made glass I can see the rose garden and cricket pitch, and beyond that the rugby fields and the woods rising up from the river. The glass makes the trees look wiggly and for a moment I'm distracted...

Sheila's voice nudges me back to reality. Ben is missing some of his lessons, she says. "The thing is... if the register says he's in school we need to know where he is." Usually Ben can be found hiding in the boys' toilets and Sheila will calm him down in the medical centre. These days it takes an awful lot to calm Ben down. Once Sheila spent an entire afternoon walking with him around the grounds, just talking and trying to get through to him.

"The sports coaches are concerned that he's lost a lot of weight," she says. I tell her I already know this; I've had a chat with the Head of Year. "And the netball coach saw him pushing himself hard in the gym, almost as if he was in a trance." She looks at me, waiting for a response.

Suddenly I'm pouring it all out. Ben isn't eating. He can't stop exercising and he's isolating himself from his friends. He's getting hysterical, flailing and shrieking, crying out like a wounded animal, banging his head against walls and getting violent. Getting him out of the door in the morning is a nightmare. Picking him up from school is even worse. Meals are a battle ground and he goes to pieces most evenings. He seems to hate school. We've taken him to the GP

several times but we're just told to go away with instructions to eat sensibly and come back in a week or so.

Sheila passes me some tissues, goes to fetch the coffee and sits down to talk. "How much do you know about eating disorders?" she asks in a way that makes my blood run ice cold. It's the first time someone has echoed my own concerns.

I tell her I know virtually nothing; it's not something you think about when you have a boy. I remember there was a skeletal woman at the gym who used to punish herself on the cardio equipment. People used to whisper and stare, and ask why the management allowed it. But apart from being a "diet gone wrong", I know nothing about eating disorders. Zilch.

"I did wonder," I say slowly, hoping she'll say no, it's probably just teenage angst gone a bit too far... But instead she says, "I think you should ask your GP to get Ben referred to CAMHS".

Sheila explains that CAMHS stands for *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services*. They're the people that deal with eating disorders in our city. No, she's never come across a boy with anorexia, but - unfortunately - it looks as if all the signs are there. Deep down I know she's right. "I'm so sorry," she says. "But the good news is that eating disorders are treatable and CAMHS are very good."

But, I ask her with mounting panic, if eating disorders are about, well, *eating*, then why the extreme behaviour and moods? The thing is, Sheila explains, eating disorders are mental illnesses just as OCD or clinical depression are mental illnesses. They don't just affect the body. After all, the brain needs fuel to function. She tells me to go back to our GP and insist on a referral right away.

"Look," she says, holding the door open for me afterwards, "Whatever the school can do... whatever I can do... don't hesitate to ask for help. Call me anytime. And if I'm not here, my deputy will be. Meanwhile I'll keep a discreet eye on Ben, and the medical centre is open to him whenever he needs a bolt-hole. Or whenever *you* do for

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that matter, Bev". She even gives me her mobile number in case I need to get hold of her in an emergency. It's the first of many occasions when I will feel eternally grateful to her.

Later that afternoon when Paul gets home I tell him about my visit to Sheila. "Right, that's it," he announces angrily, picking up the phone and dialling the GPs' surgery. Minutes later he has a GP on the line. He insists on an immediate referral - urgently and without delay. It's clear that Paul means business and he gets his way. Good old Paul. We spend the rest of the evening trying to come to terms with the fact that our only child probably has anorexia. Ben has a mental illness. That's difficult to grasp. But, as Paul says, by catching it early enough we should be able to get it sorted out fairly quickly. Ben's not like the woman at the gym by any stretch of the imagination. *Well not yet, at any rate*, we think to ourselves silently. We wait for CAMHS to get in touch.

BEN IS STILL COMING HOME from school with tales of how so-and-so annoyed him. Or of how he's being ignored by everyone as if he's invisible. It's become our prime topic of conversation as Ben gets increasingly agitated and upset.

One evening, following a particularly distressing meltdown, I attempt to give him a reassuring cuddle, even though my whole being wants to slap him and yell: *Stop this!! For God's sake stop this!!!*

Ben stands there rigid - unemotional, blank and numb - staring ahead into space like a zombie. "Please Ben," I plead, tears streaming down my face. "Just tell me what's wrong... Please tell me what's wrong so we can do something about it..."

"Can't you see?" he screams suddenly, making me jump out of my skin. "Whatever I say, whatever I do, I just get ignored - no-one talks to me!"

At the heart of the problem lies one boy. This boy is the cleverest boy in the year and now - it seems - the most popular, especially with

the girls. The image I'm getting, from what Ben says, is of this boy surrounded by an adoring public wherever he goes. This boy revels in adoration and his admirers hang on to his every word.

Meanwhile Ben fades into the background. Everyone ignores him. He doesn't get hugs. He doesn't get admired. And this boy is often too busy sending and receiving texts from his adoring public to bother with his old friend Ben.

Worse, this boy has a six pack which attracts gasps of admiration from everyone. Or at least that's Ben's version of events.

Given different circumstances, I'd laugh it off and tell Ben not to be so ridiculous. But this is serious. Deadly serious. And I feel sorry for this boy who must have no idea of the effect his actions are having on Ben.

I'm painfully aware that Ben is exercising more than ever in a bid to get that coveted six pack so he'll be "loved" (his words) like this boy. But the more Ben exercises and the less he eats, the more weight and muscle he loses. And the more the eating disorder forces him to withdraw socially, the more impossible the task becomes. It is a vicious circle. And Ben is blind to what is happening.

BUT IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS. Sometimes the emerging eating disorder gives us a bit of time off. Bonfire Night - 5th November - is one such occasion. For once the weather is fine and dry, but because it's so very cold we've packed a hot picnic to take to the local fireworks display. I've baked large jacket potatoes and inserted a couple of hot sausages into each with some fried onions and BBQ sauce. (Yes, *fried* onions...) I've also taken along some of Ben's home-made gingerbread and mulled apple juice in a thermos flask, crossing my fingers that he will eat it all.

For once everyone is relatively relaxed. By now my inner ear problem has receded, too, so I feel much more like my old self. Also, to my relief, Ben eats everything without any fuss. That's what's so

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odd, I think to myself again. It's like Jekyll and Hyde. One moment he's relatively okay and the next he's a monster. After the fireworks the three of us make our way home along the dark suburban streets, kicking the fallen leaves as we go. Just like any other family.

But I can't totally relax. Underneath I know that the monster, demon or whatever nickname we give Ben's condition will be back, picking up where it left off and dragging him below the surface.

IT'S AGES BEFORE I can say the "A" word. *Anorexia*. For some reason the term *eating disorder* doesn't sound as serious whereas *anorexia* conjures up terrifying images in my head of skeletal people that are more like the walking dead. Or celebrities like Karen Carpenter and Lena Zavaroni who lost their fight against the condition. Or that woman at the gym.

Frightened of what this illness could do to my child, I spend a lot of time Googling for anything I can find on eating disorders. Like any condition you look up, there's so much information - some of it written by "experts", some by parents of children with eating disorders, some by the patients themselves, and most of it pretty scary.

It's also confusing. One website says this, and another says that... Then there are the sensationalist media reports featuring celebrities with eating disorders or extreme "before and after" photos of someone that's recovered from anorexia. Or someone that hasn't.

Finally there are the sinister websites written by people who are only just hanging onto the threads of their brittle lives, their bodies permanently damaged or disabled from the effects of long term starvation. What's doubly frightening is the impression I'm getting that, once ensnared, this is something that is very hard to break free from. These "hardened anorexics" are well aware they're destroying themselves, yet they seem powerless to do anything about it. A bit like a drug addict hooked on heroin - some may get clean while

others never do. I'm quickly realising that anorexia isn't something you can just "snap out of" or a "diet gone too far".

If only it was this straightforward.

And still there is no sign of an appointment with CAMHS.

Please eat... A mother's struggle to free her teenage son from anorexia is 253 pages long and comprises 32 chapters. It can be purchased from Amazon. It is also available as a Kindle ebook from Amazon.

acknowledgments

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE who has supported us in our battle with anorexia. The following is in no particular order...

Firstly thank you to the CAMHS team for providing 24 months of support. Thank you to Sheila, the school nurse, who took Ben - and me - under her wing and suggested I put our experiences into a book. I wish you all the best in your new vocation in Uganda; I know you will be awesome. Also, thank you to the Headmaster and staff for going out of their way to help in any way they could.

I must thank my husband Paul for being my rock through the dark days. At times the going was tough but you were always there for me. Thank you to my sister for being there on those Sunday afternoons when I needed a shoulder to cry on and the hundreds of other times you supported Paul, Ben and me. Thank you to my parents. Dad, I'm so sorry you passed away before you could see your grandson fully recover.

Thank you to all the FEAST-ies from the *Around the Dinner Table* forum. You know who you are! Thank you to my fabulous volunteer proof-readers: Sue S, Becky, Eva, Becki and my sister Alison. Thank you to all the reviewers who have said nice things about this book. Thank you to Oxford University's Health Experiences Research Group for permitting me to use some quotes from Ulla's interview with Ben.

Finally words can't express how thankful I am to Sue - the tiny woman with the big smile and even bigger heart who supported me, selflessly, until her illness took her away.

And, of course, thank you once again to my wonderful son, Ben, for being courageous enough to allow me to share his story with you.

by the same author

Anorexia Boy Recovery: a mother's blog about her teenage son's recovery from anorexia, Part I (2011) - by Bev Mattocks

Anorexia Boy Recovery: a mother's blog about her teenage son's recovery from anorexia, Part II (2012) - by Bev Mattocks

Interested in reading our story in more detail? Since January 2011 I've been writing a regular blog about my teenage son's recovery from anorexia: ***AnorexiaBoyRecovery.blogspot.co.uk***.

I love blogs. As a serial journal writer I've been doing this kind of writing since... well... for an awful long time: first my teenage journals, then a regular blog for a regional newspaper and blogs for various business clients - and now this blog.

I love it when someone tells me how much my blog has helped them in their own family's battle with anorexia. Of course I'm neither a clinician nor an expert; I am just an ordinary mum. But when you suddenly find yourself on this devastating journey, it can be reassuring to know that others have been along this road too. To know what they went through, to know what signs to watch out for and to know what worked. And, importantly, during those many false summits and disappointments, to know how they found the strength to carry on fighting and guide their child towards recovery. This is why I write my blog.

But, because blogs are difficult to scroll through or refer back to, I made the decision to publish my blog in paperback: in two parts - 2011 and 2012 - both of which are available on Amazon and as ebooks.

Like my blog, these 300+ page books describe our battle with anorexia in more detail, including countless incidents that haven't

been included in *Please eat* in order to compress the story line and keep the book to a manageable length.

So, if you're interested in reading more about our long battle with anorexia, these books are definitely well worth a read. And, to keep up to date with Ben's progress in 2013 and beyond, why not follow my blog?

Best wishes,

Bev Mattocks, February 2013

resources

Websites

www.aroundthedinnertable.org - The *Around the Dinner Table* forum provides support for parents and caregivers of anorexia, bulimia and other eating disorder patients

www.feast-ed.org - *FEAST (Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders)* is an international organisation of, and for, parents to help loved ones recover from eating disorders by providing information and mutual support, promoting evidence-based treatment, and advocating for research and education

www.b-eat.co.uk - *BEAT* provides helplines, online support and a network of UK-wide self-help groups to help adults and young people in the UK beat their eating disorders

www.mengetedstoo.co.uk - *Men Get Eating Disorders Too* is a UK based charity dedicated to representing and supporting the needs of men with eating disorders

www.maudsleyparents.org - *Maudsley Parents* is a US based volunteer organisation of parents who have helped their children recover from anorexia and bulimia through the use of a family-based treatment known as the Maudsley approach, an evidence-based therapy for eating disorders

www.kartiniclinic.com - the *Kartini Clinic* is a US based medical and mental health treatment facility dedicated exclusively to the treatment of eating disorders in children and young adults - this website includes a stack of useful information, videos, etc

www.drSarahRavin.com - *Dr Sarah Ravin* is a US based eating disorders therapist whose website includes a highly informative blog plus other useful information

www.anorexiaboy.co.uk - my website which talks about our fight to help our son recover from anorexia

www.youtube.com/user/CandMedPRODUCTIONS/videos - C&M Productions' eating disorder resource for carers promoting evidenced based treatment and hope

www.thenewmaudsleyapproach.co.uk - an excellent resource for professionals and carers of people with eating disorders

Books

Skills-based Learning for Caring for a Loved One with an Eating Disorder: The New Maudsley Method - by Janet Treasure

Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder - by James Lock and Daniel Le Grange

Treating Bulimia in Adolescents: A family-based approach - by James Lock and Daniel Le Grange

Decoding Anorexia: How Breakthroughs in Science Offer Hope for Eating Disorders - by Carrie Arnold

Brave Girl Eating: The inspirational true story of one family's battle with anorexia - by Harriet Brown

Eating With Your Anorexic - by Laura Collins

Just Tell Her to Stop - by Becky Henry

Running on Empty: A Diary of Anorexia and Recovery - by Carrie Arnold

A Girl Called Tim: Escape from an Eating Disorder Hell - by June Alexander

Boys Get Anorexia Too - by Jenny Langley

Hope with Eating Disorders: a self-help guide for parents, carers and friends of sufferers - by Lynn Crilly

Blogs

anorexiaboyrecovery.blogspot.co.uk - the blog which I began writing in January 2011

ed-bites.blogspot.co.uk - a super blog by Carrie Arnold, author and recovered former anorexia sufferer

www.lurassoapbox.net - a fabulous blog by Laura Collins, founder of FEAST and ATDT

charlotteschuntering.blogspot.co.uk - a blog by Charlotte, one of the ATDT members