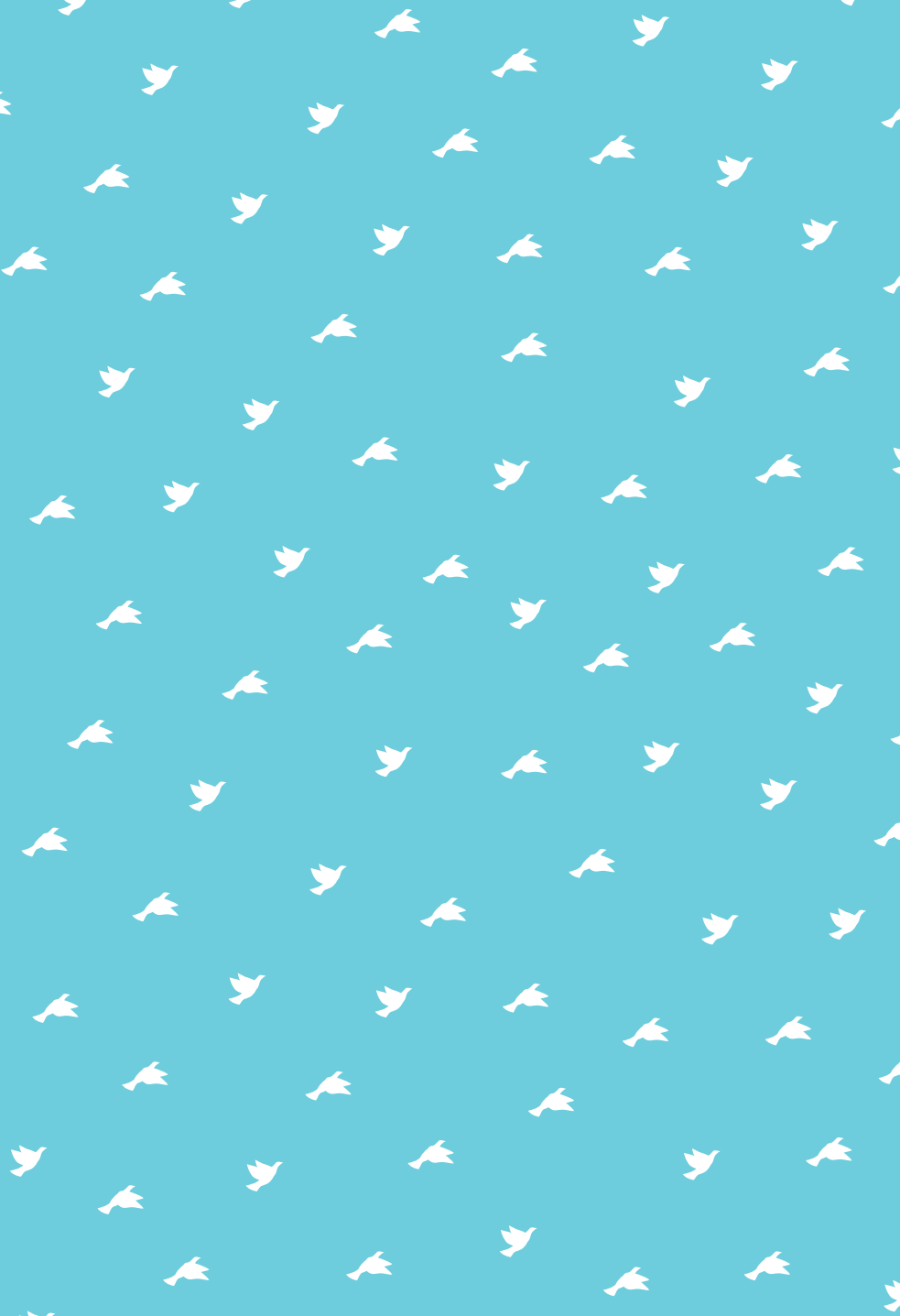




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The rippling lines on the left of the cover represent the challenges faced by people with eating disorders (ED), they also symbolize the distorted and fragmented inner self due to excessive control. The cleanliness on the right of the cover portrays the sense of calmness after the storm. The center of the word “Control” is hollowed out, as if opening a window to allow us to see the vast and bright sky on the next page. The flying birds on the cover resonate with the small birds on the next page, symbolizing that they fly into our lives to bring hope and light to the wounded soul.

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## Foreword

Having researched on eating disorder and treated such patients for over three decades, I earnestly resonate with Pat's book in several non-trivial ways. She convincingly showed us that although fat phobia has been elevated to become the core feature of eating disorder, it is but an epi-phenomenon in the genesis and course of illness of affected patients. This is because eating disorder is fundamentally less about fat phobia and dieting than about a self-hurting approach to solving the problems of living across the different phases of life. Eating disorder ("ED") may therefore be considered, first and foremost, a living disorder ("LD").

I recall an anorexia nervosa patient with traumatic family experience that I had treated since she and I were young adults. She wore long hair and dressed like an adolescent all through the years. When we met each other at the clinic three decades later, she retained the same general adolescent look though the unavoidable external signs of ageing were visible at a close distance. She had lost her menses for 30 years and was still much underweight. When I asked her whether she's worried about persistent amenorrhea and osteoporosis, she replied me this way: "I have lost not only my menses, but work, marriage, health, love and everything else in life".

I have anorexia nervosa patients who shared how their experience with busy clinic doctors was like. One had this to say: "I saw the doctor for ten minutes or less. Every time he asked me what my weight is and advised me that I must eat more to gain weight if I do not want to be locked in a psychiatric hospital again. We did not talk about the difficulties I encountered in my life. I know weight preoccupation is a key diagnostic symptom of eating disorder, but I do not feel my problem is about weight at all. It makes me think that the doctor is more weight-obsessed than I am!"

Any good theory of the causation of eating disorder will have to explain the well documented fact that they afflict primarily young females across the globe. It is also a hard fact that whereas the cultural fear of fatness is ubiquitous today, clinical eating disorder affects a much smaller number of individuals. Thus, it is those who are facing difficulties in living as well as over-control food intake that come to develop eating disorder. In this respect, I concur that a sense of control (over-control or under-control or an intimidating combination of both) is a core issue in the eating disorders. Control for eating disorder sufferers is certainly double-edged. It is a problem solving as well as a problem creating method of coping. It cheers as well as depletes the person adopting it. Pat has elegantly illustrated its complexity and its gradual transformation into resilience in this book.

Eating disorder is also one of the few mental disorders that have been found to be largely irresponsive to psychiatric drug treatment. This repeatedly proven scientific finding lends further credence to the fact that

eating disorder is rooted in interwoven psychological and social predicaments that demand psychological and social interventions to address and heal, such as by nurturing a genuine interest in life. This too Pat has generously shared in the final part of her book. Admirably, she has extended her recovery to lending a helping hand to others for their healing to occur. Although every eating disorder patient is unique and the journeys of healing defy generalization, Pat has the rare advantage of having been both a sufferer and a healer to tell us that deeply binocular story of the experience of eating disorder.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to eating disorder sufferers and their families as well as health care professionals. I greatly appreciate Pat for her professional and yet intimate sharing, and I congratulate the Hong Kong Eating Disorders Association for having accomplished such a meaningful task of publishing the book to benefit a wider community. HEDA has transformed countless family members from being helpless sufferers into partners of healing for eating disorder sufferers. This book is another remarkable step in this very noble direction.

Professor Sing Lee

## Preface

Many people find it difficult to understand why individuals with eating disorders have such a complex relationship with eating and constantly battle with their thoughts and decisions around it. They wonder how complicated eating can really be. Perhaps they cannot comprehend the conflicting relationship between themselves and food, and why they are so fixated on their body image. Is this simply a result of societal and cultural influences?

**If I were to choose something to describe eating disorders, I would say it is a terrifying "lover" that is hard to let go of. Sometimes it pursues me, sometimes I pursue it.**

Those who have experienced eating disorders refer to it as "ED". Each person on this journey has a different understanding of it. Surprisingly, they unanimously claim that ED feels real as if it accompanies them every day. If you have to choose something to describe ED, what would it be?

The past always influences the present. Do you remember when ED first appeared in your life? When looking back, we may discover some traces of it in

our past experiences. In fact, ED appears in our lives much earlier than we imagine. Memories may be blurry and feelings may fade away, but ED has been with us all along. There are something it is doing which it wants to let us know.

Having lived three fourth of her life with ED, Pat has transformed from a young girl desperately pursuing thinness to a wounded counselor, a companion as well as a helper on the recovery journey of people with eating disorders. While walking alongside them, she unfolds her own past, eventually reaching her heart of hearts that she had never paid attention to.

She discovered that sometimes ED pursued her, but more often, it was her to pursue ED.

We cannot change the past. However, self-awareness from our past empowers us to make decisions in the present moment, whether to accept, be indifferent, transform or... We all have the freedom to decide in the here and now. Despite each person with eating disorders having a different story, we invite you to embark on Pat's journey of exploring the sea of memories with curiosity and gentleness, and gain a deeper understanding of yourself.

## About Pat

Our consultant Patricia Kitchener (Pat) grew up in Canada and began her tumultuous relationship with food and body image during her formative years. She firstly experienced anorexia nervosa and then bulimia nervosa. With over thirty years of experience in the field of mental health, Pat is now a professional psychotherapist specializing in the treatment of eating disorders. She also has extensive expertise in couple therapy, gender relations, and grief counseling. Pat has been working closely with Chinese families affected by eating disorders in Canada, providing counseling and support to individuals and their families struggling with eating disorders. Additionally, Pat is devoted to raising awareness of eating disorders in various sectors of society. She has held positions as chairperson, board member and advisor in several organizations dedicated to eating disorders.

We express our gratitude to Pat for sharing her story of living with eating disorders, providing us an opportunity to understand ED beyond their symptoms and discover alternative ways of getting along with it beyond "resistance."



Exploring the past is not to blame anyone. But rather, it is about listening to the unheard voices, understanding the suppressed emotions, and acknowledging the needs that have gone unnoticed.





## Those seemingly inconspicuous past events have left a profound impact on your life.

Many childhood memories, whether they were fun, boring, or heart-breaking, have faded over time. However, this particular incident has deeply imprinted itself in my heart.

When I was almost 8 years old, my dad, who used to be a pilot, changed his job and started working as a weather reporter at a television station. Back in those days, we did not have a television at home so my mom took us to a furniture store to watch my dad "on TV" through the glass window. One day, my dad went to work with his reddened face from drinking. While he was reporting the weather, he suddenly collapsed due to intoxication. The TV camera swiftly skipped over this scene. Probably the viewers did not see my dad getting drunk, but the whole television station was clear about what had happened.

Consequently, my father was dismissed from the television station. He then moved to his parents' place. Meanwhile, my mom took my sister and me to her mother's house. At that time, I was still excited and thought that it was going to be a long trip. My mom was unusually quiet, busily deciding what to discard and what to take with us. Her hollow gaze expressed an unspoken sorrow.



**The adult world hides many secrets. They don't want to impact children, but they can't completely prevent these influences either.**

I did not remember much about the days at my grandmother's house, except that sometimes she exchanged hesitant glances with my mom. When they engaged in long conversations, my sister and I would be sent to another room. Later on, I discovered that my grandmother disagreed with my mom visiting my dad. It was probably because my dad had done something terrible in my grandmother's eyes, which was why she did not allow my mom to see him. However, despite my maternal grandmother's advice, my parents reconciled.

For the rest of my childhood, we constantly moved homes due to my dad's alcohol problem. In the eight years until junior high school, I had never completed a full academic year in one school. The constant moving exposed me to different living environments: apartments, shabby rooms, and even the basement of a refugee family. During that time, my mom became the primary breadwinner of the family but was often not at home due to work. My parents argued frequently, neighbors called the police, and my sister took me to her friend's house as a temporary refuge. I thought I had grown accustomed to such a tumultuous life and did not realize the impact it had on me. However, these influences gradually surfaced in my later life.



**Some people use their childhood to heal their entire lives, while others spend a lifetime trying to heal their childhood. The difference lies in how the family responds to the inner issues.**

Our family had a secret: my mom did not want a second child. In fact, beneath the surface of my parents' seemingly simple and happy life, there were undercurrents. My dad loved children and wanted our family to be filled with more joy and vitality. On the other hand, my mom was content with the small family of three after my older sister was born and did not want to add any new member. My dad persistently persuaded my mom to have more children, but she remained hesitant. Did my birth represent a consensus they had reached or imply my mom's compromise?

My arrival brought some changes to the family, like making a swirl in a latte art, the beautiful pattern was disrupted and could not be restored. When I was little, I was cared for by two "mothers" – my biological mother and my older sister who took on a maternal role. My mom was aware of the "hostility" from my older sister towards me. She therefore asked her to help take care of me, hoping that our relationship would become closer through hands-on caregiving. Before I was born, my sister had been the sole focus of attention in the family. My presence not only diverted the attention and love she had received from the family, but also brought expectations of

her as an older sister. She was no longer the little princess of the family.

However, my mom's attempts to bring my sister and me closer were not effective. All I heard and saw were my older sister arguing with my mom, my mom trying to reason with her, and the scenes of their conflicts and reconciliations. Nevertheless, my mom and sister still shared a relationship that others could not enter. They passed secret notes to each other, my mom would stay "neutral" when my sister bullied me. I tried hard to gain my mom's attention and affection but was constantly obstructed by my sister. I couldn't receive sufficient intimacy and care from my mom, nor could I count on my sister's love. As a result, from an early age, I learned to take care of myself. If I could not rely on even my closest mom, whom could I depend on?



**In an insecure environment, I became accustomed to being on edge, to the extent that I couldn't even realize when I was feeling anxious.**

I had been attending Catholic school since I was young, its decorations and structured timetable rescued me from the whirlpool of insecurity I felt at home. Only when I was at school and church, I could relax and cast aside worries, temporarily not having to think about "what will happen next". It allowed my mind and soul to take a brief breath in moments of tranquility and comfort.

However, this was only a fleeting respite. The teachers' unpredictability and elusive behavior once again triggered my sensitive nerves. I had been praised by a teacher in front of the whole class. On the other hand I had also been publicly humiliated by the class teacher for a minor mistake (I had accidentally torn a hole in my writing practice book). Watching how my classmates who were labeled as "poor students" or "misbehaved" suffered—being criticized, ignored, treated coldly, or even abandoned—I could not help but wonder: How could I escape these outcomes? How could I gain the teacher's praise and trust? How could I avoid being abandoned by them? My "inner theater" began to bustle—I observed the teachers' words and actions, analyzed their unspoken thoughts and expect-

tations, honed my social skills to meet every expectation they had on me, and even surpassed their perception of me. I strived to become the "teacher's pet" in the eyes of my teachers, unknowingly pushing myself onto the path of pursuing perfection.





**Feeling ashamed is unpleasant, but it is a tool that propels the rapid growth in children.**

When I was young, I longed to have a birthday party like the kids next door that we could play with one another for the whole day, enjoy delicious food, and exchange gifts together. I had not gone to school at that time, I did not know the concept of “birthday” nor how to count days on a calendar. Seeing how the neighboring kids hold a birthday party, I followed them and invited my friends to go to my home for the party on a certain day. On the way home, I excitedly thought about how to prepare for my first birthday party. However, I was greeted by an angry mother when I arrived home. Seeing her face change, the excitement in my heart cooled and beads of cold sweat formed on my forehead. It seemed that... I had done something wrong. My mom told me that I could not just inform people about having a birthday party without consulting her. She could not arrange it in such a short time. Besides, my birthday had already passed that year so she could not explain this “lie” to all the neighbors.

After that incident, my mom did not talk to me nor did she make eye contact with me for quite a long time. She withdrew her love from me and became an insurmountable stone wall that no compensation could break through.

**I must not make my mother feel embarrassed; it was even more painful than losing the opportunity to play.**





## Feeling of shame is a driving force that urges you toward perfection.

Parents are akin to a mirror, children know and understand who they are from their facial expression, reactions, emotions, and words. At that time, I saw “a problematic me” in the eyes of my mom, the ways she looked at me seemed telling me that “there were something inherently wrong with me”. This uncomfortable feeling transformed to a strong and distinct inner voice throughout the formative years, like a strict discipline teacher criticizing my every word and action. I learned to constantly pay attention to both the explicit and implicit expectations and comments of others, and swiftly respond to them, so that I could avoid seeing the inadequate and terrible “me” again. I became increasingly adept at mindreading and excelled at self-criticism.



Family is like a mirror. We come to know who "I" am and understand the world outside through it.



## **Satisfying others is like walking on a path that you can only reach halfway but never reach the destination.**

The pursuit of perfection was not without its rewards—I became the epitome of an exemplary student receiving praises from many teachers, and easing the minds of many adults. However, each moment of self-satisfaction lasted only a few seconds, like reaching a midway station knowing that I was on the "right" path towards perfection. Even with many "A"s, I could not feel any better about myself. I exerted all my efforts to achieve an "A" in every role I played—daughter, sister, student, friend, neighbor, assuming it would bring me a sense of security and help me preserve all the hard-earned, fragile relationships.

Perhaps the beliefs of "becoming perfect" and being a people-pleaser had previously helped me overcome my childhood insecurities. Hence I could grow up smoothly. When I reached another stage of life, these beliefs and personalities began to lose their effectiveness and became "problems" that reminded me of the issues that truly deserved my attention.

## **Trying to satisfy others is the beginning of losing control.**

When a "strict discipline teacher" resided within my inner self for a long time, the "good Pat" which was perceived in the eyes of other people was not regarded as the "authentic me" in my self-perception. The strong self-critical voice quickly denied my abilities, accomplishments and strengths, attributing my "goodness" to luck, coincidences, or the kindness of others which were often unrelated to me. I was still that worthless and inferior Pat.

I treaded extremely cautiously in life and every relationship, fearing that one misstep would result in the loss of acceptance and recognition from others. Satisfying others became an unbreakable rule for survival. However, could I possibly know and fulfill everyone's expectations? When their expectations contradict one another or constantly change, which one should I heed? Believing that I could hold onto people by giving myself away, I gradually surrendered myself in the hope of pleasing others. Only in the end did I realize that relationships could not be held onto.

So, what could I truly control? Where could I find genuine peace for my restless heart?



**An unintended remark hurts more than deliberate criticism, like a wound accidentally grazed by a piece of paper.**

In one summer after entering into puberty, my highly respected uncle came to visit my father and me. As it had been a while since we last saw each other, I believed that my appearance had been blurred in his memory. Upon seeing me, who had grown into a woman figure, my uncle whispered to my dad "she has a bit of a big butt". Unexpectedly, I overheard this remark. At that time, I had not yet understood the concept of objectification; I simply felt the immense discomfort of "being fat" along with feelings that my uncle should not be surveying my body that way. The feeling from that moment etched in my memory. Although the memories of my adolescence faded, the impact of that comment remained strong.

Another unforgettable remark came from a neighbor with whom I had no interaction. Perhaps due to the changes in my body during adolescence, one day a boy living nearby suddenly teased me by calling me "lumberjack" ("lumberjack" referred to workers in logging camps in North America, typically portrayed as robust and rugged). Implicitly, he perceived me as so large that I resembled those workers in the logging camps without the slim and gentle appearance that girls should have. Teasing could be that simple, without any deep-seated animosity. Perhaps, this senseless mockery made me even more convinced that I was too fat, and being fat was indeed a problem—and my problem specifically.



**Important matters need to be repeated three times in order to be remembered if they are said by ordinary people. On the contrary, when spoken by important people, ordinary matters are remembered even with just one mention.**

Body changes rapidly during adolescence, so clothes are replaced quickly as well. There was a summer dress that I really liked. Though I could no longer fit into it easily like before, I did not want to throw it away. One day, I wore the dress and my dad looked at me attentively. Suddenly, he said coldly, "we can dress you up: but we cannot take you anywhere", I was shocked by the words of my dad. Looking a picture of myself in that dress after being an adult, I suddenly realized the significant change of my body in puberty. There I saw a pubescent girl who grew from a slim little girl to a meaty young girl. My body change was more explicit in that unfit summer dress. I instantly understood the worry of my dad who did not say it out at that time – the daughter was fat like that, wouldn't she become a fat and unattractive woman after growing up? At the same time, I agreed with my dad – who would willingly go out with a fat person?

For countless sleepless nights during my teenage times, I laid in bed pressing my stomach, hoping it would be flatter. Unconsciously, I reduced the portion of every meal, from skipping lunch at school to eventually only eating a slice of cheese and drinking a can of sugar-free cola for the whole day. I was happy when I was losing

weight, I could not stop myself from doing so, like my mom did when she was young. Nothing would affect her determination to maintain a slim figure, not even when she was pregnant with me. She relied on smoking and drinking coffee to control her weight during that time.

Maintaining a slim figure was only a part of beauty routine, keeping up with makeup and fashion trends was also necessary. The body became the main arena where girls competed for the attention of boys (as well as girls). This gave me a sense of control over my life.





We think that the body is the easiest to control, but how much control do we truly have over it?



## Losing weight is not the best solution, but it is a master key that can unlock all the locks.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I gained 60 pounds.

This shocked me as it was the highest weight I had ever been in my life. Losing weight became an urgent matter that needed immediate attention. It was even more important than taking care of my newborn son and recovering from childbirth.

At that time, losing weight not only solved my weight problem, but also alleviated my anxieties that came with being a new mother. Being a new mother was not easy. My husband and I grew up in very different families. I tried my best to be the good daughter-in-law in the eyes of my in-laws and fitting into their family. No matter how hard I tried, there was always room for improvement in their eyes.

Later on, I finally realized that if someone does not like you, no matter how hard you try, they will not like you. Thus, there is no need to exert effort pleasing someone who doesn't like you.

I returned to the workforce for a living, any job would do. I just wanted a temporary break from this stressful home which was like a pressure cooker. I

found a job at a hospital, requiring me to go up and down the stairs many times every day delivering documents. I consumed a lot of energy, and, surprisingly, I started losing weight and gradually became the slimmest female colleague in the department. In those days that perfection could not be achieved with all my effort, "thin" brought a great sense of accomplishment and excitement. Finally, there was something I could achieve.





## The body is the least controllable. It will "betray" you.

Having the experience in my first pregnancy, I thought that I would be able to handle the weight gain problem during my second pregnancy. However, after the birth of my second child, my weight did not naturally go down like it did after the first pregnancy. I felt frustrated when I looked at myself in the mirror, feeling like my body betrayed me. It was difficult to accept my plump body, and I had an unprecedented strong dissatisfaction with it. The inner voice telling me that "I'm ugly" was loud, weight loss became the top priority in my life. I intentionally met with a doctor who was willing to prescribe weight loss medication. Indeed he brought me a glimmer of hope—the weight loss pills he prescribed could help me lose at least one pound per week.

The medication suppressed my appetite. I no longer felt hungry. Nonetheless, its effectiveness quickly diminished, so the doctor increased the dosage to maintain its efficacy in each follow-up visit. At the same time, he prescribed another medication to alleviate the side effects of the weight loss pills. As long as my weight remained within the "reasonable range", I did not question these medications: whether they had any potential dangers, addictive properties or side effects.



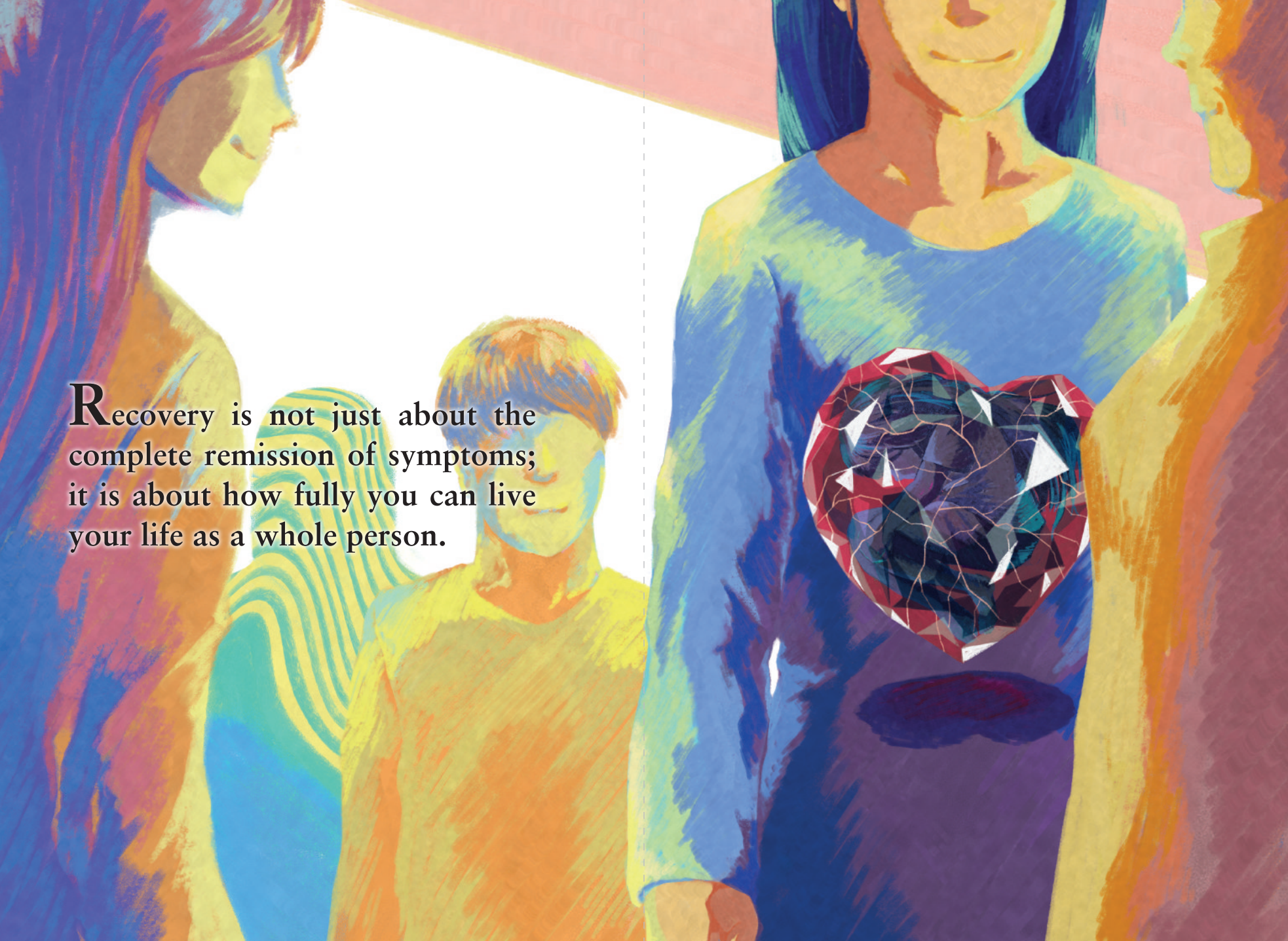
## The words of ED are to be obeyed without resistance or questioning.

ED was an inner voice as if it was a living person who engaged in numerous conversations with me every day: it told me whether other people would know I was fat from my outfit, it assessed my body shape and granted me the permission to go out that day, I considered feeling hungry as a failure. From dressing presentably to nitpicking every aspect of life, ED set different high standards for me. Obtaining control and being perfect were the only way to bring me happiness.

In the eyes of ED, being fat was seen as the root cause of all the problems. Therefore, once I became thin enough, all the issues in my life would be effortlessly solved. I believed that living in this way would make me happy, and never questioned whether this kind of control could truly bring me joy. Actually, it was easy to turn self-control into self-harm.







**R**ecovery is not just about the complete remission of symptoms; it is about how fully you can live your life as a whole person.



**Crisis means danger as well as opportunity. Losing control marks the beginning of regaining control.**

In the winter of my 35 years old, I had a severe skiing accident that required lumbar fusion surgery and a month of bed rest. Temporarily losing my mobility made me feel like I had “lost control”. I could not manage household chores as efficiently as before. I lost my usual productivity and even needed assistance with daily activities. While I had always worked hard to take care of my family, being the one to be taken care of did not make me feel blessed and relaxed. Instead, it made me feel anxious and miserable.

Greater anxiety came from the need to re-establish a regular eating routine of three meals a day.

Due to the intense pain in the injured area, I had to take painkillers three times a day for relief. To avoid stomach discomfort, I needed to eat something before taking the medicine, which meant that I had to resume to the habit of eating three meals daily. It was a real challenge for me for I had not eaten regular meals for over 20 years.



**Persisting to eat regularly and wisely is the key to breaking the endless cycle of restriction, bingeing, and purging.**

During that time, my mind was still occupied with the voice of ED. I meticulously monitored the intake of every meal to keep it to the least necessary to avoid causing any stomach discomfort. Nevertheless, the habit of eating three meals a day continued after the surgery. Day after day, I began to experience the sense of physiological hunger that was produced by my body rather than psychological hunger created by my mind. After 20 years, I finally regained the sense of real hunger. My body had genuine physical strength, not the high and excitement obtained from caffeine.

I started to feel interested in life and developed goals that had nothing to do with being "thin". I decided to pursue the goal I had set aside when I became a full-time mother—to return to the university. In this belated youthful college life, learning and friendships gradually became the focal point of my everyday life. Meanwhile, I thought less and less of food and my body. These more meaningful rewards replaced the sense of accomplishment and meaning that ED had provided. The endless cycle of restriction, bingeing, and purging that had persisted for over 20 years was broken at last.



## ED occasionally returns. It helps you see the truth behind the obsession in despair.

Ups and downs are part of everyday life. Relentlessly pursuing perfection in life is an impossible task. The self-imposed demand for perfection constantly kept me under high pressure and the unrest in my mind was as active as a live volcano, bringing me long-term anxiety and tension. Hence, controlling food and my body seemed to be the most effective way to cope with the "chaos" of life and anxiety by providing me with a tremendous sense of control. Eating and weight became a numerical game. The only successful formula of getting thin is to ensure that energy consumed exceeded intake. I had complete control over my weight and eating.

I finally learned the lesson of how excessive control could backfire after the breakdown of my marriage. Growing up in a family with deeply ingrained traditional gender roles, I learned to be a submissive and obedient woman. After getting married, I became the typical wife who was able to manage household chores well enough to create a harmonious and blissful home. In spite of my absolute compliance, I lived like a bird in a cage, sacrificing my sense of self in the pursuit of maintaining a harmonious family.

No matter how beautifully it was decorated, a cage was still a cage. The feeling of powerlessness could

not be subdued, and it fermented into extreme craving for eating and body shape. I yearned to become thinner and more perfect in the hope of finding solace and control within the inescapable cage.

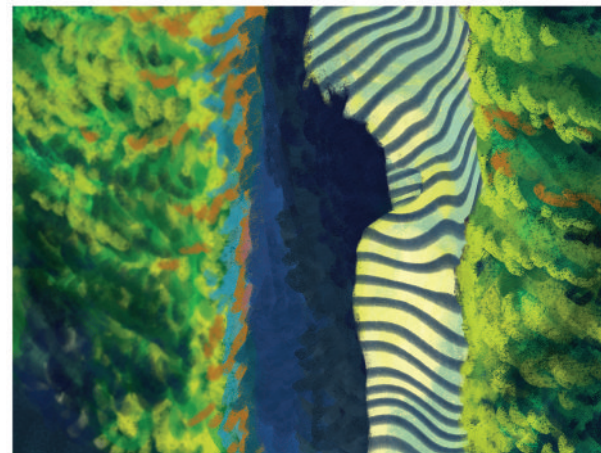
Nevertheless, becoming a perfect woman did not lead to a perfect ending. My husband had more complaints about me while I became more indifferent, our relationship became more distant. A marriage certificate eventually lost its meaning.



**ED has been patiently waiting in your life.  
It is always ready to offer help to you.**

Regardless of the severity of the problems in life, ED was always eager to extend its "helping hand" when issues arose. It used my anxieties about my body shape to overshadow the more difficult troubles that laid in front of me, making me believe that my weight was an immediate "problem" that needed to be solved instantly. Compared to the situations that could not be fully controlled by myself, such as complex interpersonal relationships, meeting the expectations of others, and constantly striving to excel, dealing with body image concerns seemed easier to manage. Weight loss was simpler and more straightforward to achieve. As a result, I had no time to address those real problems, including the old wounds that brought tears with a slight touch. The voice of ED masked the unexpressed emotions in my life, making me blind to what truly matters.

It became a frequently used and "effective" coping mechanism for dealing with past old scars as well as responding to the challenges in everyday life. When I neglected self-care, failed to genuinely face my inner self and ignored its needs, ED quietly emerged to grant me that familiar sense of control over life. It became the "master key" to solving all life's difficulties.





There may be many answers to problems in life, but one thing to be certain, those answers have nothing to do with weight and food.



**Recovery is a self-discovery journey, allowing you to pause for a moment in the restless life to focus on yourself.**

It is often said that excessive control is one of the reasons for the development of ED. Indeed, the sense of control that ED provides is substantial. People who feel they have no control over their lives simply cannot resist. In fact, the need for control is essential to our mental wellbeing like human basic needs such as food, water, and air. No one enjoys living in chaos. Nonetheless, excessive control is like gripping a rope hard and tirelessly climbing towards an endless sky. Even knowing that there is a soft grassland beneath us, or our hands are bleeding because of gripping the rope too tightly, or we are suffocating in the heights, we dare not let go of the rope as if it is the lifeline in our eye. Excessive control yields nothing but emptiness, it drives away the people we care about and depletes our mind and body.

Only by appropriately adjusting the strength of our "grip", holding the rope tightly at times and loosening it at times, self-discipline ceases to be a relentless demand that drains us. Only self-discipline with flexibility can lead to true freedom.

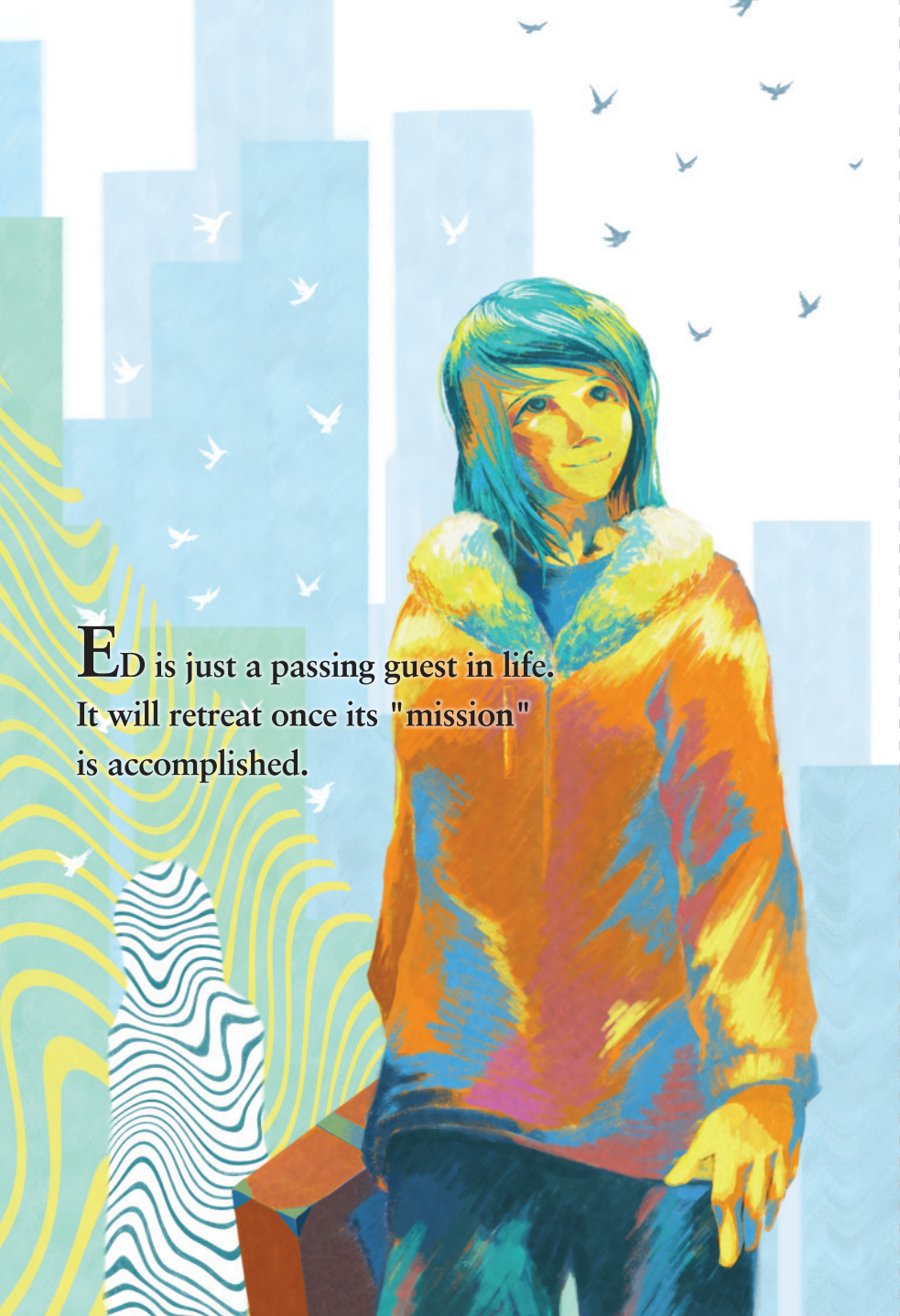


**Understanding ourselves through the past is not to blame anyone, but rather it lets us gain a deeper understanding of ourselves so that we know how to make choices for the present moment and the future.**

Recovery from eating disorders is not just about restoring a "normal" weight or completely abandoning thoughts of weight loss. ED serves as a guide on the journey of self-discovery. It leads us into our unfamiliar inner world like peeling off layers of an onion. It broadens our perspectives, allowing us to see the overlooked emotions, unrecognized needs and unmet desires. Only when we are willing to understand and respond to these deep parts of ourselves, we can find the key to change and sincerely follow our own desires to live the life we want.







**ED** is just a passing guest in life.  
It will retreat once its "mission"  
is accomplished.

## Control

In this journey of writing and sharing her stories, Pat expressed her happiness in reflecting on the love-hate entanglement with ED in these years. Looking back at the ups and downs in this journey, she has gradually learned to loosen her grip on ED in the process of seeking the sense of security through excessive control. She has understood that ED is no longer the master key for solving all problems in her life nor is the only lifeline she had.

From a young girl lacking a sense of control over her life to a youthful mother exerting excessive control over her body in search for a solution to difficulties in life, and eventually becoming a counselor who accompanies many troubled individuals on their recovery journey, Pat stated that there was no magical solution. She did not search for a panacea among various kinds of treatments and therapies, rather she simply deepened her self-understanding with each ebb and flow. She gradually recognized her own needs, becoming more willing to muster her courage to let go in order to seek the appropriate balance of control.

When you encounter more opportunities in life, I hope you will remember Pat's story and have the courage to pursue other possibilities in your own life. ED is just a passing guest. I believe you can gradually grasp the right balance of controlling your life and reclaiming true freedom.



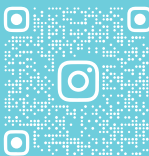
## About ED

Eating disorders are complex and potentially life-threatening mental health conditions. They have destructive and far-reaching effects on individuals' physical and psychological well-being, social lives and their families. Common types of eating disorders include anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa which are characterized by attitudes and behaviors towards food that are different from those of the general population. People struggling with eating disorders are preoccupied with thoughts revolving around weight control, food, and self-image. These mental health conditions often occur in adolescence with a higher proportion of female patients. It is important to note that the issues surrounding eating and body image concerns are not simply a matter of "eating or not eating", but rather it encompasses a range of physiological, psychological, interpersonal, familial and personality factors.

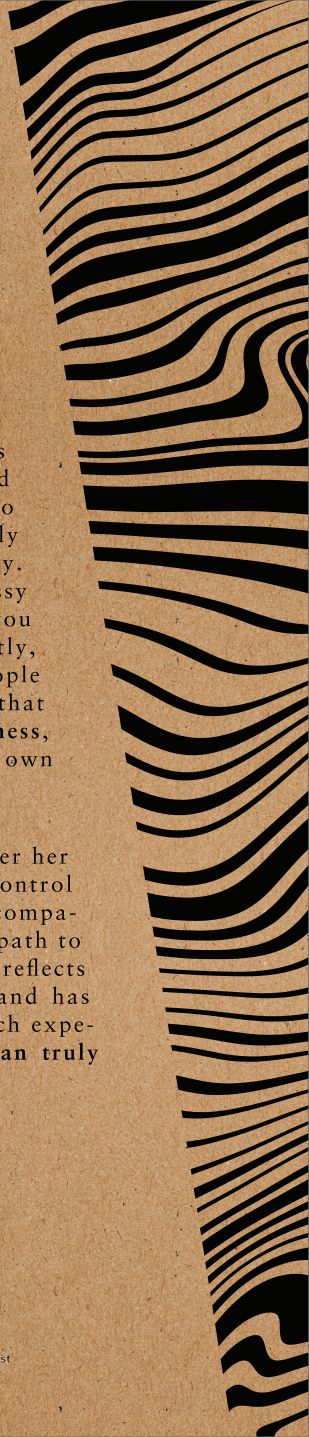
For more detailed information about eating disorders, please visit our website at [www.heda-hk.org](http://www.heda-hk.org) or contact our hotline at 2850-4448 for inquiries.



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Over control is often cited as one of the causes of eating disorders (ED). Indeed, ED provides a tangible sense of control. It is difficult for those living in a world that feels uncontrollable to resist it. The sense of control can be considered as "basic" psychological need like food, water, and air which are essential for survival. However, too much control is like desperately clinging to the only rope available to climb towards an endless sky. Even though one knows that there is a soft grassy ground below the sky (it will not lead to death if you fall), or their hands bleed from gripping too tightly, or they are suffocating in the high altitude, people who tend to control excessively dare not let go of that "only lifeline." **Over control only yields emptiness,** driving away the loved ones and depleting one's own body and mind.

From the young girl lacking a sense of control over her own life, to the young mother exerting too much control over her body, to becoming a counselor who accompanies many other people suffering from ED on the path to recovery. Pat, the major character of the book, reflects on the ups and downs of her recovery journey and has learnt to adjust the extent of her control with each experience. **ED is no longer the only lifeline; you can truly achieve freedom with flexibility in your control.**