

Living inside my head – is this awful

EATING

disorder



Kemi shares her story

Sitting here now, casting my head back, to when I was a small child at the age of five years old I cry, I was such a happy little tomboy. I used to run and up down my street where I lived in Bow in London, UK, and hang out with my friends. Life was a constant whirlwind of excitement and frenzy. I stayed blissfully happy, immersed in that happiness until the age of eight years old when my parents decided to relocate to a new area. My family began to have problems we never had to worry about before. Money now became an issue. My family life was difficult; my parents often fought in front of my sister and me. We had to try and separate them often. At the same time I also found it hard to settle down in my new school. It had a completely different approach to education my former primary school had had, and I found it hard to relate to my new classmates. I felt misunderstood during the three years that I spent at my second primary school. Furthermore, I was used to having quite a few black pupils around me and there were hardly any in my 'new' school. As a result of all this upheaval and unsettlement, I only managed to make one good friend during this period. I was used to being friends with nearly everybody before. I terribly missed my old school and my old school friends at this point in time.

Also, at the age of eight, it was at this time that the feelings of love from my parents seemed to stop almost overnight and I felt unrecognised by my parents. I felt like I was too big for my father to demonstrate me any love. He never showed it anymore. I was a "big" girl, or so he said. You must remember too that my parents heritage and roots are in Africa where "parents" are not encouraged to be overly demonstrative towards their children once they reach a certain age, but I was such a sensitive child that I needed more than the show of affection that I was being given. I remember standing there as a little girl at the age of eight and wondering, "daddy do you love me anymore, because, if you do love me daddy you don't seem to show it anymore. Of course I kept these feelings submerged and silent, but in truth I felt like I was unlovable and that I had done something wrong and that was why my dad didn't love me as much as he used to do. I felt alone, the feelings of loneliness intensified by my feelings of isolation brought on by my relocation as well. My parents catered for all my financial needs, I had good parents, but the emotional content of our relationship was just not there. My mother, at this stage, was also very consumed in her job and I was a latch key kid. I often used to sit in the house with my sister for long periods of time alone while my parents were out at work. Given my feelings of isolation, I turned to food for comfort and to blot out and numb my pain. I was hurting. It is also important to note at this stage that my mother got a new job employed in the catering industry and used to bring lots of food home. My sister and I were not used to having all this extra food around the house, it was a lot and my sister and I definitely went overboard with the food because it was seen as a 'new toy' and we had to try it out. Our parents did not put an end to our excessive eating. I remember walking to primary school with 12 packets of crisps in my bag and eating them before I got to school. I remember queuing for endless food outside the school tuck shop in an attempt to feed my already ingrained disorder, (which I now believe was emotional overeating). I also remember telling a dinner lady that I wanted to starve myself to death, and that I was going to refuse food. Of course she was very worried and got me to eat.

As you can see, disordered eating was with me back then to some degree. Still with the extra food I soon gained weight and the teasing started. I hated it, I didn't like people making rude comments about me, but I just tried to laugh it off at this stage. The memories that I hold from those years are quite painful. I remember at age 11 being