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Jenni Schaefer , Thom Rutledge

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Jenni had been in an abusive relationship with Ed for far too long. He controlled Jenni's life, distorted her self-image, and tried to physically harm her throughout their long affair. Then, in therapy, Jenni learned to treat her eating disorder as a relationship, not a condition. By thinking of her eating disorder as a unique personality separate from her own, Jenni was able to break up with Ed once and for all.

Inspiring, compassionate, and filled with practical exercises to help you break up with your own personal E.D., "Life Without Ed" provides hope to the millions of people plagued by eating disorders. Beginning with Jenni's "divorce" from Ed, this supportive, lifesaving book combines a patient's insights and experiences with a therapist's prescriptions for success to help you live a healthier, happier life without Ed.

Life Without Ed: How One Woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder and How You Can Too Details

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Jennifer Brierly says

Overly simplified view of ED's and recovering from one. Strongly pushed in many treatment centers, maybe I would have been more receptive if Jenni Schaefer hadn't been shoved down my throat and this elementary book touted as revolutionary.

April says

Life Without Ed was a very interesting book, although not extremely helpful at the point in my journey when I read it. I didn't take advantage of the exercises that Thom Rutledge provided at points throughout the book, although I would advise readers who are in recovery from an eating disorder to not ignore them as I did.

Jenni's voice is clear and honest and helps make the reader feel not as alone in his/her journey through recovery. She's unflinchingly true to herself about triggers and problems that arose during her recovery, and she and Thom together make a good team to cowrite this book.

One thing I appreciated about Life Without Ed is that Jenni avoided the use of any numbers - no weights, no calories, no measurements of any type are mentioned in the book. She also does her best to avoid giving tips and does a very good job at being an honest yet awesome role model for recovery. I have had the privilege of hearing her speak in a small gathering and she made recovery seem possible for anyone who struggles with an eating disorder. I guess in short, the message her book sends is: "Don't you dare give up, because there IS hope."

Kyle Schindler says

This was a very memorable read. I feel like the author's prior therapy experience was a definite boon in her ability to convey her thoughts and feelings, as she truly held nothing back. I feel this gave me a phenomenal understanding of just how difficult eating disorders are.

Conceptualizing her eating disorder as a man named "Ed" personified her difficulties and served to emphasize the persuasiveness and relentlessness of her thoughts very effectively. I did not just envision the abstract thought itself, but instead envisioned a physical, malevolent shadow following her throughout the day and providing this thought as a statement in her ear. Through this personification, I felt like her situation resonated much more strongly with me.

I feel this book should be highly recommended reading for anyone attempting to understand an eating disorder, be they professional, aspiring professional, or layperson.

Some chapters become repetitive to an extent, but this serves to provide a really good message: Eating disorders do not go away overnight. You will make some mistakes, and some will be big mistakes. You will have to work through the same problem more than once sometimes. This is okay and you are not alone.

I feel the author's willingness to accept her "failures" and relapses serves to make this book a really good read for those who are also struggling with an eating disorder, above and beyond the suggestions and exercises provided at the end of each chapter.

Maddy says

I read this book while I was in the hospital this past March. I was in the process of being treated for anorexia, which I'm still battling today. This book was very inspiring to me, and made me feel that I was not alone in fighting such a terrible disease. With each turn of a page, I felt more and more determined to recover, whether my "eating disordered mind" wanted me to or not. Every line of this book is completely truthful, and is relatable to all who have an eating disorder. I strongly recommend this book to anyone who has been diagnosed with an eating disorder, whether it be anorexia, bulimia, or any other branch of the illness. It truly will restore your faith and hope in what could one day be a life without Ed.

Audrey says

I first read this about six years ago. I had just begun my treatment for my eating disorder then, and this title was suggested to me by the counselor I was seeing. I found the book to be tremendously helpful to me at the time, and it's one of the first books I would recommend to someone suffering from any eating disorder.

Reading this again years later, continuing to battle my eating disorder and feeling like I still have a long way to go, I still got a lot out of the book. Because more time has passed, I feel like I can relate on a deeper level to the struggle and feelings expressed—as well having an even stronger yearning for freedom.

There were many parts of the book that found me mentally nodding my head and thinking "this is exactly what it feels like." Many sections felt like something that I could've written. Her disorder was a little different than mine, so naturally I didn't relate on every little thing, but I think this is a book that any kind of E.D. sufferer could glean something helpful from.

As the author says, eating disorders often negatively affect the ability to concentrate, so the book is organized with a lot of short chapters grouped by topic. I still have a really hard time with concentration, so I really appreciated this format and found it to be very helpful.

The tone of the book is accessible, reader-friendly, very creative, and often humorous, yet she still touches on the deeper and gritty details of eating disorders and recovery from them. It gave me a lot to think about. As I said, many parts were poignantly reflective of my own experiences, and sometimes these memories were painful to dredge up. But the overall tone is very hopeful and encouraging. I really, really hope and pray that someday I can have a "life without Ed," too.

Laurie Hamame says

It seemed to me that most of Jenni's chapters consisted of "I did this when I had my eating disorder. I don't anymore. Isn't recovery great?" While there's nothing necessarily wrong with this (and, additionally, while

Jenni does spend a good amount of time talking about how tough it is and what she did to overcome it), as a book directed at those afflicted with ED, I expected (and hoped for) a more journey driven "This is what I went through, and this is an exercise I did, and this is what happened as a result of the exercise, and maybe this can help you too." I'm nervous that someone reading the book with ED may look at her almost-rose-tinted portrayal of recovery and feel inferior or unhelped.

Molly says

Honestly, anyone recovering from any type of eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, etc.) is not going to be able to write completely coherently because our malnutrition combined with our personal issues means our individual mental states have been so oddly affected by the disease itself that writing a truly magnificent, poetic, and touching book would be a Herculean feat. But somehow, Jenni's created as touching a novel as a "survivor" of an eating disorder possibly could. Jenni's book is what helped me through my first serious battle with my disease. I was hospitalized for two week at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, NY in Spring of 2007. While in hospital and in intensive outpatient treatment, I kept returning to passages of this book to keep me motivated.

Hylarie says

A bit repetitive in some parts, but that's a good thing because there are some things we need to hear more than once. This is an incredibly helpful book that I'm glad to have on my shelf, and I really like the fact that Schaefer took into consideration the possibility of her readers suffering from short attention spans due to their eating disorders. Her decision to break her writing up into short sections throughout the book allows a lot of sufferers to sit down and work on their recovery without being too overwhelmed. Schaefer shares her journey through her illness in a non-triggering way, and the story of her recovery gives hope that recovery is possible for everyone who struggles with an eating disorder.

Thomas says

In *Life Without Ed*, Jenni Schaefer shares how she ended her abusive relationship with Ed, the personification of her eating disorder. Two things stood out to me in Schaefer's book in comparison to other works I've read centered on eating disorders. First, she sticks to the theme of making Ed a person - giving her eating disorder a voice, a personality, and a hurtful spirit. This creation of Ed as an actual entity gives her book consistency and allows her to provide a variety of helpful tips: taking out a chair and having a conversation with Ed, writing out a dialogue between her and Ed, to name a few. The second distinction in Schaefer's book is her tone - other works have a much more heavy, troubled feel to them, but *Life Without Ed*, while still serious, maintains a light and cheerful mood throughout its chapters. Some might find this off-putting or unrealistic, but I feel that others will appreciate its brightness as well as its good advice.

Each chapter *Life Without Ed* runs from one to three pages, so the book is a quick read. Still, it contains great anecdotes and developed, repeated ideas. Recommended to those interested in eating disorders or who know of someone suffering from one, though I would also recommend other memoirs as well, such as *Appetites* by Caroline Knapp or *Unbearable Lightness* by Portia de Rossi. As Schaefer quotes in this book, Maya Angelou once said, "When you know better, you do better."

Crystal W says

My recovering anorexic daughter was hospitalized in 2009. During the next year, I spent a great deal of time in waiting rooms. I read anything and everything I could get my hands on about eating disorders. This was the first book I read that truly gave me hope for my daughter. A year after her hospitalization, we were lucky enough to attend a speaking engagement of Jenni's. My daughter has a picture of a herself and a few of her compatriots from the hospital at the book signing with Jenni. It's right next to her bed where she can remind herself daily that recovery is possible.

I've noted that some people are not pleased with her characterization of her eating disorder as Ed, the abusive boyfriend. I have to agree that it is disconcerting. On the other hand, this is not my struggle, and really, why should it matter to any of us what tool she used to convince her mind that the behavior was inappropriate and counterproductive to her spirit. Her message of hope and persistence is what gave me a ray of hope.

Andrea says

a review at the beginning recommends this book "if your relationship with food is undermining your self-esteem, your honesty, your happiness, and your joy." i couldn't agree more! jenni's honest compassion for the reader and her sense of humor sets this book apart from others. her quick, easy-to-read themed segments made this a smooth read. this style of writing kept my attention, and also made it easy for me to return to the book and refer to specific topics. being able to say "screw you" to a relationship and not to myself anymore...that's healing.

Alex Murphy says

This book kept coming up in conversation while asking others what I might possibly do to help a struggling friend of mine.

I was simply going to give it to her and say "This was recommended to me. Read it or not, but I want you to have it," but after flipping through it, as you do any book you just bought, I found myself engrossed in it and decided to read it myself first.

I really liked the short, concise chapters. It made an already relatively-slim volume (188 pages) even less daunting to read (I'm an impatient reader and can't stand when chapters are 60+ pages long). Jenni's writing wasn't too bad, either. She has a very direct way of speaking which, while perhaps lacking in flair or ingenuity, is refreshingly easy to absorb and understand.

What I'm nervous of is how the book translates for an ED sufferer. I suppose the success of the book should be some indication, but it seemed to me that most of Jenni's chapters consisted of "I did this when I had my eating disorder. I don't anymore. Isn't recovery great?" While there's nothing necessarily wrong with this (and, additionally, while Jenni does spend a good amount of time talking about how tough it is and what she did to overcome it), as a book directed at those afflicted with ED, I expected (and hoped for) a more journey driven "This is what I went through, and this is an exercise I did, and this is what happened as a result of the exercise, and maybe this can help you too." I'm nervous that someone reading the book with ED may look at

her almost-rose-tinted portrayal of recovery and feel inferior or unhelped.

That said, I loved every "Thom's Turn" for precisely the reasons I criticised above. Whenever Jenni forgot to talk about the actual process of recovery, Thom's blurbs would give a very tangible, easy, accessible foray into "This is an exercise you can utilize on your own. Give it a shot."

Overall, I enjoyed the book and will be gifting it to my friend.

Taylor Groneck says

I recommend this book to my clients with Eating Disorders. Originally recommended to me by a former client struggling with ED/BI concerns. Schaefer writes in a manner that's engaging, easy to relate to, and informs of the struggles one faces when beginning ED recovery. A great book for clients, family, friends, and mental health professionals alike.

Kristin Gheen says

Practical for anyone who struggles with an eating disorder (any kind), or wants to understand what letting go of an eating disorder is like for a loved one. Speaks to the pain of breaking things off with the eating disorder, like the pain of a breakup. So true...

Eating disorders are portrayed as an abusive relationship in this book, and that severing ties is vital to being healthy. Not the scientific/medical perspective, but I've found it necessary to recognize this element in recovery. NOT a triggering book for someone in the midst of an eating disorder - FINALLY! Many books/memoirs that deal with disordered eating and similar issues are extremely triggering, with too much focus on weight and numbers (particularly when they are authored by a recovering anorexic/bulimic). This book is different. I can honestly say it was part of my RECOVERY (didn't help me indulge in the disorder, or make me want to).

Amanda Hope says

While there are times that Jenni Schaefer is repetitive throughout the book, the concept and theme is strong: you have to disconnect from your eating disordered thoughts in order to make room for your own.

Here is a list of my favorite essays/chapters of this book (as a reminder to myself) - and yes, they are short for a reason and the author states why:

"The format of this book is specifically designed for the eating disorder victim in mind. ... my thoughts were so consumed by food and weight that I found it hard to concentrate on anything else. Reading was especially challenging because of the difficulty in concentrating and the almost impossibility of my sitting still long enough to read. Taking into account the decreased concentration that you may experience, this book is divided into bite-sized, easily digestible portions. I have discovered that it is easier to stay focused on one short section as compared to a long chapter composed of page after page text."

*Ms. Perfectionist

*Not Just Anyone

*Holidays

*Overcompensating

*You Don't Look Like You Have an Eating Disorder
