



Girl Talk: And I Thought My Addictions Were Strange... by Dorri Olds

Thanks to the new TV show, "My Strange Addiction," I have nothing to feel ashamed about. The TLC series, which offers rubbernecking shock value, made my own struggles with addiction seem more commonplace.

I was riveted by a woman who chows down on toilet paper. She even has a favorite easy to digest two-ply brand. She eats up to half a roll per day—that's 1200 pounds over the last 23 years. It gave me the creeps to watch the mom who confessed to her horrified child that she has a penchant for gobbling household cleansers and has been doing so for 30 years. Her teeth have all nearly dissolved thanks to Comet. A hair puller who eats the follicles will surely give me nightmares. Doctors have warned her she can die from a fatal hairball yet she goes on chomping. Before this show, I didn't even know a person could be addicted to sleeping with a powered-on blow-dryer. She finds comfort in the hum and the warmth but has awakened to severe burns. Unyielding, she makes it clear to anybody who wants to share her bed that the plugged-in gadget stays.

All of these addictions make my childhood quest to commit suicide seem almost mainstream. I once stepped on the third rail of the Long Island Railroad. When nothing happened I stepped on it again. I was under the impression it would electrocute me instantly.

"Hey, kid," a station worker had called out. "You could get yourself killed."

In science class the next day, I asked, "Hypothetically, what would happen if I accidentally stepped on the third rail?"

"Nothing," my classmate said. "You're wearing sneakers and rubber can't conduct electricity."

As a teen runaway fleeing from a cop, I jumped down onto the subway tracks in front of an oncoming train. Death by hurtling steel seemed like an ideal exit from planet Earth. Fast as a speeding A train, a terrifying thought hit me. I could be maimed and live. Life as an amputee was not high on my plan B list, so, with seconds to spare, I squeezed tight against the wall. After a blast of horn and screech of metal, the train passed. I coughed my way through the manic swirling dust to the nearest exit.

One day, I hitchhiked and a truck picked me up. When the driver fell asleep, the vehicle veered off the road and somersaulted. Three people died. I was unconscious for days. Despite the doctor's predictions, I popped up again just F.I.N.E. (read: F'up, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional).

Survivor's guilt and self-loathing led me to drugs and alcohol to quell my thoughts of death. Chemical elation agreed with me until I slammed down hard into the plague of addiction. My substance abuse—originally just a symptom of deeper disturbances—became a torment all its own. One night I swallowed a quart of Stolichnaya vodka and a fistful of Quaaludes. I didn't leave a note so my demise would appear accidental. That way, whoever got stuck cleaning up the body wouldn't hate me. Two days later I woke up.

After every attempt to end my life had failed, I took to shooting drugs, sharing needles, and having unprotected sex. That went on for a few years. Ultimately, it was the fear of becoming a middle-aged barfly that finally saved my life, sending me to 12-step programs for drunks, dope fiends, anorexics and bulimics. I ducked into Sex and Love Anonymous, too, in the hopes of finding a cure for my proclivity for bad boys.

Years of professional help, anti-depressants, and the kindness of friends, family, and strangers transformed me into the suicide attempt-free, drug-free, alcohol-free, physically fit woman engaged to a good guy that I am today.

At first, I felt guilty for watching a reality show that seemed to exploit neuroses as entertainment until I realized that the stories made me feel more at peace with my past. When I was younger, the rock stars, movie celebs and athletes who went public with their addictions helped me know I wasn't alone. Perhaps this TLC series unveiling lesser-known compulsions may encourage silent sufferers to stop keeping secrets and ask for help.

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