



Mission Statement: We wish to provide a safe place for women and girls who are struggling with an eating disorder while providing physical, emotional, and spiritual healing in a conservative Christian setting.

Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Gal. 6:2

A Journey to Healing ~by one who knows~

It was a cold December night in western Virginia. Snowflakes fell gracefully around the little brick house nestled in a wood of large oak trees. The setting was next to perfect, or so the young couple in the house thought. Five hours earlier they had brought their firstborn child home from the hospital. The baby, Ellie Rose, had been excitedly anticipated! She was finally here. They had every right to feel an indescribable sense of joy.

Trevor and Stephanie, the young couple, had been married for three years. So far, marriage had been fairly happy. They had both had somewhat troubled childhoods, but because of that they strongly felt they were compatible for each other. They covered childhood pain and agreed to marriage. Now with a baby, what more could they ask for?

Three years after Ellie was born, Chloe Brielle was added to the family. Two and a half years after that, Tracy Jo made her appearance. Now life spun quite hectically for the young couple. Trevor spent many long hours working to support the growing family. Stephanie kept busy tending the girls, doing laundry, cooking, cleaning, and all the other mother responsibilities.

Ellie, now almost six, was a very curious child. She loved to explore the world and learn new things. The woods surrounding the house really fascinated her. She loved sitting on the front porch and watching the birds. Sometimes she got a glimpse of other wild animals. That made her day.

Another thing that appealed to her were books. She could spend hours paging through a book and looking at the pictures. There were many things she didn't understand, but she wasn't easily stopped. Mom was usually busy, so she just allowed her imagination to run wild.

One evening, Ellie couldn't hold back her curiosity any longer. She was outside playing in the woods. It had rained that afternoon, so mud covered the ground. As Ellie meandered in among the trees, she spied mysterious tracks in the mud. "What kind of animal tracks could that be?" she wondered to herself. Like a bolt of lightning, she dashed to the house. "Mom, Mom!" she yelled as she burst into the house, letting the door wide open. "Come out into the woods! I want to show you something!"

Stephanie turned wearily away from the stove where she was preparing the

evening meal. Just like that, Baby Tracy began crying lustily by the rude awakening. "Ellie," Stephanie reprimanded, "How many times do I have to tell you not to yell in the house? Please go shut the door. You are letting the flies in." Stephanie turned back to the stove, shut the burner off, and disappeared into the nursery to retrieve sobbing Tracy.

Ellie slowly walked over to the door and obediently closed it. Dejectedly, she stood at the window and stared out into the world beyond. "Maybe I have to ask Mom later to look at the tracks," she thought.

As the days slipped by, Ellie began to feel like her parents never had time for her. One day as she paged through a book of animals, her eyes landed on an animal she never saw before. "Mom," she called as she ran into the kitchen. "What animal is this?" she asked.

Stephanie briefly glanced over her shoulder at it. "It is a hippopotamus," she replied as she continued quickly folding laundry.

"What does it do? Where does it live? What does it eat?" Ellie bombarded her with questions.

"Ellie, can't you see that I am busy?" Stephanie asked shortly. "If you want to look at that book you may, but you may not ask questions. I have other things I need to do."

Ellie trudged sadly back to her spot on the sofa. It wasn't fun looking at a book if she didn't know what she was looking at. Tears welled up in her eyes. She wanted to cry but she knew that Dad would soon be home from work. She also knew from experience that if Dad saw her crying, he would ask what was wrong. She, of course, had no words to explain the inside hurt. He would tell her to stop crying or he would give her something to cry about. Bravely, she stifled the tears and went to find Chloe. She would try to forget it all and play doll instead.

Summer rolled gracefully into fall. School bells began to ring for Ellie. She would be in first grade! Mom sewed a brand-new pink dress for her. Ellie thought it was the prettiest dress she ever owned. Mom also took her shopping. She picked out a pencil box, backpack, and lunchbox. Excitement ran high for Ellie.

Finally, the big day arrived. Ellie was excited but also a wee bit scared. What would school be like? Would she enjoy it? Would it be hard? Would she make friends? Most of her church friends attended a different school, so she didn't know many of the children.

Ellie awoke at 4:00 that morning. She leaped out of bed and proudly slipped into her crisp new dress. She turned several times, enjoying the soft fabric swish around her ankles. Happily, she bounded down the stairs, only to find the house cold and dark. "Mom!" she yelled frantically. "I need to get ready for school! I don't want to be late on the first day!"

Stephanie emerged from her bedroom, groggily wiping sleep from her eyes. "Hush!" she commanded quietly. "It isn't time to get up yet. It is only a little past four o'clock. Dad is still sleeping. We don't want to wake him up!"

Ellie nodded her head vigorously. She did NOT want to awaken Dad. She knew from past experiences that awakening him would bring undesirable consequences.

Stephanie led Ellie over to the sofa. "Why don't you try to get some more sleep before it is time to get up."

Ellie nestled down on the sofa while Stephanie tiptoed back to bed. By now, Ellie

was even more awake. There was no way she could fall asleep again with such a bit day ahead of her. She laid there, trying her hardest to stay quiet. After about forty minutes, sleep gradually overtook her. Before she knew it, she awoke to hearing Mom in the kitchen making breakfast. Ellie leaped from the sofa. She grabbed her pencil box and placed it neatly in her backpack. Then she slipped on her brand-new pair of shoes. She was ready for school.

"Breakfast is ready," Stephanie called from the kitchen. "Let's eat." Trevor had already left for work, so Stephanie, Ellie, and Chloe sat down at the table with Tracy in her highchair. They all bowed their heads in prayer. Stephanie served the girls scrambled eggs and homemade bread. Ellie just pushed the food around on her plate with her fork. She wasn't hungry. Butterflies of anxiety, excitement, and nervousness flopped wildly in her stomach, stealing her appetite.

All too soon the big green school van drove in the lane. Tears welled up in Ellie's eyes. "Mom," she whispered, "I'm scared. I don't want to go to school." One lone tear trickled down her cheek and splashed gleefully on her pink dress.

"You'll be alright," Stephanie reassured her. "Stop crying now and be a big girl. You don't want the other children to see you were crying, do you?" She gave Ellie a quick hug and shooed her out the door.

Ellie choked back her sobs. With trembling legs, she climbed into the waiting van. As the van drove out the lane, Ellie covered her face in her hands and let the tears flow. She didn't care what the other children thought!

As the days crept by, Ellie began to enjoy school. She loved her teacher and made friends with several of the other girls. But most mornings she was too nervous to eat breakfast. Every bite of food made her stomach feel queasy.

That winter a big change affected the family. Trevor was ordained as a minister at their church. Ellie really didn't understand what was going on. She knew that Dad had to preach every Sunday at church, but why was everyone so sad about that?

Because of what Ellie learned as a small child, she didn't ask questions. Instead, she stuffed all her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and questions deep within her soul. She tried her best to be a good, obedient girl so she wouldn't add more stress to the family.

Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, and months to years. Ellie now had Chloe to go to school with her. Ellie enjoyed learning, but she also had a lot of anxieties. She knew she couldn't bother anyone with her fears, so she stuffed them. To her mind, she HAD to get perfect scores at school. Everything HAD to be done perfectly.

Life at home had taken on a whole other level of busy. Recently the members of the church had been disagreeing on some matters. Trevor and Stephanie kept busy by trying to bridge the gaps between members, discussing the issues and many other church-related things.

Ellie spent many hours after school helping at home. Since the conflict with the church continued, Trevor and Stephanie attended many, many meetings. Ellie stayed home with her sisters while her parents were gone. Even though she was thirteen, she hated those evenings. She felt responsible for the work that Stephanie hadn't completed earlier in the day. Her world felt like it had spun out of control. At least, though, she had some sense of purpose and control by working hard. Maybe someone would appreciate her work even if they didn't appreciate her.

Many nights, Ellie flopped into her bed, bone tired. But sleep evaded her. Her thoughts raced madly through her head. Tomorrow would be another day of school. She knew that a science test would be assigned, but she hadn't had much time to study. Now what? What if she failed? What if she wouldn't pass on to the next grade at the end of the term? How she wished to talk to someone, but that appeared impossible! Dad and Mom were busy helping others. They didn't have a spare moment for her! She must pretend that everything was fine and just be the perfect daughter. Mom and Dad had enough to worry about. They didn't need her worries. Many nights she eventually cried herself to sleep.

Eventually the day came when Ellie said goodbye to school days. It was a bitter-sweet moment. Many memories surrounded the school, but she definitely wouldn't miss the sleepless nights while worrying about school. Little did she know that life would take another spin.

That summer, the church undertook a nasty split. Ellie was left feeling very confused. Trevor and Stephanie decided to move the family. The girls helped Stephanie pack box after box. Chloe and Tracy thought it was an adventure. Ellie felt torn. She hated the conflict around the church, but she didn't want to leave her friends.

On Ellie's sixteenth birthday, the family said goodbye to their little house. From there, they traveled to Kentucky to a new home and a new community. Several other families moved as well, but that didn't still take the twinge of anxiety from Ellie's stomach.

Trevor and Stephanie were very busy at their new location. The house needed a lot of repairs. Many hours were spent redoing room after room. It was a long-drawn-out process. For Ellie, anxiety had reached the roof through all the change. She sensed that Trevor and Stephanie were also stressed with the responsibilities at home as well as at church.

"It's all your fault," a little voice within Ellie's head whispered. "You aren't helping Mom and Dad enough. You need to work more and work harder!"

"I will try!" Ellie vowed to herself. "I know everything is my fault. I am a bad daughter. I will try to do better. Maybe then life will be happy."

As days flowed into weeks, Ellie became even more critical of herself. If something failed, she took the blame. Anxiety began to eat away at her appetite. Little voices whispered in her head, "You don't deserve to eat. You aren't even working much, so why would you eat? Anyway, why would you eat if you aren't even hungry?"

Ellie, already in a confused state of mind, took every word to heart. She would be perfect! Her life was in an absolute messed-up state, but she would bring it back together. She had control and that felt wonderful.

As time went on, the voice became louder. "You are a slacker!" it bellowed. "Life would go better for you if you would lose weight. Mom and Dad probably think you are fat and ugly. If you would be as thin as Chloe, they would love you more." Again, Ellie listened to the voice; she began to skip desserts. Her parents questioned her, but she explained how she had enough of the first course, and she wasn't hungry anymore. It worked! Trevor and Stephanie had enough other things on their mind. Ellie had control! Food was the one thing she could control while the rest of her life was so hectic!

Before long, the voice spoke up again. "You need to do more. Skipping dessert isn't enough. You are still fat and disgusting! Try harder!"

Again Ellie latched on to that bait. She began serving herself smaller portions. She watched in delight as the number on the scale continued to steadily drop. It was working! She had control! Her worth as a person was wrapped very tightly in that number.

Ellie was fully addicted to these behaviors. It was her coping strategy. Whenever she felt anxious, worried, alone, fearful, or out of control, she turned to those behaviors. Like any other addiction, she needed more and more to receive the same kind of high. Instead of just cutting out desserts, it turned to more.

Now that she was old enough to be with the youth, she had more freedom. She made many excuses to be away from home over meals. "My friends are planning to eat together this evening, so I don't need supper," she would say. Many times that wasn't true. When her friends would eat together, she lied and said she wasn't hungry because she had eaten at home before she came. Her life was in a terrible mess.

Many evenings she returned home from youth events around twelve or one o'clock. She HAD to exercise for an hour before she could go to bed. After that was completed, she sank into bed, exhausted. The exercising was torture, but disobeying the voice was a thousand times worse! Any spare moment throughout the day, she would disappear to her room to "read" while in reality, she exercised until she almost collapsed from exhaustion.

Ellie began weighing herself countless times a day. The scale was her best friend. It determined if the day was good or bad. As time went on, it became harder and harder to hide her behaviors. Many mornings she skipped breakfast, declaring that it was too early in the morning to eat and that eating so early made her feel sick. Now that she was old enough, she started a job at a local grocery store. Stephanie made sure Ellie took a lunch along. When it was time for Ellie's lunch break, she slipped off by herself to eat alone. Many times, she nibbled on her carrots or ate a few bites of her apple. The rest of the lunch found its way to a trashcan. Guilt pricked her conscience. "Think of all the poor children who have nothing to eat. You are being wasteful!"

The voice bellowed in response, "It's fine! Mom is just trying to make you fat! No one, not even the poor children, know the difference if you ate the food or not! If you eat it, think of all the hard work you will lose!" So, she continued to repeat her behaviors. The more she repeated them, the more addicted she became.

Some days at the store were slow. Ellie would disappear into the bathroom to exercise. She became very distant from her co-workers. She didn't want them to figure out what was going on. On her seventeenth birthday, Ellie's co-workers threw a big surprise birthday party for her. After singing "Happy Birthday," they presented a beautifully decorated Dairy Queen ice-cream cake to Ellie. Ellie was distraught! She could NOT eat a bite of that cake, yet her co-workers waited expectantly for her to enjoy it. After serving everyone a generous helping, Ellie took a tiny sliver for herself. As they all sat enjoying the treat, Ellie pretended to eat hers, as well. But when no one was looking, she covered it secretly with her napkin. There was ABSOLUTELY NO way those calories would enter her mouth!!

The addiction continued on. As time went on, restricting and exercise were too weak of tools to get the desired results of control. Restricting released a neurochemical called dopamine. That chemical gave Ellie a false sense of control, happiness, and relief. Instead of facing what caused the anxiety, she found another solution. With time,

her brain built a wall. The wall continued to grow larger and stronger. It began to demand more in order to get the same results.

Ellie discovered some more techniques. Laxatives, isolation, and purging became her friends. A well-worn pathway formed in her brain. When hard, tough, feelings arose, she knew what to turn to in order to feel better.

Ellie knew this wasn't the life she wanted to live. She knew that God did NOT create her for this reason. But like any other addiction, it felt impossible to quit. All her behaviors were automatic. She acted before she even thought it through.

By now, Trevor and Stephanie knew something was wrong with their oldest daughter. Meals caused much anxiety for the whole family. Trevor demanded that Ellie eat more. "You must stop being so stubborn! Just eat! You are a pack of skin and bones! It is this simple: EAT!" Stephanie, not wanting to interfere with her husband, disappeared into the other room. Chloe and Tracy didn't know what to do. They spent hours trying to convince Ellie to obey their parents. "You are disobeying the Bible. Don't you think Jesus is probably crying? You are causing so much stress in our family. We wish we could just be a normal family!"

Ellie usually escaped to her bedroom to cry. She wanted to eat, but it was impossible. No one understood! Her thoughts raced. If she died, would she go to hell? Was God mad at her? She was sorry for the way she acted but was powerless to change. Little did she know that her addiction, the eating disorder, was NOT a sin problem. She had emotional, spiritual, and psychological issues. Telling her parents sorry and asking for their forgiveness wouldn't overcome her addiction.

As the weeks wore on, Ellie's health went from bad to worse. Every muscle and bone ached in her body. Going up the steps to her room felt like climbing Mt Everest. It took so much energy. Her arms and legs were mere sticks. She could count the ribs on her chest. When she combed her hair, large chunks fell out. Big black and blue marks covered her legs. She was cold all the time. She wore her coat in the house just so she could be comfortable. Sitting in church resulted in excruciating pain. Her body weight hovered at a dangerously low spot, so she had NO extra cushioning. Ellie loved children, but picking up a one-year-old and carrying her around was almost impossible for her to accomplish. She could feel her heart beating in funny patterns. That alarmed her, but she couldn't do anything about it. She knew she should eat more, but the voices in her head screamed otherwise.

Trevor and Stephanie were at a loss of what to do. One evening they decided something had to be done. They took her into the emergency room. She was immediately hospitalized. Ellie was upset! She was fine! Why was everyone making such a big deal out of nothing? It was ridiculous!

Throughout the week, Ellie saw her fair share of doctors, nurses, psychologists, and food! The nurses basically forced her to eat. The little voice, which had grown to a big, screaming monster, yelled, "You can't eat that! You're not allowed to! You will get fat!"

Ellie fought a hard battle! The doctors diagnosed her with an eating disorder. After she was medically stable, they sent her to a treatment center that specialized in eating disorders. They could then help her overcome her addiction.

Ellie entered the treatment center with determination. She would do this!! She would eat what was required, gain the necessary weight, and leave. It would be that

simple. Her team put her on a weight gaining meal plan. She basically shut down all her feelings and emotions and plowed through it. She gained the weight and felt successful! Her team was pleased! She looked healthy and happy, so they agreed to discharge her. Ellie blocked out all her inward pain and joyfully left the treatment center. She was recovered!

Home she went. She had been gone for three months, but not much had changed. As soon as she stepped into the house, triggers (negative memories that cause an emotional response) came flooding back. Here was where she had restricted food, exercised, purged, and used laxatives. How would she keep from turning back to those behaviors when the temptation was so strong?

Trevor and Stephanie were glad to have their daughter back, but at the same time they were nervous. They didn't want her to go backwards again. Ellie felt that immediately, and stress and anxiety began to build up in her. She turned back to what had worked before: the eating disorder. It wasn't long until she was sucked completely into her old habits.

Four months later, Trevor and Stephanie realized again something had to be done. But what would help their daughter? She had been in treatment, but it was a temporary fix. They had helped her physically and a tiny bit mentally, but the emotional and spiritual parts had been totally skipped.

It was decided that Ellie would have to go back to treatment. This time it was a different place, with different people, but the same goal. Ellie knew she would despise every minute of it. She wanted to recover, but she wasn't willing to give up all the eating disorder behaviors. As she got ready to leave home, she knew she would have no control over anything again. That was a terrifying thought. Right before she left, she went to the store and bought a pack of laxatives. She emptied them all into a little plastic baggy and safety-pinned them to her bra. Now she had control! No matter what her team asked her to do, she still had something to turn back to. She would recover, but only give up some of her behaviors.

The second time in treatment was harder than the first. Ellie knew which strings to pull to get the results she wanted. The disorder was extremely sly, and Ellie could lie her way out of anything. She knew the Bible strictly forbade lying, but in her mind, disobeying the eating disorder would bring worse consequences than facing God on Judgment Day. As Ellie slowly began to gain weight, the voice became more and more frantic. "You are fat! You have to stop eating. You can't let others control you this way. You need to leave immediately," it screamed. Ellie began to hide her food. No one noticed when she held food in her mouth until after the meal and then spit it into a tissue. No one noticed her "accidentally" dropping some food on her lap and letting it land on the floor when she stood up. No one saw her smearing food on her lips then wiping it off in her napkin or on her hand. She could fool the world and be in control!

Ellie knew her team wanted her to gain weight. They continued to increase her meal plan as her body began requiring more. Ellie could hardly handle that. She HAD to do something so it would appear like she was gaining weight so they would decrease her meal plan and allow her to go home. One evening while she was outside, she picked up rocks from the flower garden. She hid them in her jacket. The next morning when it was time to be weighed, she had her rocks stored neatly under her pajamas. With time, she added more and more rocks. It was hard to get them all hidden without

anyone seeing. Many nights she tossed and turned, worrying that someone would discover her trick.

The team was pleased with Ellie's "weight gain." They slowly began decreasing her meal plan. Ellie begged and pleaded to go home. She had gained the weight, or so it looked, and she had addressed some of her mental struggles. The team again agreed that it was time for her to move on. Ellie wanted to recover, but she wasn't willing to surrender EVERYTHING.

Home she went, but the story was repeated. Within months, the addiction had taken over again. Back to treatment she went. This scenario happened not once, not twice, but five times. Many people thought Ellie had a sin problem and was just being stubborn. They thought she should confess her sins, be anointed, and everything would be fine. It frustrated them that the minister's daughter was so wicked. Why didn't Trevor, as a God-fearing minister, correct her?

Finally Trevor had enough! He approached Ellie with the idea of an anointing. Nothing else was working. Ellie was confused. She knew she was sinning, but going against the eating disorder voice was worse than disobeying God. She knew her parents were at the end of their rope. She agreed to an anointing.

Two evenings later, Ellie, her parents, a minister, a bishop, and their wives gathered at Ellie's house for the anointing service. Ellie was nervous. She didn't know if she actually wanted to carry through with it. But maybe, just maybe, God would come down and perform a miracle. As they prayed together, and the oil trickled down her face, Ellie felt a deep sense of inward peace. Maybe this was the answer!

The days following the anointing were stressful. Before long, Ellie's health was worse than ever before. Ellie felt disappointed. Where was the peace she had after the anointing service? Was she so bad God decided to punish her instead? Why couldn't she just die? Many thoughts plowed through her head.

Trevor and Stephanie felt helpless. Their daughter was withering away right in front of their eyes. She was practically a walking skeleton. They were scared to see her go to bed at night, because they didn't think she would ever wake up. Ellie, on the other hand, declared she was fine. She continued going to work each day. The addiction had totally consumed her and Trevor and Stephanie didn't know which way to turn.

Knowing they had to do something if they wanted their daughter to survive, Trevor and Stephanie sought out another treatment center. They didn't have much faith that it would work, but they HAD to do something.

As Ellie packed her bags for yet another "vacation" in treatment, she felt like a zombie. She thought it was impossible to ever recover. She wanted to live out her dreams and goals, but felt like there was no way it could ever happen.

A war raged within Ellie as she entered the treatment center. She wanted to hold on to her old life and all the habits, but yet she wanted something better. Her habits were HARD to break. The neuropathway in her brain was wide and very deep like the ruts on an old heavily used dirt path. Every time she gave in to the addictive behaviors, the pathway in her brain was reinforced. She wanted desperately to break free, but it was impossible to do so without a lot of support.

While in treatment, Ellie again had no control of what she ate, how much she ate, if and when she exercised, or if she used laxatives or purged. The voice grew louder and very frantic! It was trapped and because of that, Ellie felt trapped as well. She tried

many ways to control situations and the outcomes. She began hiding food again. Within days, her trick was discovered. She was devastated! She knew that wasn't the path to true healing, yet she wasn't willing to sacrifice her old behaviors. She began to blame herself. "I am a bad person. I am not good enough. No one loves me. I am fat and ugly. I deserve to die. God doesn't even love me, and He never will. I won't ever have a fulfilling life. I am a burden to everyone. If people knew everything about me, they would hate me forever." Those were a few of the many negative thoughts she had.

Her team realized the damage the addiction did to her body. They helped her to recover physically so her brain could work in full capacity and her emotions would be more stable. They realized she faced many battles each day. They knew it was important to approach every aspect of her, in order to help. She had to heal mentally, physically, and emotionally before they could help her spiritually.

As time went on, Ellie made progress. The time came when she began to see a mentor named Kelly. The first step was connection. Kelly knew Ellie needed a safe person to confide in. A person that would listen without judging and freely giving advice. She didn't need someone who told her everything she was doing wrong. She needed someone who walked next to her. Kelly tried her best to be that person. As they built that safe connection, Ellie started unravelling all the hurts, lies, and confusion of the past. It was a very difficult time. She shed many tears, but through that process, healing came slowly.

As Ellie worked through her past hurts, she realized that she really did have a problem. She tried hard to reach freedom from the addiction. She wanted to go home and enjoy life. She wanted to be a normal teenaged girl, but the disorder was hard to destroy. Many times, Ellie found herself giving in to the voice. She didn't want to, but she did it without thinking. At times, she tried hiding her behaviors. She wanted to perform. Her team saw through the performance. Instead of being free, she was continuing the addictive cycle by adding performance. Addictions are not solved by how a person looks on the outside. Ellie soon realized the only path to freedom was through honesty. She couldn't just change her outward behaviors. She needed to truly want recovery. She had to change inside. She needed to be honest with herself, God, and the many people trying to help her. She needed to acknowledge and confess the mistakes in her past. Honesty heals, but secrecy kills. First, she confessed to God and asked for His forgiveness. But it didn't stop there. She needed to ask her parents for forgiveness for all the times she had wronged them.

Ellie had to change her beliefs. The way she thought and the things she believed were a part of her addiction. She believed she was a burden, a failure, unworthy, and stupid. She believed she was a bad person. Those beliefs caused her to feel anxious, worried, sad, alone, and hurt. She was sure others would judge her or tell her to read her Bible and pray more. When she felt those emotions, she turned to her behaviors. It was a domino effect. She was disconnected and isolated, so she turned to the things that brought relief. At that time, the whole process was automated. Her brain was just making the choices, and she didn't even think through it. Satan was in the eating disorder. That was his way to get into Ellie's life. At that time, she felt like she couldn't talk to anyone and was all alone in her thoughts. She believed each and every negative thing. As she began to recognize and change the negative thoughts, she began to feel much happier and positive.

As Ellie continued to heal, Kelly guided her in trying to stop her destructive behaviors. Her behaviors were a way to numb her feelings and feel better. When things were stressful at home, she went to exercise, restricting, laxatives, or whatever it was, to feel better. Now in treatment, instead of escaping from the pain, she had to sit in it and feel it. It was SO hard to do, but very necessary for complete healing. Emotional pain is hard to face, but the only way to heal emotional wounds is to open them up and dig out the bad so they can heal properly. It was TOUGH. Triggers arose in different forms while in treatment. Ellie wanted to turn back to her behaviors. The staff and Kelly helped her to focus on just doing the next right thing for today. That was the way to retrain her brain: ONE DAY AT A TIME.

The time came when Trevor and Stephanie came into the picture. Ellie's team explained to them that the eating disorder was not Ellie's fault. She hadn't woken up one morning and decided to have an eating disorder. Like any other addiction, there were factors that created vulnerability to addictions. They helped Trevor and Stephanie to see what those factors were. They explained that before a baby is born, that baby is connecting with the mom as well as the other family members. Once the baby is born, it mirrors what is around them. Mom smiles at the baby and the baby smiles back. The baby feels loved and secure. The baby learns to trust its parents through what it experiences. When parents become busy and don't take time for the child, the child learns to survive alone, instead of being connected. The child feels unsafe, abandoned, and alone. By the time the child is five years old, it has one of two beliefs established: "I can trust others to supply my needs, and I deserve to be loved" or "I cannot trust others to supply my needs and I don't deserve any love." Once the belief is formed, the child will continue to gather information to support the belief.

Trevor and Stephanie slowly began to see that by them not dealing with their personal problems from years before, they had handed them down to their children. They realized that what they modeled to their children, the children grasped without even realizing it. If the cycle continued, it would be passed on to the next generation.

The team pointed out that any addiction is rooted in emotional pain. Growing up, Ellie had no way to express that pain. She needed a way to feel better. She found that relief through restricting food. It started out gradually, just skipping dessert, but a wall had begun to grow. As the wall grew, so did the addiction. It took more and more to find the same relief from the pain, just like it takes more and more alcohol for an alcoholic to get the original high. Of course, it wasn't all Stephanie and Trevor's fault. Behaviors are carried from generation to generation. Parents teach their children their coping strategies. Many men are taught to be tough and not talk about their feelings. When a dad doesn't know how to talk about his feelings with his sons, he has unintentionally silenced his sons from talking about their emotions. It has a domino effect. If someone doesn't know how to express themselves, they are more vulnerable to addiction because they need some way to release all their hidden pain.

Trauma was explained thoroughly to Trevor and Stephanie. Trauma is not always a big, bad event. Sometimes it is a bunch of small happenings. Sometimes it is feeling alone, powerless, and unloved. When something happens, the person is alone to face emotions they have NO idea how to handle. That is the most traumatic time.

Ellie's team helped her parents to understand what Ellie would need when she discharged, so she could continue a recovered lifestyle. They explained that Ellie

needed connection and their presence. She didn't need reminders to read her Bible, pray, and give it to God. What she needed was a safe place with safe people. Instead of focusing on the tasks that needed to be done, Trevor and Stephanie needed to focus on Ellie's emotional needs. And not just Ellie's, but the rest of the children's as well. If a child needed to be corrected for something they did wrong, the parents had to focus on connection and not just addressing the problem that is frustrating them. It wasn't about how the parents looked to other people, but about what the child needed. Trevor and Stephanie were also encouraged to work through their childhood hurts with the help of a counselor.

Finally, the day of discharge arrived for Ellie. She was happy, excited, nervous, and scared all at once. She knew the journey wasn't over and it would take a lot of hard work to continue on. She also knew that she had the tools and the skills to make it possible. As she stepped out the doors, she thanked God for bringing her to this place to find freedom.

The days, weeks, and months ahead were far from easy. Many times, she felt that every step forward was countered with two steps backwards. Many triggers and challenging situations came her way and had to be fought. Many times, Trevor and Stephanie made mistakes which brought more struggles for Ellie. But with all the skills, tools, and support, she continued to make progress. Years later as she looked back, she realized the journey had been worth it, even though it seemed impossible.

