

Lorri Antosz Benson
Taryn Leigh Benson
Interview

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1. What was the worst part of your ordeal?

Taryn: “The loss of control over my own life. In the beginning, I didn’t realize I was out of control, but it became painfully obvious once I reached the point where I knew I wanted to get better. I remember crying as I was bingeing and purging because I knew I couldn’t stop.”

Lorri: “Dealing with the fear, the uncertainty and the helplessness. Once we realized how deep Taryn was into the disorder, my instincts were to fix it; to help her be happy again, and nothing I did achieved that goal. I had to watch my child physically and emotionally disintegrate, and that was indescribable.”

2. Why do you feel this is an important story to tell?

Taryn: “I think it is rare to find both a victim of an eating disorder and their parent who are willing to talk about their experiences. I think there is a lot of valuable information for families in both sides of our story and our book reaches out to others besides the person with the eating disorder.”

Lorri: “This is such a growing problem in our culture- getting worse all the time. When I was in the thick of it with Taryn, nothing helped more than to talk to another parent who had been through it. There were no books out there that focused on the parents’ point of view, and while we all know how difficult it is for someone personally struggling with an eating disorder, it is also a horrific experience for the family. We hope our story will provide insight and reassurance to other family members, whether they are in the midst of a battle or just wondering if they have a problem.”

3. Why do you think this is such a prevalent problem?

Taryn: “I think the media plays a very big role. Even though no one says eating disorders are good, there is way too much focus on celebrities rumored to be anorexic and weight loss strategies in general. Most people don’t realize that models and movie stars spend hours every day with personal trainers and constantly watch what they eat – and many of them still turn to unhealthy weight loss strategies to meet the standards for appearance!”

Lorri: “I believe today’s society is putting way too much pressure on our young women and men to be thin. While I know there are still psychological factors that contribute to the development of eating disorders, you only have to visit a grocery store check-out counter to see the unrealistic ideals and standards our children are being told are

necessary. All the headlines are about weight, abs, what celebrity has cellulite, etc. And no one tells them the extremes the models and stars go in order to be thin. They also don't tell them they're airbrushed and lit specially to look like that. Our daughters only know they need to be a size 0, no matter what."

4. Who will want to read this book and why?

Taryn: "I think this book is unique because it is written from both sides. It will appeal to girls with eating disorders because of my side of the story and it will appeal to their families and friends because of my mom's story."

Lorri: "When this topic comes up in a conversation, it's amazing how just about everyone knows someone with an eating disorder- either a daughter, sister, wife, niece, mother or friend, or maybe they personally had one. Or it's a mom who wonders if she's seeing signs of an eating disorder or if her daughter is just a light eater. This book is for any family member who is concerned or wants reassurance. It's also for those who are battling an eating disorder; it's an opportunity for them to see how their actions affect their families and friends."

5. How did you find out Taryn had an eating disorder?

Lorri: "It was a process. In the beginning, I thought it was a phase she was going through, or just something all her friends were trying. I did not think she actually had a disorder. But the book's prologue describes the moment our battle with her eating disorder began- the night I caught her throwing up after we went out for a family dinner."

6. Was there any connection between your personal relationships and your eating disorder?

Taryn: "In the book, I talked a lot about my personal relationships with friends and boyfriends. My group of friends consisted mostly of dancers and all very concerned with their appearances, which gave me the initial idea to experiment with eating disorder behaviors. I depended on close friends and boyfriends for self-esteem for a long time, and I unfortunately chose people who didn't really care about me and eventually made me feel worse about myself, which increased my depression and eating disorder behaviors. Eventually I learned to surround myself with people who made me feel good about myself because of who I was as a person and this helped me tremendously in my recovery."

7. How did this affect other areas of your life?

Taryn: “It affected most of the other areas of my life. I lost many friends and spent most of my time isolated in my room. I damaged the relationship I had with my family and my parents lost a lot of trust in me. My whole life was centered on this eating disorder and I pushed everything else out of the way to make room.”

Lorri: “For me, it greatly impacted our family; my other daughters were devastated with worry and anguish for Taryn, and acted out accordingly. It kind of took over our lives and spilled over into friendships and almost every conversation. I think every area in my life was affected due to the stress it caused.”

8. Why is this book different from others out there on the same topic?

Taryn and Lorri: “Most books out there are from the patient’s viewpoint, or from a medical viewpoint. Ours offers the unique focus on the parent or family member, but does it from two perspectives- the parent’s and that of the child with the eating disorder. This is such a disease of manipulation and deception, which becomes crystal clear through the telling of the same story in dual voices.”

9. Taryn was very explicit in the book about the disorder and what she went through. Was that difficult for you?

Lorri: “Very difficult. It’s always hard to discover things you don’t know about your child, especially when you think you’re an aware parent. It’s even more painful when you learn your child has suffered tremendously. Even as Taryn was turning in chapters for the book, I was still learning about how bad it was for her. I remember getting chapters from her and telling my husband, ‘Wait until you read this- prepare yourself.’”

10. Do you have any advice for someone going through a similar situation?

Taryn: “It’s hard to give advice to someone in the midst of an eating disorder, because until they realize they need to recover, there is not much anyone can do. For girls in the middle of it, I would suggest taking some time to really see what the eating disorder gives you that makes it worth losing everything else – including your life. For girls who are in recovery, keep focusing on the goal and remember that even if you have a bad day, you will always have tomorrow. Even though sometimes it is so difficult, you are on your way to beating a disorder that claims 10% of its victim’s lives – that’s a pretty impressive accomplishment!”

Lorri: “Take it seriously, remain calm, trust your gut. What helped me ultimately was to realize that Taryn had her own life journey, which included having an eating disorder at that time; that she needed to learn from this challenge. That helped me accept my own journey and inability to fix this for her, and that in turn relieved a lot of the stress and pressure I was feeling.”

11. Are there any particular events that caused your eating disorder?

Taryn: I don’t think so. I think my low self esteem was a major factor and the depression and anxiety problems I had only exaggerated the fact that I hated myself.”

12. Was there anything positive that came out of your experience?

Taryn: “I learned a lot about myself through all the therapy and inpatient treatment. I also realized my own personal strength. Whenever I have a personal challenge now, I just remember that I was strong enough to beat a disorder that kills people and ruins lives, and I know I can get through whatever it is.”

Lorri: “It reinforced the strength of my relationship with my husband, it ended up making our family even closer, it made me grow tremendously as a person both spiritually and emotionally, and I think this book is a very positive product of this experience.”

13. Why did you decide that both of you should write this book?

Lorri: “We were talking one night and I mentioned that I wanted to write a book for parents and the loved ones of those with eating disorders, since nothing like that had been available for me. Taryn said she really wanted to write about her experience too, and we realized that by writing it together, we would illustrate the manipulation that goes on in an eating disorder. Seeing how different the reality of Taryn’s life was, compared to what I thought was going on, is an important and very revealing distinction.”

14. From your experience, what are some warning signs that parents should look for?

Lorri: “Obviously a preoccupation with weight, but especially watch for a need to scrutinize the reflection in the mirror. Taryn could not pass a mirror without lifting her shirt and turning sideways. Also, look for increasing excuses to miss meals, curious absences after meals, unusual eating patterns. For example, cleaning her plate and then continuing to clean up someone else’s, or the opposite; abnormally tiny portions, separating foods on a plate, pushing food around a plate but not really eating. Watch for a sudden interest in everything about food- the Food Channel, scoping out eating

disorder stories on the Internet, etc. Sometimes, your daughter may find excuses to eliminate entire food groups from her diet, i.e. wants to be a vegetarian, hates dairy products, etc.”

15. Looking back, is there anything your mother could have done differently that might have made a difference in your eating disorder?

Taryn: “There was nothing she could have done that would have stopped it. I do wish she had respected my privacy a little more. Even though I understand her reasoning behind reading my journal and searching my room, it didn’t stop anything from occurring. Instead, I didn’t feel safe in my own house and I was angry at her, which led to bingeing and purging out of spite. I think it made her feel more in control of the situation, but I think it hurt more than it helped.”