



Art Jamie Russell

## Zoe's secret

An interview with Zoe Bush, co-founder of the Bridges Foundation

The Bridges Foundation is a local (Western Australian) initiative, in its infancy stage, which aims to form an alliance between young people, parents, carers and professionals, promoting understanding of eating disorders and providing support and services for people affected by them. For more information or to get involved contact either Karen Bush [bushy@inet.net.au](mailto:bushy@inet.net.au) or Julie McCormack (Princess Margaret Hospital Eating Disorders Clinic) [julie.mccormack@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:julie.mccormack@health.wa.gov.au)

What's your secret Zoe?

I suffered an eating disorder for one and a half years, it was a nightmare. Not only are you fighting these voices screaming at you inside your head, but you're also dealing with the stigma and stereotyping that comes with having an ED.

Can you describe the stigma and stereotyping?

Since body image has recently become a big thing in the media, it contributes greatly to blurring the lines between diets and full blown Eating Disorders. While awareness is out there a lot more, which is good, a lot of it is negative. Many people will read gossip magazines with 'Paris's Bulimic Hell' or 'Mary-Kate's Life or Death Battle' and see it as a publicity stunt and see them as attention-seekers and people who are obsessed with themselves. And for some celebrities it's just that, but for those affected by Eating Disorders in real life, these stigmas and thoughts that people receive from the media are harmful and negative because they are viewed as simply being vain and wanting attention.

What was an eating disorder really about for you?

For me having an Eating Disorder was a way to hide away from the world and problems I had to deal with, but at the same time I wanted to express my pain by becoming so disgustingly thin that I would almost look like a demon, so finally what controlled me inside would be seen. I'd had enough of pressures from the world and I felt out of control of everything and thought food was the only thing left. Everything I did wasn't good enough so that just snowballed greatly until all I could do with it was focus it on food. The more these feelings developed towards eating and exercising, the sicker I became.

Why did you keep it a secret for so long?

In the beginning of an ED, you are abiding by what the voices tell you and almost proud for keeping it all your own secret, it all seems perfect. But then the knowledge of what you're doing to yourself gets heavier and heavier until basically, if you don't tell someone, you're going to crumble.

How did talking about it help?

Reaching out to your loved ones is a major step in recovery. Even if you are not interested in it, it takes the heaviness out of it because it is no longer a secret. I found this immediately after I told my mum. No longer did I feel so alone and isolated. Sure, I had to deal with the thoughts that Anorexia bombarded me with like 'you've betrayed our little secret' and 'how are you supposed to be thin if people know something is wrong?' ... but the relief was worth it. I encourage people with ANY type of mental illness to reach out ... I can not stress how important it is! You don't have to go this journey alone.

What sort of things did people say that helped?

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It's often hard for people to know what to say when someone has an eating disorder ...

...What sort of things did people say that helped you?

I think mainly letting you know they're there. Sometimes, a simple heartfelt hug is all that's needed and can mean a whole lot more than words. Talking with others who are further along helps because you don't feel so alone and weird because when you discuss the thoughts you have and emotions you feel, it's like a confirmation that you're not so isolated that you'll never have anyone understand you in your whole life.

Helpful links:

[www.thebrontefoundation.com.au](http://www.thebrontefoundation.com.au) (newsletter subscription available on this website)

[www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au](http://www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au)