

Interviewee: Suzanne Lewandowski
Interviewers: Erin Muschette and Eily Finn
Date: November 10, 2009
Place: Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcribers: Erin Muschette and Eily Finn



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Abstract: Suzanne Lewandowski was born in Patterson, New Jersey and moved to Massachusetts in 1979 when she was about 25. Lewandowski attended Butler University and received her BA in interior design. She started working towards her Master's in Education at Assumption College in 2004, and will complete her education in the next few years. Lewandowski is also taking courses at Plymouth State University through a certified program at the Eating Disorders Institute of Plymouth State University. Lewandowski lived in several towns in Massachusetts before settling down in North Brookfield where she enjoys the tight community and friendly atmosphere. Lewandowski finds joy in gardening and chose a profession in landscaping before she injured her back and was anxious to find a job with good benefits. She discovered an opportunity for education and employment at Assumption College where she has spent nine years. Lewandowski's biggest challenge in life was her battle with bulimia. Lewandowski's father passed away right before the eating disorder started in January of 1974, when she was 19. Bulimia took over her physical, emotional, and mental health for 25 years. During that time, Lewandowski also became dependent on alcohol and spent five years battling her substance abuse in addition to bulimia. Through faith and determination, she was able to rise above her alcohol abuse and began her mission to overcome her eating disorder. She has been symptom-free from bulimia for almost ten and a half years and has been busy constructing plans to make a difference in the lives of those fighting the same battle against an eating disorder. Her goal is to make sure women and young girls are screened for eating disorders early on, and to set up facilities to help women through the process of recovery. Lewandowski is an active leader in her town and local schools through composing newsletters and web pages to keep students and parents informed about domestic abuse, depression, eating disorders, and other important issues. She is also involved in organizations such as NB CARES, Hearts for Heat, and PTA. In 2009, she was named a Massachusetts "Unsung Heroine" for her advocacy for eating disorders awareness.

EM: So the first question is what is, what is your maiden name, and if you are married, what is your married name?

SL: My maiden name is Yerdon, Y-E-R-D-O-N, a German name from Smith, New and my married name is Lewandowski, obviously Polish.

EM: Okay, and where are you from?

SL: Patterson, New Jersey.

EM: And do you have any children?

SL: I have my 18 year old daughter who is a freshmen at Johnson and Wales College in Providence.

EM: Mmhm

EF: Oh, my brother goes there.

EM: And you said that your maiden name was German, do you identify with any other ethnicities?

SL: Dutch...and English.

EM: Are your parents from another country or were they born here?

SL: My mother was born in New Jersey and she is DAR so quite a long ways from the Americans and my father is from upstate New York a little town called [?]

EM: And were you born in New Jersey or did you move there when you were younger?

SL: I was born in Patterson, New Jersey, and I moved to Massachusetts in 1979 and I was about 25.

EM: When you moved to Massachusetts what was it like? Different from New Jersey, or...

SL: Actually New Jersey and Massachusetts are VERY similar. I moved first to Framingham then to Franklin and then to Natick then back to New Jersey and then to North Brookfield. I have been in North Brookfield now for ten and a half years.

EM: Do you like it?

SL: I love North Brookfield, it's a very small community, where people are pretty close.

EM: Would you ever go back to New Jersey?

SL: No.

EM: And do you have family that lives in North Brookfield or...

SL: Do I have what?

EM: Any family that lives in North Brookfield?

SL: No. Well actually that's not true. My sister-in-law who is originally from Massachusetts and lived in Watertown for many years moved to North Brookfield about three years ago across the street.

EM: Since you are not from Worcester what is your connection to Worcester?

SL: My first connection was getting a job with a landscaping company call Hillary Landscaping which I worked for about six months before I injured my back and I decided that I was old enough to get a job with heat and repetition with a paycheck all year round and I first started working at Rutland Nurseries as a secretary and then I came to Assumption College.

EM: Do you like it here at Assumption?

SL: I do, very much. I have been here almost nine years and it's the best job I've ever had in my life. Truly. [laughing] Assumption has been the wind beneath my wings and has allowed me to do things and get an education that I never would have gotten had I not come to Assumption.

EM: I think that leads us to the next topic which is education.

EF: Where did you attend school?

SL: Well, I went to school in New Jersey and I attended Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana and I had started out as a Botany major but I was a very lousy student so it changed to interior design and got my first job doing interior design work in New Jersey. And then I started college again and got my BA at Butler and I started my Master's here at Assumption College in 2004 and I anticipate, in another four or five years, completing my education. In the meantime, I have been attending Plymouth State University. They have an Eating Disorders Institute and a certified program for eating disorders education which I will be completing in about three weeks.

EF: Have you had any challenges in your education?

SL: My only challenges were related to the eating disorder. When you develop an eating disorder, it affects your ability to concentrate, and so it's much harder to study and stay focused.

EF: Umhum

SL: I have been eating disorder symptom-free for almost ten and a half years. So it is not now affecting my ability to [laughs] pursue my education. Time is, and raising a family, and being an active volunteer interferes with the ability to sit down and write a paper. And transcribe notes like you are doing now.

EF EM SL: [Laughing]

EF: So you have any future goals that you are focusing on and looking forward to?

SL: Well, if you don't mind me spewing some statistics.

EF: No problem.

SL: The following eating disorder statistics, there is a national trend of one-half percent to 3.7 percent of females, and I can give this to you if it helps, suffer from anorexia in their lifetime. If you plot those figures into Worcester, just the city of Worcester, and they had, in 2008, they had 91,236 females. And if you put into those statistics, 456 to 3,375 females will have anorexia in their lifetime. For bulimia, the national statistic is 1.1 percent to 4.2 percent. Which means, or translates into, 1,003 to 3,831 females will suffer from bulimia in Worcester, just Worcester, this city proper. Two, ah, ten to twenty, ah where is it? Up to 19 percent of college age women in America are bulimic. And if you plot those figures into the enrollment at Assumption College in 2005, there were 1,263 females attending the college that would translate into 239 Assumption College females with bulimia. And if you translate those figures into seven of the Worcester Consortium schools, that translates into 1,479 women. There are no facilities in the Worcester County that treat eating disorders. There are maybe four or five nutritionists, maybe five or six therapists. I have yet to find a primary care physician that specializes in eating disorders. And so my goal, to take the long way around, is to bring services to Worcester County to treat people with eating disorders because they are most successfully treated with early diagnosis. When college students leave, they will not, not get well unless they get help.

EF: Umhum

EM: So the courses at Plymouth, are helping you to start that here? Or just for more information about the disorders?

SL: Well...if it goes well, if I can back track just a little bit.....In my education here at Assumption College ...in my volunteer work that I do in running an eating disorder support group in Worcester County ...I've met, well I've sent letters to and met with many of the key people that run mental health organizations such as ...The United Way of Central Massachusetts, the president of their clinic and the president of the Worcester Consortium, and try to bring awareness to all of them. And so right now all the dots are starting to come together and hopefully within the next few years, we will have a facility here with one of the major hospitals

in Boston. The classes up in New Hampshire are teaching general information about eating disorders which I know were the nutritional aspect of eating disorders that which is something I really have a general idea and it's very helpful, and then the medical aspect of eating disorders and all the different things that can happen when one suffers from starvation and now I'm in the treatment classes and all of these will help me with the eating disorder support group.

EF: This is clearly a passion of yours in your life.....does it have any other meaning to you, to help others?

SL: Well...when you develop an eating disorder it takes over your life, it interferes with your emotional health, physical health, psychological health, your ability to concentrate on a job or your studies and ...it's very difficult to recover from. Just lost track....I suffered from bulimia for 25 years. I developed it at 19, within a few weeks after the death of my father, and I have only been recovered since 1999...so I wasted about 25 years of my life. For all practical purposes there were several times I should have died. And I gave you statistics earlier, I have survived and I have a voice that can help.

EF: How have you balanced different priorities in your life and responsibilities as well as the important goals of yours?

SL: My family might disagree, [laughter], I look at things as a jigsaw puzzle and I have a lot of pieces well in my own recovery during the process of that 25 years I developed alcoholism. I was a pretty hard alcoholic for about five years, and I've been sober now for 16 and a half years, and in sobriety I've learned how to cope with life on life's terms and gradually rebuild the puzzle of my life. Back in 2003, I was asked to be PTA president of a town in North Brookfield and I had never been a leader in anything in my life and it was a very terrifying year. It was the best year and the worst year of my life. I learned how to face anxiety, to follow through, and to make a difference. And from that day, I have actually, my advocacy actually started here at brown bag lunch put on by Assumption College's human resources department. They brought in a speaker to talk about parenting your teen and at that time my daughter was, I think, in seventh grade. And I learned about friends with benefits. And the impact it has on many women who participate in sexual activity before they're ready. And how many of them develop an eating disorder, or self-injury, substance abuse, and alcoholism. And I knew from...at that point that I had to do something and I started a parents' organization in my hometown in North Brookfield, which has since developed into or we renamed it NB CARES, Community Action and Responsibility to Empower Students. And...for the last four years...I have I sent weekly emails to 450 families in North Brookfield with a schedule of events so it's a calendar of events so they know every activity that's going on in our town and they can better spend time with their children and do things that are fun or academic pursuits for their children and I also have a webpage which is also a community calendar and I will send out emails on statistics on eating disorders or alcoholism and for a few years when I had time I sent monthly newsletters home with the students which game resources and umm and again the calendar so families would know about depression and to learn things that they don't talk about that they really need to know about and domestic violence I'm also on a domestic violence task force and the town's emergency

management agency and I'm president of a fuel assistance program that we started last year called Hearts for Heat.

EF: Is your husband involved in your work as well?

SL: He's..he's on the board for Hearts for Heat, [short pause] no. [laughs]

EF: no?

[laughing]

EF: What about your daughter? Does she..

SL: ummm my daughter has become well before the last few years of high school. She did become president of her..the senior class and secretary of student council and does volunteer work because...she had no choice.

[Everyone laughs]

SL: And all of her friends' parents were very active in the PTA meetings in the town so they all help out.

EF: Umm what do you foresee as some costs and benefits of this focus in your life, some benefits or some costs?

SL: I have not really enjoyed down time too much in five years. I am an avid gardener and for my gardens are ...where is where I spend as much time as possible regrouping and every morning now I walk the dog for half an hour and that's pretty much my regrouping time [chuckles] My husband's a salesman so he travels a lot . I did try to cut back a year ago for my daughter's senior year but she was never home once she got her license and he's on the road so it doesn't have that much of an effect. Other than...I'm..always stressed

EF: Yeah...

SL: There's always deadlines and its..they never end. But I have recently asked someone to take over Hearts for Heat and she will become president next week and we will be given a break [laughs] And so I let go of that and I there were a few others I was on, I worked church vestry the leadership and I ... resigned from that to take on Hearts for Heat and I was on high school council and I resigned from that to take on Hearts for Heat and this year after I finish Plymouth State in the next few weeks. I do I have a capstone project which I have to do to tie it all together and that's part of the outlook we can see in the next year but I plan on putting school on hold for a while so I can remember what it's like to

EF: Have down time hehe.. how has religion played a role in your life?

SL: My faith ...plays a big role in my life. When you first become or start the recovery process you really....you don't set out to become religious or have faith but as each day goes by you rely

on God for help, and you look back and you're like whoa! I have come quite a long way on this journey and the fellowship has grown and the Episcopal Church in North Brookfield is very important to me and my relationship with God is as well. Being a gardener you learn about faith by being outside and feeling the breezes and smelling the graphite and you can taste the seasons as they go byso..its a big part of my life.

[Pause. Giggles] that's why I like it. [chuckling] seriously. [Chuckling]

EM: ahh ...ok so...if like besides everything else, are you very active like politically or...

SL: No.

EM: Ok so...Now I forgot what I was going to say heheh

[Everyone laughing]

[Something mumbled on tape, can't make it out]

EM: Yah...[laughs]

EF: What about women's rights? How do you feel about equality ...the struggles that women face in general? Like do you feel that more should be done to...help them like get them like equal to men?

SL: Well I certainly feel that there should be equal pay for equal work, and my husband and I well...my husband is still from an older generation that expects to.. not-not so much lately cause-cause its been a process but he has certainly had to learn how to take on some of the load as I have increased mine. I think women still...do it all and it, and it really helps to have a man help around the house because when you walk in the door and you've been busy all day long, you don't want to see what you have to do, you want to come home to just be able to sit down and enjoy your home and your [laughs]...your haven there after all. And I live in a big old colonial and its...you know...I love just going home and putting on music and putting on candles or sitting out on the porch and... with my laptop writing [laughs].

[Everyone laughs]

SL: While I was involved with an eating disorder, recovery was all I focused on so that's all I did was sit on the porch...write and I like to watch the garden grow [laughs] and the weeds

EF: [laughs]

EM: Just back tracking a little bit, so you've been, you got over bulimia for 25 years and have for ten and a half of them been symptom free, symptom free since then..

SL: mmhmm

EM: How do you like-what keeps you going? How do you get through those tough times? Is it still a thought on your mind or...

SL: Well...with recovery one has to change ...anybody that has some sort of substance abuse or any kind of addiction it's a Band-Aid for something that's out of line in your life and when you become middle aged and you still have the addiction problem you have to go back and find out what went wrong and make conscious changes and how you cope with everything in order to...to survive and thrive. When I was in the garden, in my recovery, I lived in Natick at the time, on a farm and the most I could do in the beginning was just pick beans ...hmmhmm but I mean, I literally, I-I was landsc-ahh I was a farm (?) that summer, I picked tomatoes I picked beans, I just sat out there and did menial work that gave the mind-body connection back and little by little just doing things and having your mind focused on something other than alcohol or food I'd had five minutes here and then ten minutes there then twenty minutes then an hour and it-it's a very slow process when you're immersed in an eating disorder you wake up in the morning and everything is about you know, what you look like weight, ways to get food or restrict food, I never restricted so its different but

EM: Can you define restriction?

SL: For anorexia nervosa, you withhold eating in order to lose weight. Whereas with bulimia, you binge, and then you purge. What I did at my worst, I would binge and purge from the moment I got up to the moment I went to bed sometimes 10 to 15 to 20 times a day. I really consumed about 80, 80 thousand calories.

EM: Were people aware that you were going through this or...?

SL: No..I hid it very well for the first well the first ten years I had it. The word bulimia hadn't even, well I'm sure it existed, but it had never been in the public eye. My eating disorder started in January of 1974, at least the bulimia did. It was in the 80's when I first heard the word -- when I realized that I was not the only one in the world that had this horrible problem. But by then it was so enmeshed in my everyday living, that I couldn't stop and I stopped trying to stop.

EF: How did it affect your relationships? With friendships, or boyfriends for you?

SL: That actually is a whole other story. My, my ex husband was my boyfriend at the time, it was an abusive relationship, not physically abusive but mentally abusive and controlling. And so I wasn't really allowed to have other relationships and ...I was sexually abused so it did affect me in my inability to have relationships with other men because when it got to the sexual bit I mean, I sort of fled. But I also married him, and so the abuse continued, until I finally moved back with my mother...

EM: Um, yea I forgot my question...

SL: With what I've given you it gives you sort of a time line of how each one of the components... an eating disorder doesn't just happen on a diet, it is a, it's like a puzzle, the pieces here and there come together and you start poking in a certain direction and the pieces fill

in maladaptive behaviors. In my case, my mother had cancer when I was growing up. She had depression because of it, which turned into mental illness, so my mother's relationship and mine is very difficult and then when my ex-husband came into the picture I was torn and torn in two again. So, when you are already down that path you already have problems with relationships and when every minute is spent thinking about food, or eating, or finding the bathroom to throw it up it gets really difficult to maintain relationships especially when you don't want anybody to know.

EM: When you...mentioned how you didn't hear about bulimia until a few years after you were already a victim of it. Knowing that you weren't the only one and that other people did it too, were you not as like embarrassed by it? Or did you think it was like okay because you weren't the only one...or...did that make you want to do it more?

SL: At that point I remember standing in my kitchen looking at the television and I turned scarlet. No one was around, and I felt that pit in my stomach. It had a name..it did not help in any way. In a way it made me, every time I heard the word, it made me cringe...even more embarrassed. I had a few episodes of dehydration and ...muscle cramping, electrolyte imbalance and I was rushed to the hospital and I still refused to tell the doctor what was wrong. And so I lied, it is a very shameful disease and you don't want anyone to know for the most part. I know it's a little different now but back then...

EF: Were you afraid of like dying or was that not even a thought that crossed your mind?

SL: Oh you were afraid of dying, but that's not, oh there were many a nights when I was trying to quit drinking or I'd lay awake at night, I'd refuse to sleep I was afraid I wouldn't wake up in the morning. There were times I called the emergency room and was too ashamed to go.

EM: So you kept it locked in, and you feared dying, but it wasn't enough to stop?

SL: See, it's alcoholism, drug abuse, and eating disorders you don't have a choice. You wake up and your thoughts go there and they run, you can't, can't bring them in you're left to, you can't reign them in unless you get help from doctors and that is why the advocacy that I'm doing is trying to find primary care physicians and trying to get doctors more aware of how to screen. Because it is a lot easier to prevent an eating disorder than it is to recover from one, and if doctors could screen, and get these young kids help before it becomes an eating disorder, it's a lot cheaper for insurance companies and a lot better, a lifetime better for these kids. In my case I was almost grateful for the alcoholism because even though the eating disorder got worse, and I started smoking when I was in... when I got sober, I learned how to live again, and I learned self-reliance and how to do things sober. But it took another six years from the time I got sober until I shed the eating disorder. It's a slow process of relearning who you are and learning how to cope with everything, totally different.

EM: Do you have any regrets? Or...how do you feel about the choices you've made in your life?

SL: Sometimes I have regrets. Bulimia destroys your mouth and destroys your teeth and I probably spent about 70,000 dollars on dental work and in addition about another 125,000 dollars on food in a 25 year period. So I could have my house paid off and a nice car and money in the bank, ...and so that is my regret. However, I've learned a lot about myself. I've recovered. I don't know if my life would ever have been as good as it is now, had it not been as bad as it was. I have a purpose and a goal, and people keep asking me if I ever, do I miss -- my daughter's in college -- and I go well I don't have time to do that, I have more time to do what I have to do. When I was pregnant with my daughter, and I'm not real happy about this certainly, but I drank throughout the pregnancy, I binged and purged, and I smoked throughout my pregnancy. It was a miserable time and I prayed every single night, that if my daughter was born healthy I would make a difference. She was, she was an athlete scholar, she's a great kid, and so I'm just trying and keeping my end of the bargain. These tangents keep happening with my life, when we first moved back here in '99, there was..I got at a job with the landscaping company and I actually got fired from it. [laughs] No one gets fired from a landscaping job, but one of the girls that had been there for maybe six or seven years, she was not getting paid as much as I was, when I was in New Jersey, I got state certified as a landscaper cause I went to school so I had all these credentials for landscaping and so I was getting paid three dollars an hour more. One day she got her paycheck, and I mean I got her paycheck and she got mine and she found out how much I was making, and he let me go and it devastated me. And so I went to get some help because I didn't want to relapse with the alcohol. And my eating still was not great and so I went to see a therapist and got some medication which made me extremely tired, so much so that I couldn't even continue with bulimic activities, that is actually when I stopped taking my medication I had determined that it was time to let go of the eating disorder and the next day it was the last time I binged and purged. It was on my birthday the day before my birthday in '99. But two years later my husband, who was a preemie and has a predisposition to alcohol, had a detached retina and he had four surgeries in three years, and I had to take care of his job and my job at the same time. So I was working about sixty hours a week and then I got a second job to help with the finances with a group home with disability, disabled adults in Worcester and I worked that job for three years. And so at that point about 70 hours a week and then I got the interview at Assumption College and the, the chairman of the history department at that time during the interview I asked him if it would be okay if I was late every once and a while if something should happen at the second job because I was work at night and I would come right from there to here. And it turns out he had a son with a disability and said that if you can do that work, then you can do anything and he hired me. So had it not been for my husband's bad eye, I never would have had to get the second job and I never would have been chosen at Assumption. So, you know when you look back and you see all these connections it's just amazing how things work.

EM: Everything happens for a reason.

SL: Yupp.

EM: Do you think that ...you know, you had to go through the disorder to be where you are now to help other people...(can't hear recording)...in the Worcester County...

SL: Absolutely. Absolutely, I don't know what compels me to do it but...I have people calling me, all the time looking for services and when you have an eating disorder you're in a cocoon that you can't get out of, you just...your life is horrible, its-its just the quality of life is devastating emotionally and psychologically and physically and...I think I have to help, I have no choice. You know there's-there's just no question about it. I-I have a voice now and I'm not going to let you know these young kids spend 25 years doing what I did...and for a lot of people it's long term

EM: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

[pause]

SL: If you are not feeling good about yourself, see your doctor, make sure that if it is something like depression something that can be treated with medication, that you get help because you deserve to feel good. You deserve to wake up in the morning and not feel anxiety you know because a lot of times people will...cope with the anxiety and it's biologically, and eating disorders they are finding are more and more biologically based...and if you can get help getting rid of those fumes that just make you feel wrong, umm you may not choose to cope with something to feel better. And if you are feeling better physically and emotionally you might not choose substances which interfere with your ability to raise your children and make educated choices. If you have a child umm well-well my generation was the first generation to that had really gotten involved with eating disorders and each one now I mean...its very difficult to say you know I'm-to feel good about yourself in a world where everything is...blasted (?) ahh

EM: the media...

SL: Heck yah. So...I mean there's so many different ways to cut into this to get better but I think, volunteer, get involved, go for walks, you know, find something that helps with the mind-body connection, do it with your children, umm you know be involved with your community, that old (?) it takes a village is very, very important because when you're around people you care about the other things don't matter quite so much.

EM: (too low to hear)... one last thing, going back to you know what you said how everyone deserves the best for themselves, do you think that specifically from popular magazines and the media that everybody has to be really small and that leads to not only a genetic tendency to maybe have an anorexia nervosa or bulimia but now you have the media saying that you have to be really, really thin

SL: There's...a new book well I don't know if it's a new book but *Health at Any Size*. If you eat healthy, again this is complicated but when you are born you sort of have a...a weight that you are going to be and within range if, and you-you can spend your whole life trying to fight and not win and it really wrecks your life, so help, get outside, and if you can and-and get healthy exercise eat as healthy as you can umm and let nature take its, you know course you know I eat cookies, hehe I eat cake, you know I eat what I want but I try to eat healthy things to you know,

to balance everything out and um I mean I'm-I'm always eating, I-I bring...(laughing makes it hard to hear) I mean because of my dental issues I can't chew so...so I have to-I have to make adjustments to what I eat and-and sometimes its really hard because I can't just sit-if I'm hungry and I'm running out the door I can't grab a-an apple because I can't chew it.

EF: Is that because of the bulimia or...

SL: The-the bulimia destroyed my teeth and so I do have a denture and it does not stay in [laughs], very well, once the glue goes, once you start eating then it's very painful so eating is not always fun anymore. And-and I like to eat but...you know...again you have to make, you can't...you want to look your best and what your best is-is feeling, waking up in the morning and feeling good about the day not thinking about what you look like but think about what you are going to be doing and..you know, for me that is walking the dog in the morning, and getting that mind-body connection, feeling the cold in my face on a fall day, smelling wood smoke from the neighbor's fire place, just feeling alive, and being kind to your fellow people although I'm not always nice to my husband [laughs] he's the one that takes the brunt of everything. You know when you're always on the go its not always so easy but my husband was the wind beneath my wings. I have, when I got sober he knew me, my current husband, knew me and married me when I was a drunk and I was binging and purging and then I changed when I got sober then I changed more when I quit drink, smoking and then I've changed even more when I quit the eating disorder. Now I'm in grad school and I, you know, now I sit on this pedestal of perfection looking down on him [we all laugh] saying why didn't you do this [laughs] but he's been there to support me every step of the way. And when I got the Lucy Stone Achievement Award for making the world better, two years ago, actually your teacher nominated me, Leslie, [all laughing] you know I couldn't have done it without him. And through the connections I made with that , last-last May I was nominated for one of the Unsung Heroines in the State of Massachusetts and was honored in Boston ...

EF: What is that again, the unsung-

SL: Oh un-un-unsung heroine, it is, actually if you go on the Assumption College webpage where they have the list of, they have archived things, you go to August and there's an article and it talks about it.

EM: Umm sorry I have another question.

SL: That's ok

EM: You said that you-you know wake up in the morning and it feels good to just be able to be happy about life and looking to the day, when you were unhappy with yourself like with the eating disorder, did you take it out on other people in like other ways or.. or were you just mad at yourself or mad at other people or...

SL: You mean, during my illness?

EM: Yah.

SL: No, no I wasn't mad at other people.

EF: Did it change like your personality or...

SL: Oh oh, I'm sure it did. When you're, when you wake up in the morning you feel fat and feeling fat is a state of mind. It's, you just don't like yourself, you have this anxiety that just makes you hate everything because you're not thin, and you mistakenly believe that once you're thin, things are going to be fine because, look at all those happy people on TV that are thin and then you get thin, and then you have to stay, it-its hard to stay at an under-listed weight in using those behaviors, especially with bulimia because you go up and down, up and down and if you've been low, you keep trying to get lower

EF: It's never good enough...

SL: It's never good enough and-and then when you try to...to recover, your-your whole system is so screwed up that being healthy -- you have no metabolism, and so, even if you eat a minuscule amount you put on weight and then its [tape cut off, had to flip to other side]. When, when you get down no matter what you eat your body hangs on to it because your body is trying to stay alive, it does not know that you're trying to be thin, it's trying to keep your-your body's organs from failing and so it keeps every calorie in your body as long as possible to promote health, life and so when you start recovering you will put on weight and that is normal. And when you try to recover on your own as I did, you put on weight and you say, you fat pig, you're blowing it, and then you go right back to that old place and you just, you try and you get sucked back and sucked back so it's very important to, you know, try and get as much of a treatment team as you can, a primary care physician, a psychologist, a support group, a dietician, because you will need all those people to watch out for all of the different parts of you.

EM: Was that the hardest part, when you try to stop and gain weight, and then you doubt yourself and do it again.

SL: Yes, that-that is hard. I think by the time I-at the very end of my eating disorder ...I had started my own business in New Jersey, a landscaping business and I was actually so engrossed in what I was doing with the business I would binge and then I would be too busy to purge and so I was putting on the weight anyway and so the passion of landscaping and gardening and anything I was capable of doing became more important than what I looked like and that's part of the transition when you're close, 'cause it's very-there's different stages of recovery and you-just like I knew I was an alcoholic for three or four years before-and then I made ha-half attempts [laughs]. Is that on here? ... at getting sober and then there's a certain point when you and then you finally make the plunge to get well-to do it. With an eating disorder you hover, but you don't want to let go, that eating disorder has helped you survive, in your mind, for a long time and it's become your friend and you don't really wanna let go because you're scared of what's on the other side and so you have to build-that's why I call it a recov-a recovery puzzle, and you have to -when you do a jig saw puzzle you don't just start here and just put the puzzle together, you do the boundaries, you know, it's the easiest. And then if there's a bunch of sky you'll do the blue pieces until you're stuck, and then if there's sand, you'll do the sand until you're stuck and

if there's trees then you'll do some trees until you're stuck and that's like recovery part of it is. Part of it is nutritional, you'll work on that until you can't-until you know, you're stuck. Part of it is exercise, part of it is, you know it's behavioral changes but if you work a little here, and work a little here and work a little here, the picture becomes more clear and then it's-I didn't have this puzzle theory when I was in recovery [laughs].[all of us spoke at the same time, not understandable on recording]...When you are in grad school here at Assumption you have to write a reflection paper for pretty much every one of your classes so-so I had the reflective paper on the, how the-the job choices of everything affected my recovery, so I had to look at my recovery as putting things in place so that's where I came up with, and it- its true. It is like a puzzle little by little, piece by piece, and relapse isn't failure, it's a piece that just isn't the right place to put it in, you tried it, didn't work, you put it over here, until a later date. [short pause] (can't distinguish who's talking) anything else? No I'm done.

EM: Well then, thank you so much for participating

SL: You're welcome.