

Julie's Story

This is my story of hope for all those suffering from trichotillomania... A compulsion to pull out one's hair.

Trichotillomania. That's some name.

I have always done this in private and have been very secretive about my behaviour. Those closest to me would not even know. And so the fact that I am writing this, - bringing it out into the open - is very significant and certainly very empowering for myself.

In a nutshell ... I am 42 years old and began pulling out my eyelashes when I was about four. This progressively got worse over the years and by the time I was 18 I was wearing false eyelashes and heavy make-up to disguise the fact that I had none. Off and on during the years up until I was 21 I was also pulling out my eyebrows. By the time I was 35 I was without eyebrows and eyelashes. So you could see the way I was heading... No hair on my head at 40!

But I just couldn't stop. I was totally powerless. The more I beat myself up by negative self-talk the worse it got for me. I was depressed. I was totally consumed by this thing.

Desperate. Exhausted. Sleeping sometimes, whole weekends away staying in my bed where I felt comforted - this was my way of coping when things got really bad. I hated myself for this ridiculous behaviour... this self-mutilation. But the amazing thing was that I could go into work on Monday morning and act as though nothing was wrong...but of course suffering secretly.

You may be wondering at this stage, why didn't I ever get some help. Well I did. But I found over the years that various doctors that I had seen weren't able to in any real positive way, simply because there was very little known obsessive compulsive disorders until recent research in the last 10 years.

And so at around 35 I decided to do a personal development course (one of many to follow). I knew that if I were to integrate changes in my life, changes in my behaviour, I needed to do a lot of work firstly on my self-esteem. It was very low. Later I would look at my life in a more holistic way and in the actions of "doing" this is where I made progress. I realise that you have to really grasp the nettle - you've got to hold something that may be uncomfortable and you've got to come to grips with it and take the hard decisions. People only change when made to feel uncomfortable.

Before I got to this point though I'd had a real battle with my mind to integrate a new kind of behaviour. While in many ways reading books and group work was helpful it

never seemed to be constructive where my compulsive behaviour was concerned by going over and over my past and discovering the reasons, for, why this and why that.

I had all this knowledge about my life, all these insights – a wealth of information – and still I couldn't stop pulling off my eyelashes and eyebrows. I know during these times of looking inwardly there was a great deal of healing that took place. And yet the compulsion to pull was still there... especially at times of great realisation.

My relationships were not fulfilling because of my lack of participation in many areas. Just to name a couple of things: I was very inhibited in certain ways. For instance... I'd give some silly reason as to why I couldn't go swimming; or I'd quietly get out of bed in the morning to see that my eyelashes were still glued on and then pencil in my eyebrows and quietly slip back into bed feeling relief before my partner woke up, and then I'd think up something so as not to share a shower or bath with him. You can see all the good things I've missed out on. There was no way anyone was going to see what I looked like without eyelashes or eyebrows... You get the picture. This compulsion was keeping me from me being out there in life. It kept me down there.

I believe you need to look everywhere for help and never give up. Life has been about beginning over and over again. My gains have been slow but steady – with many setbacks. I've been consistent. I've been tenacious.

I feel for that little girl in me all those years ago who was repeatedly told to stop pulling out her eyelashes or else she would be punished. Consequently she was hit very often and sent to her room and usually deprived of something. No matter how hard she tried she just couldn't stop. Her schooling suffered and there was not much fun in her life.

To have support from parents/friends/doctors/loved-ones, to surround yourself with people who are compassionate and who are caring is absolutely essential.

I'm beginning to see a new me now without the constant thoughts about eyelashes and eyebrows.

And so at 42 I have managed to grow eyelashes. This has been gradual from about the age of 40. And I'm managing to let my eyebrows grow back too. But I can't do this alone any more... I need the support from people around me. And I have.

I would just like to finish by saying: it's not what happens to you in life but how you handle it.

Thank you,
Julie