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HAVING COURAGE TO SEE IN MY SHY HEART OF HEARTS

Doctoral research had always sounded quite fancy and elusive a thing for me. According to my previous illusions, it had been a merit that only those scientists who are distinguished and have advanced in their careers striving after researcher’s life would consider doing it. I could have not been able to imagine me beginning with doctoral research even in my wildest dreams at the beginning of the 21st century when my own life and dreams for the future were still messed up because of my difficult eating disorder. Nevertheless, moving from my place of domicile far to the North, to Rovaniemi, new and a few old friends, a study place at the University of Lapland, and starting a new relationship led me away from the pitfalls of anorexia. The feeling of loneliness diminished and I found a meaning for my life through which I built my self-esteem and self-respect combining the pieces bit by bit. The thread of life was found and as the trust in my own abilities increased, I was able to dream about ordinary things at first but little by little about something unattainable.

MY DESIRE TO HELP THE ANORECTIC

I believe that I was led to my dissertation journey by my great ambition to do something significant and useful. My survival from anorexia aroused my will to help people like me. My first thought was not to do it in the form of doctoral thesis but my Supervisor suggested me to begin a doctoral research due to my successful Master’s thesis. Especially, she appreciated my fluent writing and prompt methodicalness. However, I did not take the bait immediately because my purpose was just to graduate quickly as a class teacher and get work. Destiny had interfered in the game always in the “critical” moments of my life – and it did now as well.

At the finish line of my studies, I was happy to find out that I was pregnant: I was not supposed to have a child ever after my anorectic life! The miracle that was growing inside me changed my future plans and made me ease up training and part-time working as a cashier in store. After the hard weeks at the second quarter of my pregnancy, I felt great and energetic, even idle, as my Master’s studies would be completed after the finishing touches. After Christmas Holidays, I was ready to consider the thought that was brought out earlier.

I listed the possible research themes and contacted my Supervisor. The meeting with my Supervisor was encouraging and just supported my decision of becoming a doctoral candidate. Even choosing the research theme was easy because at once my Supervisor got excited about the anorexia theme that was close and familiar to
me. She respected my personal experiences on anorexia and invited me to write in a book she was editing *Helposti särkyvää: Nuoren kasvun turvaaminen* [Fragile: Securing the Youngsters’ Growth] (2007, Määttä, Ed.). The article “It all started from candy strike” I wrote sealed my decision of starting the doctoral research.

Surely, I was considering many threatening factors and I had butterflies when wondering what the future with research would mean to my own life. Could I develop anorexia again or otherwise lose something from my present life by putting my heart and soul into the depths of the anorectic world? The research theme was wretchedly familiar to me and at the same time, sort of safe as well. I knew that there was relatively much stark reality-based literature about anorexia available. However, I wanted to bring light and a gleam of hope into this darkest world of eating disorder from the point of view of survival. Indeed, I was one example of how ending up on the survival path and walking it through successfully was possible. With my spouse Jarkko’s support and encouragement I began studying literature about anorexia and the narrative research method.

**FOLLOWING THE DETERMINED SCHEDULE**

Secretly I had set a relatively tight schedule for my project. I even said out loud that I am not going to to-and-fro this on my desk for years; instead, I will have in the form of a completed research quite quickly. Endlessly, I had to listen to people’s opinions and doubts about too tight a schedule and too big dreams but still I knew my own strengths and believed in my ability to “fly” with the wings of science. I did proceed fast although simultaneously I was starting my career as a class teacher in a year-long position in a new place and training seriously orienteering, my main sport; and in addition, I was a mother since my son, Joona, had been born. My husband encouraged me and my family supported me even though the last half-year sprint before the public defence of my doctoral thesis meant spending almost all extra-time with writing the thesis. In the flush of creativity, I even drove to my mother-in-law’s place to spend weekends in order to be able to indulge in my work completely.

This fast progress would not have been possible without my extremely efficient Supervisor who seemed to be always available. I have never before witnessed or even heard of as fast feedback as my Supervisor gave me. At its best, it was as if we were instant messaging about my work although we contacted just via email. My fast proceeding thus demanded serious commitment from my Supervisor as well. Her feedback was always encouraging, constructive and supportive, and she gave me opportunities to advance my work all the time. Her valuable advice and revision demands were sometimes even strict but never misinforming. I was able to totally trust in her opinions at every phase of my research.

**WITHOUT FORGETTING TO EXERCISE**

I had always built my life on sport. Exercising and training have offered me a place where I can fulfill myself and test my limits. These elements were worth gold also