

BROKEN SPIRITS AND STRONG HEARTS

By Rob Heinrich, Remuda Ranch Chaplain



Eating disorders have reached epidemic proportions in America, and yet they still remain taboo. The symptoms—and the societal contributors behind them—are tough to look at directly. Debra Cooper's novel *Behind the Broken Image* does just that and more.

Cooper humanizes the issue through the stories of three women at an inpatient eating disorder treatment center. The novel dives deep into the lives of a little girl, a teenager and an adult socialite to discover the family dynamics and life events instrumental in their disease.

Though the characters are fictional, the facts are drawn from Cooper's experience as a staff member at Remuda Ranch Treatment Programs in Wickenburg, Ariz. The result is a raw account of the gut-wrenching realities of an eating disorder—full of pain and heartbreak, but abounding in hope and redemption. As Cooper peels back layer after layer of each woman's struggle, the attention to detail is so true-to-life that it is easy to forget that *Behind the Broken Image* is a work of fiction.

MORE THAN THE SUM OF THEIR SYMPTOMS

In actuality, the only fictional elements of the novel are the characters' names. Cooper expertly weaves scientific fact into the storyline to produce a work that is as educational as it is emotionally gripping. As the women learn that eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia are not only about food, weight and appearance, but actual survival, the reader is receiving the same education. At their core, eating disorders are coping mechanisms that victims use to assuage pain and meet deep-seated needs.

Cooper exposes the typically unseen individual suffering of patients and also sheds light on the traditionally private journey through the therapy process, including the experience of the family members and treatment team. Many textbooks and reference books sterily summarize the clinical facts of eating disorders, without addressing the pain at their core. *Beyond the Broken Image* does not shy away from the candid emotional and psychological issues at the heart of eating disorders, providing a riveting, three-dimensional account rather than a cut-and-dried entry in a glossary.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH EATING DISORDERS

I am the chaplain at Remuda Ranch Treatment Programs, which specializes in the treatment of eating disorders and anxiety issues, as well as the many secondary issues that inevitably arise. I began my career at Remuda Ranch as a therapist in 1998 and still practice therapy there on a part-time basis. As I read *Behind the Broken Image*, I was taken back to similar journeys with past patients and was

reminded anew of the incredible privilege of entering in to the trenches with these courageous girls and women who choose to fight for their release from the tyranny of their eating disorder.

I recommend this book to any family seeking information, guidance or motivation in dealing with an eating disorder. While professional opinion and traditional reference material must be part of the process, *Behind the Broken Image* gives the encouragement and hope that are sometimes sideswiped during the chaos and worry of treatment. The redemptive response of God's grace and forgiveness is interspersed throughout the book, but in an unobtrusive way that is respectful and understandable to all worldviews. For an inside look into the path into and escape from the prison of eating disorders, this book is one of the best.

Behind The Broken Image
By Debra Cooper
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*For more information on Remuda Ranch Treatment Programs, please visit
www.remudaranch.com or call 1-800-445-1900*