

‘Anorexia Misdiagnosed’

Laura Daly shares her story of how an underlying physical condition caused severe weight loss

By Charlotte Marsch

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When Laura Daly went from being overweight to dangerously thin as a teenager, she had to live as a social outcast and wait nearly 10 years for a correct diagnosis of her condition.

Doctor after doctor diagnosed her with “anorexia nervosa,” an eating disorder characterized by refusal to stay at even the minimum body weight considered normal for the person’s age and height. They kept telling her it was “all in her head.”

But her mother was not convinced that diagnosis was correct.

“She lived with us,” Marilyn said. “We would see her eat, and we wouldn’t see her throw up.”

Laura was told by doctors to eat fatty foods to help her gain weight. But she would later find out that fat was making an underlying physical condition — chronic gallbladder disease — even worse.

As Marilyn saw her daughter’s condition worsen, she became more determined to find help for her daughter. Though she is not too proficient with using a computer, Marilyn started surfing the Web and found hope — and eventually a cure.

She made contact with Wilkes-Barre, Pa., surgeon William P. Smedley, M.D.,

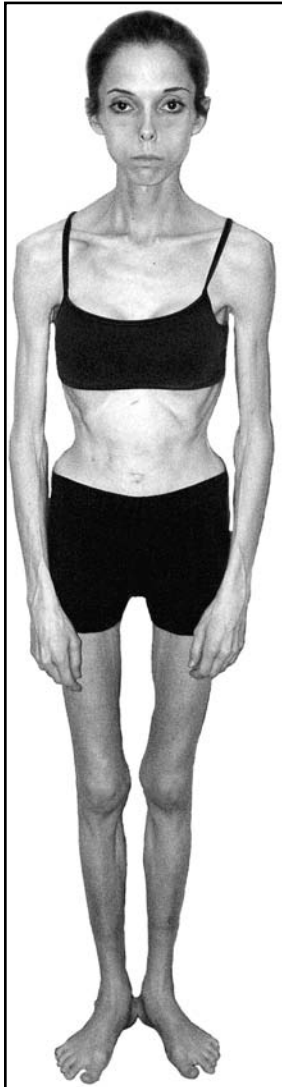
FOR MORE INFORMATION

• **“Anorexia Misdiagnosed” by Laura Daly.** Available at Borders Books, Copybiz Copy and Print Center and Mama Jean’s Natural Market in Springfield, as well as from amazon.com. Sales of the book are helping to fund a nonprofit foundation she set up to educate people about the link between anorexia and chronic gallbladder disease.

• **www.CuringEatingDisorders.org.** Daly’s Web site.

• E-mail Daly at **misdiagnosedanorexic@yahoo.com.**

• **www.docsmed.com.** Web site maintained by William P. Smedley, M.D., F.A.C.S.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Life was difficult for Laura Daly through high school and college when doctors told her she had anorexia nervosa, and it was “all in her head.” This picture was taken before surgery to remove her gallbladder in April 2005.

F.A.C.S., who had discovered that sometimes there is a physical underlying cause for what many doctors diagnose as “anorexia nervosa.” When Marilyn looked at a list of symptoms of gallbladder disease on Dr. Smedley’s Web site (www.docsmed.com), she said Laura’s condition matched every one of them.

About 15 years ago one of Dr. Smedley’s family member was diagnosed as anorexic. He knew her and her family well enough to know that she was not starving herself, so he started looking for a physical reason for her weight loss. He was successful in diagnosing her with chronic gallbladder disease — but only after conducting the cholecystokinin (CCK) challenge test in an upright position rather than lying down, how it is normally done.

Being erect for the test is important for proper diagno-

sis, Smedley said, because a gallbladder that is not attached to the liver will fall over and kink when standing up and, therefore, not function. In cases such as these, gallbladder problems will not show up in a gallbladder ultrasound or normal CCK test. Dr. Smedley has helped 100 women who had previously been diagnosed as anorexic or bulimic find the underlying physical cause of those conditions.

After making contact with Dr. Smedley, the Daly family packed up and left their Springfield home headed to Pennsylvania, where Laura met with Smedley and had the proper CCK test that confirmed a diagnosis of chronic gallbladder disease. Before she left Wilkes-Barre, Dr. Smedley removed her gallbladder.

“She was dying,” Dr. Smedley said, recalling when he first met with her. “She

looked horrible. She didn't have very much time."

During surgery, he discovered her gallbladder was not attached to her liver and the bile duct on the gallbladder had a kink in it. He also discovered she had an artery growing into her bile duct and was able to repair the problem during the surgery.

The road to recovery since her surgery in April 2005 has been lengthy, but Laura has gained 30 pounds and is now healthy enough she owns her own interior decorating business.

Before having her gallbladder removed, toxins had affected her liver, as well as her pancreas and thyroid gland. Her liver is slowly healing from the toxins, and she has been treated for hypothyroidism and hypoglycemia.

Marilyn said she now realizes that symptoms of her daughter's chronic gallbladder disease started when Laura was a baby.

"We had taken her to a pediatrician when she was 1 month old," Marilyn said. "She had constipation. He did nothing. I used Karo syrup because that's something my grandmother used."

Now the Dalys know the disease is genetic. It runs on the mother's side of the family, but it can affect both men and women. Since Laura's surgery, both her mother and grandmother, who is 88, have had their gallbladders removed and found relief from many symptoms of the disease.

Laura is on a mission to share her story whenever she



STAFF PHOTO/CHARLOTTE MARSCH

Laura Daly has gained 30 pounds since her gallbladder was removed two years ago.

can because she doesn't want other girls to have to suffer like she did. She has published a book and maintains a Web site that tell her story. See sidebar for more information.

Laura wants to help others find a proper diagnosis for extreme weight loss, and she knows of two people whose lives have changed already as a result of hearing her story and getting a correct diagnosis.

"I know now it wasn't anything I was doing to myself,"

she said. "After a while, I kind of wondered because everybody labeled me as an 'anorexic.'"

It's not just Laura, though, who is determined to spread the word. Her mom is beside her every step of the way.

"I feel like Mom is supposed to fix everything for their kids, and I couldn't fix this," Marilyn said. "In some ways, I kind of went along with the doctors and thought Laura Just couldn't gain

**SYMPTOMS
OF CHRONIC
GALLBLADDER
DISEASE**

Some of the symptoms common to chronic gallbladder disease and anorexia nervosa.

Constipation

Diarrhea

Weak digestion and lack of appetite

Unwillingness to eat

Intolerance to fatty foods

Intolerance to carbohydrates

Prone to excessive exercise

Complain of feeling fat or distention

Complain of gas, belching or bloating

Dry skin and hair

Low blood pressure

Lost menstrual cycle

Abnormal liver function

Erosion of gums and teeth

Hemorrhoids

Distorted self image and sluggish thinking

Confusion

Insomnia

Source:

www.curingeatingdisorders.com

weight. I still live with a feeling of guilt, and I don't want other mothers to have to go through that. It could have saved her so many problems in her childhood."