Nice Jewish Guys Have Eating Disorders Too

March 19, 2010 By David Evans

There's an eye-opening and moving piece in *The Jewish Chronicle* about a 35-year-old North London guy who's had a mighty struggle with an eating disorder. The gent, Rob Richman, says his anorexia was trigger at age 13 by bullying and by the age of 20 a doctor was warning him that he was all but certain to die from the disorder. It took his father's grief to propel him toward serious recovery. Talking about that turning point, Richman told *The Jewish Chronicle*,

"The doctor said that I had anorexia so severely for so long that I will die and there was little hope of recovery," he says. "When I heard that, I didn't care. I thought it was the best thing - for years I wanted to die.

"My dad was my rock. I had never seen him cry before. When everyone left he went on to the landing and fell in a heap and burst into tears. He told me I was tearing the family apart.

"I can't explain how emotional that was. That was the

turning point. I decided life with anorexia was no life."

Your probably wondering why *The Jewish Chronicle* is covering the story. Richman is Jewish, and feels that added a unique twist to his problem.

During his time in and out of wards, he noticed a high proportion of Jewish patients. "I think there is more pressure on Jewish children to achieve qualifications and become what parents demand from them," he says. "When children feel they are being controlled and that they can't assert themselves in the family, it is a way of controlling something.

"Food is a major part of Judaism. I remember at one point, a rabbi came to visit me and asked: 'What's wrong - don't you like your mother's cooking?'"

Dr John Morgan, one of Britain's leading eating disorder experts, says that the "focus on food rituals" in the Jewish community may be a contributory factor in cases of anorexia. "I have come across cases of offspring of Holocaust survivors where there is a sense in the family

that any food is precious and should be respected so a normal teenage rebellion of not eating at family times was a sacrilege.”

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