



Sue Ann Says: Perfection is an illusion

Once I was asked to be in a fashion show. I walked down the runway and fell flat on my face. I remember staring at the carpet thinking, what do I do now? But I got up, did my job, and got the heck out of there. And to this day, if someone asks me to do a fashion show, I politely decline.

That fashion show was just one in a long line of experiences that taught me that nobody is perfect. But this is a world where we drive ourselves to perfection. We have to do more, we have to be better. A good life, though, isn't about being perfect. It's about good health, happiness and peace of mind. It's about being kind to ourselves and being kind to others.

Mental health is a primary focus of our work at the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation. We've learned that more than eight million women suffer from eating disorders – a heartbreaking illness.

The media tells young girls that excruciating thinness is the standard of perfection they should strive for. But nobody really looks that way – including those air-brushed, Photo-shopped models. As a result, beautiful young women look in the mirror and don't see the reality. They see fat. They see ugly. They see “no good.” Is it any wonder that girls as young as fourth grade worry about their body image? This striving for artificial perfection does terrible damage to the soul and the spirit of young women.

Through the Foundation, we've met some women who have shared their stories of tremendous pain and personal courage. Rachel was desperate to be loved by parents who were physically and emotionally unavailable. She began obsessing about food when she was just eight years old. “I was filled with self-hatred and had no idea how to cope,” she told us. She was severely anorexic by the time she was 11, and receiving inpatient treatment by 14. By then, though, Rachel was sick of being sick. She was hearing a new internal voice. Instead of saying, “You're too fat,” the voice told her, “You've suffered enough.”

Rachel learned to completely change her thinking. When that little voice told her she was fat, she learned to say “That's the eating disorder talking. That voice is a lie.” She learned that her greatest problem was being too hard on herself, and to stop worrying about what others thought of her. Instead of trying to outperform everyone else, she learned to cut herself some slack, to be gentle with herself.

Rachel developed tools so she wouldn't go back to eating disorders. She has a network of support people. She's learned what her triggers are and how to avoid them. The way I won't walk down a runway anymore, Rachel avoids fashion magazines and television touting that impossible standard of perfection. She refuses to set herself up for failure. Instead, she sets her self up for success. She's involved with things that bring her joy.

Rachel teaches us that life isn't about perfection. It's about being good to ourselves and others – and that means placing good health at the forefront of our lives. Her experience shows us that we have to *choose good health* every day.

Lucille Ball is famous for saying: “Love yourself first and everything else falls into line.” Take that advice to heart. Become your own best friend and ally. Trust yourself. Get rid of the constant internal nagging, that little voice that says “I'm not good enough,” and remember that perfection is an illusion.

Please be kind to yourself. And always remember: it all begins with a healthy woman!

Yours in good health,

Sue Ann Thompson
Founder & President
Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation

The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF) is a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF presents women's health education and outreach programs, funds women's health research, provides scholarships for women in academic medicine, and publishes resource materials. Your donations help the Foundation reach women all over Wisconsin with the information, resources and tools they need to be healthy. To make a donation or to learn more about WWHF visit www.wwhf.org or call 1-800-448-5148.