

Extract from *Fit Not Healthy* by Vanessa Alford



When people ask me what caused me to punish myself with such an extreme lifestyle, I don't have an answer, but the word control comes to mind. Sometimes the choices we make in life reflect our history and upbringing and create our destiny, but sometimes things just happen. I believe I fit the latter. I thrived on the control I had over my body, of testing the boundaries and pushing it to its absolute limit. I am strong-minded, strong-willed and will do whatever it takes to achieve goals set out for. In this case, I paid a hefty price. When I reflect on my journey, I am surprised at my lack of introspection. That even my firsthand experience with children whose lives were a constant struggle, who were neglected and left to die on footsteps by their parents wasn't enough to take my focus off my running and make me realise the important things in life. It wasn't enough to make me realise that being fast, lean and athletic is not the most important thing in the world. But as I have told my story, it is only now I understand the web of confusion I had become entangled in and how blinded I was by my obsession. In denial and unaware of the damage I was doing to myself, this self-sabotaging young woman feels distant to me now. She is nothing but a stranger for whom I feel a great amount of sympathy. . .

Now that I am detached from the person I once was, looking in from the outside, I see all too clearly what everyone around me could see all along. And I am proud to say that the self-absorbed woman who left Brent perched on the edge of a mountain over four thousand metres above sea level, breathless and hallucinating, in order to conquer the physical challenge set before her and reach her goal, the selfish, trouble person whose life revolved around running and being fast and lean is a stranger to me now.



Vanessa and daughter Mia

My desire to have a baby was the turning point in my journey. When Brent and I started talking about having children, I was struck with an enormous sense of guilt that I may not be able to fall pregnant and I knew I had to change the way I was living my life – fast. I knew this was going to be my biggest challenge yet – a battle I had to fight with myself and with the voice. I also knew that as with all challenges set before me, losing was not an option. My pregnancy however wasn't a miraculous cure and my recovery didn't happen overnight. There were times during my pregnancy when I still felt dizzy and unbalanced and thought it would never end. I wondered how I would be able to look after a baby feeling so unwell. But from the moment I made a promise to my body to look after myself

and vowed never to return to my former lifestyle, I gradually began to feel well again. . .

I don't care that I no longer have a six-pack to show off. Nor do I care that I will probably never fit into my cute, extra small crop tops and bike pants. What I care about is that I continue to feel well, I have the energy to be a good mother and wife, I enjoy running without racing against the clock and that I remain healthy.

Fit and healthy.