**Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?**

“Just start eating” was one of the hardest phrases to hear when I had anorexia nervosa. As I was relentlessly poked fun at for being chubby and overweight by my family, I fell into a spiral of isolation, developed a hate for food, despising the way I looked in the mirror, and afraid to eat lunch with my friends in fear I would fall into the temptation of eating.

For six months, I would hear the constant sound of a single mango being peeled for my meal every day. I became severely underweight and despite the words of encouragement my friends and family gave, it was never enough to outweigh my hate for food. Until one day my aunt said to me, “I’ll eat whatever you eat”. I was shocked to say the least.

I’d been to countless sessions of therapies. Friends shunned me, my family tried every trick in the book to help me get to eat more. However, what my aunt did for me was something no one ever did for me – she walked together with me. She didn’t understand me better than the therapists or my closest friends. She had no idea what was going on inside my head even though she tried. But she did what no one else did – assuring me that she is there with me every step of the way.

She started reducing her portions to match me. She wanted me to feel comfortable with my diet and not have to feel guilty about how little I was eating. Although later I found out she supplemented her diets with vitamins and necessary nutrients to stay healthy, she lost weight with me. Watching her, I realized in my heart what my therapists had been pounding into my mind: the problem was never about the food or the weight-gains, it was my broken self-image. I saw in my aunt what was happening to me. She didn’t become more beautiful or better, she only seemed unhealthy to me. It was that epiphany that made me want to be better, despite the mountainous challenge ahead of me. I started eating protein again, despite repeatedly falling back into the same pattern after stepping on a scale and seeing an increase in my weight.

It was my first time experiencing true empathy, from my aunt, and towards my aunt. During the times I didn’t want to eat, I ate more just so she can eat more. It took me years to change my maladaptive ways of thinking. Even now I still have to consciously put effort into reassuring myself not to fall into the same pitfall. But throughout all this time, I never forgot the hardship my aunt went through for me.

Her persistence and empathy in approaching and educating me on understanding anorexia and myself made me aware of the various potential approaches to education. I learned that educating people was, as recovery was for me, not as simple as finding a problem and a solution. Pointing out the mistake and showing the path sometimes are not enough to make someone learn. They can study and comprehend it in their mind, but true education to me, must allow that information to change their lives.

The months after my recovery felt liberating and I started to perceive education in a different light. I wanted to do for others what my aunt had done for me. I searched for opportunities to improve free education in Indonesiaavailable to various groups of people who struggle, leading me to start my own organization, Komunitas Pelajar Mengabdi Bangsa (KOMIB). Approaching education in a way where students’ knowledge is not only hammered into their head, but also into their hearts to bring meanings into their lives, heart and bones.