SCAMP to Skin Picking Recovery
Dana Marie Flores
TLC Board of Directors
Phoenix, AZ
Adapted from a speech given at the 2014 International Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders Foundation Conference

My name is Dana Marie Flores. I'm 44 years old and I live in Phoenix. I have been on the Board of Directors for the Trichotillomania Learning Center since 2009. I have a successful career in the mortgage industry, raised two children through the teenage years, have a rewarding and exciting love life AND I've been a skin picker for over 30 years!

I am a very typical case; I started to pick at my skin uncontrollably when I was 12 or 13 years old. It started with acne on my face and I would turn a simple zit into a month-long project. I soon moved on to my arms and legs. The picking on my legs has caused me the most heartache. If you are a leg picker you know the skin on your legs will scar very easily, and heals very slowly. I would spend hours studying the geography of this vast canvas that makes up my body. I was easily able to reduce anxiety with an hour-long search and destroy mission.

I felt powerless for many, many years. I visited a psychologist in 1989 and was not told there was one other person like me and that the behavior would probably continue, during stressful periods, for the rest of my life. I left defeated, still feeling like the only freak on earth and assuming I would have to continue to deal with these picking behaviors on my own, by myself...and I did just that, very unsuccessfully for many years. For 23 years I thought I was the only skin picking freak!

At my worst, I was picking for up to 42 hours per week. Once I learned how to implement Cognitive Behavior Therapy tools into my daily activities, I was able to reduce my picking to one hour per week.

In 2005 I saw a local news story about Trichotillomania. A blonde-haired girl spoke of her struggle, often pulling for hours and hours, to the point her arm was completely numb. She described agonizing urges that, although she was doing immense damage to herself, she could not stop. Others spoke of severe guilt and shame, under a cover of lifetime hiding. They spoke of how they spent their lives not wanting anyone to know. One woman had her face blacked-out, ready to speak of her disorder, but not willing to let viewers connect it with a face.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Every aspect, every urge and symptom sounded just like me. I had always kept my ears open to hopefully, at last, solve this 23-year mystery. The only thing that didn't make sense was, I didn't pull my hair. I pick at my skin. I scrambled to find a piece of paper and pen. I wrote down the word “trichotillomania” and then found trich.org – the Trichotillomania Learning Center.

Tips to Help Conquer Trich
Christina Hammell
Coordinator, BFRB Support Group
Oaklyn/Camden County, NJ
Today started like most days, startled awake by the annoying buzz of my alarm clock. But this morning is different- I woke up with a sense of peace in my heart. The heaviness, guilt, shame, lies, fear and lack of personal love are all gone. Although I have Trichotillomania, today I awoke 2 years into my remission.

I started to pull from my scalp when I was 9 years old. I was terrified of my 4th grade teacher for the upcoming year. Ironically, she ended up being one of my favorites. I was misdiagnosed with having Alopecia and was lying to my parents, my teachers, my friends and mostly myself. I knew that I was pulling my hair out.

For the next 23 years, I continued to struggle in secret, until one afternoon, my daughter would say something that triggered something deep inside of me. I remember standing in my kitchen, leaning against the breakfast bar, fiddling around on the computer. I didn't realize it, but I was pulling my hair out while she was watching me. Her sad little blue eyes met mine, and she asked me innocently, “Mommy, what are you doing?” Then it hit me hard, like someone kicked me in my stomach. “What AM I doing?”

I started to pull from my scalp when I was 9 years old. I was terrified of my 4th grade teacher for the upcoming year. Ironically, she ended up being one of my favorites. I was misdiagnosed with having Alopecia and was lying to my parents, my teachers, my friends and mostly myself. I knew that I was pulling my hair out.

For the next 23 years, I continued to struggle in secret, until one afternoon, my daughter would say something that triggered something deep inside of me. I remember standing in my kitchen, leaning against the breakfast bar, fiddling around on the computer. I didn't realize it, but I was pulling my hair out while she was watching me. Her sad little blue eyes met mine, and she asked me innocently, “Mommy, what are you doing?” Then it hit me hard, like someone kicked me in my stomach. “What AM I doing?”

Continued on page 8
The Trichotillomania Learning Center's mission is to end the suffering caused by hair pulling disorder, skin picking disorder, and related body-focused repetitive behaviors.

Donations from members and friends are TLC's largest source of support, and they are the sole reason TLC can provide help and healing to people with compulsive hair pulling and skin picking. It is people like you, giving what they are able, who make our work possible. All donations are tax deductible - please consider making a donation today!

TLC Board of Directors
Joanna Heitz, President
Deborah M. Kleinman, Treasurer
Brenda Cameron, Secretary
Jon E. Grant, JD, MD, MPH, Scientific Advisory Board Chair
Amy Buckman
Dana Marie Flores
Brian Haslam
Douglas Robson
Susannah West

Staff
Jennifer Raikes, Executive Director
Alice M. Kelly, Membership Services/Accounting Manager
Leslie Lee, Program Manager/Editor
Mya Stark, Development Director
 Shannon Sinclair, Program Assistant
Dana Hickerson, Office Manager
Betsy Wootten, Administrative Support
Christina S. Pearson, Founder

TLC is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization and all contributions are tax-deductible.

Our Tax ID number is: 77-0266587.

InTouch is a quarterly publication of the Trichotillomania Learning Center, Inc.

To submit articles or send letters write to:

Trichotillomania Learning Center
207 McPherson Street, Suite H
Santa Cruz, California 95060
(831) 457-1004
www.trich.org
info@trich.org
Editor: Leslie Lee

Copyright © August 2014. All Rights Reserved.

The information in this newsletter is not intended to provide treatment for Hair Pulling or Skin Picking Disorders. Appropriate treatment and advice should be obtained directly from a qualified and experienced doctor and/or mental health professional. The opinions expressed are those of the individual authors.

Safe
by Molly Hill, 18 years old

This burning, this itching, is buried deeper than skin deep. My flesh is tearing itself apart under the surface, the muscles tumbling and twisting, screaming to be freed.

My whole body is tense with anticipation. Power surges through my seasoned fingertips. My mind numbs and the world goes black.

Crooning in the distance is my heart, pulsing with sorrow, but drowned out by this white noise of temptation.

I know better than this. I am stronger than this. For all I know, this single dark drop of blood reflects a future of loneliness and guilt and it’s just one piece it’s just one more peel it’s just one tiny bit, it won’t matter in the long run and I give in.

And it is done.

An hour later, my soul is sold. The deal is done. I wash my hands.

And my soul aches with guilt as I begin the ordeal of re-burying my secrets beneath gauze and ointment and makeup once more.

And the lights are out. And I emerge into the hallway again. And I flop to the living room, And I curl up on the couch, And I flip on the TV, And my mind goes blank, And hibernation begins. And I am safe from myself once more.

Annual BFRR Awareness Week
Oct. 1-7, 2014
Plan now to raise awareness in your community and social networks! See the back page for a list of ways you can get involved, including joining or hosting an Awareness Walk! Check the website for event updates as we get closer to October 1st.

New York City One-Day Workshop
Oct. 11, 2014
with Merrill Black, LCSW, Reiki Master, Hypnotherapist
Marla Deibler, PsyD, TLC Professional Training Faculty

New York City BFRR Awareness Walk
Oct. 12, 2014
Walk/Run to raise awareness and funding for TLC! Starts at 11am at Central Park-exact location TBA
Suggested donation $10-$15
Contact nycrichsupport@gmail.com with interest in participation as a walker, runner, or volunteer.

Seattle One-Day Workshop
Oct. 25, 2014
with Stacy Shaw Welch, PhD, and David Kosins, PhD
Phinney Neighborhood Center

Atlanta One-Day Workshop
Nov. 1, 2014
with Suzanne Mouton-Odum, PhD, Natalie C. Arnette, PhD, LLC, and Elana Zimand, PhD

Professional Training Institute
Oct. 24-26, 2014 - Chicago
A Continuing Education Program for Licensed Clinicians
Facilitated by:
Charles Mansueto, PhD, Jon Grant, MD, JD, MPH, Fred Penzel, PhD, Renee Reinarudy, PsyD

The Professional Training Institute (PTI) offers clinical training in effective, CBT-based treatment for trichotillomania, skin picking, and related body-focused repetitive behaviors. Earn 20 CE's, gain understanding of these behaviors from leading experts in this field. Sign up online via www.trich.org.

Upcoming Websinars
TLC's Annual Conference
SAVE THE DATE! April 10-12, 2015 - Arlington, VA
Sponsors needed! Help support the ONLY conference in the world specifically focused on hair pulling, skin picking, and related behaviors. Contact leslie@trich.org for information.

Call for Conference Workshop Proposals
Clinicians, researchers, support group leaders, activists, poster presenters and other inspiring speakers are invited to submit proposals to present at TLC's Annual Conference in Arlington, VA: April 10-12, 2015.

Check www.trich.org for presenter guidelines and submission information.

Conference Sponsors Needed!
Share your message with the BFRR community! Sponsor, advertise or exhibit at the TLC Conference.

Why sponsor or advertise at the TLC Conference? 2,000 members, 17,000 email subscribers and 30,000 monthly website visitors look to TLC to provide accurate information about treatments, products and services that can make a difference in their lives.

Your support gives back to our community. Sponsorships help lower conference registration fees, making the event more accessible to those who need it. You’ll also be supporting TLC services such as research, treatment provider training, outreach and awareness programs.

Contact Leslie at 831-457-1004 or email leslie@trich.org for more information on sponsorship or advertising at our annual conference.

Check www.trich.org for more details on TLC's upcoming events!
By Christina Pearson, President
Heart & Soul Academy for BFRB Living Skills
TLC Founder

People often ask, “How does one recover, and is it even possible?” Christina Pearson, TLC’s founder, shares the following advice for how she found long-term, sustained recovery from both trichotillomania and skin picking disorder.

I stopped pulling and picking, and have had very little behavior (aside from one small slip when my Dad died) during the past ten or so years. And – I come from a life where I used to pull/pick an average of 2-6 hours per day, for almost 23 years.

What did it take to stop? Honestly, a lot of work.

Has it been worth it? Absolutely. Today I am free of being controlled by unconscious urges, and if an impulse DOES happen to emerge, I know how to respond to it.

As a result of doing this work, today I am more self-aware, healthy, and centered than I used to be. Is it perfect? No, because I need to maintain a certain willingness and awareness. But this is such a small price to pay for having clear skin and a full head of hair. Which I have today!!!

How did I do it? I hope someday to write the long form, but to break it down here, this is what I did.

Realized it was not my fault, and I needn’t feel ashamed that I had somehow “made it happen.” It is a real condition; I didn’t ask for it, but I got it. For WHATEVER reason.

To understand that although it is not my fault, if I really want to stop, it IS my responsibility, as no one else can feel my nervous system like I can.

Decided there were two choices:

1. Begin investigating and practicing new behaviors, which I have today.
2. Choose to continue to do things the way I had been doing. Some people do find things that help chemically, but I always suggest making sure to do the cognitive and behavioral aspects of practice anyway, as this is how we build new pathways in the brain that can last beyond the impact of a particular substance.

Did fairly comprehensive self-monitoring, on my own, for a 4-month period, for an average of five days a week. I learned SO much about myself, my patterns, and my responses to situations, whether it was PMS, being tired, holding onto unresolved conflict, or whatever.

With the guidance of a psychiatrist that I trusted, took Prozac to moderate my depression – it didn’t help my pulling after the initial phase, but I did experience a lifting of the Persistent Depressive Disorder (previously called Dysthymia) that I had experienced since childhood. I was much more able to stay motivated and began to regularly practice tools I had learned from others, and many I had developed on my own.

Some people do find things that help chemically, but I always suggest making sure to do the cognitive and behavioral aspects of practice anyway, as this is how we build new pathways in the brain that can last beyond the impact of a particular substance.

Did a LOT of self-awareness/centering/mindfulness training; first on my own, and then formally with various knowledgeable instructors. Eventually, I became aware of impulses rising before my hands would move. Then, I had to learn how to respond in a whole new way! Took a long time for me personally as I had no guidance, but I learned that it IS possible. Along the way I learned and practiced various meditations and relaxation techniques, and made up quite a few.

Learned not to beat myself up when I did pull/pick – came to realize that we DO tend to experience flurries of unwanted behavior on the road to recovery, or most of us do. So learning to be gentle with myself was a big part of the process.

Discovered that if I expressed myself accurately in appropriate ways, and learned to set good boundaries (for example, learning it was ok to sometimes say no, instead of always saying yes and then resenting it), I was less likely to be triggered. Good self-care became a huge part of the process.

Perhaps MOST importantly, I learned to measure my recovery NOT by whether I had pulled or picked, but by how fast I got back on track, how little I berated myself, how much I was able to congratulate myself for being willing to simply just keep trying.

Today I live with the full understanding that yes, it could come back at any time. I have no fear about it though, as this way of life has become an opportunity for ongoing self-growth, deeper centeredness, and enhanced general awareness. Today, I am ready, have the skills I need and the commitment to use them. What I have found humorous - is that the more willing I am to be ready, the less I am actually triggered!

In Love & Service, Christina

Christina Pearson established the Trichotillomania Learning Center (TLC) in 1990 as the first step in giving an unknown disorder a public voice. Receiving nonprofit status in 1991, she served as TLC’s first Executive Director for 18 years, in 2009 taking on the role of TLC’s Founding Director. Christina resigned from TLC in 2013 to expand upon her work, and is now focused on developing an online educational portal (Heart & Soul Academy) to further serve the BFRB community she loves. (Christina says TLC is phase one, HAS Academy is phase two...)

Christina suffered greatly from both hair pulling and skin picking from about the age of 12 until 39, and now has 19+ years of strong recovery from the behaviors. She has worked ceaselessly for the past 24 years to raise awareness, support treatment development, and create beneficial resources for those who suffer from hair pulling and skin picking disorders.

Christina is a Graduate of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Teacher’s Practicum developed and approved by the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School - Worcester, MA.

I have been teaching classes online in order to test the waters for a new project that I had envisioned and am now building: Heart & Soul Academy – a new resource that I hope over time will work in excellent alliance with TLC to significantly expand the ability to reduce worldwide suffering in our beloved BFRB community.

The Heart & Soul Academy for BFRB Living Skills has just received non-profit status, and the website should soon be live! (It’s not yet, probably be a month or two...) And, even though it does have a very touchy-feely name (that I love) the living skills taught will have been widely (and often empirically) validated as beneficial to enhancing quality of life, and taught by esteemed and knowledgeable instructors.

I have learned much since I wrote this outline and still stand by its essential framework, although I must say that I have enlarged upon and strengthened the process so it could be integrated into my classes.

For more information on this project or to contact me personally, please visit my website at: www.christinapearson.com.
I would dearly love to hear from you!
At that very moment, I knew I HAD TO CHANGE. I quickly went back to my laptop, opened a private support group on Facebook for others who have Trich and typed the words that would ultimately be the pivotal moment I remember most. I typed, “I am out of control. I need help.” Never before had I been strong enough to ask for help, or recognize that I truly needed it. A wonderful woman from Scotland, Jude Stevenson, replied with a simple, “Baby, you are sooooo in control!” She was completely possible. Like Jude said, “Baby, you are in control. It’s OK to ask for help when I need it. No one needs to take on this battle alone. And being in remission is really hard to pull when you are hugging someone. It’s hard to pull when you are hugging someone. I would also sit on the other side of the sofa where I would have normally been, just to be outside of my comfort zone. For me, I pulled when I needed comfort. I sat on my dominant hand while driving, and now I drive a car with a manual transmission on purpose. Changing things in my routine just a little bit was enough to shake my brain up to not pull. I also didn’t linger in the bathroom. I used it with the door open when I could. When that wasn’t an option, I used a kitchen timer to make sure I was in and out quickly. I asked my oldest daughter to keep an eye on how long I was in there because I wouldn’t hang out if I knew she was waiting for me. I always washed my hands afterward in the kitchen sink because the bathroom mirror was too tempting to search for those hairs that need to go. I took hundreds of showers (and still do!) to stave off an urge, because it helps me de-stress, and it’s so much harder to grab wet hair.

I purchased several brushes that have built-in handles from Sally Beauty Supply, and kept one in each hand. The brush acted as a barrier when my hand accidentally wandered up to my head. I placed those little brushes all over the house, in the car, in my purse, everywhere I was waiting for me. I always washed my hands afterward in the kitchen sink because the bathroom mirror was too tempting to search for those hairs that need to go. I took hundreds of showers (and still do!) to stave off an urge, because it helps me de-stress, and it’s so much harder to grab wet hair.

The brushing stimulates the scalp for hair growth, and soothes the itching urges. I also wore bracelets from the Dollar Store that had charms on them. I would “hear” my hands raise above my shoulders, and avoid the accidental pull.

One of the best things I ever did during the course of my journey was open up and speak about Trichotillomania. I tell everyone: friends, family, perfect strangers in the grocery store, each and every chance I get. I no longer feel shame when I discuss the condition, and have a sense of accomplishment afterward. The more people I educate, the easier it becomes, and the less I feel alone and ashamed.

I learned when I was using my journal that one of my triggers is gray hair. Because of that I HAVE to dye my hair every 4 weeks. I know when it needs to be done because I find my hands in my hair more often. I also know when it is time to trim it. I think having regular haircuts keeps me accountable because my hairstylist will see any potential damage.

A very important tactic I have learned is to be patient. While I was fortunate enough to stop pulling from the minute I decided to put my whole heart into it, I also realize that I am lucky. Slip-ups are ok. Perfection is not necessary. I think that as long as I am better today than I was yesterday, then I am moving forward in the right direction. For those of you wondering, as of writing this, I have not pulled one hair, but like I said, there is no need to be perfect. If you slip, forgive yourself and move on.

So, at the end of the day, what remains constant for me is this: It’s OK to ask for help when I need it. No one needs to take on this battle alone. And being in remission is completely possible. Like Jude said, “Baby, you are soooooo in control”.

**Christina’s favorite barrier method: one of these little brushes in each hand. Available at Sally Beauty Supply for only $0.79 each.**

**Christina’s favorite barrier method: one of these little brushes in each hand. Available at Sally Beauty Supply for only $0.79 each.**

**www.sallybeauty.com Item # SBS-502135**
My path to recovery began.

Soon after finding out my disorder had a name, I began to attend annual TLC conferences and retreats in order to work on reducing my picking behaviors. I became a volunteer for the organization and was voted to the board of directors in 2009. I am the only skin picker on the TLC board and I work hard to advocate for pickers around the world and to serve as an ambassador to our community of wonderful people.

I’ve met many young women and men who are completely bald as they have agonizingly pulled, strand by strand, every hair from their head. I’ve met those who chose not to date because of these behaviors, cutting themselves off from love and the possibility of a family because they felt unworthy or that the hurdle, too high to jump. I know a face picker that did not leave the house for 8 months, her face covered in bandages. I’ve met several who have had emergency surgery to remove a Trichobezoar (hair ball) from their digestive system.

I knew a young 15-year-old girl that wished for broken legs when she blew out her birthday candles. The wish was not for a new sports car, the hottest pair of jeans or even a cute boyfriend. It was for broken legs! Broken legs in the hopes two casts would allow the skin on her legs to heal, therefore ending this ugly disorder. That 15-year-old girl was me! I had a dream of becoming a Radio City Music Hall Rockette, but you have to show your legs to do that.

Thru TLC I learned about CBT – Cognitive Behavior Therapy – and attending conferences and retreats I was given a chance to put together my own CBT plan. With this plan, I was able to customize options that would work for my individual behaviors and help to positively meet some needs that the skin picking was providing.

I put together my plan using a CBT model created by Dr. Charles Mansueto and Dr. Sherrie Vavrichek using the acronym SCAMP - which stands for: Sensory, Cognitive, Affective, Motor and Place.

At first, CBT tools didn’t sound like much to me. I’d tried 13 different oral medications, been to two psychologists and a psychiatrist and wasn’t finding much that was working for me. Now that I knew my disorder had a name, I had become very frustrated I was not getting better, so I decided to give these CBT tools a real try.

I must admit, when I first heard of these CBT tools, I thought to myself, “Okay, these people really do not understand what a serious picking problem I have – bubble wrap is not going to do it!” But then I realized how little HAS been proven to help and I became willing to at least give the tools a try and to my bewilderment, they really did help!!

Part of putting together an effective CBT plan is self-monitoring, which really is not fun! Journaling or keeping track of constant emotions is hard work, it’s boring and not easy to make yourself do, but becoming more aware of your environment and when you are susceptible to fall into the picking or pulling behaviors will help in implementing the correct tools.

As pickers and pullers, we spend countless hours strategizing ways to stop. If one can focus that same time towards investigating their own behaviors, it will be easier to complete an effective plan for yourself.

Again – SCAMP:

S - Sensory: to stimulate or soothe through tactile, visual or other sensory means. I am a crazy fidgeter! Many times I feel my hands just need to be busy and there are many many nerve endings in the fingertips – so it’s no wonder! If you are a sensory picker, crafts with soft yarn or ribbons, fiddling with fidget toys, sunflower seeds, bubble wrap, rubber fingers (turned inside out!), manicure and pedicure baskets or Silly Putty may help you. For these tools to be effective in curbing your picking behaviors, they must be within arm’s reach of your picking place.

C - Cognitive: to challenge distorted or exaggerated beliefs. I have a lot of these! As a cognitive picker, creating competing responses on index cards has helped when I have “silly notions” in my head, that as a logical thinking person, I know are absurd. An example would be someone who constantly tells themselves a scab needs to be removed before it’s ready and creates a card that reads, “A scab is nature’s way of healing my skin.” If you are a cognitive picker, just the act of creating your CBT plan should help you.

A – Affective (and Physiological): to help calm oneself or manage discomfort. If you are an affective picker, burning incense or scented candles, exercise, participating in online or in-person support groups, treating co-morbid disorders and journaling may help you. Many are able to feel relief by sharing and offering others support through various social media sites like Facebook, Tumblr, XOJame, etc. There are many private groups and forums.

BFRBs create a very self-absorbed existence. Doing volunteer work can really help offset this! I encourage all who suffer from BFRBs to get involved in this cause and any other non-profit work you feel a deep passion for. It can be a productive escape, a period of time to not be thinking of only oneself, and an opportunity to provide help for those in need. It has been deeply rewarding for me and helps me consistently to move forward on this path of recovery. Activism in the community creates empowerment in a world where we feel powerless much of the time!

M – Motor: to block, delay or provide a motor substitute. If you are a motor picker you most likely would benefit from awareness or mindfulness training. Barriers such as gloves, hats, long sleeves and/or long pants, and bandages create a barrier between you and your hair or you and your skin. A kitchen timer in the bathroom can alert you as to how long you have been there and call to your attention what you are doing. And again, fiddle toys or bubble wrap can help to keep those hands busy.

P – Place or Environment: modification of the physical or social environment. Examining the environment or location where your behaviors most commonly occur is crucial. Obviously, for many, mirrors and good light are the enemy. If you are in an environment in which you can remove the mirrors and cover the windows do so! If you are in a dorm room or have a roommate, cover mirrors with spray snow or decorative film. A clever trick is to leave one small spot visible in the mirror to brush your teeth, shave, put on make-up, etc., but place it so you have to stand on your tip toes to see. That way, you won’t be able to stand there very long!

I need both hands to pick at my face, so I put on my make-up while sitting on my bed and holding a hand-sided mirror not standing at the bathroom mirror both hands free. Yes, I can prop it up between my knees - if I get desperate - but I can’t do it for long and it is another step I have to consciously make. If you use tweezers or implements, ask a spouse or friend to hold them for you and only allow you to have them to pluck your eyebrows, etc., for a short period of time. They can also be frozen in glass of water. By the time the ice melts, your urge will likely be gone.

I pick mainly in my bathroom. I added a dimmer switch to the bathroom lights and often take a shower by candlelight. Skin looks awesome by candlelight!! I listen to soothing music and burn incense to calm me. At one point I was even picking while sitting on my bed, right next to the window – too easy and comfortable to sit in and pick. The chair had to be removed! I challenge you to really inspect your environment, to come up with ideas of how to make the behaviors harder to do there. You won’t want to! You might have to think of removing item for a long time before you do, but do it! Think of one thing to change your environment to make it harder to pick or pull.

In my experience those who suffer from BFRBs are very bad at being uncomfortable. The feeling of resisting urges to pick is very uncomfortable and we know just...
The shame involved is also very destructive as many people, just like me, that I have surrounded myself with. This has not been a short or easy path but one that has taken much time and much patience with myself. I’ve had to learn to be kind to myself, to love myself and not beat myself up constantly with thoughts of regret or failure. I’ve learned not to judge my progress based solely on the condition of my skin, but how I feel inside. And that has changed me tremendously. I’ve been able to help others who have suffered as I have and it has been most rewarding.

To be successful I have to work my CBT plan daily. I was once told by a very wise picker and puller, and I believe this to be true: many, many, many tiny changes over time equal transformation!

And you’ll need not just one tool, but multiple tools at one time, you’ll alternate tools and sometimes bring back tools that previously didn’t work. And it’s still work! It’s not fun and the constant self-awareness is tiring, but reducing my picking behaviors from 42 hours a week to one per week has been completely worth it and has so changed the way I feel about myself! I hope you will give some of these tools a try also!

It is believed that at least 11 million people in the United States alone experience BFRBs at some point in their lives. At least 2-3 million compulsively pull hair. We believe skin pickers make up the difference – that is 8-9 million people, just here in the United States.

I want everyone to know that these BFRBs are very serious and destructive, not only to the skin and hair, but also to the psyche as a whole. The daily conflict of “I hate it!” and “I love it!” destroys one internally.

The daily conflict is tiring, but reducing my picking behaviors from 42 hours a week to one per week has been completely worth it and has so changed the way I feel about myself! I hope you will give some of these tools a try also!

It is believed that at least 11 million people in the United States alone experience BFRBs at some point in their lives. At least 2-3 million compulsively pull hair. We believe skin pickers make up the difference – that is 8-9 million people, just here in the United States.

I want everyone to know that these BFRBs are very serious and destructive, not only to the skin and hair, but also to the psyche as a whole. The daily conflict of “I hate it!” and “I love it!” destroys one internally. On a physical level, severe skin picking can lead to infection, skin grafts, even possible death by sepsis. The shame involved is also very destructive as many know; shame is the most harmful of all emotions.

If you are suffering with compulsive hair pulling, skin picking, cheek biting or extreme nail biting I encourage you to find your voice. When you are at a good place in your recovery process, speak out! Share your story with others. It is very hard to talk about but the thought is, if you begin to speak about your experiences and share your feelings, the shame will decrease. Reducing your feelings of shame can actually help reduce anxiety and stress, thereby reducing the repetitive, destructive behaviors. Sharing in online forums, or even better, at an inperson event or support group, is a big part of recovery. Realizing you are not alone, that "normal," healthy, beautiful people also engage in these behaviors helps reduce the "freakish" feelings we have inside.

~To peaceful hands, Dana Marie Flores

Better from the Executive Director
Jennifer Raikes
Los Angeles, CA
Jennifer@trich.org

Dear Friends,

Driving my girls home from school recently, I found myself inching along in single lane traffic (this is Los Angeles, after all). I noticed that the woman driving the car in front of mine had her arm up to her head. She was pulling her hair out. Really pulling it out. Strand after strand. Dropping them out the window. My hands gripped my steering wheel and my mind raced. I so wanted to help her. I wanted to leap out of my car and just let her know she isn’t alone. Maybe she already knows this. But maybe she doesn’t. My own car sports a big TLC bumper sticker on the back. Could I maneuver ahead to at least put the www.trich.org message in her view? No. I was stuck. So close, but so far.

But the other day, the sister of one of my closest friends called me. Her daughter had recently started talking about how fun it is to pull out her hair. How it feels good. And before her daughter had even the slightest bald spot, she knew how and where to seek information and advice. Because if there is one thing my friends know about from me, it is TLC. I write them all annually with an update on TLC’s work and asking for their support – of me, and our mission. And in turn, I hear from them, and their friends, and friends of friends, whenever hair pulling or skin picking problems develop in their loved ones.

This BFRB Awareness Week, I urge you to reach out to your friends and family, too. It’s as easy as changing your Facebook picture to the Awareness Logo… or adding a TLC-themed sign-off to your emails… or setting up a First Giving page and reaching out to your contacts to donate – maybe even sponsor you in a run/walk/stroll or mosey. This is how change will happen. And while your friends support you, you in turn will be able to help them if ever BFRBS impact their own lives.

What a difference it has made in my life to know I am not alone with BFRBs. To know my children won’t be alone if they develop these problems. I am deeply grateful for the recovery I have had from pulling my eyelashes and eyebrows. But I am just as grateful for the relief that has come from being able to talk about BFRBS openly.

I released my secret gradually — talking to close friends, hedges my story a bit… sharing at my support group. Speaking more and more openly, until I was truly at ease with myself and the fact that I am not to blame for this disorder. Until I had the confidence to handle any misguided comments from others, knowing that they are the ignorant ones. Even more than full hair or clear skin, that is the feeling I want to make possible for others. Relief from shame.

So take whatever step is right for yourself, now. But I encourage you to step forward and participate in Awareness Week this October 1-7th.

Even if we’d spoken, I couldn’t instantly relieve the suffering of the woman in the car in front of mine – and I have no idea what journey she’s been on. But it was heart-breaking to realize she might not even know help is available – just one bumper away. Let’s change this by making BFRBs a household term — speak out! (But please, don’t leap into traffic to do so!)

Love, Jen

P.S. Did you notice that both Dana Marie and Christina Hammell each suffered for 23 years before finding out they were not alone? That’s too long! This we can change during Awareness week.
Your voice makes a difference! Here's how you can help:

**Share your Story**
Inspire others and give hope by sharing your personal BFRB story. Share your story, photos, essays, poetry, or artwork and www.trich.org/together.

**Social Media Outreach**
At least 3% of the population are affected by BFRBs, many not realizing it is a medical problem and help is available. Your friends and followers may be among them--will you be that helping hand? Visit TLC’s Facebook page to share statistics, images, quotes and inspiration. Make our profile pic and cover page your own.

**Community Outreach**
Get the word out in your community: order brochures from TLC and mail them to salons and health care providers, start a support group, host an outreach event - you can make a difference in your hometown.

Visit www.trich.org for more links and ideas!

---

Awareness is the key to better treatments and ending the shame associated with BFRBs

**Walk for BFRB Awareness**
and help TLC train more treatment providers!

Join walkers in New York City, Phoenix, London, UK, and more cities across the globe who are walking to educate their communities about trichotillomania and skin picking.

Learn more at: www.firstgiving.com/trichlearningcenter

---

2 out of 50 people are affected by BFRBs like hair pulling & skin picking disorder

Get the Facts - Get Involved www.trich.org