

Beating BDD Episode 23 – Berni Benton

Berni hid what she called her “secret shame” for 40 years before discovering she’d been suffering from skin-picking disorder – a common co-morbidity with BDD that can also manifest on its own. She’s since learnt how to say no to the skin-picking voice and has even appeared in a naked calendar.

“Forgive yourself... Many more people than you realise live this life. They just look like they have it all together.”

How did the naked calendar come about?

[00:00.57] Berni explains how the COVID-19 pandemic has actually given her time to look into her skin-picking disorder.

[00:05.00] She saw something online about World Naked Gardening Day and decided to take part. She went on to create a calendar with 23 others that raised over £1,000 for the BDD Foundation.

[00:10.10] The calendar made her very proud and in awe of the stories people told.

What does it feel like to have skin-picking disorder?

[00:15.28] There’s a voice in Berni’s head telling her to pick, and her mind is always scanning her body for something to smooth out.

[00:17.23] It’s really compulsive and rarely stops. Using Zoom has made her realise how little her hands are still – she’s always touching her skin.

When did her symptoms start and why?

[00:24.46] When Berni was a pre-teen, she had a lot of eczema, followed by acne in her teens. The family moved around a lot too and she experienced bullying.

[00:26.52] She started skin-picking because it made her feel in control.

[00:27.25] As an adult, she had periods of great confidence and others when she’d avoid a lot of activities because she wanted to cover up.

[00:29.38] Until 15 years ago, she didn’t leave the house without full make-up.

How did Berni find out what she was actually suffering from?

[00:11.32] It was her secret shame for 40 years. She’d spent her life until then skin-picking and pretending she had an illness, which made her feel like a fraud.

[00:33.30] She only found out what was wrong when someone from the BDD Foundation gave her a book on BDD at an event. It included a story by Liz Atkins, who also suffers from skin-picking disorder.

[00:36.56] Berni told the doctor she had the disorder in 2020 and asked for help.

What strategies has she developed to cope with the disorder?

[00:19.38] She’s now working with a therapist to find a balance between the skin-picking voice and other aspects of who she is.

[00:23.23] Part of this is about celebrating being able to delay the picking, not do it as soon as the voice tells her to.

[00:38.05] Berni tries to be kind to herself. She finds that gardening and stained glasswork stop the body scanning. Creating a distraction also helps take control away from the skin-picking voice.

What would she say to someone who's really suffering?

[00:44.38] Berni uses the phrase "progress, not perfection" a lot. If you reduce or delay the picking, that's an achievement. Look for the positives.

[00:45.28] It's also helpful to acknowledge that anyone who looks like they've got their shit together, probably hasn't.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org
- Liz Atkins speaking at the 2019 BDD Foundation International Conference: bddfoundation.org/conference-2019-body-focussed-repetitive-behaviours/