



To: CALI

From: Emily Andersen (Founder, Class of 2017)

What does the starfish mean in CALI?

When I started working on establishing CALI as an organization back in 2014, I had just gotten out of eating disorder treatment in Dallas, Texas at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital. When I was in treatment, we did a lot of art therapy and at the time I really disliked art therapy because I wanted it to always be “perfect” and I was a harsh critic of myself really. Needless to say, I now love art therapy. Funny how that works out. Anyways, when I was in treatment, we did an art therapy exercise where we were given that white Crayola clay that you can mold and then it hardens. We were asked to sculpt an animal that reminds us of ourselves. You can imagine as a client who hated art therapy at the time that I really struggled with this one. We weren’t allowed to have our phones or look anything up. I always hated being asked “what animal would you be?” because I felt like I could never come up with anything “good.” You can see I had a lot of self judgement and a very negative sense of self which are very common in people with eating disorders. I thought about it for a while. I looked around and saw what everyone else was doing. And I thought about where I came from (California) and where I was going with my life because of my eating disorder journey and wanting to become a therapist. I thought about how the ocean was my safe space; it was where I felt relaxed. I thought about my life and major moments in my life where the beach has somehow been a part of it. Even when I lived in Europe in high school my parents through me a beach themed surprise sweet 16 despite it being -4 degree outside. And today, I live in Huntington Beach, CA and go to Pepperdine earning my Masters. My life has always been symbolized by the beach even today. So I thought to myself during this art therapy exercise, what about the beach represents me? And I thought of the starfish and made it and called it a day. When I got my phone back after programming that day, I looked up the symbolism of a starfish to see if it resonated with me and my recovery and it did.

I found that the starfish has many meanings and symbolism but what I found most interesting is how resilient a starfish is. Starfish can actually grow back their limbs and regenerate from trauma or predator attack. For example, if they are attacked by a predator, they will detach their own arm to free themselves. And these limbs will grow back! Like the starfish, I was learning to change and adapt to change in my recovery from my eating disorder and learning to let go of a lot of stuff I was struggling with. With any self-growth comes renewal and regeneration just like the starfish. Symbolically, the starfish teaches us to regenerate our thoughts and mindsets to rid ourselves of negative thoughts and negative dialogue we tell ourselves. When the starfish grows back an arm, it also means that it has healed itself. So, the starfish also symbolizes healing. For me, healing from my eating disorder. Despite my first attempt in treatment, I did not heal from my eating disorder. I actually got sicker and ended up going to treatment in California after I graduated in 2017. Texas, at the time when I first was in

treatment, did not have adequate care for people like me. So my first recovery and treatment attempt was like putting a band aid on a bullet wound. However, the starfish never left me. I ended up going to treatment in Malibu, CA where the house was covered in starfish. I knew I was where I was meant to be. 3 years later, I am in solid recovery from my eating disorder.

When the time came to create CALI, I wanted to make my story apart of it too because my story and my struggles were what prompted me to start the organization to begin with. I was so frustrated that there were no organizations on campus supporting a mental health philanthropy yet a lone eating disorder. I was frustrated at Texas A&M for having no resources for students with eating disorders especially since they are so prevalent among college students. This is also a whole other story of why CALI was started and what the acronym and each word actually mean in order to form CALI. But that's a story for another time.

When I decided to come up with a logo, I wanted to choose something that reminded me of my struggle and my journey of recovery and something to remind CALI members as well of how resilient they are and how strong they are and how deserving they are of self-love and compassion for themselves. And that they can do anything they set their mind to. So, I made the logo a starfish.