

Light Over Darkness

For a long time now, I've thought about discussing a topic that was extremely difficult for me to open up. An obstacle that has weighed so heavily in my life. As I grow older, I have learned through experiences from speaking and sharing stories that everyone has something in their past that although days do become brighter, there is always something in our past that will always feel like it's haunting us. I write to discuss and share my own personal experience about something that I firmly believe not many people are open about. I've written a story of my own that unfolds my personal journey in recognizing and reaching out for help when struggling with Bulimia.

I just want to quickly give a quick description of what Bulimia is to those who are not entirely aware of what it is. Bulimia is an eating disorder that deals with body image and an obsessive desire to want to be thin, which in result involves self-induced vomiting and purging usually almost immediately after eating. This can cause depression, affect your mental health, along with many other health factors that may also be life threatening.

This is something I continue to learn daily from and see how it affects me in my daily living now even though I am now more aware and healthy.

I did not know at the time, when I was going through what I was, that I had a problem. I thought of it as something I was just doing to make myself feel better. The biggest thing about an eating disorder I've learned is that people normally do this because it is about control. At least, in my own personal experience. I later took a class in college and learned more about it and generally that is the big motive behind eating disorders. Control. Because we cannot control many things in our life, the one thing we can control is our body and what we do with it. What we put in and what we do not. I had grown up to be chubby mostly my whole life. It's weird because I don't remember being completely self-conscious, but I can't say that I was always confident too. Of course also growing up Hispanic you got plenty of meals in front of you that when you're young, you are not aware of what's healthy or not. I mean, you've got your tostadas, tacos, enchiladas, frijoles, enfrijoladas, arroz, etc. etc. whatever, you name it!

When I was in school I was one of those kids who were bullied. Mostly because of my weight. Kids would make comments, literally poke my stomach, was pushed around and once I was pushed up against a fence and

got white glue poured all over onto my hair. Also for the record, I do want to let you guys know that if you know me at all, you know I'm someone that loves to make light jokes about it now and about myself and that's because I am NOW comfortable with who I am and the only way any one is ever able to move on with the events that's happened to you in life, is to look back, recognize, laugh and move on. Oh and also as a kid, I did always have a silly personality, so honestly I'm just a pretty funny girl LOL.

I can't remember what exactly made me decide to do what I did, but I do know that it was accumulated over many little things throughout my life. I remember thinking to myself, "You know Ciara, if you want to be thin, I heard this works." Terrible, I know, but really it's true. It just goes to show how very quickly anything can happen after a small simple thought. It wasn't until it was almost too late before I got stuck in the darkest place that I have ever been in my life that I had decided to reach out for help.

I won't go into detail exactly what or how I did what I did, mostly for reasons because if someone who is dealing with this reads this, I do not want to give them any triggers or any ideas to prolong it. My main purpose of this is that in hopes it reaches to someone and helps them to want to speak to someone close to them to get help. I cannot stress enough that if I did not

open up to my oldest sister about my struggle, I do not think I would be in the place that I am right now. Going through this alone was the most depressing, saddening, TIRING, mentally straining, thing I have ever gone through. And would never want anyone to have to deal with the same thing. So many times, after I finished doing what I would do, I have almost been caught plenty of times by my own mother. Lying to her about why I took so long in the bathroom, about why my eyes are red, if I have been crying and if I am just genuinely OKAY. I became really good at lying and playing it off. I had put on the perfect mask. “Yeah, of course I’m fine. I’m just tired. Why do you ask that?” She would give me a strange look like she had an idea of what I was doing cross her mind but shook her own head in disbelief like if I, I, would ever do anything like that. ME. Ciara, the one who’s always making jokes. Who’s always asking OTHERS if they are okay. Always making sure everyone in our family is happy and taken care of. Who is always known as the “strong” one in the family. After my mother believed my lies, I went into my room to be alone and I just sat on the ground and cried and cried and cried with my hands covering my face. I couldn’t confess to my mom what I was going through. It would break her heart. She would blame herself. I couldn’t tell my friends, what if they get upset and call me stupid for it. I

couldn't tell my sisters. I'm the strong sister. I'm the one they can come to when they are feeling low themselves. If they found out I was struggling, they would feel like they can't come to me anymore. SO many things went through my head. I faked a smile for so long, it was almost like I wasn't myself anymore. And I wasn't. Not entirely.

I attempted many times on my own without telling anyone to better myself. And many times, I'd go maybe the most 4 days without purging, and on the 5th day I'd relapse again. This happened so many times. It became extremely difficult. I avoided the internet because I did not want to know about the horrible facts that can come from this. I told myself, I can do this alone. I don't have to tell anyone and I will have rescued myself. My family doesn't have to know and I don't have to go through the embarrassment of telling them. One time, I fell ill. I went to the doctors with my mom and the doctor came to ask your normal health questions. My mom stepped out of the room to answer a phone call thankfully, and scared and nervous as I was, I began to ask the doctor what happens to people who make themselves throw up. She looked at me confused but I'm sure she saw the cry for help in my eyes. She just told me, "Sweetie, that is incredibly bad for you. Please, just do not do it. Do you need someone to talk to?" I looked back at the door worried

that mom was going to walk in and hear our conversation so I just said “No I’m fine I don’t do it. I just wanted to know.” And that was that.

One day, I was in my room sitting on my bed nervous and my hands sweating from being so anxious and my eyes so tired and heavy from not sleeping well. I knew what I had to do. I avoided it for so long, asking for help. Actually telling someone what I was going through. But I had to decide and be completely honest and real with myself. “Ciara, you CANNOT do this alone. You will NOT over come this darkness if you do not shed light onto this”. I tried to talk myself out of this so many times but I just kept telling myself if I want to be happy again, if I want to be healthy again, I have to do something about it. It was going to have to be either this ugly monster or myself. I choose myself. I left my room that day, and I went to my older sister. I stood in front of her and with a shaky voice, nervous, and sweaty hands I laid it out to her. Shocked to learn that I was dealing with this on my own, she gave me sisterly support and comfort and love. DAMN. It felt SO GOOD to finally tell someone. I let out a sigh of relief and tears and felt my lungs take in air again. After opening up to a family member, I knew I was going to overcome this.

As time went on, I took up running to substitute my dark thoughts. Instead of dwelling in my room, I decided to pick up a hobby. And to this day, I still believe running has saved my life. It has brought a feeling over me that is bigger and stronger than what I was struggling with. Of course, it is not as easy as I probably make it seem to be. Like I said, the thought of relapse creep over me often. And I have failed again after even opening up to my sister. Instead of letting it defeat me, I decided to finally open up to someone else, and that was to my mother. I expected her to cry and be upset, but instead she was really strong about it and I know she did it for me. After spilling the beans to her she sat up with me all night and made me do research on Bulimia showing me pictures and all that. I was even like “Mommmmm I don’t want to learn about this anymore it’s scaring meeee”. And she’d say “Para que aprendas cabrona! Y no lo vuelvas hacer!” LOL I laughed but dude yeah, it worked.

One summer, after some time has passed, I took a health class at my local college. I had really gotten into sports and I just was really curious to learn more about our human body and our overall health. My professor was awesome. She had this professional attitude that we all respected and she also had this personality that also let her be relatable with the environment of

the class. She was up to date with what was going on in society today and what people in our age group are going through and dealing with. One day, she began a lesson talking about eating disorders. I sat up still when she said this is what we will be discussing today. I looked around in hopes that I didn't make myself obvious to those around me, that I was a little nervous for some reason. She discussed the three types which are anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder. She continued to talk about how social media now a days, plays a BIG role in this. And it's very true. I know to some this is silly, but this is a real thing. There have been times that I had to remove myself from social media because it really can make you feel self conscious about yourself I don't care what anyone says. Also, for some reason this affects mostly women. I did learn that men actually have a lower rate in eating disorders than women. But this paper goes out to both genders, to whomever! Girls younger than my age group, are struggling with it so much more. The internet is their generation. This is why it is important to speak on this matter even more so because our own children will be growing up the same way with the internet being very much in place.

At the end of the discussions she asked the class if they had any questions regarding the topics and should she move on from it. No one said

anything and she responded with “Okay moving on”. At the end of the class, I decided to wait until everyone was gone and I wanted to speak with my professor. She was a stranger to me, like I was a stranger to her. Only knowing each others names. I talked about how I was interested in the discussion we had today. I opened up to her my reasons why I was interested. Shortly after, I began to cry as I told her my struggle and she teared up with me. I couldn't believe that I opened up to someone who wasn't close to me. How it came out so freely and I felt safe. I told her that I wish I said out loud during class to continue discussing about it because I did want to learn more from it. I did not speak up because I was embarrassed, but I told her that I did wish that she did, and if she does not mind, if she can continue to cover that topic tomorrow. Maybe someone else in this class was also afraid to speak up like I was, and can benefit in learning more about it and the health factors, and they can too possibly want to be better from it and just do not know how to find help. She thanked me for opening up and for coming to her about this personal issue and wanting to learn more. She also referred me to some counseling which I appreciated dearly because I have always wanted to go see and talk to someone but never knew where to look or how to start.

Fast forward to today. I am healthy. I have picked up running as a lifelong hobby. I have also picked up martial arts which I found out I have a passion for. I am open to trying so many different things that will motivate me and make me feel more comfortable with myself and my body and my mentality. Exercising is the best remedy. For me personally. Writing, is another great method. Talking, hanging out with friends. Just finding what makes you happy. I've always been told I dream too BIG. And although that's true, there's nothing wrong with that. I've got many dreams, so many things I want to do, and little by little I'm doing it. I recently heard about someone who is going through the same thing that I was. And the best thing I can advice to anyone, is please to speak to someone about it. Never assume someone close to you isn't going through something, people don't open up easily and just always check in on your friends and loved ones. Check in on your STRONG friends. Remind yourself who you are and you are loved by many. Find hobbies/activities to replace the dark thoughts that lead you. Never be ashamed or embarrassed for what you are going or have gone through. As much as I've said that I wish I've never done this to myself, at the end of the day I have to say, that without that hard, and troubling experience I had, I don't think I would trade it because it has made me into

the person I am today. What I've learned is so much more valuable, that I am grateful for everything I went through and for those who supported me after it all. I reached out to my professor recently again, it's been a while since I last took her class. I thanked her for everything again for letting me confide in her. I told her that it is because of her class, it gave me a different kind of strength that now, if I hear someone struggle with what I did, I can offer my support and my own personal experience and advice. I told her that to her it probably seemed like what she did was so little, which was to let me talk to her and at the end referred me to someone. I told her that because of that, she has left a positive impact on me and for that I am always thankful. Because of that, she helped me, along with others around me, to find the light out of what seemed to be a never ending darkness. To this she responded with, "Keep living your truth and helping others, we all go through things for a reason". And I believe I found my reason.