

Light Over Darkness

Hey everyone! For a long time now, I've thought about discussing a topic that was *very* difficult for me to open up about. A topic I swore to never share because of numerous reasons but mostly the feeling of embarrassment. Today I feel stronger and more confident as I reflect and talk about my struggles. As I grow older, I learned through talking and experiences that everyone has something in their past that is not always pretty and they too have encountered low moments in periods of their life. I'm here today to discuss and share my own personal experience about something that I feel not many people like to share or discuss about. And I completely understand having gone through this myself. But because of this, it has made me more determined to be the type of person someone can reach out to without feeling judged or alone and has made me stronger as an individual to be comfortable enough and to share my own story. My story, that the few people that I have already shared with are always shocked to learn about, and that is the story about how I chose to not let my struggle with my eating disorder win, specifically, Bulimia.

I just want to quickly give a quick description of what Bulimia is to those who aren't aware of what it is. Basically short and to the point, 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 and many other health factors and can and is also life threatening.

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. You see, the biggest thing about an eating disorder is that people normally do this because it is all 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, but 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 such a confident individual. Of course also growing up Hispanic you got lots of meals in front of you that obviously we can't say no to. I mean c'mon you got tostadas, tacos, enchiladas, frijoles, enfrijoladas, arroz, carne con chile,

you name it! Basically I'm saying that its hard to maintain a healthy weight with all kinds of food around you.

When I was young in school, I was one of those kids who were bullied. Because of my weight, people would make comments, poke my little round belly, people pushed me around and once I even got white glue poured all over onto my hair and laughed at. As I'm talking about this I should also let you guys know that if you know me at all, you know I'm someone that regardless of how I've been treated I do like to make light jokes about it 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 bad things that's happened to you in life, is to look back, recognize, laugh and move on. And also as a young kid, I did always have a silly personality so naturally I'm also just a funny girl ya'll should know haha.

I can't remember what exactly made me decide to do the most unhealthy thing to myself, 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 now, but really it's true. It happened very quickly and it started small. It wasn't until it

was almost too late before I got stuck in the darkest place that I have ever, ever been that I had to reach out into the light 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 incredible 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 alone. And would never want anyone to have to deal with. 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. "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 the 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 my ground and cried and cried and cried. 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 could 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 then 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 shaking because 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. And I told myself, no I choose myself. I choose myself. I left my room that day, and I went towards my older sister. I stood in front of her and with a shaky voice and nervous, sweaty hands I told her my darkest secret.

Shocked to learn that I was dealing with this on my own, she gave me sisterly support and comfort and love. I let out a sigh of relief and tears and felt my lungs take in air again. Now before I told my sister, I did open up to ONE friend. And that friend is still very close to me still to this day. After opening up to both a friend and a family member, I knew I was going to overcome this.

As time went on after opening up to my sister, 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 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. My sweet mom, she was really strong. 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 “Mommomm I don’t want to

learn about this anymore it's scaring meeee". And she goes "Para que aprendas cabrona! Y no lo vuelvas hacer!" Hehehe well, 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 to the age group 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. And she had a great sense of style. Just throwing it out there. Lol. 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 adays 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 seeing pictures of beautiful models and not only models (BTW), how happy they are, how marvelous life is to them, can make you

feel self conscious about yourself. You begin to compare yourself and it's the most terrible thing to do. 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! We forget how unique and wonderful we are in our own way just because we see people who live this fantasy life and think because we don't look or have those things, we are not as equally beautiful and such. I don't mean to make this sound sappy or anything, but I am just speaking from my own experience and what I have learned throughout my course. 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 told me she was shocked to hear this, as she said that I was such a beautiful girl who was very smart. She thanked me for opening up and for coming to her about this personal thing about me 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 boxing which I found out I have a passion for and yoga. 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 form of method to be open and comfortable with yourself. 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 so 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. It does not have to be exercise, even painting, writing, reading, photography, whatever interest you and will remind you of your happy place. Never be ashamed or embarrassed for what you are going or have gone through. Before, as much as I've said that I wish I've never done that to myself, at the end of the day I have to say, that without that hard, and troubling experience I encountered, 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 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 great 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.