Restriction

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Food. What is food? Is it really needed in order to survive? Why does everyone encourage it? I was 13 and it was the beginning of the new year. I had many resolutions ahead of me and I was excited for the new year. I planned what I would do and where I would go. I was happy. I had no problems with school or with my mental health until February came around.

I started to notice that I constantly went on my phone whenever I heard a buzzing sound coming from it. I downloaded an app called TikTok. I always scrolled through TikToks and there were always these girls who are skinny and pretty. I remember thinking to myself 'Why don't I look like that?' and 'how do I become like that?' I was having a hard time especially because I wanted to work out so badly to get what is called a 'summer body.' I started looking up YouTube workouts and tips on how to become skinny. I looked up diets as well. I remember that when I started working out I felt really happy, but then looked at myself in the mirror only to see my body staying the same. I wondered 'Why do I look the same, I'm working out isn't that supposed to help?' This is what I said to myself all the time when I was facing the mirror.

I then came to the conclusion that I needed to eat less plus workout in order to get the 'summer body.' I didn't really think that I needed to eat healthy in order to get the body I wanted. I downloaded some apps to track all the calories I ate because apparently on Google, girls my age need to eat at least 1,000 calories a day but I didn't eat that amount of calories per day, instead I ate less. Every time I had a plate of food I went on the app and tracked the number of calories in each food I ate. At the end of the day, I looked at my phone and only realized then that I had eaten at least 600 or 800 calories. I had the mindset that if I ate over 800 calories it wouldn't be good for me. Anytime I did eat over 800 calories I felt so much guilt. The guilt was physically and mentally eating me up, every night I would cry into my pillow wishing I looked different. Anytime someone offered me food I refused. My family was always commenting on how skinny I looked but from my perspective, I saw a wide girl.

I worked out every day in the afternoon not caring about what homework or family activities I had to do. In order for my day to feel fully fulfilled, I needed to get my workouts done. I worked out for an hour and a half every day. I did at least 3-4 workout videos which lasted about an hour and then I ran on the treadmill for about 30 minutes. I drank green tea right after my workout because I heard it helped with weight loss.

Looking back now I realized that my weight was perfectly normal and healthy. Being a 13-year-old girl and weighing about 97 pounds wasn't considered overweight or underweight, it

was normal. Social media also did not help, but back then I thought it did, my ForYou page was filled with girls who were also working for their 'summer body' which made me feel really comfortable because that meant I wasn't the only one. I followed Instagram accounts for food ideas and workout inspiration. I kept the same schedule every day and I thought no one would notice, but I was completely wrong.

I remember I was at my cousin's birthday party and they offered me food and I always said 'no thank you.' My sister started to notice that I wasn't eating and kept pulling me aside to question me about it. She kept saying 'why aren't you eating' and my answer was always 'I already ate, what are you talking about' or 'leave me alone.' I felt bad for her. She was only 9 and I didn't want her to see me suffer. I cared for her a lot and I wouldn't want her going through the same struggle I did when she was older. My mom always tells me 'your sister looks up to you' and 'be a good example for your sister.' The problem was I never was a good example, actually, I was the worst example which sucked because I was her only sister. We always went out to dinner and my stepdad and mom would wonder aloud why I only ate salads and never drank soda. I had no answer but to day that I really like salads. I wasn't lying about that its just anytime I saw my sister's food come, which was always chicken tenders and fries, I always thought about how good it looked but my brain would respond by saying 'You can't eat that you're going to get fat.'

My mom took me to the doctor to get a check-up. When I saw the scale to see how much I weighed for some reason I got excited because I felt that the scale would give me the answer to whether my techniques of not eating and working out were working. I remember stepping on it and waiting for the numbers anxiously. In my head I did not want to hit 3-number digits, that felt terrifying. I thought 2-number digits were better and meant I was skinny, and that 3-digit numbers meant I was fat. I remember the number flashing on the scale saying 91 pounds. Keep in mind I was a 13-year-old girl weighing 91 pounds. My doctor asked my mom to leave the room and started asking me questions about whether I had problems with eating or my body image and all I said was 'no' to each answer. When the doctor was finished asking me questions she left the room and went to speak to my mom. They talked for about 10 minutes but it felt like an eternity. My mom came back into the room, her face showing disappointment, and all I thought was 'did she find out?'

When we got back into the car, my mom started asking me why I was starving myself. I didn't say one word. At that moment I wanted to cry. She found out my secret and I didn't want her to. I didn't want her to think that she failed as a parent. Though I grew up in a rough childhood I do not feel she has an effect on this decision. I love her so much and when she looked at me I thought that I had failed her. When I got home she started talking to me about being 'underweight,' telling me that I had to eat more because I needed to gain weight. Truthfully, it was so bad weighing 91 pounds at 13, but it's the fact that I chose to hurt myself and my family. It was never my intention for my family to be upset. But soon my stepdad, aunt, grandma,

grandpa, and sister found out. My grandma and my grandpa told me how much they loved me and I just broke down crying. They didn't want me to get sick because I starved myself. All I wished for was that my family knew that I didn't do this on purpose.

Ever since that day I was forced to eat more and exercise less. Not forced exactly, but I had to take my time with eating and become more intentional about it. This effort started with small proportions and then lead to bigger ones. I started to realize that I needed more food in my system to be healthy. I know that I didn't bring this up before but I had also found out that I was almost prone to diabetes because there wasn't enough sugar in my system. There's always one thing that I wish I could tell others who are struggling with this issue right now and that is that it's not going to be easy right now, but it is going to get better. Just take your time, don't force yourself, and just keep going. You are way better than the people you see on social media. You and your health are more important than any and all appearances.