Dear Diary,

I finally had the conversation with my mom.

I told her about my weed addiction, my eating disorder, my attempts to solve both of them through therapy, my fear of approaching her about her similar problems with alcohol and her own body image. I told her everything.

We had such an open and amazing conversation. Here’s what I told her over the phone:

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This past year was the hardest year of my life. Starting in January, I found myself in a really bad place mentally. I don’t think there’s a specific circumstance that I could pinpoint for what caused this to happen, but I became incredibly depressed. I tried to start numbing my feelings with smoking weed, because at this point, smoking weed was a huge habit in my life. It was even something that I had tried to quit multiple times, but had been unsuccessful at. So, I began to smoke all day, every day. I was only doing it to numb myself. One of the worst parts about the smoking too was that for some reason, I felt the need to hide it. I would get high when Margarita was home, but I would do it secretly and try to hide that I was getting high from her. even though I know she wouldn’t have judged me for it, I felt compulsion to hide what I was doing. I deleted my social media, and got rid of my phone at this point, so I was completely isolating myself from everything and everyone. I stopped reaching out to friends, to you and dad, to any family, and I wouldn’t even talk to Margarita when I was home. She thought that I was mad at her and Trevor, so they stopped staying at our apartment. This meant that I was living alone in my apartment, being alone about 90% of my day because all of my classes weren’t on campus, completely isolated and depressed. I reached a tipping point and Claudia and Yeng were worried about me, so they reached out and tried to start helping. At the time, I thought that the problem was weed. I thought I had an uncontrollable addiction and that I wasn’t able to go through the day without constantly smoking and needing to hide that fact. So, they helped me get rid of all of my weed and tried to watch over me so I wouldn’t fall back into it. I went through some rough withdrawals that included Yeng having to help me through some panic attacks and spend the night at my place so I wasn’t alone. But, as I stopped smoking weed for even just two weeks, I realized that there were much bigger things hidden underneath the surface of what I thought was a weed addiction. A lot of emotions and thoughts were coming up that I didn’t know how to deal with, so Claudia suggested that I start going to therapy to work through them.

So, about half way through February I started going to therapy at Cal Poly. After talking to the therapist there for a while, we started unearthing a lot of things that I had been repressing down, and it turns out that the weed addiction actually wasn’t the problem, but a result of other mental issues that needed addressing. The main problem we discovered was that I have an eating disorder.

I’ve had an eating disorder since about middle school, but it only got progressively worse throughout my time in college. It’s called a binge eating disorder. So this means when I am feeling out of control emotionally or triggered by certain things, I’ll eat until I feel physical pain from eating and I can’t eat any more. Then, I’ll feel so much guilt and hatred towards what I did that I’ll either over-exercise, purge, or restrict my eating for a period of time afterwards. Until my body gets so hungry from this that I inevitably end up binging again. It’s a cycle that can easily spiral out of control. The first time I truly noticed this was a problem was winter of freshman year, which was why I gained so much weight that year. In February of this year, I was at my all-time worst. When I’m being controlled by this eating disorder, every thought that I have the entire day is centered around an impulsive need to eat food. Every thought about myself and my physical appearance is incredibly hyper critical and honestly just downright brutal and mean. Looking in the mirror triggers me when I have disordered thinking. The bad thoughts that YOU feel and have shared with me about your own personal appearance are exactly the same thoughts that I’ve struggled with my entire life. I am just as hypercritical of myself as you are. So, this winter when I was taking 24 units, I was also in 2 hours of therapy a week, 1 hour of nutrition coaching a week, and getting a ton of medical tests done on my body to make sure that I hadn’t done any long term damage, while living alone, being isolated from the world, and being too afraid to talk to anyone about it.

Over the course of the winter, therapy started to help me so much, and I was able to identify my disordered thoughts so that they couldn’t control my actions as much anymore. But I still wasn’t completely healed yet. In fact, I’m still not healed right now. I have binging episodes all the time, not nearly as much as I used to, but I’m still recovering.

Now I’m going to shift focus a little bit…

It was during spring break when I came home that I wanted to talk to you about all of this, I was scared but ready to come forward about it. But, it was at this point in time that you were trying to switch over to smoking weed as an alternative to drinking when you come back from work. Mom, I’ve been wanting to tell you for a long time that when you are at home or visiting me or me visiting you, and you pour alcohol into coffee mugs or try to hide alcohol in the laundry room or hide the fact that you are drinking, I think a majority of the time I’m actually completely aware of the fact that you are drinking. But, when you hide it from me, I feel too awkward to bring up the fact that I know what is going on.

When I was home during spring break, I noticed that you lied to me one night about not having drank or smoked that day yet. But, I had witnessed you both smoking and drinking in secret and knew that you were trying to hide it from me.

I don’t want you to feel like you need to hide drinking from me or from eric and wesley or from dad. I know so many people who drink so much more than you do, but it’s not a problem with them because they do it openly. The problem with drinking and with smoking and with drugs comes from when people try to hide it. Which is exactly what happened to me last winter when I was trying to hide my smoking from everyone. That’s why I got so triggered when I came home during spring break because when I saw you hiding drinking and smoking, I realized that it was exactly the same thing that I had been doing.

Mom it is in our genetics to have addictive personalities. All of us in this family are such creatures of habit, regardless of whether those habits are good or bad.

I think I’ve been afraid to come to you about all of this for two reasons:

1. I feel a little bit of pressure towards being this almost-perfect child that everyone else in the family needs to be able to lean on for support and to be there for them, where people can ask me for advice about Eric and Wesley and anyone who is going through a hard time mentally and emotionally, but no one ever asks how I am doing mentally because they just assume that I’m doing good.
2. I think our family has gotten in a bad habit of talking ABOUT each other instead of talking WITH each other. I’ve heard you and Wesley and Eric complain about dad more times than I could ever count, but never once has our entire family actually sat down together to cohesively and maturely talk through our problems. I feel like that kind of environment that we’ve created doesn’t promote openness and vulnerability with each other, and it’s made it very hard for me to want to open up with anyone.

When I was finally talking to Eric about some of this stuff that I’ve been going through in terms of my addiction and eating disorder while on the PCT together, we both discussed that families often drift apart as everyone grows older because lack of authenticity with each other. The way I see it, our family can choose to slowly grow apart and share less with each other and judge each other’s actions and keep our thoughts from each other, or we can be vulnerable with each other. We can be there for each other when we need it. I can go to you and say, “mom, I have been dealing with impulsive eating, disordered thinking, self hate, and addiction to cope with depression and sadness. I’ve seen you struggling with alcohol and self image for a long part of my life, and I think we are struggling with a lot of the same hardships in our own heads. Nothing would make me happier than for us to help each other.”

I’d love to have a more open dialogue about all of this with you. I really do think we can help each other, and when you sent me that message the other day it made me realize that it is finally time to address the elephant that has been in the room of our relationship for so long.

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It felt incredible to finally get all of that off of my chest. It was so many years in the running. After telling her, we talked about our own insecurities with our bodies throughout our lives. Mom confessed to me she might have had anorexia in college and that her mother is a large reason why she has body issues. She got breast implants after having me which is what instigated her need for surgery this spring when one of them ruptured. She also got her abdomen fixed up and the fat taken from her stomach and put in her chest to help with the scar tissue.

She said that she wishes she had been able to love her body enough to not want to change it. I find that inspiring.

I think my mom and I can really help each other. I’m going to help her stop drinking for a while and she’s going to help me stop smoking for a while.

I will admit I’m high in my apartment in Seattle while writing this, but I am still not doing bad because I’m keeping up with my daily habits and still getting all of my things done. I need to try to keep a little bit calmer around my friends and not get as frustrated with Sam, but it is a learning process.

Overall, I’m just so ecstatic about my conversation with my mom. I have to thank Sam for encouraging me to finally get the nerve to do it.

Also rest in peace Derek’s brother.

Okay that is all for now,

Jessie J. Smith

Age 21

PS I OFFICIALLY bought my one way ticket (non-refundable) to thailand!!!! Also I OFFICIALLY bought my GRE test today!!! I am investing in the future that I want. Manifesting my dreams baby :) <3