



LET'S TALK AND LET'S LISTEN

By Alicia Quick

For the last 5 years this day has come and gone with people tweeting the hashtag [#BellLetsTalk](#) and sharing pictures claiming their want to end the stigma. And that is absolutely terrific. But I do have a small problem with this day, I see everybody tweeting “#BellLetsTalk” and I see the Facebook shares, but I never actually see the talking part. Yelling out “end the stigma!” is great, but what is the stigma? So I want to talk about it, and show you through firsthand experience, why people have such a hard time talking about it.

The first time I told someone I was depressed, at age 14, I was told I was being selfish and seeking attention. So I stopped talking about it and found a new outlet for the pain – self-harm. When I told someone I was self-harming, they told me I was too pretty to self-harm, too beautiful to be sad, as if that affected the chemistry in my brain. So I stopped talking about it and continued my self-destructive ways. When that stopped being enough and I locked myself in my bedroom and tried to overdose, I was told my attempt at taking my own life wasn't serious AKA just a cry for attention. So I didn't talk about how I promised myself my next attempt would be lethal. One day I overheard people talking about how medication for mental illness is wrong and that it will screw up people's minds, so I never talked about the pills I take religiously every day, never talked about how it was one of the only things that actually helped. When I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, I did a simple google search seeking support; instead I found articles and articles of how people with BPD are manipulative and toxic. So I never talked about it. When I dropped out of school because I was so depressed I could barely move and so anxious the thought of facing one of my teachers made me physically sick, I didn't even try to talk about it. Because by then it was already ingrained in my head that people weren't going to understand and that it was useless to try and explain.

It could be quite easy to get angry at the people who don't understand, but I can't be. These people are extremely blessed people who will never understand simply because they have never gone through it. I want these people to know that it's not as simple as just thinking positively, or putting it in God's hands. From someone who has gone through this for almost a decade, I think that if it was that easy I would be better by now. I have tried to beat this from so many angles, I promise you I would cut off my right arm if it guaranteed that I wouldn't have to suffer any more. Please understand this. Please don't tell people how to fix their mental health issues or tell them their mental illnesses aren't real unless you have spent over a decade in school and are a registered psychiatrist. Doing this is dangerous, it leads people to believe that maybe they really aren't sick, so they don't seek treatment. If people don't seek treatment, they are going to try and get relief from somewhere else, and that is where many people find themselves abusing drugs and alcohol and/or self-harming. Please stop shaming something just because you don't understand it. Stop silencing people with your ignorance.

And to the people who do understand because they've been there, to the people who suffer, to the people who are afraid to speak about the demons who haunt them, I want you to know there is nothing to be ashamed of. You aren't your mental illness, you aren't the ways you try to kill your sadness, and you aren't any less worthy of a wonderful life than anyone else. There is nothing wrong with taking medication, it saves lives. Reaching out and wanting therapy doesn't make you needy or weak, it makes you brave for facing a real life threatening problem. And days like today that always lead to so much attention around depression and anxiety, I want to point out the people with disorders like bipolar, OCD, PTSD, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, and so many other scary ass mental illnesses that are barely talked about yet tons and tons of people deal with, I see you and I care about you, and I'm not the only one that does. Your battles are tough and legitimate, and you are brave for living a life that is extremely hard to live. I wish you the strength to reach out for help, there are people who want so desperately for you to be happy and healthy and will try their hardest to get you there. Talking about it is terrifying, but it can lead you to a better life.

I didn't write this because I want attention or sympathy, I wrote this because I am scared that one day one of my little cousins will be as sick as I am and they'll be scared to reach out because of the way people perceive mental illness, because I am scared that I will lose another friend because they took their own life, I wrote this because after years of silence it was simply time, because at the end of the day, silence is deadly. So now I pass it off to you, let's talk and let's listen.