An All Too Familiar Story About Hunger
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At the beginning of this trip, I thought the biggest obstacle I was going to face was my fear of open water. In the preceding weeks, I prepared myself by developing various coping mechanisms and strategies that would help me through this fear. Little did I know I’d be embarking on the journey of a lifetime and facing my deepest fear yet, being seen.

Back to the beginning of the trip! I was focused on my thalassophobia (fear of open water) research because I wanted to explore how generational trauma in African Americans can show up in unexpected ways. When I packed my suitcase, I was intentional about bringing things that would give me comfort on my journey. There were three bags filled with focused on my thalassophobia (fear of open water). In the preceding weeks, I prepped myself by developing strategies that would help me through embarking on the journey of a lifetime and facing my deepest fear yet, being seen. At the beginning of this trip, I thought the biggest obstacle I was going to face was my fear of open water. In the preceding weeks, I prepared myself by developing various coping mechanisms and strategies that would help me through this fear. Little did I know I’d be embarking on the journey of a lifetime and facing my deepest fear yet, being seen.

There was someone I’ve admired from afar but we hadn’t had many opportunities to connect prior to the trip. We spent the first few days together and getting to know him was one of the major highlights of my experience. He taught me very valuable lessons, helped me sort through my thoughts and feelings, and gave me many opportunities to understand both him and my research on a deeper level. Connecting with him brought me comfort.

Two days before we returned home, a faculty member attempted to give me their version of a pep talk. They said some things I found to be of extremely poor taste both then and now. I had a common feeling from my past experiences of being judged before being understood. For me, it usually happens at times where non-Black women will speak from made assumptions before asking meaningful questions to fully comprehend my situation.

In the moment I remember being so upset and I wanted to comment on their lack of tact but then I started to remember my physical body. And just like that, the rose-colored lenses were lifted and I realized that I just needed food that would nourish me.

What helped me to accomplish on that trip was exceptional despite the many adversities I had to overcome. Imagine how much more I could have done for Barranquitas if I was properly fed, supported, and understood.

Oversights are what keep us from getting to the root of humanity’s issues. Now imagine the 828 million people around the world experiencing hunger. What hidden talents do they have but are unable to share? What can they solve? And will we ever know?

When it came time for us to get in the water, I was one of the last people to get in. I was trembling with fear on the inside but stoic and reserved on the outside. It’s very easy for me to overthink things and when my fear began to consume my mind, I looked up to my new friend coming towards me to invite me in. Seeing him put my thoughts at ease and once I entered the ocean, everything went better than anticipated. The coping mechanisms I developed settled my fear almost instantly.

With encouragement from a few friends, I decided I would draw a design. I wanted to make something beautiful since beauty was all I could see during the first half of my trip. I was so happy from being in the ocean that day and decided to take all of my experiences and knowledge about Puerto Rico and let that fuel my design process. People liked my design and things developed rapidly from there...

I have always been in advisory leadership roles but never the main lead. This is something I’ve done my entire life and I owe it to my fear of being seen. I can’t describe why I have that fear nor why I’ve tended to it all these years but that’s something to explore in another story.

Once we returned to Barranquitas from the ocean, the group was asked to draw some design ideas for the medicinal garden. Though I have a background in landscape design, I hesitated in doing this because I don’t care to have my talents on display. Pissed, I had an idea of what would come with drawing a design: leading the project.

NOTE: A common adversity that many Black women face in the United States is the lack of support. We often must prove ourselves and our worthiness of trust before receiving the support that we need in the moment. Being one of two vegetarians on a trip in a place that doesn’t know vegetarian food left me with bread, cheese, ice berg lettuce, and tomato slices most days.

I was thrilled to be able to see the aquatic world with curiosity rather than terror. When I thought the ocean was my biggest obstacle, my mind and body were at ease. In that moment, after realizing I had just conquered a huge part of my fear, I felt like I could relax for the remainder of our trip, but I was wrong.