

Dark Wave

Imagine you're in the ocean. The water is cool against your skin, the sun is radiating off your face, you feel fish brush up against your legs, the sand moving underneath your feet. This is your happy place. Just enjoying life. Out in the distance, not too far from you, you see a wave. Small at first, but it slowly is building up. Taller and taller. You get an uneasy feeling deep in your stomach, as the wave gets closer. Closer and closer, bigger and bigger. You look around, and see no one by. You are alone.

The wave won't crash. It keeps building taller, and your anxiety follows it. All the worst possible things race through your mind, and you come up with every awful ending to this story. As these thoughts fly around your mind, you are trying to fill it with solutions. How can I fight this wave? How can I survive this? But your emotions are too much. This darkness has taken over. The wave reaches you, and pulls you under. You fight the water, trying to reach the surface, just to take one more breath. You're swimming, fighting, trying to climb. Your lungs are losing oxygen fast, and soon there's nothing left. You need to get to the surface. You are looking for the light, and can't find anything. You are surrounded by darkness. With no way out.

Just as you feel you are about to lose everything, the sun peeks through the darkness. You start to swim in the direction of the light, and your feet hit sand. Just then, the darkness disappears, and you plant your feet in the sand, and stand. Your lungs finally get that much needed oxygen, as your head is raised above the water. You look around, and realize you could have simply stood up the whole time. The water was only a couple feet deep. Why was your body so oblivious to its surroundings? Why was it worried in the first place? Why did you get anxious so fast, not realizing you weren't in any danger? You have so many questions, and can't seem to find the answers. Now imagine going through all of that, multiple times a week or even daily. That's Panic Disorder.

For most, that experience would be traumatizing. Of course, having a panic attack puts you in no physical danger. All of this happens in the mind. All of those emotions, feelings, anxiety, and darkness all explode inside their head. It can happen at any time, any place, and to anyone. You can be surrounded by people, or be completely alone. Sometimes, some of those questions can be answered. Like, where did all this negativity come from. A family member passed or you are at risk of being fired. Lots of events can cause panic attacks. That's Panic Disorder.

But, there are certain attacks, where nothing makes sense. You could be in the middle of the most exciting day of your life, and it hits you like a freight train. No reason, no explanation, no answer. Just darkness. As it consumes your life for a brief time, and all you want to know is why. And then, just like that, the light comes out of nowhere. And the darkness disappears. Even when it has disappeared, you still want to know why. You contemplate all that has happened, and try to force a reason. Eventually you give up, and move on. People are watching. You have to leave it alone. But what about the next time? When will this happen again? Are there ways to prevent it from happening? You don't want to go through that again.

You don't want to have to fight the wave of emotions and darkness alone. But you don't have a choice. That's Panic Disorder.

The kicker? Most people who go through this treacherous experience, never reveal what is happening to them. You would never know they are experiencing these emotions, this sadness, this anxiety. They hide it. There may be some signs. Legs bouncing, fingers fiddling, neck rubbing, mouth quiet, eyes empty. But no one notices those things. And even if they did, they ignore it. Why would I want to get involved in that? Leaving this person to fend for themselves. To go through all of this alone. That's Panic Disorder.

Most people hate the feeling of being sick, or being nauseous. Most people hate the feeling that you are about to pass out, and your vision gets blurry. Most people hate the feeling of not receiving enough oxygen, and you feel like you can't breathe. Most people hate the feeling of being ignored, and others notice signs and choose not to help you. Most people hate not being able to express what's really happening. Most people hate constantly being anxious, and not knowing when another attack will happen. Most people hate not being able to explain all of this to another person, and hearing from others, "Just calm down", "You're fine", or "Don't be stressed". Most people hate not being able to control what's happening to them. Most people hate not being able to stop the darkness. Most people hate having Panic Disorder. And I happen to be one of them.

As a society, we need to shed more light on all mental health disorders. The more light we shed, the less darkness there is for those who are suffering. The more we can understand disorders, the more we can help others through these awful experiences.