

Former Miss America Reveals Secret, Shameful Battle

Prior to the Sept. 11 airing of the Miss America 2017 pageant, Miss America 2008 Kirsten Haglund is speaking up about her past struggles with anorexia and finding her identity in order to inspire others in a new White Chair series film released today on .

“For someone who’s severely struggling from an eating disorder, your mind doesn’t act normal. You literally see yourself as horribly disgusting,” said Haglund in her *I Am Second* film. “It’s about food, and it’s about losing weight, creating a body type you want, but it is about so much more than that. It is slavery.”

Haglund’s journey began after discovering her love for ballet at an early age and soon realizing dancing was all she ever wanted to do. But at the age of 12, Haglund’s life began to unravel. Her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and her older brother developed OCD. This, plus entering into puberty, created in her a deep insecurity.

Grappling for her identity, Haglund made the personal decision to do whatever it took to be a professional ballet dancer. While away studying at a competitive dance school one summer, she began pushing her body physically, putting in extra hours in the studio.

“For the very first time I thought, ‘Maybe I should be thinking about what I’m eating. Maybe I should be dieting.’” Haglund recounts. “Isn’t that what every fashion magazine says? ‘How to be a woman and lose five pounds and feel great.’ I thought maybe that’s part of this growing up and being a good ballerina thing that I haven’t gotten yet. Maybe I need to go on a diet.”

These thoughts culminated one day at ballet camp when Haglund made a conscience decision to throw away her lunch.

"It felt very good. I felt very proud of myself," Haglund said. "And I would continue to do things like blacklisting foods ... I started to make up these rules for myself. It fit in with everything else I was doing. All ballet is, is rules."

By the time Haglund was 15, she was a total shell of her former self.

"The lie of anorexia said, 'If you just stick with me, I'll give you everything you want,'" said Haglund. "The mirror for someone severely struggling with body image is like a torture device ... all I saw was failure. I still wasn't there yet. I still wasn't anorexic enough."

Though both her parents were nurses, their denial clouded the signs of Haglund's disorder. But after months of Haglund expressing anger and anxiety, her parents took her to the doctor, who immediately recognized her anorexia.

"I was so mad at my mom that she betrayed me, that she took me to the doctor. I was just doing what I needed to do in order to be a professional dancer. They didn't know," Haglund remembers. "I thought, 'I will play their game. I will just gain a little bit of weight in order to make them feel like I'm playing along. Then they'll OK me, they'll give me a check mark, and I'll go back to being anorexic again.'"

Haglund began to reconsider her plan when she realized she couldn't fool God, who knew the front she was putting on for people; however, she wasn't ready to give up her anorexia yet. But six months into her strategy, while she was running on the treadmill, having not eaten enough and pushing herself too hard, she nearly blacked out and fell. In that moment she was overcome with the fear she could no longer control her body.

"Out of the pit of my stomach, out of nowhere and three years

of basically feeling so few emotions, just came this desire like a volcano erupting out of me,” Haglund said. “It was that moment that I really realized I wanted to change.”

Surrounded by supportive friends, Haglund truly began the road to recovery. During this time, she began to read the Bible, specifically the book of Psalms.

“I found the words to be my words,” said Haglund. “It wasn’t like an answer. It wasn’t like I opened up and saw ‘here’s how you release your perfectionism,’ but it just brought comfort to my soul. And I realized I wasn’t in it alone.”

It was through this that Haglund finally found her identity not in her eating disorder but in something more. To see Haglund’s full story shared in the I Am Second White Chair film, visit .