



How Health Coach Massy Arias Found Her Real Strength

A decade ago, she began sharing her fitness trials and triumphs online after experiencing the dark side of the industry. Since then, she has motivated millions to find their motivation, strengthening techniques, and focus—and built a wellness empire that includes an app and the TRU Supplements line. In this episode, Massy gets candid about her recent divorce, and all the things we don't see on Instagram.

Alicia Menendez:

I have been on a mission to get Massy Arias, personal trainer, health coach, Instagram phenom, on Latina to Latina since we launched. We have hit a few bumps in the road. This is actually the third time we've connected. Once, Massy got pulled away to be a mom. Another time, she was at a photo shoot and the acoustics didn't work. And through it all, I learned that Massy is exactly who she says she is: disciplined, driven, committed, relentlessly positive and enthusiastic. She's also really savvy about her business, how she's building it. And for the first time, Massy opens up about her divorce, ignoring naysayers, and building the life she's dreamed of.

Most of the time when I hear your story, it starts with you coming to the States from the DR. You were 13. I want to know what your life was like before that, when you lived in the Dominican Republic.

Massy Arias: Well, my life was pretty simple. I come from very humble backgrounds, very humble beginnings, and I lived with my mom and my stepdad. My parents were divorced. But it was pretty simple. I had an awesome childhood. Then my family decided we needed a better life.

Menendez: Was that transition to the States smooth? What do you remember about it?

Arias: No. The transition wasn't smooth at all. When my parents made the decision of bringing me to the States, I was a sophomore in high school, so as a teenager, obviously I don't want to leave my friends, my family, my culture. I had to pretty much transition into a new environment, into a new culture, and even though I was excited to come to the States, it was very rough.

Menendez: You say that as a kid, you had to be an adult. I wonder how that showed up for you.

Arias: When I came, two of my brothers came as well with me. A stepbrother and my blood brother. My only blood brother. And when we came, I pretty much had to be sort of like the mom. My father here, he wasn't rich, obviously, and was a working parent, so when I came, I had to be the one overseeing the things that my brothers were doing, even though they were a year or two years older. So, a lot of responsibility was put on me.

One of my brothers got diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma, and he got really, really sick with stage four Burkitt's lymphoma. He did not acclimate to the culture like I did and went back home, and when he was back home, he was 18. I was 17. Just graduating from high school. My parents broke the news, "Hey, your brother has stage four cancer." So, when he came over, I took it upon myself, being the only one who was pretty much speaking the language, writing it, understanding it, I took it upon myself to help my brother, help my mom, and I spent a year in a Presbyterian hospital, sleeping in the room where my brother was being treated. So, a lot was put on me, and one of the things that I wanted to do after high school was go away. I wanted the full experience. I wanted the American dream. I want to go away to college. I'm going to experience the dorms, and the whole, full experience.

I had to stop with my dreams of going away to college, of studying, then I stayed local and went to Queens College, and pretty much I was juggling going to school, being with my family in the hospital, and also working at the same time. And everything that I've done, I pretty much excelled in, because I know nothing more than just hard work. This is what my parents instilled. I saw individuals that were honest, that were caring, that were hardworking, and that worked really hard to be where they are right now.

Menendez: In the course of all those struggles too, you also come to realize that you're dealing with mental health issues. Specifically, you're dealing with depression, or living with depression. What did it show up like for you and how did you begin to address it?

Arias: In the middle of me juggling work and school, my father said, "I am done with the States. I'm gonna sell my businesses and I'm going to retire and go back to Dominican. Masy, come with me." I said, "No. There's absolutely no way I'm going back. I want to stay here." And I said, "I'm going to emancipate and I'm just gonna stay with or without help." I was pretty adamant about that. And I made it happen.

Working, going to school, being in the hospital, it's too much. It's way too much to handle. Period. So, my depression came from a lot of things going south, meaning I'm very type A, and I plan, and I'm a control freak, and when things don't go as I have them planned, then it really just messes up with my brain. I've done everything that I've done. I've put the right people in place to do certain things. And when things go out south, or go in another direction, at that time it was really, really hard for me to comprehend that.

A lot of different things started to happen in my life where I said, "Wait a second. I am not living my truth. I am hiding all these things from my parents." The tattoos, I hid everything. Think about it. I'm 17, 18, just doing whatever. I was making good money doing what I was doing at the time. I started selling accessories at ALDO and I ended up climbing that ladder.

Menendez: I love it.

Arias: I know. Climbing that ladder to the point where I was handed keys, I was making good money. I was just hiding a lot of things. And I didn't feel like I was my true self. I felt ashamed. I felt... What was I doing with my life? I was clubbing, and partying, and drinking, and smoking, and oh my God, it was just a slippery slope to disaster. What my parents think of me is everything, and when I started to lie, and not living my truth, and not seeing my family for a very long time because I have to hide these tattoos, and I have to hide this,

and I have to hide this, it just became a ball of lies, and I couldn't handle it. Years passed that I couldn't remove my clothing because I didn't want my mom to look at what I did to my body.

So, I fell into this depression. My father comes back from the Dominican. I quit school, I quit my job, I quit everything. I had no desire to do anything. And I stopped eating. I just couldn't understand how am I going to get out of this mess, the mess that I created for myself. Unhealthy habits, unhealthy patterns, me not feeling like I was reaching my full potential, the fact that my parents... And even my mom, knowing that I'm very responsible, trusted me to be by myself, and I was living a lie. So, I stopped eating, and my body started destroying itself pretty much. Like when you don't eat, your body just starts pulling from its reserves. I fell into a deep depression. I tried everything. I tried hypnosis, cognitive therapy. My parents just thought, "Oh, she's just a teenager. She just doesn't want to do anything and what are we gonna do?" My father was up to here.

Then, I turned into fitness, and everything changed. I was a cardio bunny. That's all I had. I didn't know how to do anything, you know what I mean? And being that I quit, my father was still, again, supporting me in everything that I wanted to do. I was lying to my father about going to school, too, and meanwhile he would leave to work, come back, and find me in the same place, with the same clothes, with the same... He knew I did not go anywhere. It got to a point where I then started to go outside and go to the library. My father was not supporting me. He said, "What are you doing with your life? If you are not going back to school and if you're not doing XYZ, then I'm sorry."

So, I started going to the library, saying, "Okay. Well, I'm wasting away. I have to start doing something that really transforms me." And mind you, I had body dysmorphia from my past relationship, being that I am very small, I don't have the Caribbean body, and this person made me feel that way. So, I started lifting to try to change my body to look like what my body possibly even structurally couldn't even get to that point.

I remember I opened social media and I was just sharing my story, just putting pictures with filters. No problem. And as I started to go out more, getting more sun, I had made acquaintances in the gym. These people held me accountable. I was spending more time outside and I started feeling better, and better, and better, and better. Changing my eating habits. Learning about nutrition. I felt weak mentally and physically that I allowed myself to be in a position where someone made me feel inferior. To me, even now, what I do, my physical strength, I want to feel strong mentally and physically, and exercise did that for me, because it's a regimen.

And it taught me how to be resilient. How to fail. Get back up when you fail. And it is... It sounds really cliché and sounds really simple as to what the principles of changing your lifestyle installs in you a lot of healthy habits that will translate outside of the gym, or outside of the movement spectrum that we're talking about. It taught me how to get back up. It taught me that, "Hey, this may not happen this week, but a month from now it's going to happen." And for me, it was like life and death. This was the one thing that made me feel alive. This hour that I was there, sometimes two hours that I was there, I felt alive. I felt like I wasn't thinking of anything else but what I was doing at the moment.

Menendez: When you started to share your journey on social, then people started to ask you for training advice, and you realized that you needed to get certified if people were gonna be

Latina to Latina: How Health Coach Massy Arias Found Her Real Strength

asking you for advice. What's fascinating to me is that you found yourself in an industry that you didn't really know. When did you realize that you didn't like the standard of the fitness industry the way that it is built now?

Arias: I was posting pictures. One picture that went viral, and it was my stomach, and at that time I was competing, because I thought, "Oh my God. If I do these fitness competitions, I really want to transform my body. Let's see if I get a coach and they can coach me to get to that point." I needed to feel like I had purpose. People started asking me about fitness advice. I said, "Wait, let me get certified, because at the end of the day, I need to put out the right information." And it comes down to honesty. Being honest.

So, got my first certification, started training people at a Planet Fitness. People don't know this, but Planet Fitness, \$20, I would train one client in the Bronx, I would come down to Brooklyn, I would go to Manhattan, and from 5:00 in the morning, I used to come home at 11:00 at night. My dad never understood that. But indeed, I'm making my money so that I'm able to continue to get better certifications and whatnot.

Then I started to conceptualize, okay, well, let me just give the advice. People started to ask me like, "What do you eat?" I started posting it. Very organically posting it. And then my journey into competing started because I needed purpose. I want to do something. I really want to manipulate my body. As I started to train for fitness competitions, I did about a year and a half, I started realizing, "Wait a second. This is unhealthy." I started realizing what happens behind the scenes in the bodybuilding world. It's a lot of steroids. It's a lot of lies in order to look a certain way.

So, then my body was starting to transform, but I was living a lie, because I'm doing all the things that are unhealthy in order to get to a point where I'm in a stage and someone can judge my physique. I saw in the industry the biggest names you can think of with bulimia, with anorexia, with body dysmorphia, and I remember my coach back then said to me, bodybuilding coach, "There will never be a Black Miss Bikini Olympia." And I said, "Then why am I doing this for?" When I started to continue my education with nutrition, and exercise, and everything in between, I realized something, so I started to do my own thing. Manipulating my body how I wanted.

So, the creation of my programming and everything that I am came in that transition. How do I change what is happening? If there are so many people who have been trying to change their body composition, get healthier, lose weight, all I wanted to do was get healthy. Mentally and physically. I wanted to be at a healthy weight. I wanted to feel good from the inside out.

Menendez: You also have become a one-woman business. A Cover Girl endorsement, a Fabletics collection, a supplement line, a book, a fitness app. I mean, how do you choose, given the number of opportunities that are available to you, which opportunities to take on?

Arias: The one thing I wanted to do in the industry was create a supplement company, because what's out there, it's really just trash. I believe that in order for you to get to a certain point in your health journey, or your body composition, you don't have to do unhealthy things to get there. So, in 2015, I remember I was creating my programs, I had bands to sell, I would literally be in a 500 square foot apartment, reinvesting everything into my business. Anything that I would get from my fitness programs, I would invest it into bands, into

equipment, into a better website, into better support, into the employees to help me with that support, and I created the supplement company that in the past year and a half has been booming.

I believe that life is not a race, but a marathon. And the belief of creating that supplement company was with the thought that consumers were going to catch up to ingredients and what is healthy and not healthy. It went from a performance line, because it was for me, to a lifestyle brand that now brings performance, and lifestyle, and everything in between, and hopefully will continue to grow into skin. The dream is big.

Fabletics, for example. I like their clothing and I'm in workout clothes 24/7 before we signed the contract with Fabletics, we're going on three years, and it's a really great brand. Cover Girl came about. That was an amazing opportunity. It's incredible to think they've never signed anyone in fitness and they're signing me. How? So, all these opportunities, I've been on every magazine cover you can think of. I'm missing only a few. I've done so much with my career, so I get emotional, because I've done so much, and it's inspiring. It's inspiring me. I look back sometimes and I'm like, "Whoa, how far we have gone to this point where now you can do the one thing you wanted to do." Some partnerships are strategic in the way that I am going to use that revenue. I'm going to use that budget from that partnership and I'm gonna reinvest into my business. That's where the app creation comes in. It's a web app. It's a lot of money. And it's a lot of risks that you have to take, but one of the things that I put my hands on fire for is myself.

I bet on myself because I know my work ethic. I just know.

Menendez: I have to say because you share so much on social media, I think it can sometimes give us the false impression that because we see a part of your life, that we see all of your life. What is there that we don't see?

Arias: Oh, my God. Well, I'm recently divorced. There's a lot of questions about that and I made that decision. When you have to make a decision, you have to make a decision. What they don't see is all the work that goes behind the scenes. For the past year and a half, I have carried my business on my own. I've never been a CEO and I am doing those things, and when the expectation is for you to crumble as a woman, I took that and I said, "Okay. Bring the challenge." And that's what people don't see. They think things are being done for me. No, it's me doing it. Every detail that you see is with my team, guiding the team, making the decisions, taking the risks. They don't see that. The fact that my daughter is not allowed on social media anymore, it's because I have to be mom and dad for Indi, and a lot of the things... I'm not waiting on anyone to support her and give her the future that she needs, even though on social it doesn't look that way. I am the one.

I've had to put on the hat of CEO, mom, talent, social media creator, absolutely everything. It's prepared me to be where I am today. A year and a half of hardship and really hard times, I focused on my work and my work has been my therapy. And I hope that any woman that is listening to this is inspired.

Menendez: When you were making the decision to separate, given that you are a public person, were you grappling with what other people would say? Was that even in your space as you were trying to make your way through this?

Arias: I haven't really talked about it. I haven't really touched it. Of course, there's a bunch of questions, speculations. I've always been the type of person that I'm gonna carry myself with honesty and integrity and then the truth will come to light at some point.

Menendez: What do you want people to know about it?

Arias: Know that I made a decision. I made a decision that was the best for me, and the best for Indi, and that's it. At the end of the day, I'm just gonna continue with my life. Continue to move forward. And that's what I want people to know. I moved forward. And there's nothing to talk about rather than maybe in the future, give women the inspiration to go out there and do things on their own, and have the strength, and the confidence that they're going to thrive. If something is not aligning with them, if it's not aligning with me and if I'm unhappy, I'm gonna do everything that I can to fix that. But if I cannot fix it, then it's time to move on. I don't have to be in pain. And that's what I want people to know. Especially women.

When you become emotionally independent and financially independent because you have those tools, when you have those tools, you can thrive. And you can do it. And I thought that I was going to crumble. A lot of things were intertwined and I'm thriving in a very good way. It's been hard but it's gonna pay off. I know that this is preparing me for something better and brighter.

Menendez: It seems to me that between the app and the supplement company, you're also beginning to create something that lives outside of you, Massy, the individual. Even though you may touch it, even though you may be the CEO of all of it, it doesn't require you in the same exact way.

Arias: The hardest part has been with my community because I refuse to let that go. I'm very close to it. I'm very, very close to it. No one is gonna touch that-

Menendez: You're very close to it because you feel like you get something out of it?

Arias: It's my tribe. If I lose that, I lose my purpose. You know, my purpose is changing people's lives. It is what I thrive on. And oh my God, I'm getting teary again. I'm getting teary again. This is my calling. And I love it so much. I love interacting with my community. I love it. I get so much out of it personally. Over the past nine years, we've served over half a million people. It's amazing. I mean, I cannot read every single email. I used to be very one-on-one with people, with my community, but now it's like thousands and thousands, right? But I do a live three times a week with my community. Once this app is available, this web app, hopefully in the next couple of months, it's gonna be pretty cool because everything is going to be embedded in that platform and users are going to interact with other users.

I have people fighting cancer right now. I have diabetics. I have girls ranging from 14 years old, all the way, like 65. I have couples. This, to me, this community, I want it to be bigger than Massy. The hardest part has been that if I was doing a program, for example, and I was launching, say a thousand people joined. I made 100 connections, for example, because I was always here, on my computer, talking to them, doing more one-on-one. Now it's different, but as a connection, this is something that is like a hard no. Me building this community, me building this platform is it, and me connecting with these women, because a lot of people don't know that I get a lot of inspiration from the stories that I get.

Latina to Latina: How Health Coach Massy Arias Found Her Real Strength

Menendez: Of course. Yeah.

Arias: Tons of inspiration.

Menendez: It's what keeps you going.

Arias: It's literally what keeps me going. I'm a people person. I love humans. I'm very intrigued by how people act and why in their environment, and how can I change that, how can I be better.

Menendez: Massy, this was totally worth three different attempts at. You are exactly who you say you are.

Arias: Oh, thank you.

Menendez: So, thank you for showing up as that person. I am in awe and really grateful that you spent an hour of your time with us.

Arias: Oh, thank you so much. Thank you.

Menendez: Thank you for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you when you email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, when you slide into our DMs on Instagram, when you tweet at us @LatinaToLatina. Remember to subscribe, follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please, I know I ask this all the time, but do leave a review. It is one of the fastest, easiest ways to help us grow.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "How Health Coach Massy Arias Found Her Real Strength." *Latina to Latina*, Lantigua Williams & Co., April 11, 2021. LatinaToLatina.com

Produced by:

