

Marybeth, 49

Eating disorders advocate who has lived with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, NORTH CAROLINA

Marybeth, 49, North Carolina, is the Founder of 'Epiphany', an organization dedicated to offering support and treatment to those living with eating disorders. Marybeth established Epiphany in 2019, after overcoming her own 20-year-long battle with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

At 16 years of age, Marybeth's grandmother, with whom she had lived her entire life, died. This devastating loss propelled Marybeth into a cycle of depression, and rigorous dieting.

Marybeth spent the ensuing two years restricting her food intake, and over-exercising. At 18 years of age, she was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.



After entering college, her disordered eating behaviors escalated. She spent Monday to Friday restricting her food intake, and exercising excessively, and her weekends bingeing – a vicious cycle which she struggled to break.

Marybeth's eating disorder consumed her life for more than 20 grueling years, rendering her unable to focus on anything else besides maintaining her restrictive diet, and exercising excessively.

In 2012, Marybeth commenced her journey towards recovery, attending residential treatment for two months, and a day program for a further five weeks. Today, she is continuing to receive professional support from a dietitian and therapist.

As the Founder of Epiphany, Marybeth is passionate about helping others begin their journey to recovery. Her organization provides therapist and dietitian-delivered outpatient services to those living with eating disorders.

Marybeth is proud to participating in the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) research study, to help identify the genes that influence a person's risk of developing anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder, to improve treatment, and ultimately, save lives.

This is Marybeth's story.

"Living with an eating disorder is like having a voice in your head telling you what to do all the time. There is no rest and no escape," said Marybeth.

"I had an urgency to exercise as much as I could, and to restrict my food intake as much as possible."

When Marybeth started to attend college, her disordered eating escalated. She found herself bingeing on the weekends and restricting her food intake and exercise routine during the week.

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"It was a vicious cycle. I never made myself sick, instead I used exercise to purge," Marybeth said.

Throughout her mid-twenties, Marybeth received support from a nutritionist and several therapists. Although her condition improved for a short period of time, it wasn't long before she fell back into her former, unhealthy exercise routine and disordered eating.

When encountering various challenges and stressors in her life, such as her dad undergoing heart surgery or when she started a media company, Marybeth would ramp up her exercise regime and further restrict her food intake.

"It was a horrible, isolating existence. My family felt like they were walking on eggshells around me. We were in a constant state of stress.

"I was also too afraid to be in situations where there might be food, so I avoided going out with friends," said Marybeth.

In 2012, Marybeth decided it was time to regain control of her life. By this point in time, she had already been receiving outpatient therapy for two years. However, in need of more support, she subscribed to a two-month-long residential treatment program. After completing the program, she attended a day program for five weeks. Today she is continuing to see a dietitian and therapist.

Marybeth believes genes play a significant role in the development of an eating disorder, especially given her family history of disordered eating.

"It's often said that genes load the gun, but the environment pulls the trigger," Marybeth said.

To learn more about one's genetic predisposition to the development of an eating disorder, Marybeth has chosen to participate in the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) – the world's largest genetic research study of eating disorders ever performed. She is urging Americans aged 18 and over, with first-hand experience of an eating disorder, to follow suit.

"It's essential that we identify the underlying genetic causes of eating disorders, to save lives and improve treatment options available to those living with eating disorders."

"Families need to know that eating disorders are not a choice, and those living with an eating disorder need to know there is no shame whatsoever in the struggle," said Marybeth.

Importantly, Marybeth urges anyone living with an eating disorder to reach out and seek help, especially in the current COVID-19 climate.

"I always say that my worst day in recovery is 100,000 times better than my best day living with an eating disorder.

"Please know that you are worth it, and have a lot to give," Marybeth said.

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