

## **Kelly, 29**

### **Nursing student who has battled anorexia nervosa for the past 16 years, FLORIDA**

From as early as she can recall, Kelly, 29, Florida, has struggled with disordered thoughts and behaviors around food.

As a child, Kelly grew fearful of going through puberty. When puberty hit at 13 years of age, Kelly's disordered eating immediately escalated. Nine months later (at the age of 14), she was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

Ever since, Kelly has been struggling to free herself from the insidious grip of her eating disorder. She has been admitted to inpatient and residential treatment centers on more than 15 occasions, and has sought professional support from many specialists.

Today, Kelly remains under the care of her psychiatrist, and visits her dietitian and therapist regularly. She has also turned to practicing reiki, yoga, and meditation to aid her journey towards recovery.

Given her first-hand experience with an eating disorder, Kelly has chosen to participate in the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) research study – the world's largest genetic research study of eating disorders ever performed. The study aims to identify the hundreds of 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 Kelly's story.**

"I was always a very anxious child who lived with untreated obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). I also had a severe phobia of menstruation, puberty, and developing a woman's body," said Kelly.

When Kelly developed her period at 13 years of age, she claims it was the 'final straw' that triggered her illness. Over the ensuing nine months, her eating disorder progressed, until she was formally diagnosed by a psychiatrist, with anorexia nervosa.

Kelly has been battling the life-consuming illness ever since.

"Living with an eating disorder is extremely painful and isolating. Every day of my life is controlled by my rigidity around food, my body and exercise, despite having tremendous awareness and insight into my behaviors," Kelly said.

During high school, Kelly was referred to many US treatment facilities, and was on occasion, admitted for eight months at a time. Due to her extensive absenteeism from school, Kelly graduated with an alternative to the US high school diploma – a General Education Development (GED).

**more#**

"It took me seven years to graduate from college. I struggled to hold down jobs and find any sort of purpose, until recently deciding to return to school to study nursing," said Kelly.

Since her diagnosis, Kelly has struggled with her mental health, and ability to form and maintain close relationships.

"I deal with depression, including periods of intense suicidality, largely associated with the impact of having spent so many years living with an eating disorder."

"I've found dating and developing intimate relationships extremely difficult. After experiencing little success, I often feel worse about myself, while I watch others my age starting families," Kelly said.

As a result of living with anorexia nervosa for the past 16 years, Kelly has developed osteoporosis, permanent liver damage, and has also been hospitalized on many occasions with other health-related complications.

Today, Kelly is under the expert care of a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of severe and enduring eating disorders. She also checks in with a therapist and dietitian, when required.

"The less focus I place on 'eating disorder treatment', the more I have been able to move forward with building my life," said Kelly.

Given her family history of mental illness, Kelly maintains genes are a potentially significant contributor to her longstanding illness.

"I believe I was genetically predisposed to developing an eating disorder, in addition to anxiety and depression. My gene pool, combined with environmental factors, created the perfect storm," Kelly said.

Living in hope that new treatments will one day be available to those living with an eating disorder, Kelly has chosen to participate in EDGI. She is urging Americans aged 18 and over, with first-hand experience of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge-eating disorder, to follow suit.

"Thankfully, in recent years, there has been more evidence-based treatment available. More research, however, is absolutely critical, to better serve those battling eating disorders."

"The more participants who enroll in this study, the closer the researchers will get to pinpointing the causes of these illnesses, and to developing adequate treatments, so that people do not have to live with these disorders for the rest of their lives," said Kelly.

By sharing her story, Kelly hopes to positively impact the lives of those affected by eating disorders.

"I hope my story will educate others about the complex nature of eating disorders, inform future treatments, and encourage healthcare professional advocacy for evidence-based, supporting, and nurturing care for patients and their families," Kelly said.

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