

Sexual Assault Prevention, Mental Health Awareness and PTSD Education Programs

Amy Oestreicher

Motivational Speaker on Trauma, Student Mental Health, Resiliency, and Entrepreneurship

PTSD peer-to-peer specialist, artist, author, writer for The Huffington Post, health advocate, member of RAINN Speaker Bureau, TEDx Speaker actress, and playwright.



www.amyoes.com

“I grew up believing that my entire life would be dedicated to the performing arts. Now, I’m also a survivor and “thrivor” of sexual abuse, 27 surgeries, coma, organ failure, and the PTSD that comes from ten years of trauma – or what I now call my “beautiful detour.”

At 18, years old, a blood clot caused my body to go into septic shock. I was in a coma for six months, and after a total gastrectomy, I was unable to eat or drink a drop of water for six of the past ten years. After 27 surgeries, I was miraculously reconnected with the intestines I had left. To persevere through those tumultuous years took great inner and outer strength – strength **I didn’t know I was capable** of until I was tested.

I learned that the human spirit feeds off of hope, and **hope is fuel we can cultivate ourselves.** Ultimately, I learned that with resourcefulness, creativity, and unwavering curiosity, we can transform any adversity into personal growth and a resilience that is uniquely ours.

Everything became possible once I was willing to intentionally wander from the life I planned and embrace this “detour” as an opportunity for discovery. This is not the life that I planned for myself – *but does anyone’s life ever work out exactly how they plan it?”*

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***Celebrating Life's Beautiful Detours
by Transforming Adversity to
Creative Growth***

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Gutless & Grateful
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Sexual Assault Prevention, Mental Health Advocacy and Broadway Theatre

Amy Oestreicher is a PTSD peer-to-peer specialist, artist, author, writer for The Huffington Post, health advocate, member of RAINN Speaker Bureau, speaker for TEDx, actress, and playwright. She is also a survivor of sexual abuse, 27 surgeries, coma, organ failure, six years being unable to eat or drink, and the PTSD that comes from ten years of trauma.

Knowing how difficult it was for me to speak of my own abuse (especially after waking up from a coma months later), Amy has devised a program that combines Broadway theatre with sexual assault awareness and mental health advocacy, in order to empower survivors of assault and to create a more compassionate, open community. I deliver this keynote to organizations, conferences, shelters, colleges and universities, to promote mental health, provide hope, help, and improve lives.

The program can also be expanded to three components:

Part 1) A 70-minute **one-woman autobiographical musical** – Gutless & Grateful – a comedic yet poignant story on how I survived 27 abdominal surgeries, organ failure, and sexual abuse. Through interwoven song and dialogue, I share a primal piece of live-storytelling – a powerful message that it’s possible for survivors to become empowered by their own identity and be secure in their choices.

Part 2) An **educational session/speech** where I discuss a compassionate approach to emotional well-being, how to develop a resiliency toolbox, how to cultivate hope, foster understanding, build a supportive community, and be comfortable reaching out to a support system. Individuals will learn tools for coming forward as survivors and as visible allies and leaders for all.

Part 3) A **Q&A session** to introduce wellness resources. Especially for students, this can be used to discuss Title IX, and other sexual assault and wellness resources on campus.

The program can also be followed by smaller workshops centered on building confidence and compassion through **creative expression**.

View clips of me presenting Gutless & Grateful, a facilitator guide with learning objectives/key themes, references and a booking history at this link: <https://www.amyoes.com/gutless/for-sexual-assault-awareness/>

See a longer portion of the program: <https://www.amyoes.com/gutless-talkback/>

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PTSD, MENTAL HEALTH AND SEXUAL ASSAULT SPEAKING TOPICS

View additional topics at <https://amyoes.com/in-depth-speaking-topics/>

PTSD and Sexual Assault: For Survivors

What factors lead to individual's ability to assertively cope with and escape from potentially dangerous situations? In the wake of sexual assault, destructive coping strategies can lead to amplified PTSD symptoms and victimization.

Through sexual assault prevention, PTSD education and empathy-building, we assert our innate power to move through trauma. By understanding the psychological repercussions of sexual violence, individuals are empowered to come forward as allies and leaders, creating a community striving towards compassion. Learn healthy coping skills for healing after sexual assault.

PTSD and Sexual Assault: For Professionals Working with Survivors

In the face of trauma, an individual can fight, flee or freeze. For many survivors of assault, the "freeze" response can trigger complex feelings of shame and guilt, intertwined with feelings of helplessness from their initial trauma. When unattended, immobility can lead to destructive coping mechanisms, which create barriers to healing. Learn why understanding the freeze response in trauma is the secret to building a community with an empowered approach to sexual assault prevention.

Finding the Gifts After Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Learn more: <https://amyoes.com/trauma>

People need adversity, trauma and setbacks in order to grow, change, evolve, develop as a person, find their inner strength and become a richer, deeper version of themselves. Amy will explain the psychological aftermath of trauma and symptoms of PTSD, define post traumatic growth, and provide means of developing creative, healthy coping strategies. This can also be followed by an information session for family members and supporters.

As someone who has been affected by illness, dissociation, disability and chronic conditions, my mission with Gutless & Grateful is to provide hope, help and resources for others who have also had experienced the physical effects of trauma, as well as its psychological aftermath, and to inform communities through starting a vital conversation on how trauma affects us all.

For organizations interested in hosting the Gutless & Grateful Trauma performance and presentation, learn more at <https://amyoes.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Sponsor-Information-Booking-History-References-Testimonials-Amy-Oestreicher.pdf>

Reframing the Trauma Narrative: Turn Your Life into the Best Story You've Ever Read

The spoken, sung and written word has the power to transform our lives, our community, shape our world, cultivate self love and compassion. Our stories transform our personal experience, enrich our community and teach others the lessons we have learned for ourselves. Through expressing our stories, we reframe the seemingly random events in our lives by stringing them into a singular narrative, making meaning in the process. Through sharing our stories, we embody our role as "author," as we both uniquely define ourselves and create empathy through our common threads. Learn emotional and persuasive power of telling an authentic story as an essential leadership, self-development and resiliency skill.

Food and Gratitude: Nourish Your Body, and Stay Hungry for Life

“Surgeons connected my body, but food connected my mind and soul.” After being unable to eat a morsel of food or drink a drop of liquid for six years, Amy learned powerful lessons about the emotional, physical, psychological and social importance of food. Relearning how to nourish her body after 27 surgeries required and new approach to self-love and self-care. Take an empowered, compassionate approach to nourishing your body and come to love the food that breathes passion into your life. With mindfulness, you’ll learn to observe your thoughts and emotions without immediately acting and are better able to choose how to react more effectively. Embrace your right and responsibility to define beauty on your own terms and to love and respect themselves and their bodies. Form a deeper relationship with yourself and with others through love, care and confidence. Shedding insight into our emotional and intellectual relationships with food, Amy goes far beyond body image and eating disorders to get to the heart of the issue, helping individuals shape their perspectives about nutrition, stress and weight management, with humor, poignancy, and practical tools.

College Mental Health Mindset on Campus Keynote

Learn more at <https://amyoes.com/student-mental-health>

Explore the secrets to gratitude, hope, stories and creativity to maximize student success. Learn how to build resilience, and develop healthy self care strategies, Discover how to create a healthy campus with an empowered approach to health through fostering long-term mindsets.

Mental Health Mindset can also be expanded into three components:

Part 1) ***60-90 minute multi-faceted keynote:*** a comedic yet poignant story on how I survived 27 stomach surgeries, organ failure and sexual abuse. Through interwoven song and dialogue, I share a primal piece of live-storytelling – a powerful message that it’s possible to overcome physical and mental health obstacles.

Part 2) ***An educational session/speech:*** I discuss an empowered approach to mental health, how to develop a resiliency toolbox, how to cultivate hope, and how to thrive with a physical or mental health condition, rooted in a comprehensive understanding of psychology, mindfulness and creative arts therapies.

Part 3) ***A Q&A session and creative participation segment:*** storytelling, theatre games and resiliency exercises. The program can also be followed by a panel involving wellness faculty to introduce mental health resources on campus. **Students will also be given a Recipe for Resiliency Workbook™** and will receive local and national resources for student mental health and trauma.

*“My perspective on illness has changed since my days of “croup”, and it’s also changed since my last surgical intervention. I’ve learned that illness isn’t always in the physical scars. I’ve learned that some wounds aren’t visible, and some wounds even we don’t know we have, until we choose to take care of them. But I’ve also learned that I’m resilient, strong, broken and put together again, differently, yet even more beautiful – **like a mosaic.**”*

PTSD has not broken me. It's taken me apart, and I'm reassembling myself day by day. In the meantime, I'm learning to love what I can build.” - (from Amy's Huffington Post Essay)

Selected Articles on Sexual Assault and PTSD

It's Okay to Freeze: Healing from Sexual Assault (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/its-okay-to-freeze-healin_b_8777146.html

Healing From Numbness (Sammiches & Psych Meds, Manifest-Station)

<https://www.amyoes.com/2015/08/09/healing-from-numbness-a-sexual-assault-piece/>

From Frozen To Free (Dropping Keys)

<https://www.amyoes.com/2015/06/22/from-frozen-to-free-recovering-from-sexual-abuse/>

Music Therapy and Sexual Abuse

<https://www.amyoes.com/2015/08/27/music-therapy-and-sexual-abuse-healing-with-the-voice/>

To the man who molested me when I turned 17 (Role Reboot)

<http://www.rolereboot.org/life/details/2015-12-to-the-man-who-molested-me-when-i-turned-17/>

Five Ways Everyone Can Participate in Sexual Assault Awareness Month (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/five-ways-everyone-can-pa_b_9396870.html

What to Say (and Not to Say) to a Survivor of Sexual Assault (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/healing-through-our-voice_b_9541086.html

PTSD: The Illness I Couldn't See (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/ptsd-the-illness-i-couldnt-see_b_8216634.html

Discovering “The Courage To Heal” (Original Monologue) (The Writing Life)

<https://www.amyoes.com/2016/03/08/podcast-courage-heal/>

Expression Sets You Free: How Playwriting Broke My Silence on Sexual Abuse & Surgeries (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/expression-sets-you-free-_b_9998816.html

Why I Didn't Testify Against the Man Who Abused Me Before My Coma

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/why-i-didnt-testify-against-the-man-who-abused-me-before-my-coma_b_9612506.html

“Prevention is Possible” for Sexual Assault Awareness Month

<https://www.amyoes.com/2016/04/04/saam/>

Waking the Tiger: How Do We Heal Once the Trauma is Over?

<https://www.amyoes.com/2015/12/28/waking-the-tiger/>

How Students Can Have The Biggest Role In Improving Mental Health (Uloop)

<http://bit.ly/2dmv2Cw>

Bridging the Gap: How I Used My Own Detour to Help College Students (Medium)

<http://bit.ly/2d3ZI9k>

Are PTSD Survivors Weak? (Medium)

<https://medium.com/tedx-experience/the-secret-strength-of-a-ptsd-survivor-what-i-didnt-share-in-my-tedx-talk-3bf3b92f678d#.j1lm3fr73>

What I Realized After Trying to Run Away From My Life (Thought Catalog)

<http://thoughtcatalog.com/amy-oestreicher/2016/08/what-i-realized-after-trying-and-failing-to-run-away-from-my-life/>

Art Therapy in Addiction Recovery (Psych Central)

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2015/08/09/art-therapy-in-addiction-recovery/>

Why I'd Like to See an Accessibility Club on Every Campus (The Mighty)

<https://themighty.com/2016/04/able-club-at-fulton-montgomery-community-college-empowers-students-with-disabilities/>

Read feature articles, reviews, television and radio interviews and special segments on Amy's Media page: <https://amyoes.com/media/>

Select Interviews:

- **Shrink Rap Radio: Post Traumatic Growth**
- <http://shrinkrapradio.com/488-how-losing-my-stomach-made-me-hungry-for-life-with-amy-oestreicher/>
- **Unmistakable Creative Podcast**
- <https://unmistakablecreative.com/podcast/a-beautiful-detour-with-amy-oestreicher>
- **Intentionally Wandering Podcast**
- <http://www.intentionallywandering.com/60/>
- **How to Overcome Adversity Productivity Podcast**
- <https://amyoes.com/2016/08/18/productivity-podcast/>
- **The Perpetual You Cover Story: Embark on a Beautiful Detour**
- <https://amyoes.com/2016/01/01/amys-cover-story-in-the-perpetual-you-embracing-change-and-embarking-on-beautiful-detours/>
- **Powerful Nonsense: Turning Adversity Into Creative Growth**
- <https://amyoes.com/2015/10/09/amy-on-powerful-nonsense-podcast-part-2-what-doesnt-kill-us-turning-adversity-into-creative-growth/>
- **Inspire Nation: How to Find Happiness In Your Detours**
- <http://inspirationshow.com/inspire-286-amy-oestreicher-my-beautiful-detour/>

Gutless and Grateful for Students

The Problem: “Data from the 2013 National College Health Assessment II indicate that about one-third of college students across the United States had problems functioning because of depression in the last 12 months; almost half said they had felt overwhelming anxiety in the last year, 20 percent said they had seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, and 5.8 percent said they had attempted suicide. The same survey showed that four of the top five “substantial obstacles to their academic success” were sleep difficulties, stress, anxiety, and depression.” A Strategic Primer on College Student Mental Health, 2014

Gutless & Grateful combines mental health advocacy, awareness and invaluable tools in a dynamic, musical theatre performance and/or interactive workshop. Students will be informed, inspired and entertained with engaging entertainment and powerful firsthand experience told with humor, honesty and heart.

Students may feel uncomfortable reaching out to health and counseling services. Worse, students may be unaware that these [resources](#) exist.

In 2014, a [report](#) by NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, the American Council on Education, and the American Psychological Association focusing on student mental health issues:

“Given the complex relationships among mental health, problematic health behaviors, learning, campus safety, and the quality of the learning environment, mental and behavioral health should be a strategic priority on every campus. Mental health professionals lead efforts to understand and respond to the needs of students with psychological, emotional, and behavioral concerns—but not all students who could benefit from mental or behavioral health services will come to the counseling center. Students may not recognize the need for or recognize the availability of available services.” – A Strategic Primer on College Student Mental Health, 2014

Gutless & Grateful, The Show: Engage – Encourage – Entertain – Educate - Empower

Amy shares her near death experience and unique personal story with humor, hunger and heart, highlighting the disappointments, struggles, triumphs, and gratitude in her life on a musical journey of hope, determination, and perseverance. A celebration of life through creativity, passion, and resilience, Amy shares what trauma can teach all of us. Just as suffering is relative,

1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year.

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#MentalHealth AwarenessWeek

Create your own toolbox:

- Ask for help
- Practice mindfulness
- Take a break
- Call a friend
- Get artsy
- Take a walk
- Eat nourishing food
- Talk about it
- Create a mantra

healing is a human right as natural as learning, evolving and changing. Amy will share how passion fueled her success and turned her hunger into an insatiable entrepreneurial drive. Amy will perform segments of her autobiographical one-woman musical, talk about the healing process of telling her story, and provide tools for others to do the same.

Gutless & Grateful strives to shift an entire college ethos in the direction of inclusion – partly to give courage and a sense of belonging to people who are struggling with all kinds of mental health or physical challenges, but it's also to help build a campus that gives everyone the kind of awareness and generosity of spirit that makes that world a better place.

Students will learn how to:

- Develop Healthy Habits and Take an Empowered Approach to Wellness
- Cultivate a Support System and locate resources for support on campus
- Reframe “Failure” and “Obstacles”
- Prepare for Life After College
- Make a Positive Impact in their Community
- Learn How To Bounce Back in Difficult Times
- Develop a Resiliency Toolbox
- Break Down Body Image Barriers

“Throughout these ten years, I’ve been strong, determined, and willing to do whatever it took to stay alive. Yet I still wrestle with being grateful that this happened to me, wanting answers, wanting my old life back, being ambivalent, and just being confused. But the one thing I refuse to be is numb. I am changed by all of this, but alive nonetheless. With creativity, passion, and that little spark, anything is possible. “

How to Thrive, Not Just Get Through: Celebrating Life’s Beautiful Detours

The aim of Gutless & Grateful is to present a picture of a “detour” in life, whether that detour be a physical condition, a mental illness, or an everyday stress/concern of a college student. As someone who has lived through various detours, including sexual abuse, PTSD, medical conditions, illnesses, and more “typical” unexpected twists and turns in life, Amy provides a safe, open and honest forum where we can reduce the stigma and make it acceptable for people to talk about mental illness, depression and suicide as well as physical health conditions, traumatic past experiences, and feeling of alienation on campus. It is important to use the performance and the talkback to show that an individual who had a perfectly healthy and “normal” childhood was forced to grapple with an entirely different world and new circumstances when a coma threatened to change life forever. Amy strives to paint a picture of a vulnerable teenager struggling, yet also a picture of recovery to prove that with resilience, trust, creativity and the cultivation of inner resources, one can work toward that through use of tools for resiliency and coping skills. Gutless & Grateful is based on an action plan to help students cope with their own detours in life, from the every day struggles to more concerning health issues. Gutless & Grateful is a celebration of the *detours* that unite us all.

What are the five most common Detours for college students?

Mental Health Issues: Depression, Anxiety, Eating Disorders, Suicide, and Substance Abuse.

The Power of Our Stories

The more [stories](#) we hear about turning an obstacle into an [opportunity](#), the more empowered we are to transform our own lives and have confidence that when life DOES surprise us, we're capable of getting through anything.

Community Art-Making Component

Another available option is to be followed by a community-based collaborative art-making project, fostering a sense of creative community and a way to integrate the key issues addressed in the keynote.

Empathy and Empowerment

Through creativity, we embrace our individuality while emphasizing our commonalities.

"It's about learning how to occupy your own story so you can control it. It's not about the specialness or uniqueness of my story or a life-threatening crisis, it's about owning an unexpected event and making things happen a reason, turning obstacles into opportunity and learning how to dance through the detours."

Gutless & Grateful Talkback Component

We navigate our detours through creating our own recipe for resilience:

- **The Power of Stories:** the healing effects of sharing our story, learning our stories for ourselves, and allowing ourselves to be affected by the stories of others
- **Gratitude:** The idea of cultivating hope through gratitude. Through simple exercises and habits, including the discipline of a daily gratitude list, we become grounded in who we are, once we know what our values are and what we stand for. Once anchored in ourselves, we can begin to access our inner-trust and compass to navigate our detours
- **Creativity:** Once we become grounded in who we are through gratitude, we can use creativity to center ourselves and propel us forward. Through creativity, we are able to be with our experiences and emotions that may be too painful, frightening or overwhelming for words, as well as experiences that have yet to be acknowledged.
- **Hope:** Hope can start out as a "lie" we tell ourselves – or as one occupational therapist told me, "therapeutic lying." Cultivating hope can be hard work, intentional fabrication, or willing suspension of disbelief – but it is our active duty.

Gutless & Grateful Wellness Q & A

According to a 2011 NAMI study, 64% of college dropouts were for mental health-related reasons. Of those, 50% never accessed any mental health programs or services.

The Gutless & Grateful Talkback can be followed by a Q and A session, introducing a wellness staff member. Through prompted questions and an open discussion, the staff member has the opportunity to address campus concerns and introduce [resources](#) on campus.



Booking History: Gutless & Grateful as a Keynote combining mental health advocacy and sexual assault prevention with Broadway Theatre

- Keynote Speaker: Pacific Rim International Disability Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2016
- Keynote Speaker: International School of Social Work Conference, Columbus, Ohio March 2018
- American College of Surgeons Clinical Congress 2016 (Washington, DC)
- Transformative Language Arts Network's Power of Words Conference, Kansas City, MO (Narrative Medicine)
- Eating Recovery Center, Denver, CO (Mental Health, Acceptance)
- Heart of the City: Turning Passion to Business (B:Hive, Bridgeport, CT 2015)
- Mental Health America Annual Conference 2016, Alexandria, VA (Media, Messaging and Mental Health)
- New England Educational Opportunity Association 2016 (Sexual Assault)
- Transformative Language Arts Network, Sacco, Maine, 2016
- Great Comebacks Eastern Regional Recipient (Convatec) WOCN Conference, Greensboro, NC 2014
- Great Comebacks (Convatec) Eastern Regional WOCN Conference, Meriden, CT 2014
- Great Comebacks (Convatec) National WOCN Conference, Nashville, TN, 2014
- Wound and Ostomy Continence Nurses Society Annual Meeting, NJ, 2016
- Creator of Gutless & Grateful (Mental Health/Disability/PTSD Education performance), Presentations 2012-2016 Colleges Nationwide
- Expert/Features on NBC's Today, CBS, WNBC, News 12, Cosmopolitan
- Co-creator of medical workshops with Adam Blatner, MD
- League for Advancement of New England Storytellers Annual Conference
- Brockport College Diversity Conference (2016)
- Modern Femme Conference (Virginia Beach, May 2017)
- National Student Leadership Diversity Convention (NYC, October 2016)
- Fairfield County Arts Association, Fairfield, CT
- National WOCN Conference, Nashville, TN
- Convatec Great Comebacks Awards, Greensboro, NC
- WOCN Eastern Regional Conference, New Jersey, November 2016
- TEDx Syracuse Glitch, April 2016
- Sharing the Fire (LANES Conference), April 2016
- Great Comebacks Awards, Meriden, CT
- Fairfield County Cultural Alliance
- Coastal Arts Guild "Make Art Monthly"
- Resilience and the Power of the Human Spirit, Westport, CT
- Youth to Youth International Leadership Conference (Bryant College, RI)
- NAMI Ending the Silence Presentations
- International Women's Art Salon, New York
- Art Kibbutz, Governor's Island, New York (July 2016)
- StoryCollider: Science and Storytelling, New York

College Mental Health Speaker/Advocacy Program (*selected colleges*)

- Hampshire College 2014
- Boston College 2015
- Central Penn College 2015
- Russell Sage College 2015
- Haverford College 2015
- Fulton Montgomery Community College 2015
- New York University 2016
- College of St. Benedict & St Johns 2017
- "Take Back the Night" Pima Community College, April 2017

Gutless & Grateful: Theatrical Venues

Writer, Director, Performer of One-Woman Show: Gutless & Grateful: A Musical Feast

- Triad Theatre (October 2012, New York, New York)
 - o BroadwayWorld Award Nominee "Best Theatre Debut"
- Stage 72 (June 2013, New York, New York)
 - o Woman About Town's "Woman to Celebrate"
- The Bijou Theatre (June 2013, Bridgeport, CT)
- Barrington Stage Company (July 2013, Pittsfield, MA)
 - o Part of "Mr. Finn's Cabaret" series (personally invited by William Finn)
- United Solo Festival (New York, New York, October & November 2014)
 - o "Sold Out Top Pick" – awarded additional performance
- Transformative Language Arts Network "Power of Words" National Conference (Kansas City, MO, September 2015)
- Eating Recovery Center (October, 2015, Denver, CO)
- Hampshire College (November, 2015, Amherst, MA)
- Boston College (February, 2016, Boston, MA)
- Emerging Artist Theatre (March 2016, New York, New York)
 - o NYC Bistro Awards Top Pick
- Chenango Non-Profit Equity Theatre (Greene, NY, June 2016)
- Midtown Theatre Festival, New York (August, 2016)
- Transformative Language Arts Network (Sacco, Maine, August 2016)
- Metropolitan Room (NYC, February 2017)
- Statera Women and Theatre Conference (Denver, CO, October 2017)
- Sarasolo Performance Festival (Sarasota, Florida, January 2017)
- New York New Works Theatre Festival (NYC, August, 2016) *Semifinalist
- 54 Below (NYC, June 2017)
- Licensed to regional monologue competitions and college theatre departments as an academic senior project, campus event, and competition performance piece
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Professional References

- 1.) “Recently, Amy Oestreicher performed *Gutless and Grateful*, to a packed house at Hampshire College, framed around her remarkable life journey from teenage ingenue to survivor of trauma and countless complicated medical procedures and finally to a place of gratitude. The production, which received rave reviews in its off-Broadway debut, contains beautifully sung musical theatre numbers as well as honest personal narrative. *Gutless and Grateful* was co-sponsored at Hampshire by the Theatre Program and the campus wellness center, a useful tool to talk to students about mental health issues and a powerful testament to the healing potential of the arts. Amy’s seemingly unlimited energy and enthusiasm is infectious.” – Talya Kingston, Visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre, School for Interdisciplinary Arts Hampshire College
- 2.) “You are what every campus needs right now. If we had more people with your desire to get the student body talking, a lot of issues could be brought to light.” – Aaron Ferguson, *Disability Counselor, Hampshire College*
- 3.) “Amy Oestreicher not only shows us the power of the purest kind of perseverance, but she does so in song and dance, telling her astonishing story of surviving a daunting and lengthy medical nightmares without allowing her challenge to strip her of her dreams. She brings to life the transformative power of music, theater, dance, and storytelling along with many other arts to educate and inspire our souls as to what is possible. It was a privilege to have her perform her breathtaking one-woman show at the Power of Words conference.”
– Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Kansas Poet Laureate 2009-13, and founder of Transformative Language Art at Goddard College
- 4.) See reference letter from TLAN Coordinator, Terri Grunthamer: TLAN Letter
- 5.) One part moving testament to human indomitability, the other a thoroughly satisfying evening of song. While each element is strong enough to stand on its own, combined they illuminate and enhance each other. Rarely have I seen narration and song so artfully meshed, and Oestreicher’s likeability, good humor, interpretive skill, and manifest commitment to what she is saying and singing make us not only understand her story, but also feel it on a very deep level. -Roy Sander, critic for BistroAwards.com
- 6.) I have worked with Amy for several months and truly have seen her aim to make a difference in the college community come to fruition and take form. Amy has a uniquely innovative idea of combining mental health, sexual assault prevention and Broadway Theatre as a way to address the gap between mental health resources and students. Amy is a force of so much that is good in a person and an artist
– Josh Rivedal, *Founder, Executive Director of The i’Mpossible Project, International Speaker on Suicide Prevention and Mental Health*
- 7.) “Through her theatrical performance of *Gutless & Grateful*, Amy Oestreicher invites us along for her personal journey through challenging medical, social and emotional experiences in her life, all the while dancing—not walking—on the eggshells that typically

come with discussing tough topics like eating disorders. Amy's narrative brings her life challenges into perspective, allowing the audience to contemplate life's possibilities amidst their own pitfalls."

– Leslie McKay, Executive Director of the Eating Recovery Center Foundation

- 8.) "We loved your show...it was a wonderful example of how drama is therapeutic. Congratulations, Amy. What you're doing is not only making a difference in your life and healing, but making a difference in so many other lives as well." – Rebecca Greene Van Horn – *Lesley University Adjunct faculty*
- 9.) "I find you an inspiration. You are proof that we all need to tell our stories. Then your story becomes intertwined with another's and whether we ever know it or not our personal story may just be enough to give another HOPE." – Robin Nasitir, Friends of Ostomates Worldwide Foundation
- 10.) "She is, at once, one of the most independent and one of the most collaborative people I know. She is an inspirational figure to be sure, but her creativity expands well beyond her story." – David Friedman, *film and theatre composer*
- 11.) "Amy has continued to inspire and surprise me, our patrons and other artists through her consummate, ever-flowing creativity, incredible message of strength and resilience, her overwhelming joy and love of life against great odds and her dedication and passion to her creative work. If I were reading this letter, I would think this was hyperbole, but I would be mistaken. She is a force of so much that is good in a person and an artist. She knows what she wants to say, and is so prolific in her art and capacity in which she shares her message." – Jeanine Esposito, *Founder, Beechwood Arts*
- 12.) "Amy Oestreicher did an amazing presentation to a large group of Jewish high school students at a one night a week Hebrew High School meeting at Congregation B'nai Israel in Bridgeport, CT. The course title is 'Hope and Survival' and was extremely fitting to her inspiring story. Students felt comfortable enough to reach out to her after her talk, and she was a tremendous support and much-needed lift." – Carole Rubin, Professor at Mercaz Hebrew High School, Bridgeport, CT
- 13.) It was an honor to have Amy Oestreicher's presentation of Gutless and Grateful on our campus. Her performance was riveting in its candor. Her technique, delivery and artistry were all impressive and equally effective. She took a unique and deeply personal story and turned it into something that every person in the audience could identify with. - Larry Berger, Technical Director/Music and Dance Hampshire College
- 14.) "She uses her triumphant tale to inspire others to reevaluate their approaches to life." – Boston College (Contact UGBC for a personal reference)

Audience Testimonials

1.) *"Thank you for opening up and touring and turning your personal challenges and trials into something that others can learn from, that may well save someone else's life one day. You can't live in this world without suffering some kind of trauma or tragedy; I believe your sharing your story so widely will literally give someone on the edge the hope and vision they need to move forward instead of continuing down their road of despair and loss. I'm sure it already has, many times, whether these people contact you or not. Life can be so difficult; thank you for spreading light and love where you can.*

Also, thank you for sharing your story from a patient's perspective. I'm a medical student, and decided to study medicine at age 34 after working in both professional and volunteer capacity throughout underdeveloped countries and with vulnerable populations- genocide refugees, people living under communist governments, communities with limited resources, etc. I decided to make a career switch to medicine because everywhere I went there was a shortage of much-needed doctors. I've noticed in med school that many of the students don't understand the empathetic side of medicine. They don't realize that they are not treating a disease, they are treating a person. They don't realize that treating patients means treating the whole family, because everyone is suffering together, and everyone is worried and feeling scared and helpless. I watched a fellow student get overly excited when she had made a correct diagnosis, crying out "YES! It's cancer!" and I cringed in horror that she hadn't connected that this likely meant that someone was going to die.

So I want to thank you for sharing your story from that perspective as well. I hope lots of medical students read your words, and understand that behind every "interesting" condition or disease, there's a real person, with a real story. Thank you for spreading kindness and light. We need more of it."

- Mindy, Medical Student, New Zealand

2.) *"I'm the one you invited from Sexual Violence Response. I think it is important that you know that I have worked as a social worker with interpersonal violence and I am a survivor myself. Interestingly enough, one of the audience members asked someone what they thought the play's message was, which started a meaningful dialogue. I know that this one conversation alone signified the importance of your play - that one person will leave with a better understanding of how trauma not only affects the individual but the family as well. The more people talk about it, (write about it), acknowledge it, the better people will learn to deal with it in a genuine way. That is why this play needs to be seen."* - Roni, NY Survivor Advocate

3.) *"You are the first person I have heard of that has been through something similar, although much worse than I can even imagine and I just had to tell you our story and tell you how much I admire you. I will never stop thinking about your performance."*

- Jenni, Oncology Patient, Washington, US

4.) *"I saw your show and was moved by your honesty and your bravery. I was a general surgeon (I now do wound care) and so I can fully appreciate your struggles. I am inspired by your pursuit of life and all you can experience. You do not let being an "intestinal cripple" keep you confined"*

- Marilyn, Surgeon, New York, US

5.) *"I'm sure you received many emails in regards to Gutless and Grateful. Thanks for inspiring us to look at the problems we face down the road as detours. I'm not sure what sense to make of the current detours I'm facing and it's hard to love your detours when they sometimes hurt so much. However we can't let those detours determine where we'll end up simply that they've made the trip a little longer to where we want to be. That's what I got from your show, and then I found your TEDx Talk, and it came right on time for me to have a new perspective on the issues currently sending me down another road. Your New Fan and Fellow Human"* - Daniel, NJ, US

6.) *"This was theatre unlike I've ever seen. I just want to say Thank you for having the courage to let others know about your issues- as a 47 year old survivor of currently 12 major surgeries(at least 1 more to go soon) and uncounted minor procedures- it is always good to see others talk about it – especially younger people- letting others know they are not alone and though a struggle, we can still function- even if it is modified."*
- Roger, Pennsylvania, US

7.) *"I was drawn to your show because my son had similar ostomy issues for several years and I recall the endless leaks from his fistula additional 3 ostomies. I wanted to reach out to you and than you. There are many of "us" who can relate to your story, and I hope you hear from others, for your own encouragement as well as for the great tips that many often share along the way. You are a brave, inspiring person and I hope that your show reaches even more. We need to hear this daily. Thank you again for sharing your story and for your example of strength and hope."*
- Janet, Pennsylvania, US

8.) *"Good Morning, I was thinking this morning of taking my own life. This 64 year old body, pectus excavatum, psoriasis and double vision from detached retina. Maybe I don't have it so bad. I was watching your video clips and now I want to hold on for more and more days. Thank you. Dan."*
– sent via online form (was given national resources for suicide prevention)

9.) *"I just found out about your story and your show, and it was such an inspiration to me. Last year I had elective weight loss surgery. In 2 weeks, an infection developed creating a 9cm abscess and sepsis. I was rushed into surgery to clean the infection but it was nearly too late. My kidneys completely shut down and my lungs had started to shut down. I was hours from death. I was suicidal many times and struggled with depression. I read all about your show and it changed everything for me. I went through only a small fraction of what you have experienced and yet you remain so upbeat and positive. Your zeal for life after your ordeal is an inspiration to me. Thank you so much."*
- Lisa, London, England

10.) *"I'm writing to express my appreciation of your wonderfully ingenious operetta. The Broadway sense of your performance was very, very clever a thing to compose and perform on.."* – Lee Goldstein, [TLAN Network](#) Conference Attendee, Missouri US

Professional Bio

Amy Oestreicher is a PTSD peer-to-peer specialist, artist, author, writer for The Huffington Post, speaker for TEDx and RAINN, health advocate, award-winning actress, and playwright. As a survivor and “thrivor” of nearly 30 surgeries, a coma, sexual abuse, organ failure, and a decade of medical trauma, Amy has been challenged with moments of extreme difficulty. But, as an artist, actress, college student, and overall lover of life, Amy eagerly shares the lessons learned from trauma and has brought out the stories that unite us all through her writing, mixed media art, performance and inspirational speaking.

Amy has headlined international conferences on women’s leadership, entrepreneurship, mental health, disability, creativity, art therapy, and domestic violence prevention. She is a regular lifestyle, wellness, and arts contributor for over 70 notable online and print publications, and her story has appeared on NBC’s TODAY, CBS, Cosmopolitan, Seventeen Magazine, Washington Post, Good Housekeeping, MSNBC, among others. She has devised workshops for the Transformative Language Arts Network National Conference, the Eating Recovery Foundation, the 40th Anniversary New England Educational Opportunity Association *Milestones* Conference, the Annual National Mental Health America Conference, and others, and was this year’s keynote speaker for the Hawaii Pacific Rim International Conference on Diversity and Disability.

To celebrate her own “beautiful detour”, Amy created the #LoveMyDetour campaign, to help others cope in the face of unexpected events. To creatively engage others in improving mental health, Amy developed a program combining mental health advocacy, sexual assault awareness, PTSD education and Broadway Theatre for college campuses, organizations and conferences, launching a Detourist Network, and Detourist Workshops to creatively fight stigma in society. “Detourism” is also the subject of her TEDx Talk and upcoming book, *My Beautiful Detour*, available December 2017.

As the 2014 Eastern Regional Recipient of Convatec’s Great Comebacks Award and WEGO Health 2016 “Health Activist Hero,” Amy is a passionate voice in the ostomy community, founding the online community Fearless Ostomates, speaking for National and Regional WOCN conferences, and writing for the official print publication of the UOAA. Her presentations on alternative medicine, and patient advocacy and healthcare have also been accepted to international conferences on patient care, internal medicine, medical trauma and therapeutic humor in healthcare.

As a playwright, Amy has received awards and accolades for engaging her audiences in dynamic conversation on trauma’s effects on society, including Women Around Town’s “Women to Celebrate 2014, BroadwayWorld Best Theatre Debut, and Bistro Awards New York Top Pick. Amy has written, directed and starred in a one-woman musical about her life, *Gutless & Grateful*, touring theatres, schools, festivals, conventions and organizations since its 2012 New York debut. Her original, full-length drama, *Imprints*, exploring the effects of trauma on the family and the healing power of creativity, was a finalist at Manhattan Repertory Theatre, and is currently in development for a full New York production. Amy’s collaboration with Beechwood Arts on “Resilience and the Power of the Human Spirit”, has traveled around the world, using her monologues, art, writing and recipes to express the life-altering detours and ultimately the invaluable gifts of her resilient journey. She is also a passionate arts advocate, a successful mixed media visual artist, a continuing education studio arts teacher, and an active member of the League of Professional Theatre Women, League for Advancement of New England Storytellers, Fairfield County Cultural Alliance, Theatre Artist Workshop, and several art guilds throughout Connecticut and New York.

Amy is currently touring the country with her one-woman musical, *Gutless & Grateful*, her keynote presentations, workshops and signature talkbacks, which she has devised specialized versions for corporations, college campuses, survivors, healthcare professionals, and artists. She is leading mixed media creativity workshops to promote creativity as a mindset, an essential survival skill. Amy also offers creative coaching and consulting services help others navigate their own “life detours,” and prides herself most on ending each night with a gratitude list.

Additional Information

- View *TEDx Talk*: www.amyoes.com/tedx
- Speaking Kit: www.amyoes.com/press-kit
- Additional speaking videos: <https://www.amyoes.com/speaking-media/>
- *The Mighty* Health Articles: <http://themighty.com/author/amy-oestreicher/>
- Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-oestreicher/>
- Writing Portfolio: <https://www.amyoes.com/writing-portfolio/>
- Learn about upcoming book: <https://www.amyoes.com/book>
- #LoveMyDetour Campaign: <https://amyoes.com/lovedetour/mission/>

- **Creative Workshops:**
 - Student “Detourist” Workshops: <https://amyoes.com/detourist-workshops>
 - Creative Expression Workshops: <https://www.amyoes.com/creative-workshops/>
- **Amy the Visual Artist and Teacher:** <https://amyoes.com/2015/10/01/amy-the-artist/>

Additional Speaking Topics and Workshops:

- *Collaborative Patient Care*: <https://amyoes.com/patient-care/>
- *Faith, Judaism and Spirituality*: <https://amyoes.com/faith/>
- *Leadership, Business and Social Entrepreneurship*: <https://amyoes.com/business-leadership/>

Performance:

- *Gutless & Grateful*: A one-woman autobiographical **musical** nominated for “Best Theatre Debut” by BroadwayWorld: <https://amyoes.com/gutless>
- *Imprints*: A full-length **drama** exploring how trauma affects the family, and the healing power of expressive arts: <https://amyoes.com/imprints>

“I was not able to fully appreciate the beauty of my detours until I was able to share them. As a performer, all I’ve wanted to do was give back to the world. But now I have an even greater gift to give: a story to tell.”

<http://amyoes.com/contact>

