

## LoveMyDetour

Amy Oestreicher

Starting the Conversation on Mental Health:  
*Fostering Resilience Through Creativity Through The Four Essential Skills*

<https://www.amyoes.com/speaker>



See Amy's Three TEDx Talks at  
<https://www.amyoes.com/tedx>

As a teen, Amy Oestreicher thought she had her life all figured out. She was all set to go to college for musical theater when sexual abuse and emergency stomach pains took her "planned-out" life on a different path...

Rushed to the emergency room the April of her senior year, Amy's stomach literally exploded followed by months in a coma. After 28 surgeries and nearly seven years unable to eat or drink, Amy's digestive system was miraculously reconstructed and she was able to finally digest food.

As a survivor and "thrivor" of trauma, including a year of sexual abuse by a trusted mentor, Amy became a "Detourist" - discovering the "flowers" on her unexpected path, starting college at 25 and learning how to take an empowered approach to wellness on and off campus.

Since her coma, she's given three TEDx Talks on the transformative power of creativity, premiered two one-woman musicals, three full-length plays, published her [memoir](#), launched a chocolate business, flourished as a visual artist, a teacher, and launched the *LoveMyDetour Movement*: a campaign inspiring individuals to thrive not in spite of, but because of obstacles.

In the [LoveMyDetour](#) program, Amy discusses how we can all become "Detourists," in order to thrive through any obstacles we may face. Learn how to take an empowered approach to mental wellness on campus, and navigate any life "detours" through creative strategies and healthy coping skills.

- Take an Empowered Approach to Mental Health
- Explore the Eight Dimensions of Wellness
- Learn Healthy Coping Skills
- Storytelling and Support Systems
- Living With a Visible and Invisible Illness
- Build Your Personal Resiliency Toolbox
- Develop Leadership Skills Through Creativity as a Mindset
- Navigate transitions and unexpected change as a "Detourist"

College, while a world of opportunity, also can be a breeding ground for stress – a turning point in our lives where we're independent, perhaps for the first

time. Doors become open to us that we never even knew existed. We realize we have the power to make choices, which can be both empowering and frightening.



LoveMyDetour programming develops the mindsets which build resiliency, empathy, and proactive leadership skills on campus.

*Having been affected by visible and invisible disabilities, I'm committed to providing hope, help and wellness resources for students in a three-component program:*

**Part 1: A mental health-themed keynote:** I discuss my journey of physical and mental health recovery while starting college at age 25, after I had recovered from my coma. Incorporating excerpts from my newly released memoir, *My Beautiful Detour: An Unthinkable Journey from Gutless to Grateful*, I share trauma-informed strategies for coping with major change, how to develop a resiliency toolbox, and how to create networks of support on campus.

**Part 2: Q & A/Panel Discussion:** We dispel common PTSD myths, including what it is, who it may impact, and how it can affect mental health, relationships, and productivity. This can be opened to a **panel discussion with wellness faculty**, a peer-led organization, or Title IX to discuss campus resources. **(For the spring, my sexual assault prevention program is frequently requested.)**

**Part 3: Participatory Workshop:** An interactive component for creative self-care strategies, **how to best support someone with mental health issues**, and tools for becoming socially engaged allies and leaders on campus.

**Bio:** Amy Oestreicher is the SMART Recovery project coordinator for The Hub, A division of the Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP), promoting recovery supports for young adults seeking tools to empower them to make positive changes in their life. She is also a PTSD specialist, artist, Audie Award-nominated author, global speaker for RAINN, award-winning actress, and playwright. As a survivor and “thrivor” of multiple traumas including nearly 30 surgeries and assault, Amy eagerly shares the gifts of life’s “beautiful detours” in her educational programming, writing, mixed media art, performance and inspirational speaking. Amy has toured her autobiographical musical, *Gutless & Grateful*, to over 200 venues since 2012 as a mental health and sexual assault education program for colleges, conferences and organizations. She’s a NSVRC representative, member of the National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military, and in-demand speaker on topics relating to mental health, sexual abuse, resilience, PTSD and women’s issues. Her full-length plays, which explore the impact on trauma on communities and transgenerational trauma, have been presented across the country, and her story been featured on CBS, NBC and at Cosmopolitan and Seventeen. She is a SheSource Expert, a top writer for Medium and Huffington Post, and a regular lifestyle, wellness, and arts contributor for over 70 notable online and print publications. She has recently published her memoir, *My Beautiful Detour: An Unthinkable Journey from Gutless to Grateful*.

See [booking history](#). Contact Amy at [lovemydetour@gmail.com](mailto:lovemydetour@gmail.com)

## **GUTLESS AND GRATEFUL: A PROGRAM COMBINING MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY WITH BROADWAY MUSICAL THEATRE**



### **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 today, or any day. 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 aims to:**

- Engage
- Encourage
- Entertain
- Educate
- Empower

### **Gutless & Grateful: The performance**

*“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 (more press quotes here)*

### **Celebrating Life’s Beautiful Detours**

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, 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
- Reframe “Failure” and “Obstacles”
- Prepare for Life After College
- Make a Positive Impact
- Bounce Back in Difficult Times
- Develop a Resiliency Toolbox
- Break Down Body Image Barriers
- Find resources for support on campus



*“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**

Gutless & Grateful starts a dialogue on any “detour” in life, whether than detour be a physical condition, a mental illness, or an everyday stress 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. Amy paints 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 everyday struggles to more concerning health issues. Gutless & Grateful is a celebration of the *detours* that unite us all.

### **What kinds of Detours are most common for college students?**

- *Depression*
- *Anxiety*
- *Eating Disorders*
- *Suicide*
- *Substance Abuse*

### **The Power of Our Stories**

*“It’s about learning how to occupy your own story to control it. It’s not about the “uniqueness” of my story or a life-threatening crisis, it’s about owning an unexpected event and making things happen for a reason, turning obstacles into opportunity and learning how to dance through the detours.”*

### **The Four Detour Resiliency Skills for Mental Health:**

- “1. Gratitude: When you know what you’re grateful for, you know what your values are. Your values act like arrows telling you what direction you need to take on your road.
2. Hope: Is a job. It has to be created as a rope to hold onto in difficult times. It’s the fuel that propels us down our Detourist path.
3. Creativity: We can create a safe container to be present with experiences we are still coming to terms with. Creative expression gently engages us with emotions that may be too overwhelming for words. You don’t need to be an artist to create. You just need an open heart and a mind willing to take a backseat.
4. Stories: Telling our stories helps us process them. We gain confidence through our shared experience, and traveling is always less scary with a partner.

Even if you’re not ready to share your story, read a book. Hear about the courageous adventures of others. We learn by example, so when that detour surprises you, you’ll be able to pull those heroic stories out of your back pocket to guide your own hero’s journey. I also reminded students that long-term mindsets come with baby steps:

1. Find one thing what makes you grateful.
2. Be willing to fabricate hope when you can’t find it.
3. Get creative and express yourself with a quick doodle.
4. Swap some stories.

Thinking back, I realized that these four strategies were intricate threads woven throughout every peak and valley of my journey that had kept me afloat. Gratitude, hope, creativity, and stories could transform our struggles into gifts that would make life worth living again.”

- *My Beautiful Detour: An Unthinkable Journey from Gutless to Grateful*

## **Gutless & Grateful Wellness Q & A**

The performance 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.



## **Other topics include:**

### **Storytelling as Mental Health Empowerment on Campus**

In 2011, 64% of college dropouts were for mental health-related reasons, and of those, 50% never accessed any related services. Stigma may prevent students from reaching out to mental health services, and many students are unaware that these resources exist and are accessible for all. By bridging the gap of communication between academia, wellness, and the student body through integrative storytelling, an entire campus community can better respond with resilience in the face of adversity.

Learn how to use storytelling to bridge gaps of communication on campus, to build resilience and foster healthy self-care strategies.

### **Finding the Gifts After Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

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, and provide means of developing creative, healthy coping strategies.

### **Storytelling For Leadership & Inclusion: Turn Your Life into the Best Story You've Ever Read**

The spoken word has the power to transform our communities cultivate 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. 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 28 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.

***See [booking history](#).***

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***Learn more at <https://www.amyoes.com/>***