



# Mary Jo Buttafuoco

## Victorious Woman - September 2009

### “Getting it Through My Thick Skull”

Nearly everyone knew about the adulterer and his teenage lover, the one they called the Long Island Lolita. But when Amy Fisher shot Mary Jo Buttafuoco that beautiful April morning in 1992, few of us understood how that bullet didn't just shatter her face... *it shattered her world.*

By the time Mary Jo Buttafuoco learned the truth, that her spouse and the teenager *did* have an affair, she was living with a bullet permanently lodged in her head, half her face drooped, she'd lost the vision in one eye, and was taking pain killers like they were breath mints.

It wasn't the first time he'd lied. Or the first time Mary Jo believed he was sorry. It was, however, the beginning of a journey that took Mary Jo down to her personal rock bottom and then back up to her true self.

In the months following the shooting, as Mary Jo struggled through each day, she stood by her man. Through multiple surgeries, Mary Jo tried to deal with the media's fascination with the Joey and Amy story – often at her own expense. Deep down, however, something gnawed at her. Mary Jo remembers her feelings, but says, “Your gut says something else but you ignore it.”

Amid the madness that became her life, Mary Jo pushed down her feelings of anger, disappointment, and betrayal. If ever she said anything to her spouse, or brought up a past wrongdoing, he would respond with an accusatory, “You *never* let anything go.” And so, thinking she was keeping things as normal as possible for her two children, she pretended, made excuses, and hoped for the best. Eventually, however, Mary Jo says she started feeling, “like the little Dutch Boy plugging up the holes.” Until, she says, “I had no more fingers and toes.”

Something had to change. Mary Jo knew it. But what... *and how?*

Then, during a conversation with her attorney, Dominic Barbara, something happened. When he asked her about the pills she was taking, Mary Jo admitted she was addicted to the prescription pain killers that made each day bearable. He told her she needed help and suggested the Betty Ford Center. It wasn't just for the drugs, but because, he said, “there's something else going on here...you have some issues to deal with.” He even offered to pay.

In spite of his generous offer, Mary Jo resisted. Old habits die hard. It wasn't the drugs as much as those “issues” that Mary Jo had long been ignoring and stuffing. So she made excuses. “I had lots of reasons why I couldn't go,” Mary Jo admits, “and Betty Ford was booked with a long waiting list.” She thought she was off the hook.

But one night her attorney called, saying he got her into the center for a thirty day program... *and* she had to go right away. Though she still balked, Mary Jo went.

The Betty Ford Center was a turning point for Mary Jo. Though she admits it was “one of the most humbling experiences of my life,” Mary Jo stuck with the process. Through it she came to understand, “I was living with a shame I didn't do anything to create.” The emotions boiled up, and then over. She worked through layer after layer of rage, anger, grief. It was a gut-wrenching experience. But in the end, as she left the Betty Ford Center, she took her counselor's words with her: “What happened, *happened*; this is your life now, and what are you going to do with it now that you're free?”

Over the weeks and months that followed, Mary Jo answered that question. One step at a time, she started rebuilding her life, *her way*. She began getting control of her SELF – the REAL Mary Jo. No more trying to make the pieces of her life fit into someone else's ever-changing puzzle. She decided to take charge of her life and forge ahead.

Not long afterward, Mary Jo decided she had to get out of the marriage that nearly got her killed. She got an apartment and started over. At first, it was painful and depressing because, as Mary Jo explains, "I had never lived on my own...for the first time in my life, *I was alone.*" Also, *everything* was an adjustment, from being single and living without her children to doing laundry in the apartment complex laundromat. She says now that, "sometimes I *did* want to give up, but after I would have my little "pity party", I would look around, realize that nothing would change unless I changed it and then started taking baby steps toward change."

Day by day, Mary Jo worked to take back her life. She enrolled in community college. She began taking classes that she could later transfer to earn a degree in Occupational Therapy. Mary Jo also joined a gym because, "I'm a big believer in physical activity. When your body is strong, your mind follows."

Eventually, the loneliness she once felt about living alone transformed into joyful freedom. That freedom enabled Mary Jo to feel open to new relationships. When she met someone she was interested in, she was giddy with excitement. But she came to understand that her new man was another one of those "eternal bachelor" bad boys. Pretty soon Mary Jo recognized that, while it was part of his attraction, it could also be her undoing. She told herself, "Oh, no, Mary Jo, you're not doing *that* again." She focused on her gut feelings and "that inner voice that says you are worth it and you're not going to settle for just anyone." The attraction ended. Happily, Mary Jo soon moved on to another, healthier relationship.

As the years passed, her children grew into adulthood. Each maintained a relationship with their father. But a couple years ago Mary Jo had a serious conversation with her son, Paul, the older of her two children. Paul told Mary Jo that he believed his father, her former spouse, was a sociopath. His suggestion hit Mary Jo like a two-by-four between the eyes. That night she looked up the definition of "sociopath" on the internet. The description perfectly fit the man she'd known since she was sixteen. Suddenly, pieces of a puzzle began to fit into place; it cleared up so many unanswered questions. She also recognized how easily she was dragged into his craziness, and also how her behaviors enabled it.

As it all sunk in, Mary Jo started seeing many other people who were living their lives trapped in a web that was not of their own spinning. She wanted to help them understand sociopaths and learn how to avoid getting sucked into the vortex of their self-absorbed neediness. That's when she decided to write *Getting It Through My Thick Skull*, published in July 2009.

Mary Jo has advice for other women who are living with – and enabling – unhealthy or sociopathic relationships in their lives:

- Listen to your inner voice;
- Speak up when something isn't right. Don't ignore or stuff your feelings;
- Read all you can. The more you read, the more you learn and the freer you become;
- Find support from people who are in similar situations (Mary Jo recommends the website [www.lovefraud.com](http://www.lovefraud.com));
- Pay attention now and "*don't wait until you're my age to 'get it!'*"

## **BRAVA, Mary Jo!**

*Though the journey was long, circuitous and painful,  
you stuck with it; now, you are enjoying the victory!  
Thank you for sharing your insights and for using them to  
shine your light on the devastating disorder that destroys lives!*

You can read about Mary Jo Buttafuoco's journey in her book,  
***Getting It Through My Thick Skull: Why I Stayed, What I Learned,  
and What Millions of People Involved with Sociopaths Need to Know.***

Available at amazon.com and bookstores everywhere; visit her website at <http://www.maryjobuttafuoco.com>