



Mary receiving OAC Member of the Year Award at 2017 Your Weight Matters Convention

At nearly every OAC Convention, event and related opportunity, you'll find Mary Grisaffi. Mary has been part of the OAC since 2012, and in this time, we've watched her become an incredible advocate for people with obesity.

Not only does Mary represent those of our members who have sought surgery, but she leaves an impact on everyone she meets with her vulnerability and passion. Mary fights to put a stop to weight bias, speaks up for people living with obesity and pours kind words into everyone she meets.

The OAC sat down with Mary to ask some questions about her personal experiences, her thoughts on the OAC and what she wants others to know about obesity.

Q1: How did you discover the OAC and what led you to get involved?

I had Lap-Band® surgery in 2007. Sometime in 2012, a friend of mine who had also undergone bariatric surgery asked if I wanted to attend the OAC's *Your Weight Matters* Convention with her in Phoenix.

I did some research on the OAC and was very interested in learning more about health and weight. I decided to go to the Convention and was very impressed with OAC's education. I became a true believer! I've now been to each of the in-person Conventions except for the very first. I've also attended the two most recent virtual Conventions which were also amazing!

“ The way you're treated when you live with obesity colors every corner of your life. ”



Mary and Gary on their wedding day.

Q2: How have you and/or your loved ones been affected by obesity?

Obesity has limited my life in many ways. There have been many experiences I wouldn't try because of what others told me while growing up as an overweight child and teenager.

The way you're treated when you live with obesity colors every corner of your life. Often, instead of being asked to join in, you're basically ignored. This treatment has followed me into parts of my adulthood. Maybe being ignored seems less damaging than being bullied for your weight, but I would argue that point. To be invisible is very lonely.

I know that obesity affects everyone in one way or another. Even if I didn't have obesity, three of my four adult children do. Unfortunately, weight bias and discrimination surround us every day. As a society, we must deepen our understanding of the scientific reasons behind obesity, educate the public, change false perceptions and stop weight bias. The OAC is doing that.

We can all make a difference in the fight for equality and fair treatment. Remember, each one of us is touched by obesity, either directly or indirectly through a loved one. Do your part to stand up and speak out against weight bias and stigma.

Get Connected to OAC Today!



The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage.

Sign-up to stay connected to our mission, latest news, events, ways to get involved, information and all things OAC!



Let's Connect!

ObesityAction.org/get-connected



Mary dressed for Halloween with her husband and best friend, Gary

Q3: You are a returning attendee of the OAC's Your Weight Matters Convention. What keeps you coming back? What do you gain from it?

The YWM Convention is my shot in the arm – my booster shot. It puts me back on track to my health and wellness goals. The education I receive is top notch and presented in an excellent, down-to-earth and understandable way that I can utilize in my everyday life. The friendships I've made, even from my first Convention, have lasted many years. The camaraderie is priceless. Having people that know what you've been through is a gift that should be cherished.

I had revision surgery in 2018 to the Gastric Bypass because of uncontrolled reflux problems. Each year, the Convention presents new and important discoveries about obesity research and treatment options. The EXPO Hall showcases new products and services. Many of the vendors have free samples and fun SWAG! I've returned each year and plan on always coming back to learn more and visit my family.

“ Never forget that you are worth the time it takes to be healthy. ”

Q4: What sets our Convention apart from others?

The quality of education. The research is broken down for the average person to understand and utilize – not just doctors and researchers. You learn so much about the science behind obesity and how you can apply it to your personal life and your own goals. There is also always time to ask the speakers questions. That opportunity is priceless!

Q5: What have you learned about self-compassion and obesity throughout the years?

Self-compassion is a hard lesson for many of us to learn because it wasn't taught to us. A lot of us who lived with obesity as a young child were programmed by others to feel “less than” simply because of our weight. Most times, I find it much easier to be compassionate toward others before giving myself that mercy.

I've learned that having obesity isn't my fault. Obesity is a disease with many factors involved. People living with it need to cut themselves some slack. Educating yourself about the factors that contribute to obesity can help improve your health, but some things can't be changed. This is where self-compassion is important. Not everything is in your control, so focus on living your very best life!



“ A lot of us who lived with obesity as a young child were programmed by others to feel ‘less than’ simply because of our weight. ”

Q6: You recently shared that you are battling a new diagnosis of cancer. Would you mind talking about that and sharing how the OAC Community has supported you?

In late August 2021, I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. This was the Friday before Hurricane Ida hit the next day. My husband and I live in New Orleans and we were without power for 10 days. It was a very scary time because I was facing a cancer diagnosis and a hurricane simultaneously.

I had surgery in September and started chemo in October. I am still undergoing chemo at the time of this interview, but I hope to be finished by mid-February. I've been very open about my cancer journey and have posted about it on social media. Ever since, I've been overwhelmed with messages, cards and phone calls from OAC friends who have shown concern for me and my health. They continue to check on me and show their love. Each one of their thoughts and prayers fills my heart and makes it easier to get through the tough times.



Mary with her grandchildren

Q7: Is there anything else you want to share with readers?

I'd like to stress a couple of points about attending the OAC's YWM Convention. One is the excellent education and information you receive from the outstanding speakers, plus the opportunity to ask them your questions directly. The other is the personal relationships you will undoubtedly develop with like-minded people who have embarked on a similar journey with weight and health. Never forget that you are worth the time it takes to be healthy.

Do You Want to Share Your Story?

Whether you have a story about navigating obesity, facing weight stigma, or inspiring others, your voice is important. Visit the OAC's story project at WeightoftheWorld.com to share yours today. Not sure what to say? Consider one of our question prompts to guide you.

If you would like your story to be featured in a future issue of *Weight Matters Magazine*, please email membership@obesityaction.org.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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