

from ORDINARY to Extraordinary



*Maureen Riopelle, President and Founder, Mary's Circle of Hope—
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Things could not have been going better! I was a star basketball player recruited by hundreds of colleges, and was a top pick by the University of Iowa. My dream of going to college, becoming an Olympic athlete, and later being a sportscaster was so close I could see it all happening. But, life has a funny way of turning on a dime.

I had suffered knee problems for many years, and most doctors attributed it to "growing pains." I continued to play sports in high school despite the pain. When I got to the University of Iowa, at the urging of my coaches I finally saw a few specialists, but the diagnosis was inconclusive. They knew my knee was in serious disrepair and that I had lost over 35% of the range of motion, they just couldn't figure out why.

After the surgery, my knees actually began to worsen. They feared a massive infection, and after more tests, another surgery was scheduled. It was then determined that the plica in my knees had hardened and formed so much scar tissue it seemed to almost form another "bone" in my leg. I was told that I would probably have to have surgery every two years to repair the damage, and that I only had a 50/50 chance of ever walking again.

In a relatively brief period of time, I went from a college basketball standout and Olympic hopeful to losing my scholarship, dropping out of college, potentially facing the rest of my life on crutches or in a wheelchair. I had five surgeries in seven months, and I spent that summer in a wheelchair and on crutches, but within a year, I was walking on my own again. Within a year and half, I walked my first 5K.

I attribute my recovery to my drive and determination. When necessary, I am the most stubborn person you'll ever meet. When I was told that I would not walk, run, or play basketball again, I took it as a *personal challenge* to prove

everyone wrong—"I'll show you." I eventually went back to college and graduated with a 4.0 GPA. After graduation, I began working, and life was moving along. Little did I know that within a few short years, I would again have to call upon that teenager who years earlier had told herself, "I'll show you."

One morning I found a lump in my breast and immediately met with my doctor, who scheduled a mammogram. After the test, I was told that everything was fine. But there was a little voice in my head that said, "You need to ask someone

else. Get a second opinion." This little voice saved my life. I did, indeed, have breast cancer, and it had even spread to my lymph nodes. My determination and strong will to live and beat the odds became my salvation once again. After surgery and treatment, there are no signs of cancer.

Both of these experiences, while trying and frightening, have led me to my real calling in life—

founding *Mary's Circle of Hope—The Mary Maguire Foundation*, a non-profit organization dedicated to the support of women cancer survivors. We help provide financial assistance, health, fitness, and nutritional assistance, empowerment retreats and workshops, and additional services that help a woman go from surviving to thriving. Being able to help others thrive in the face of adversity has become my passion and focus in life. Visit us at www.marymaguirefoundation.org.

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EXTRAORDINARY REFLECTION

Ms. Riopelle suffered a major setback with her health, causing her to lose her scholarship and drop out of college for a time. What advice would you give to someone who is facing a major, life-threatening health problem with regard to persistence, internal motivation, positive thinking, and determination?