

May 15 through June 15 is Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month
Guest Column by EATcetera Chef Lena Pyles (*limit on words is 500*)

Have you ever noticed someone's facial tic? Maybe it was a movement of their mouth or an eye twitch. This unexplained tic could be Tourette Syndrome. According to the Tourette Association of America, one million Americans have Tourette's, and 50 percent are undiagnosed. I am one of those million Americans diagnosed with this syndrome.

I was born in Big Spring, Texas, and I've always had a creative soul. However, when I was 18, I left Big Spring to join my older brother and chef, Stephen Pyles, in Dallas. During this time, I worked at Routh Street Cafe. While I loved the fast-paced environment, the restaurant business is demanding and I was close to burnout with something I loved and the tics I've had throughout my life worsened.

During this time, my former partner Victoria Newsome and I decided to move to Galveston for a three-month hiatus. I took a break from the hospitality industry for several years to focus on family while occasionally working as a private chef. This break gave me time to focus on myself and I was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome at 40. I named my syndrome Hazel. So when I'd say, "Hazel is acting up," my family would know. Honestly, this was a relief; now, I could learn new coping skills for Tourette's. It was time for a fresh start and Victoria and I opened EATcetera in 2018 when the original owner retired.

Now that armed with a diagnosis, I'm able to manage my symptoms and I'd like to use my personal story to educate people about Tourette Syndrome. Here are some statistics from a recent study by the Tourette Association of America that you may find interesting.

Impact on Children

- 72% have experienced physical pain because of their physical tics
- 50% have felt discriminated against
- 66% were forced to miss school or have extended absences
- 70% have experienced bullying directly related to having Tourette Syndrome
- *Tourette Diagnosis Statistics: 50% were diagnosed within one year*

Impact on Adults

- 87% have experienced physical pain because of their physical tics
- 51% felt tics prevented them from forming meaningful friendships and romantic relationships
- 59% believed their tics have prevented them from fulfilling their full potential
- 48% have considered suicide at some point in their lives
- *Tourette Diagnosis Statistics: 37% were diagnosed within one year*

One of the messages for Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month is, "Tourette is uncontrollable, but I am UNSTOPPABLE!" I am unstoppable; I am so proud of what I've achieved as a chef, a business owner, a friend, and a parent.

The first symptoms of Tourette's are motor tics in the head and neck area. These tics are worse under stress or when someone's excited. A diagnosis and support will help you cope with symptoms. For more information, visit <https://tourette.org/>