

# CASEY ROBERTS DUNHAM

is a former Miss South Central Georgia with a degree in Child and Family Development from Georgia Southern University. She has been a motivational speaker, has worked in teen suicide prevention, and currently works with the elderly. Her ultimate career goal is educational counseling with a focus on the special needs of children with neurological disorders. Casey recently married her long time boyfriend.



**TSA:** We've featured individuals with a wide variety of professions and life experiences, but I believe you're our first to do the beauty pageant circuit. Tell us about it.

**Casey:** My aunt, who recently passed away, was like my second mom. She always wanted me to do pageants because she knew in her heart that it would help me if I got out there and really talked about my TS. It taught me a lot about myself.

In the Miss America system you have to have a platform. Mine was personal—it was TS. I had to go public with it. So when I got to the Miss Georgia Pageant I put a lot of passion into talking about it and blew the judges away. They told me they'd never heard anyone in the Miss Georgia pageant speak about something of this nature. It was a way to share and make a difference and I had a great time.

**TSA:** The impact of TS varies from person to person. What do you think the effect has been on your life?

**Casey:** It's been hard for me. I had to learn how to manage stress. But I've found a lot of positive to pull out of the negative. Having TS gives me a lot of energy—that is, when I get it focused. TS can also throw you out of focus. Of course, we all have something to struggle with, so I say accept it and then figure out what you're going to do. Nobody's perfect.

**TSA:** When and how were you diagnosed?

**Casey:** I wasn't diagnosed until I was 19 years old. My parents thought it was just my "little habits." I learned to suppress it really early, but my "habits" would still act up. At

college it got worse and my mom took me to several doctors. Finally, my dad saw it on TV. He said, "They've just described Casey." In five minutes the neurologist knew what it was.

I was really upset. I thought, this is forever, I'll never get rid of it. I wouldn't talk about it. I was in some kind of denial about the diagnosis, but gradually—with the support of my family and friends—I started to talk about it. Talking about TS when I won—talking about it on stage and in an interview with five pageant judges—liberated me as a person. I realized that I'm bigger than this disorder. It is forever, but I have the opportunity to make it better for others who may not have the family support that I did.

**TSA:** What kind of experiences did you have in school?

**Casey:** I was brought up in a small town and went to school with the same kids for years. They took it as something that I always did—grunted and made facial expressions. But by the time I was 13 or 14 years old and went to Wayne County, where there was a bigger and more diverse crowd of kids, it was harder. They made smart remarks and I had no ammo for fighting back. I had a lot of fears—fears of dating and the reactions of guys. My confidence was beat to the dirt.

**TSA:** What about your family? What did they do?

**Casey:** They've always been there for me. They never disciplined me for my "habits" and always encouraged and accepted me.

I just got married.

He's a very supportive person—a big old teddy bear and I'm blessed to have met him. I found out about my TS a few months after we started dating. My dad told him. He asked me if I was too embarrassed to tell him and he said, "Casey I don't like all this hair on my body. We all have a lot of things we don't like about ourselves." I fell in love with him that day. He could have completely freaked out but he understood right from the beginning and he helped me achieve my dreams. He's a strong man with a big heart—and a big, hairy, teddy bear!

I had this big fear of having children. He just told me that I'd change my mind. And I will. I'll overcome that fear and work out the perfect plan because I trust him with my whole heart and soul. So far no children, just three cats but we will (have children) one day.

**TSA:** Stress has a big impact on people with TS. Do you do anything to help alleviate your stress?

**Casey:** I do a lot of different things. I'm a singer and I love to sing. You have to find a focus, an outlet, that no matter when you're doing it, you enjoy it—painting, reading, singing, taking a walk—something you can zone out into. I sing. I'm in love with Broadway, I lose myself in *Phantom of the Opera*, listening and singing. When I'm at work I simply stop and breathe. It always helps me. I focus on my breathing, meditate on my breathing—I've always done it and it works. I also get a massage once a month to reduce stress in my body.

continued on page 4

Published by the **Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.**  
42-40 Bell Boulevard ■ Bayside, New York 11361-2820

718-224-2999 ■ fax: 718-279-9596 ■ e-mail: [ts@tsa-usa.org](mailto:ts@tsa-usa.org) ■ website: <http://tsa-usa.org>

**National Officers:** Monte N. Redman, *Chairman*; Diane Mallah, *First Vice Chair*; Kenneth D. Moelis, *Second Vice Chair*; Dennis Squilla, *Third Vice Chair*; Daniel T. Anbe, M.D., *Fourth Vice Chair*; Alice Kane, *Treasurer*; Viktoria Holm Kramer, *Secretary* ■ **Corporate & Professional Council:** Diane Mallah, *co-Chair*; Dennis Squilla, *co-Chair* ■ **Scientific Advisory Board:** Neal R. Swerdlow, M.D., Ph.D., *Chair*; Peter Hollenbeck, Ph.D., *co-Chair*; Jonathan Mink, M.D., Ph.D., *co-Chair* ■ **Medical Advisory Board:** John T. Walkup, M.D., *Chair* ■ **President:** Judit Ungar, MSW

**Editors:** Milton Sutton, Judit Ungar, MSW ■ **Editorial Consultant:** Candida B. Korman ■ **Production Manager:** Tracy Colletti-Flynn

**Membership Dues: \$45.00** (includes quarterly Newsletter) ■ To donate through The United Way, designate Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc. For CFC — use #0562.

The Tourette Syndrome Association does not endorse products, services or manufacturers. Such names appear only as information for our members.

TSA assumes no liability whatsoever for the use of any product or service mentioned.

Use of material appearing in this Newsletter is permitted if TSA is acknowledged as the source. ■ Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc., Founded 1972



Continued from page 3

## Casey Roberts Dunham

I lost my aunt this year. She was a middle school teacher and a happy, loving, non-toxic person—teacher of the year. I was fortunate to have had her as my second mom, to be the little beebob in the middle of two moms. Her philosophy was that life is too short to sweat the small stuff. It helps to laugh.

**TSA:** TS is in the media a great deal lately. Some of the presentations are more realistic and more positive than others. What do you think of the role of the media in increasing awareness?

**Casey:** I have not really seen a lot of positive in the media. I've spoken to a lot of people about TS and the first thing they always bring up is a screaming, cussing character in a movie. It never seems to be about making little noises—it's always about a freak. The media has a perception that will take a lot of pushing to change, but if we all work together and get out into communities then we can really change views. What we really need are more support groups, more day camps—not just for TS but for ADD and ADHD.

**TSA:** This is the “back to school” issue of the TSA newsletter. What advice would you whisper into the ear of a child with TS as he or she goes off to the first day of school?

**Casey:** You are an individual. You are who you were made to be. You can be anybody you want to be. You make your own path. Accept who you are and no one can make you feel bad about yourself. My mom always said, “this too shall pass” and I've always believed that it's true. Live from moment to moment, because the moment is gone and it's now a new moment, new hour, new day. Section off your school assignments, organize them into pieces so you don't get overwhelmed. Be yourself and don't compare yourself to other people. ■