

# LAURA ANNE PELLICCIO

is the director of a brand new spa/wellness center in Westchester, New York. She spoke to TSA while walking along the river, which she says is the best way to relieve the stress of opening a new business while coping with TS.



**TSA:** Many of us are interested in spas. Please tell us a bit about yours and how you got into spa management.

**Laura:** I'm the director of a wellness center which is the first of its kind here—a sports facility and spa in a five star hotel. We offer kayaking on the Hudson River, outdoor mountain spinning, Tai Chi, martial arts—all in small classes. Everyone who joins sets fitness goals and we help them to achieve their goals with acupuncturists, trainers, nutritionists and more. We're exceeding everyone's expectations.

I was a biology major in college, thinking that I'd become a pharmacist, but I couldn't finish. My TS was really, really bad at that time and I had to go home. I was 19, very depressed and in denial about my TS. I gained weight and was sleeping all the time. I didn't want to leave the house—I was afraid of what people would think when they saw I was home and not away at school.

When my mother mentioned going to a spa, I sold my college books and used the money to try her suggestion at a little spa offering a seaweed wrap.

I remember thinking that this was what my mother was talking about and I asked about training to do treatments. The best part of college was that the people were very diverse, but the classes were just too big for me—with my ADD, ADHD and OCD. But this training was different. I became an aesthetician doing facials, then began doing a lot of Brazilian bikini waxes.

Eventually, I began training others, working in exchange for vacations at spa resorts. I did a lot of traveling and worked at building my skills. That's how I started in spa management. Working at the Plaza Hotel Spa gave me a lot of great experience. When it closed for renovations, I networked for seven months and now I'm opening a very special wellness center/high-end spa.

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**TSA:** As a spa professional, tell us what you do to manage stress.

**Laura:** Nutrition, acupuncture, massages—these alternative therapies truly work for me. They are something I do to keep myself sane. I'm not taking medication for my TS, but I think that alternative treatments can also be used in addition to medication. Nutrition really helps. I've lost weight and I'm much healthier. I don't mind being a guinea pig and trying new things if they can help a little kid in the future. I've found that cranial facial massage pressure points reduce stress and calm the nervous system.

I know that a lot of these treatments are expensive but there are simple things to do that don't cost a thing, such as staying away from sugar and choosing decaffeinated drinks.

"Monitoring" is a major word for me. I flinch and tic when I get nervous, especially in my hands. Right now, with all the stress and excitement of opening a new business, I'm learning that the most important thing is stepping back and relaxing. Walking along the river is the best.

**TSA:** When were you diagnosed?

**Laura:** It was late. I was seventeen and a half—the summer before college. I had minor tics in high school. I went to an all-girls school and people noticed. Some were more difficult than others. During my junior and senior year, I thought the tics would go away. My family tried to talk to me about it but I was in denial. I give the kids who are open about TS a lot of credit. I always had an excuse to explain my tics.

**TSA:** How did your family cope with your TS?

**Laura:** I'm very fortunate—my parents are very supportive people. I did some research into my family's medical history and found bipolar disorder and autism but no TS. We still don't understand where it comes from.

**TSA:** What do you think of the media's role in disseminating information about TS and the quality of that information?

**Laura:** I think that it's great that it's being exposed. But I've been offended by some of

it. Movies blow it out of proportion.

**TSA:** What are your future plans?

**Laura:** I'm ready to open boutique hotels! I love travel and want to make something of myself. I'm so much more confident right now. I'm 27 and I've seen the light at the end of the tunnel. I went to hell and back by the time I was 20 but I wouldn't be where I am if I did not have TS. And I'm still happy.

## LETTERS

**from hosts of *I Have Tourettes but Tourettes Doesn't Have Me* DVD screening parties**

Thank you, thank you and God bless you all for all you do for the kids and their families affected by this neurological disorder. My oldest daughter has TS. Back in 1981 I diagnosed her condition (she was 11 at the time) after reading an article in the Ann Landers column. As soon as I read it I knew this was what she had. I was very relieved that my husband and I could put a name to her baffling symptoms. She, as well as the family, went through some tough times before we became aware that she could not control her tics.

Thank you so very much for sending the HBO DVD. Be assured that I will put it to good use as I plan to conduct some more in-services throughout the year.

With much gratitude,  
*Marie Thompson, Ohio*

Thank you for being so prompt and for sending the DVD. I was pleasantly surprised and truly appreciate it! It was nice of you to thank me for helping raise awareness, but it is you and everyone else at the TSA who deserve thanks. We cannot thank you enough for what you have done and continue to do. Almost everything we have learned about our daughter's Tourette we learned from the TSA. Thank you!

Sincerely,  
*Selena Sheaves, Massachusetts*

