



Getting It Through My Thick Skull: Why I Stayed, What I Learned, and What Millions of People Involved with Sociopaths Need to Know

By Mary Jo Buttafuoco

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"I think, every once in a while, about the life I should be living, the one I fully expected to be enjoying right about now. In the life I was supposed to have, my husband and I would be admiring the view from our waterfront home in the town where we were both born and raised. Good friends and neighbors would be next door, up the street, and all over the neighborhood. Our parents would live only blocks away, in our childhood homes. We'd be taking our grandchildren to the beach club on weekends, enjoying the fruits of our labors and looking forward to a peaceful retirement. That was the plan, anyway . . . but the whole world knows how that turned out."

Mary Jo Buttafuoco's anonymous life as a suburban wife and mother in sleepy Massapequa, New York, on Long Island, ended in May 1992, when she was shot in the head on her own front porch. The 'Long Island Lolita' saga sparked a media frenzy that has not died to this day. As the years passed and Mary Jo steadfastly stood by her man while Joey Buttafuoco and Amy Fisher continued to make headlines, one question lingered in the minds of women everywhere: Why did she stay for so long? In *Getting It Through My Thick Skull*, Mary Jo finally answers that question fully and convincingly. The answer is simple, yet it took almost three decades of turmoil: She was married to a sociopath. And while Mary Jo's face and story are known all over the world, she's just one of countless women who have become similarly enmeshed with a partner who wreaks utter havoc on the lives around them.

Using her own experiences, Mary Jo helps readers determine if they are indeed involved with a sociopath and offers hope and help for them through her tragic and triumphant life lessons. In addition, readers will be inspired by Mary Jo's comeback: A true reclamation and re-creation of her life from the inside out. Through private details of the resiliency and rebuilding she has forged over the

past sixteen years, Mary Jo shares with readers for the first time:

- Her addiction to painkillers and her recovery through the Betty Ford Center
- Her overdue decision to leave Joey and start over again on her own in California-3,000 miles from her support system
- Taking control of her physical, spiritual, and emotional health and learning to feel attractive and in control again, despite the scars and trauma of the gunshot
- Her highly controversial and public forgiveness of Amy Fisher
- The new love in her life and how she found the courage to trust, believe, and find hope in a committed relationship once again

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Since 1992, when Buttafuoco found herself at the center of a senseless tragedy, her last name has become an easy (and surprisingly long-lived) punchline. While most everyone knows the story of her ex-husband, Joey, his relationship with teenaged Amy Fisher, and Fisher's violent attack on Mary Jo, no one knows the former Mrs. Buttafuoco's side. In this revealing memoir, Buttafuoco examines the sociopathic manipulation perpetrated by her husband, how he kept her tied to him, and how she finally found the strength to leave. Readers looking for a scandalous rehashing of the Joey-Fisher affair will find surprisingly little (it is, after all, a well-covered 17-year-old story), but Buttafuoco bares her soul in a detailed account of her life, from the high school roots of her relationship with Joey to the healthy, rewarding relationship she currently enjoys. Buttafuoco's goal is to alert readers to the dangers of sociopathic personalities, as well as to inspire in them the strength to leave and the patience to heal (a mission only slightly undermined by her admission that she does keep in contact with Joey).

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About the Author

After a five-year courtship and a twenty-two-year marriage to Joey Buttafuoco, **Mary Jo Buttafuoco** now lives quietly in Ventura County, California, with her fiancé, Stu, and their "Brady Bunch" blended family. Visit the blog at <http://maryjobuttafuoco.hcibooks.com>

Julie McCarron is a *New York Times* bestselling author and celebrity collaborator. Her work includes Tracy Gold's *Room to Grow*, rocker Gene Simmons's *Sex, Money, Kiss*, and *Why I Love Baseball* with Larry King, among others.

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April Showers Bring May Prowlers

A bright, white light shone directly on my face, hurting my eyes as I opened them and struggled to focus. I could barely see; the light was blinding. Suddenly, a female figure dressed all in white appeared over me. She put her face near mine and immediately started calling my name: 'Mary Jo, Mary Jo!' Who is this, and how does she know my name? I wondered groggily.

'You are at the Nassau County Medical Center, Mary Jo. You've been shot. But you're going to be okay. You're in the hospital; we're taking good care of you,' the woman said, enunciating very loudly and clearly.

Shot? I'd been shot? How very strange. I pondered this for a couple of seconds, and then the lights went out again.

I awoke sometime later gasping for air, panicking because I couldn't breathe and didn't know why. I vaguely recalled being told I'd gotten shot, though it seemed like a dream. I cast my mind back to the last thing I remembered: the girl I'd just seen. That girl who'd been at my house, some teenager, just a kid.

'Mary Jo! Mary Jo! Do you know who did this to you?' the nurse asked. I nodded my head 'yes.' It was that

girl. I tried desperately to speak, but I couldn't breathe, I couldn't talk; it felt like a hundred-pound weight lay squarely on my chest, sucking all the air out of me. I can't breathe, I can't breathe! I made a motion of scribbling in the air, and a yellow legal pad and pen were produced and put into my hands.

I'm suffocating, I wrote. The word trailed off at the end, all over the paper, but the nurse was elated. Not only was I going to live, but clearly I wasn't paralyzed?I was still able to write. And I couldn't have much brain damage, since I'd spelled suffocating correctly. The machine that had been steadily breathing for me for the past few days was too slow now that I had awakened with anxiety flooding my system. The nurse took the breathing apparatus out of me and off of my chest. The relief was immediate; I could breathe again. I wrote, Was I shot?

'Yes,' the nurse replied simply.

'Why?' I wrote. She had no answer. I drifted off again, waking to see my husband, Joey, at my bedside examining the words on the pad. He handed it to me.

'Mary Jo, do you know who did this to you?' he asked.

'Nineteen-year-old girl,' I scribbled.

A girl? The police had been operating on the assumption that I had been attacked by a man in my backyard. This really threw Joey and the nurse. In fact, now they worried that I really did have brain damage, because what kind of girl would do this?

'Anne Marie,' I wrote down. 'T-shirt.' Little flashes were coming back to me. 'She said she . . . ' I was trying to explain to them what she told me?that her little sister was having an affair with Joey. But the effort exhausted me, and out I went again.

When I woke up again, my whole head was pounding, and there was a maddening ringing in my ears. I raised my hand to gingerly examine where the excruciating pain was centered, on the right side of my head, just in front of my ear. My fingers traced over a thick bandage, but I couldn't feel anything as I carefully examined my head. The entire right side of my head was completely numb, as if it had been shot full of Novocain. It felt like my face was hanging off of my skull. A couple of inches behind the bandage, I felt my hair?or what was left of it. The tracheotomy tube had been removed, and I could finally speak. My voice emerged for the first time in days.

'What happened to my hair?' I croaked. The right side of my head had been completely shaved for surgery; I had been given a radical buzz cut. Two uniformed police officers were in the room, along with Joe, his brother Bobby, and my parents. They all raced to my bedside, and even in my condition I was alarmed at how tired and haggard their familiar faces were. It hit me then. This is really bad. What a commotion I've caused! I tried my best to reassure my family that I was all right by making light of the situation, like I always did. I grabbed my mother's hand. 'You see, Ma? This thick skull really came in handy!'

'Do you remember what happened? Who did this to you?' That was all they wanted to know. Amazingly enough, I remembered everything.

I was outside on our backyard deck, painting the built-in wooden bench white to match my wicker furniture, which I'd recently removed from the garage, shaken off, hosed down, and covered in bright flowered cushions. It was a sunny morning in May, my favorite time of year. Prior to that, we muddled through the snow, ice, and endless gray days, knowing that with each passing day of gloom, spring and summer would be one day closer.

I felt lucky and grateful to be a stay-at-home mother in the most wonderful community I could imagine. Paul was in sixth grade, and Jessica was in third. My days were full with homework, after-school activities, volunteering at their grammar school, and serving on the board of the Biltmore Shores Beach Club. There was a constant round of birthday parties, bar and bat mitzvahs, holidays, communions, confirmations, and christenings throughout the year, but the social calendar really kicked in to high gear in the summertime?living as we did just a stone's throw from the water.

It was truly my dream house, and I lavished it with care and attention. Nothing too big or fancy, but perfect for our family of four. The front door opened into a small foyer, with stairs leading up to the second-floor bedrooms. To the left was the living room, which was light and airy. I had decorated in blues and whites. The walls were painted and wallpapered in pastels, and I had hand-stenciled the doorways. Large area rugs were scattered on top of light hardwood floors. Dried flowers and framed family pictures softened the room. The house was warm and cozy?a real home; it was a place I envisioned growing old in and someday having our grandkids visit. My fifteenth wedding anniversary was just around the corner. The plane tickets for our getaway celebration to Jamaica were upstairs on my dresser. I had a long list of projects I wanted to accomplish before we left.

I left the front door to the house wide open to let the fresh air circulate through the house while I painted. This also made it easy to see which friend was dropping by today. Massapequa was a small, close-knit community. I'd gone to high school and even grade school with many of my neighbors. We routinely ran over to one another's houses to borrow ingredients, have a quick cup of coffee, or plan upcoming club events.

I had only been working for about twenty minutes when I heard the doorbell chime. I shaded my eyes and looked through the glass French double doors that led from the dining room to the deck. A young girl was standing at the front door. I set the paintbrush on top of the open paint can and walked through the house, removing my painting gloves one finger at a time. 'What can I do for you?' I asked when I reached the front door.

'Are you Mrs. Buttafuoco?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said.

'Can I talk to you for a minute?' the girl asked.

'Sure, no problem,' I replied, as I opened the screen door and walked out onto the stoop.

The reassuring sounds of suburbia surrounded us: a car going down the street, lawnmowers and leaf blowers whining as neighbors tidied their lawns for summer. Noise from hammers and drills, along with faint laughter and teasing voices, drifted over from the beach club as my neighbors made repairs before the club officially opened for the season in four days.

I glanced at the unfamiliar car parked across the street and saw a young man sprawled in the driver's seat. My first thought was that these were teenagers looking for an estimate on a car repair. Over the years, people occasionally stopped by the house to ask my husband, Joey, an auto body specialist, to do a preliminary assessment. He and his brother Bobby worked in the family business his father, Cass, had founded: Complete Auto Body and Fender, Inc., located just a few miles away in the neighboring town of Baldwin. I stood outside now, gloves in hand.

'I need to talk to you about your husband, Joey,' the girl began. I leaned against the wooden railing on the right side of the front stoop. The girl faced me, leaning against the left side. There were about five feet between us. She took a deep breath. 'I came here to tell you that Joey is having an affair with my little sister,'

she blurted out. This kid standing in front of me appeared to be about fourteen years old. My first reaction to this was simple disbelief. I didn't feel upset or threatened. I just looked at her skeptically. 'Your little sister?! How old are you?'

'I'm nineteen.' She started to get nervous.

'And how old is your little sister?'

'She's sixteen . . . didn't you hear what I just told you?'

'I heard you, but I'm having a little trouble believing you. What's your name?' She hesitated.

'Anne Marie.'

'And where do you live, Anne Marie?'

'In Bar Harbor . . .' the girl pointed directly behind me.

I had lived in the area all my life. I knew where Bar Harbor was, and she had pointed in the wrong direction. Something was wrong here, but I couldn't figure out what she was doing. Why was she so nervous? What was she lying about?

'Aren't you upset by what I'm telling you?'

'What are you so nervous about, Anne Marie?' I asked. Apparently, I wasn't reacting the way she'd expected. To be completely honest, though I acted nonchalantly, I was a little caught off guard by what she said, but I knew she was lying about something. I had a twelve-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter, and this encounter reminded me of the times I had caught them both in lies. This is exactly what I was dealing with now. Only this wasn't my kid.

The whole incident was starting to annoy me. I was busy. I had painting to do, and I wasn't sure where this conversation was going, but I was tired of it already. She was becoming quite indignant; she could see that she wasn't getting through to me.

'Don't you think it's disgusting that a forty-year-old man is having sex with a sixteen-year-old?'
What could I say to that?

'Well, sure, but don't make him forty yet; he's only thirty-six.' I was half-smiling because I was being nice to her, trying to humor her. 'I'm also having a hard time believing what you're telling me,' I said. I pointed to the car across the street. 'Who's that?' I asked.

'That's my boyfriend. I have proof!' she said abruptly. Suddenly, she thrust a Complete Auto Body shirt at me. I took it from her and examined it. It was one of the new white polo-style golf shirts with the company name and logo of a race car with checkers stitched on the left breast. Joey had just brought a stack of them home a few days before. 'I found this in my little sister's bed when I was making it! He came over during work and had sex with her and left his shirt!'

It was definitely time to end this meeting. It had lasted no longer than two minutes, but this kid was sounding more and more like an idiot. 'He left this in the bed and went back to work with no shirt on?' She didn't have an answer for that one. 'Look, Anne Marie, I don't know what you want me to do about this, but I'll go inside and call Joey and tell him you came by.' I was calm. Possibly a little annoyed, but my annoyance was directed more toward my husband at that moment. Joey was a big overgrown kid, my number one child. Long experience had taught me that whenever there was trouble, Joey was usually the culprit. What misunderstanding had he gotten mixed up in now? This Anne Marie was so obviously lying to me, but why? And for what?

And then, because my parents raised me to be polite, I said briskly, 'Thanks for coming by.' I turned to my right, and got my thumb caught on the handle of the screen door. That split second would be the end of my life as an anonymous housewife in suburban Long Island. An explosion went off on the right side of my head?and everything went black.

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