

'I've been through it all': Margaret Trudeau reflects on mental health journey

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Margaret Trudeau doesn't mince words about her battle with mental illness. She has spent much of her life in the spotlight, and the harsh glare of public scrutiny hasn't always been flattering.

For years, she suffered with bipolar disorder. Manic periods filled with euphoria and excitement would be followed by a dark, gutting depression.

"Being bipolar is a huge exaggeration of your emotions," Trudeau said in an interview with CBC Radio's Edmonton AM to promote her Feb. 3 talk at St. Albert's Arden Theatre.

"You can be pretty high and also terribly low, so I've been through it all. I think the highs that I have now since I got treatment and live a very balance life are true joy.

"I have a lot of lovely things in my life that I wasn't able to have before I got healed from my imbalanced life."

The mother of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and ex-wife of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau has chronicled her struggles with mental illness in books and speaking engagements over the past decade.

Her public life began as the young bride of the political star when she married Pierre Trudeau in 1971. She was 22, and he was 51.

In her memoir *Changing My Mind*, she admits she was unprepared for public life and struggled with depression.

When her marriage ended, she suffered a breakdown. While she found some stability in a second marriage, the death of her son Michel, in a skiing accident in 1998, preceded a more serious health crisis.

'Denial is a big part of it'

Like many others with mental illness, Trudeau once struggled to accept her diagnosis. "The problem with mental illness, as opposed to physical illness, is that it involves wrong thinking or impaired insight. You're not thinking correctly. You're often in a very grey place, a very dark place if you're in depression, or you're in an unreachable place where you're up in mania where you are really resistant to anyone trying to lower you from your buzz."

Her message is, seek help and be patient. It took several years, and a lot of effort, she said, before she found treatment that worked.



Ottawa Margaret Trudeau will be speaking about her mental illness battles at the Arden Theatre next month.

"It's an illness, a serious illness, and its consequences are usually to take you away from your life, and take away your hope and your feeling of belonging," she said.

"Break down your fear of getting help. The help will give you back your life and give you the chance to be a contributing, whole person, which is what we all want."

At 68, Trudeau said she is enjoying life, and finds solace in the knowledge that her story has helped others.

"It's hard. Denial is a big part of it. Breaking down that fear and that stigma of accepting is the job that I do."

"I've faced the worst and I've come through it."