

She's totally 'Terrific': 'Get the 411' from community television host Mary Barrett

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent

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Ever since she was 3 years old, Mary T. Barrett has wanted to be someone.

What this means, exactly, has taken Barrett longer to figure out. But this ebullient 42-year-old single mom from Newton believes she is on her way with "Get the 411 with Mary Terrific," a new community television talk show targeting women.

Barrett said, "To me, the power of the media is a way to help other women. There are a lot of women out there who need inspiration and they need a role model. I hope that I'm that role model. I hope when they tune in every week, they say, 'She's not afraid to speak about anything.'"

The program airs Saturdays on Newton Community Television at 5:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. and Sundays at 12:30 p.m., 5:30 p.m., and 9:30 p.m. The show also airs in Natick, Wellesley and Needham through local community access stations. Plans for a debut in Boston, New York, and North Carolina are in the works.

The show focuses on a variety of issues, from depression to domestic violence, to highlighting a monthly "terrific woman." The word terrific stems from Barrett's belief in always maintaining a positive attitude.

One recent "terrific woman" segment featured Newton resident and breast cancer survivor Laurie Caruso. Barrett and Caruso talked about Caruso's ordeal in much the same way two girlfriends would chat — the conversation was honest with plenty of laughter and tears.

Barrett had Caruso walk the viewers through the process of getting a mammogram, an ultrasound and the reality of telling her daughter about the diagnosis. Barrett then had Caruso describe how she got through it. This is Barrett's point — she wants to show other people that they're not alone and that they, too, can get through tough times.

Barrett maintains a down-to-earth, vulnerable approach with her guests. She endeavors to ask all the questions that may be going through a viewer's mind, even the tough ones. At the same time, Barrett is likable — you trust her.

While Barrett shuns comparisons to Oprah Winfrey, she admits that she'd like to be in the same league.

"Oprah has done so much for women, and I admire her a great deal. I could never be like Oprah because we have two different personalities. I would like to be on her level. I would like that status of stardom and success."

Born in England of Irish parents, Barrett moved to Dorchester with her family when she was 9. Her tenacity presented itself at an early age, often causing her laid-back mother to wonder if she had taken the wrong baby home from the hospital.

Barrett's television show was not her first foray into entrepreneurship. She started her own furniture trucking company, A Different Delivery, in 1986. Barrett's daughter, Ana, was born two years later. Although the business blossomed, Barrett's marriage suffered.

After separating from her husband in 1994, Barrett needed to figure out a way to be a full-time mom while maintaining her company. Her solution? She created a business for Ana called Ana's Attic, a furniture

warehouse-consignment shop located in Westwood. While Ana's Attic worked in tandem with Barrett's company, Ana learned invaluable skills.

Barrett said, "The price tags were little pink teddy bears. Ana was in all of the advertising, and all of the advertising and sales were done around things happening in Ana's life. She had a big birthday celebration blowout sale, a back-to-school sale, and so it was a lot of fun. She really got into it. It made her feel important. And she had her mother with her all the time."

Barrett had stumbled on her passion — helping and empowering women, no matter their age or skill set. Barrett sold her company to her brother in 1996. She continued working in the transportation industry, but the desire to help women remained in the back of her mind. Before she could pursue this dream, there were obstacles to overcome. Barrett recalled a dark moment in 1999.

"I put my trust in an attorney and he took my money. I was left with nothing."

Barrett admits contemplating suicide. She wondered what life would be like for Ana if she didn't have a mother.

"If I did that, how does that leave my daughter? I have to be a role model for her. I have to be strong for her. I have to get through this. It was hard. It wasn't like it happened over night. I just did it. I had no choice," she said.

Barrett did get through it, and was more determined than ever to make a difference in other women's lives. Although she had the concept for a talk show in her head, it wasn't until after the Sept. 11 attacks that she decided to pursue it seriously. MTB Enterprises (www.marytbarrett.com) was born.

"Get the 411 with Mary Terrific" debuted last winter. In addition, Barrett is a motivational speaker and she's currently shopping around her first book, "21 Rules for Survival."

What advice does she have for other women pursuing their dreams?

Barrett said, "First, you should believe in yourself. Have a network of support people around you. Because there are going to be times when you are going to need a shoulder to cry on."