



Shining a Light on Mental Illness

Sometimes a glimmer of hope emerges from the darkest times of people’s lives. Such was the case for the Eure family of Raleigh, North Carolina.

Alice and Thad Eure Jr. were living the American dream in the 1950s and 1960s. Thad was an entrepreneur with a gift for starting restaurants. In 1960, he and a partner opened the Angus Barn, a large upscale steakhouse restaurant on the outskirts of Raleigh, and later they created Darryl’s, a casual dining restaurant chain. Thad also started the 42nd Street Oyster Bar and Fat Daddy’s, a burger concept.

The Eures had two beautiful, intelligent daughters, Van and Shelley, and a bright, athletic son, Thad J. Eure III. But in 1975, their teenage son started showing signs of mental illness, going through manic highs and extreme lows, says his sister Shelley Eure Belk.

“It was severe. We didn’t know what was going on. It was a scary time for our family. My mom and dad went to seek help for him, and in that process, they realized how little was known about mental illness,” she says.

“Through these struggles, I remember my mother poring through books and trying to learn as much as she could. My parents worked hard to find the right treatment,” Shelley says.

Over 10 years, the couple took their son to different physicians. He was hospitalized numerous times and spent time in seven different mental institutions. Doctors struggled with his diagnosis and told the family that more research needed to be done on mental illness, says Van Eure, owner of the Angus Barn.



He was later diagnosed with severe bipolar disorder and schizoaffective disorder. The latter is a chronic mental health condition characterized by symptoms of schizophrenia, such as hallucinations or delusions and symptoms of a mood disorder, such as mania and depression.

In 1984, the Eures established the Foundation of Hope for Research and Treatment of Mental Illness, which funds research to investigate the causes and potential treatments for a range of serious, debilitating mental illnesses, such as depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress syndrome, addiction, and women's mood disorders, including postpartum depression, says Shelley, who is executive director of the foundation.

Today, Thad III, who lives on his own, is under the care of a psychiatrist. He still struggles with the ups and downs that come with his illnesses. In a 2013 letter to foundation donors, he said that after the hospitalizations of his young adult years, his parents "reached a state of helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, and desperation." But out of the "dark abyss came a fragile and delicate ray of light."

Van says their dad wanted the foundation's work to help others. "He said, 'I may not be able to make my own son well, but I may be able to do something for other people who may be going through the same thing.'"

The foundation encourages scientists in the department of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine to submit research project ideas. The foundation's scientific advisory board decides which will receive grants and awards money to pilot studies. "There are so many brilliant researchers with great ideas who need the opportunity to explore their theories," Shelley says. This often leads to other opportunities for funding.

Since inception, the foundation has funded more than 125 scientific research grants totaling more than \$4.7 million. And projects backed by the foundation have garnered more than \$145 million in additional funding from the federal government and other sources, she says. "That's the beauty of our organization. We are planting seeds."

The research supported by the foundation is "quite remarkable," says Dr. David Rubinow, chair of UNC's department of psychiatry. "There are new forms of treatment, new targets of treatment, and new treatment delivery systems—all of which have emerged from grants that were initially supported by the Foundation of Hope."

Steve Thanhauser, Van's husband and a member of the foundation's board of directors, says the group has backed the work of "cutting-edge researchers who are passionate about coming up with breakthrough cures."

The nonprofit organization has also funded 36 community grants totaling more than \$300,000 to support effective mental health treatment programs in the Raleigh area, Shelley says.

Although the foundation was established as an endowment from the Eures, it has grown into something bigger.



Before their father died of pancreatic cancer in 1988, he asked that any donations made in his honor go to mental health research, not cancer studies. He told his family, “I’ve lived a wonderful life, but the life my son’s living is not the kind of life anyone should have to live.”

His friends took his request to heart. The year after his death, a group of employees at the Angus Barn and his other restaurants started the Thad Eure Jr. Walk for Hope to raise awareness and money for the foundation. About 200 participants earned about \$30,000 in the first walk, which stretched 12 miles from the Angus Barn to the 42nd Street Oyster Bar in downtown Raleigh.

After Alice Eure died in 1997, the name of the annual event, held the second Sunday of October, was changed to the Thad and Alice Eure Walk (www.walkforhope.com). It’s now a 10K walk/run, which begins and ends at the Angus Barn where there’s a celebration that includes food, beverages, and prizes donated by companies who sponsor the event. In October, more than 4,000 people participated.

Those who come often talk about their family members who suffer from mental illness, Van says. “It’s an incredibly emotionally fulfilling day. There’s no way you can leave there and not feel good about what you’ve been part of.”

Besides the walk, the foundation hosts Evening of Hope, an annual gala and auction. Past speakers have included Mariel Hemingway; Judy Collins; Zak Williams, the son of the late Robin Williams; and Ashley Judd, who has openly talked about her struggles with depression.

In his letter to donors, Thad III wrote: “It is the philosophy of the Eure Family that if we can help just one individual who suffers from chronic mental illness lead a better, more productive and meaningful life, then we have done something very special.”

Shelley says the Foundation of Hope has become so successful because of its ability to stay the course and not get off track. “We have built this organization one research project at a time, one donor at a time, one walker at a time.”

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