



# CAROL KIVLER

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Mental Illness. Most people don't talk about it because of the social stigma and the far-reaching repercussions. Carol Kivler isn't like most people. She talks about it – *a lot*. In fact, she is an advocate for mental health. She believes that too many people with treatable forms of mental illness suffer unnecessarily because they are too embarrassed to get help. It's not theoretical for Carol, it's real life; she is living in recovery.

Twenty years ago, if someone looked from the outside in, Carol seemed to have it all. She was a college professor and an active mother with three great children, married to a prominent attorney. "I was home room mom, team mom, Girl Scout leader," Carol laughs, and admits, "My kids were my main focus." She had a great home and financial security. It was the kind of life many women might envy.

Yet, in spite of her seemingly picture-perfect life, she wasn't happy. Like many women, Carol says her life was totally defined by others, her identity wrapped up in the identities of her spouse and her children. On top of that, her spouse had been unfaithful. Though Carol he knew it almost from the beginning, she worked hard at keeping it from her children. It was years before they would learn the secret truth Carol hid from them.

In her early forties, Carol started to have depression. She says it came on gradually, almost unnoticeably. Looking back, Carol thinks it started with some post-partum depression after her children were born. As she describes it, "you start to lose yourself, a little bit every day." She felt fake, phony and more and more disconnected. With depression, Carol explains, there's "that voice in your head, ruminating over the same thing...*over and over again*."

When she was first diagnosed, she thought to herself, "I didn't do anything to deserve this." But still, she was ashamed and embarrassed, explaining, "Depression robs you of your self-worth."

Following doctor's orders, Carol started on anti-depression medication. Her reaction was negative and within a week she was into full-blown psychosis. She wanted to die, wondering, "How am I going to end this hopelessness?" It didn't get better; Carol suffered from medication-resistant depression. Doctors suggested electro-convulsive therapy (ECT), but she refused. Like many people ECT gave Carol images of Jack Nicholson from the movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It frightened her.

Still, *nothing* was working and Carol didn't think she could keep going the way she was. She knew ECT wasn't an ideal choice, but she did her research. According to Carol, statistically speaking, ECT has an 80% response rate (vs. 40% response rate for medication). Even so, it was with some hesitation that she agreed to the treatments. And, by the third session, she experienced an "immense improvement". As Carol describes it, ECT is "similar to what a defibrillator does for the heart. It jolts the neurons so they start firing in sync." That "firing in sync" is what enables the patient to recover; that's what happened for Carol. By the end of ten sessions, *Carol was back!* She resumed her life and could live normally again.

Four years later, when she had another bout of psychosis, Carol started ECT right away. Treatment was, again, successful. She did well for another four years but then an even more

severe depression settled on Carol. With that episode, she had fifteen ECT treatments. Unfortunately, at the beginning of that series, the first session went badly. It was too much shock treatment, which sent her into a bipolar episode with a grand mal seizure; afterward, she was hospitalized again, and needed an additional twelve treatments. Since that last time, in 1999, Carol has been enjoying a healthy and productive recovery.

From the time when she was first diagnosed with clinical depression, Carol was hospitalized a total of four times and she received over fifty ECT treatments. Though each of Carol's ECT sessions began while she was hospitalized, she finished them as an outpatient in a short hospital procedure; each time she went home the same day of the treatment.

In the big picture of Carol's life, and what made all the difference for her, was that she recognized that her mental illness was going to be a life-long condition. Just as someone with diabetes or heart disease would take control by being proactive in their care, Carol took control of her mental illness. She told doctors, "give me a diagnosis, *NOT* a prognosis." She refused to let them or the diagnosis define her. Instead, she decided to define it by honestly acknowledging, "I'm 5'8", dye my hair and have clinical depression...it's part of who I am."

As part of taking charge, Carol started her own business as a trainer and speaker. She's earned both an advanced degree and the designation of Certified Speaking Professional (CSP). As a writer Carol contributed to the book, *Fantastic Customer Service Inside & Out* and she also authored a journal, *Blessings: My Journal of Gratitude*.

In addition, while clearly stating that her unfaithful spouse "didn't cause the depression," Carol got a divorce as part of her recovery. And, though he wasn't the reason for her depression, Carol adds, "he didn't help it either." In fact, according to her therapist, her disease progressed as a result of harboring so much mistrust on a continual, day-to-day basis. The divorce stunned her children; they had no idea there was any problem in their parents' marriage. Though it bothered *them*, it was the *best thing* for Carol. "I came into myself," she says, smiling about her victory.

Today, Carol is doing new things. In spite of the economic downturn, her business is still doing well. More and more she is speaking out about mental illness to organizations, corporations and mental health professionals so she can help "raise awareness and remove the stigma surrounding mental illness, and to instill hope in those who live with it."

For fun, she's taken a boating course and even earned her boating license. She plays golf and "loves it." She's even "adopted" a ninety-three year old woman with whom she spends time each week. And Carol never leaves the house without a little chocolate in her handbag. "I like a little something sweet after a meal," she laughs.

Carol sees her future as a series of "endless possibilities" to see, learn, eat, explore and experience the best life has to offer. Best of all, Carol is her own person. She proudly and confidently declares, "I know what I want to be when I grow up. I want to be Carol Kivler!"

## **CAROL, BLESSINGS TO YOU!**

**We can be grateful that you are shining a light on one of society's most taboo topics, turning your victory-making challenge into a courageous recovery that blesses many, many women...and men too.**

**Learn more about Carol Kivler at**

**[www.KivlerCommunications.com](http://www.KivlerCommunications.com) and [www.CourageousRecovery.com](http://www.CourageousRecovery.com)**