

**Thank you for choosing to share your story, Carrie, why do you think it is important?**

I think speaking out about my experiences with Postpartum Depression (PPD) is important because I believe I can help other women going through a similar situation. I want to give other women and their families hope, and let them know that if I can overcome this illness, twice, then they can, too. I want to help unveil the mask so that other women won't go through what I did.

**What were your symptoms like? How long did you suffer before seeking help?**

With my first baby I was very anxious. I vomited a lot, had loss of appetite and lost a lot of weight. I was so worried that something was going to happen to my daughter. I feared that she would die. My daughter was colicky and cried a lot, so I was so worried about her and wondered what was wrong. I didn't get many breaks and I cried a lot, too; felt very depressed, and had trouble going to sleep at night. I used to dread the nights because I knew that I wouldn't get much sleep. My sleep deprivation caused more anxiety and depression. I also didn't want to be alone with my baby because I felt I couldn't look after her properly. I felt like an unfit mother, with the lack of sleep and with the level of anxiety I was experiencing.

With my second baby I knew that the chances of having PPD, again, were up to 80%. I felt fine for the first two weeks. I had my mom stay for two weeks to help, but after she went home my daughter became colicky and didn't sleep much. I was more depressed the second time, but the anxiety wasn't as bad.

**What did you do in order to get help and why do you think it was so important for your family?**

The first time I had PPD it took me three months to finally get medical help. I had heard about Postpartum Depression, but I didn't think it would happen to me. I also thought my sickness was because my daughter was colicky and I wasn't getting much sleep. That was part of it, but once my daughter was out of the colicky phase, I was still feeling the same symptoms. I went to see my doctor and she put me on an anti-depressant called "Paxil." Unfortunately, it took awhile for the medication to work. I also

joined a Postpartum Support Group at the YMCA and met three wonderful women who were going through postpartum difficulties, as well. We met once a week at the YMCA for the group and also started going out for coffee, afterwards. We also met for walks in the morning. I believe that talking to other women who were going through the same postpartum difficulties was the number one healing factor for me. The scheduled walks helped, as well because they gave me an outing to look forward to every week. Scheduling these walks helped me get out of the house and not make excuses why I couldn't go, and the endorphins released from the exercise made me feel good. After a month, of being on the anti-depressants, they finally started working and helped me feel more, emotionally, stable. I also joined a Women's Bible discussion group and found faith, again, in the Lord. I started praying often and read a lot of daily devotionals with other women.

The second time I experienced PPD, I went on the anti-depressant right away, but it still took a while to start working. I asked for help more, this time around, but it was still hard to do. Help was definitely a must because I had two small kids to take care of. It was much harder to get out of the house and go for walks this time with my girls so I talked to my friends, Carla, Tania, Cheryl and Elita, a lot on the phone. I also read Carla, Tania and Elita's book, *The Smiling Mask: Truths about Postpartum Depression and Parenthood*, which helped me stay positive and focused. Their stories of heartache and healing reminded me, again, that "this too shall pass" and I will be so much stronger for going through PPD. The "Strategies for Mothers with Postpartum Depression" section of their book really helped, as well. This information gave me strategies to practice and it really kept me moving forward with my healing journey. I read the book *The Secret*, as well, and it helped me learn how to think positive and gave me knowledge on how positive thinking is really powerful.

**What steps did you take with your second pregnancy that was different from your first?**

My husband and I hired a doula to assist us with the labour and delivery. That was the best thing I could have done for my family. During my second pregnancy we took hypno-birthing classes and our doula came out and taught us how to relax and do breathing exercises. These

breathing exercises helped me relax during my pregnancy and were very beneficial during the labour and delivery. I had a much more positive and natural birthing experience with my second birth because of the preparation work and learning to breathe, properly. I never had an epidural this time around and had every intention not to get one. My delivery was much shorter and less work. I also had my doula and husband, right by my side, supporting me every step of the way. It was a very euphoric feeling after giving birth to her and I felt so much better the second time around.

**What lessons have you learned from your healing that are positive for your family?**

I have learned that going through Postpartum Depression is nothing to be ashamed of. I am using my voice that God gave me to help other women to speak out, as well. I have learned that being healthy in body, mind and spirit is very important for a mother to have, especially when looking after a newborn baby and other children. If the mother isn't happy and healthy, then the children and husband won't be either. I need to look after my body and mind by getting rest when I can, and ask for help. It "takes a village to raise a child," and in other cultures and countries they have a whole village or community to help them. I have grown a lot in spirit by having complete faith in God and I know that He will take care of me if I let Him. I have learned to think positive and to count my blessings and be grateful for everything in my life. It takes practice, but it really is the key to happiness. I surround myself and family with other people that are spiritual and positive, as well, so I have help staying positive and keeping my faith.

**If your daughters ever suffer from a mental illness how will you help them? What do you think is important for them to know, right now?**

If my daughters ever suffer from any kind of mental illness, I would want them to be educated on the signs and symptoms of depression, and let them know that I will always be there for them to help them in any way I can. I would let them know that it is important to get some kind of medical help, or to talk to someone as soon as possible, so it can be dealt with right away and not escalate. I also want them to know other strategies that can help to overcome PPD. They

should know that they should never be ashamed of a mental illness or for asking for help. They would be very courageous and smart for doing so. What I think is important for them to know, now, is to pray to God and give thanks for all they are blessed with. They need to be grateful for everything, and to not take anything for granted. I believe educating them on body, mind and spirit, now, will be key in helping them and, hopefully, preventing them from developing a mental illness. I want them to surround themselves with friends that are positive influences in their lives.

My experience with PPD has really helped me grow in body, mind and spirit and I've met a lot of wonderful and amazing women along my journey. I will continue to grow and pass all the knowledge onto my girls!

*If you feel compelled to become an ambassador by showcasing your courage on our website [www.thesmilingmask.com](http://www.thesmilingmask.com), please feel free to contact us, we would be most honoured to showcase your story.*

*If you have more ideas on how the message of hope and healing can get around our world...contact us at [info@thesmilingmask.com](mailto:info@thesmilingmask.com)!*

*Make a difference, today, by speaking out loud the valuable lessons you just learned. Feel free to print and share this interview for others to read!*

*~ Carla O'Reilly, Elita Paterson & Tania Bird*