

The following interview is the very reason why we women – Carla, Elita and Tania – are on a mission to spread as much awareness as we can about Postpartum Mood Disorders. We want to express our deepest gratitude for Terra Brockett for sharing her story and in turn honouring her dear friend, Jen and Jen's daughter.

In memory of your friend, what can you tell us about her before the illness? What sparked your friendship, what are some beautiful things you remember about her?

It's funny because Jen really amazed me in so many ways. She was a positive, open minded, energetic woman. She had a strong ethics and refused to do anything that went against her sense of right. As an academic, she graduated at the top of her class with a psychology degree from Ehwa Women's University, one of the top universities in South Korea. As an ESL teacher, she loved being around children and her students loved her because of the relationships she developed with them. She could dance and sing like Jennifer Lopez and was naturally athletic which meant she'd play any sport someone would invite her to play. She was not afraid to try anything. She had her own sense of fashion and somehow really pulled off outfits that I am not sure you could find on any runway.

I remember last summer when she spent a few weeks with us, how she was with my baby girl. There was a moment when I thought to myself that she was just a whole different level of parent as my daughter, who was always hard to settle, just cooed and laid there relaxed in her arms. She also had this effect on me. She was comforting.

How did the illness change her, and what did her symptoms look like?

I only know bits and pieces but my impression is that anxiety and fear literally ran her life. She was anxious about a lot of things, but mostly about her daughter's health. She really thought there was something wrong with her daughter. This anxiety dictated everything she did from multiple visits to the doctor to isolating herself by not leaving the "safety" of the house or letting people in to visit. Her fears made her feel like she could not trust anyone else to take care of her daughter. Her husband was not able to step in for any of the everyday parenting things like feedings or diaper changes. This of course meant greater struggle for Jen because she was doing even more work on less sleep. It was also a struggle for her husband who did his best to be involved and really wanted to take care of the baby and help her through this.

Was she aware of the illness, and was she able to share this with you?

Her husband had done a lot of research when she started to show signs of serious depression and they talked a lot about it, but she was not able to share the illness with most people including the medical community. She didn't want her husband to tell anyone so he became her main support. He took her to the doctor three times and she would minimize her struggle. She was afraid of what might happen. She was afraid of being away from her daughter and about being hospitalized long term in a scary place (the mental health hospital). In terms of the illness, I think she was afraid it would never end, especially when the anti-depressants she was prescribed did not work.

Were the symptoms recognizable to you as an outsider, what were some warning signs that you witnessed, or were they masked?

The warning signs, in retrospect, were the absence of phone calls, pictures and sharing stories about her baby. I assumed

that this lack of contact was because she was really busy being the "perfect" mother that I always imagined her to be. She was so involved and connected with the children in her life that I always imagined motherhood as something that came "naturally" or easily for her. I never imagined that her silence was really masking the excruciating reality of living with PPD. It's painful to think about how becoming a mother, something she had been looking forward to for so long, turned out to be such a struggle – how she struggled in silence, not allowing herself support – how those of us who knew her didn't offer support because we assumed that this woman who always amazed us could never be vulnerable to something like PPD.

If you could have a dialogue with her during the struggle and now knowing more about PPD, what would you have said to help her?

I would have been honest about my own struggle with PPD before she even gave birth. I would have tried to open a safe space for any future discussions on PPD by being understanding and sympathetic not only to my own struggle, but to the struggles of so many others. This is so important- the need to make it OK for her to share her pain. Honestly, I would have handed The Smiling Mask over to her and even gone over the book together, sharing thoughts and listening to what was going on for her. In this particular case, Carla's experience may have offered her hope or a different way to look at things when her meds didn't work. I would have legitimated her struggle while talking about possible options and resources that might help. The big thing is I guess is that I would have initiated a conversation that did not take place while she was alive.

Having suffered the loss of your friend what would tell others who may encounter PPD with their own friends or family?

Share your stories, experience, and knowledge about PPD. Others may feel differently about this, but I truly feel like being educated and prepared is important so that she can identify when something is not "normal." Don't assume anything. Don't assume that a completely resilient capable woman can't suffer PPD. Don't assume that silence is only a sign of being a busy mom. Don't assume that someone who appears happy is OK. Don't assume that she will let you know when she needs help-even if that was the case before having the baby...just don't assume.

Having the courage to share your story is very brave, what are your hopes for this interview?

I hope that this will speak to the serious potential of this illness and how it affects many different kinds of women. It is everyday women, our sisters, our daughters, and our friends who suffer from this illness. It is not something to be taken lightly or passed over as something that "women just need to get over" or "suck it up" (both comments of which I have heard in the past). Women themselves need to know that this is not a matter of being strong enough to handle it yourself, but being able to ask for help because this illness in its most severe form, has taken other women's lives. It is a serious, real illness that can hit anyone –including my friend, one of the most brilliant, selfless, loving women I knew.

If you feel compelled to become an ambassador by telling your story on our website www.thesmilingmask.com, PLEASE feel free to contact us, we would be most honoured to showcase your truth. If you have more ideas on how the message of hope and healing can get around our world...contact us at info@thesmilingmask.com! Make a difference, today, by speaking out loud the valuable lessons you just learned. Even print and share this interview for others to read!