

Candlelight Vigil 2016

In her book A Tough Grace, author Alice Holstein states that, “we need a somewhere to honor all those who have suffered and still suffer from mental illness. The war we fight is noble, unheard of, unclaimed, full of sacrifice and pain. We need a place to trace the names of those who have been lost as well as those who suffer while we strive for a better way to see and treat mental illness.”

My name is Carol Jane Slovachek and this is story behind my brick in that wall.

I was born on March 9, 1958.

My father Charles Slovachek was a WWII veteran and retired Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force. My father also earned a master’s degree in physical education taught for some thirty years.

My Mother Jane Slovachek was a home maker gardener and free lance designer for Mc Calls, Better Homes and Gardens and Family Circle magazines. She also authored a book.

Like many of you.....

- I am a daughter
- A namesake
- A sister
- A sibling
- An aunt
- A cousin
- A niece
- A God daughter and God mother of two
- I am also the Matriarch of my family

I imagine like you I have achieved a number things of as a young adult.....

- I was a Brownie a Girl Scout and a Cadet.
- I was placed in accelerated classes and I was on the honor roll throughout middle and high school.
- I was a babysitter and I worked twenty hours a week as a cashier during high school.
- I was selected to participate in several environmental study camps.
- I purchased a property on the Oconto River at age eighteen with my own money.
- I was cited as the most valuable female athlete of the class of 1976 after lettering in volleyball, basketball and track for four years. I was ranked sixth in state for discus.
- I received a scholarship from the local Women’s Business and Professional organization.
- Like most of my classmates, I left for college in the fall of 1976.

Soon after arriving at UW Steven's Point to study Forestry Management, I began to experience depression, sleep deprivation and suicidal ideation. I went to the campus medical center and I was told that I was homesick. Not long after, I dropped out of college and returned home.

I sought counseling for a number of years and worked full time while attending night school. The depression never seemed to lift and occasionally I had more energy than I could manage. I asked my counselor about manic depression but she felt that my issues were not that serious.

I consulted with my family doctor about several tests for physical conditions that can contribute to depression. When the tests came back negative he simply pointed his finger in my face and said that I was "emotionally disturbed."

I gave up counseling and pushed on. Finally at age twenty seven I was diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder and placed on medication. I took the meds as prescribed and within days I felt better on a low dose. When my blood levels were not in the therapeutic range an increased dose was ordered. On this increased dose I became toxic and psychotic and I required hospitalization to stabilize at my personal expense.

Since my initial Diagnosis in 1985

- I lost my river property in a judgment due to my hospital bills.
- I was promoted to supervision at the Postal Service and served for eighteen years after winning an EEO case on discrimination based on mental illness.
- I was cited with an award for outstanding supervision.
- I also received some twenty six suggestion awards.
- I built owned and rented a townhome for nearly ten years.
- I owned my own small business for three years.
- I became the legal guardian of my mother's health during her battle with early onset Alzheimer's until her death in 1999.
- Upon my mother's death I had her brain donated to the Harvard Brain Bank.
- I resigned from the US Postal Service in 2000 after being severely harassed about my mental health diagnosis and my use of Family Leave.
- I completed my Bachelor's degree in Business Administration in 2001.
- After my father's death in 2002 I survived four psychotic episodes.
- I survived being incarcerated for seventy days without proper medications on a first offense while in the throes of a psychotic episode.
- I live with a criminal record as result.
- I was evicted while being hospitalized and I was charged \$500 in Sheriffs fees to have my possessions sold out from under me. My car was also repossessed.
- I became homeless.
- I am a survivor of three suicide attempts
- I am a trauma survivor of childhood physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- I am an adult child of an alcoholic parent.
- I am an addict.

- I donate blood. I have been a stem cell donor and a Wisconsin organ donor.
- I am a volunteer and board member with NAMI.
- I am an In Our Own Voice Presenter and State Trainer.
- I am a Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist.
- I am currently employed as an instructor.
- I have been in recovery with Bipolar for nearly twelve years.

I wish that I could say to you that my story is unique but sadly I cannot. We need to find more and better ways to treat and prevent mental illness. It is my hope that after you listen to my story that you will no longer look at any person; much less a person who lives with mental illness and assume that they are not capable or deserving of dignity and respect. Reducing stigma starts with each one of us opening up our hearts and minds to those who are still suffering.