

Interview with....

**Kara Swanson**, author and professional speaker  
By **Kimberly Paetzold**, RainbowVisions Editor

I first became acquainted with Kara at the Brain Injury Association of Michigan Conference this past October, 2004. As the breakfast keynote speaker, Kara was witty, entertaining, informative, and well spoken - a thriving survivor of traumatic brain injury (TBI). In her book titled "I'll Carry the Fork!", she covers, in detail, her recovery, challenges and emotions in dealing with a TBI. In Kara's words "I wrote this book because the understanding of traumatic brain injury is limited even by our medical community, much less the average "civilian." I left that hospital without a clue as to what a head injury was or what that diagnosis would soon imply".

Kara has also spoken publicly around the country regarding her recovery and will speak again in Wisconsin next April. Following are some questions that Kara thoughtfully answered, and on behalf of the Rainbow Staff and clients, I would like to thank her for the interview. - Kimberly Paetzold



**Since your accident, what has been the biggest challenge for you to overcome?**

Probably the acceptance that there is nothing mild about mild traumatic brain injury. "Mild" is a ridiculous term. While I am very fortunate to remain high functioning, the effects of my injury continue to color my life even nine years post. For myself and for the people in my life, "mild" initially meant that I should heal entirely and quickly. When that didn't happen, I felt like a failure. It took me a long time to understand the complexities of this injury. I had to stop failing in a life that no longer existed and, instead, start focusing on creating a life that I could succeed in and enjoy.

**What single thought would you like to convey to other TBI individuals?**

That our injuries don't have the power to render us powerless or worthless. While it's important we respect the injury enough to accept what it has taken, it's more important that we refuse to give it any more than it deserves. Not our hope. Not our spirit. Not our potential to be happy, healthy, successful members of our families and our communities.

**What would you like to say to family and friends?**

We so need and appreciate your simple, genuine curiosity to understand what our new lives are like now. Your willingness to embrace change and welcome our new selves without judgement or comparison to who we once were often defines our measure of healing.

**Regarding "I'll Carry the Fork" and your public speaking tours, you must be very proud of your accomplishments. Can you share your feelings about this success?**

I consider my appearances to be rich opportunities to represent the countless survivors who can no longer articulate their thoughts clearly. I've met literally thousands of survivors, their families, and the people who work to help us dream again. Each is a humbling inspiration to me.

As for "Fork", it was and remains a dream come true. I could never have imagined the return in terms of warmth and good will from people all over the country. I am so proud to be a part of this community and I wouldn't trade my injury for anything. The blessings and gifts have far outweighed the challenges and losses.

What helped you the most in your recovery so far? Was it any particular method of therapy or perhaps the way your recovery team worked with you?

I was so fortunate to have a doctor, therapist, friends and family who would not allow me to fall through the cracks, physically, financially or emotionally. They helped me realize that recovery is a life-long process. That we heal all the time and not just within the walls of our doctors' and therapists' offices.

I cannot say enough about the help my dogs and cat provided. I think pets are an invaluable tool in successful recovery. There is nothing like unconditional love when you are trying to appreciate and welcome this new person you have become.

I have great faith. In God, in myself, in the people who are on my team, and in the power of hope. And I have great faith in chocolate (laughing here). When all else fails, you can't beat chocolate.

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