

KELLY BLISS

VICTORIOUS WOMAN OF THE MONTH – APRIL 2007

Tell Kelly Bliss you can't do something and you'll quickly find out you're talking to the wrong person. She believes when you label something with an "I can't" you dismiss it, and miss a wonderful opportunity to overcome the obstacle that could be standing between you and victory.

Kelly Bliss knows what she's talking about because she's been there and done that – both in using excuses and overcoming obstacles. A psychotherapist by profession, she is the creator of "Fitness with Bliss" and specializes in lifestyle coaching. As a young girl she suffered from low self-esteem and body image problems. She binged and purged her way through college, marriage to her much-older college professor, the birth of two children and into aerobic exercise. Whenever she let down her guard, ate too much and gained a little weight, her spouse criticized her size 12-14 body. The man, who constantly watched his own weight, justified his comments by telling Kelly, "If I don't keep criticizing your fat ugly bulges, you might just give up and stay this way."

By the time Kelly reached her mid-twenties, she felt unhappy and depressed. She began questioning everything. She especially wondered why she spent so much time unproductively, much of it eating and then throwing up the just eaten food. After some serious soul-searching, she concluded that she was seriously dissatisfied with her life. She wanted something more, something better.

That was the beginning of Kelly's new, healthy life. She chose to change her eating patterns and began behaving in ways that brought health back into her life. Eating became a joyful, sensual experience. Though Kelly did gain some weight, her love of exercise helped her stay trim.

A short time later, Kelly auditioned to be a fitness instructor for a national chain. She weighed 127 pounds, wore a size 14, and was in great shape. Her auditions went great! However, though praised for form and technique, the company turned her down. They ungraciously told Kelly she was "too fat" and didn't fit into the cookie-cutter form the organization wanted their instructors to have.

Afterward, Kelly got angry. She decided to put an end to being bullied about her weight. She was already working on herself and had come to believe that "people are supposed to come in all shapes and sizes. Everyone, of any size, has the right and responsibility to work toward fitness. Fitness is the result of a healthy lifestyle. Fitness has nothing to do with fatness."

By then Kelly was a single mother taking full control of her life. She found a new direction when she opened her own exercise studio. She catered to women of all sizes, and encouraged women to focus on their health and self-care instead of their size. At the same time, she earned both an advanced fitness certification and her master's degree in education. Kelly was on her way up...or so she thought.

In 1991, during a car accident, Kelly's head smashed against the windshield and resulted in epilepsy. Though most of the epileptic seizures were minor in intensity, she had so many of them each day that she couldn't work, drive and often couldn't even have normal conversations. For a while, Kelly Bliss felt trapped. However, she refused to be the victim of disability and committed to finding a practical way to manage her life.

As Kelly worked with her doctors and different medications to find the right treatment, she strategized her success. It took a great deal of creative problem solving to overcome multiple obstacles, but she found a way to extend her old career and find a new career.

First, Kelly continued to exercise for her own fitness. As a consequence of the epilepsy, she knew she was likely to have a seizure and forget her routine, so she began videotaping her exercises. If she had a seizure, she could find her place and get back on track with the video. They not only worked for her, but more and more, others wanted them too. So "Fitness with Bliss" was born. Starting with exercises only, Kelly then began teaching plus-size clients fitness through healthy eating and self-care.

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Next, she offered psychotherapy sessions for a small number of clients by phone, affording her the option of hanging up during a seizure and continuing later. Kelly “became skilled at the art of phone therapy.” Those first successful rounds of sessions led her into the field of lifestyle coaching.

As Kelly continued to work with clients on issues of health and fitness, she often heard her plus size clients express the desire to have one place to get what they needed, a “comprehensive resource...available within a few clicks. “ So she got the idea for www.PlusSizeYellowPages.com, took out a 2nd mortgage to make it happen and now has listings for everything from lingerie and furniture to medical supplies and therapists.

As Kelly teaches people how to build a healthy eating style and learn self-acceptance, she sees herself as part of a small but growing size-acceptance movement within the fitness industry. She has people, mostly women, of all sizes in her aerobic classes. Her book, *Don't Weight*, encourages people to forget energy-depleting will power and strive instead for a healthy lifestyle that feels good. Kelly advises, “When you appreciate yourself and take care of yourself, your *health* will get better. If you take care of yourself and your health, *your life* will get better.”

Over the years and through challenges and obstacles, Kelly learned lessons that she shares with all women. It doesn't take long to learn that she thinks women don't challenge others when they're told something they want to do is impossible; she suggests women push back more by challenging a “NO” with a “why not?” or even a “help me to understand why...”

Kelly also believes that the energy we could use to make our lives better is “being siphoned off the top and the bottom.” To avoid letting that happen, she suggests taking the time and energy to “build a system to make your life work...and then you free up your energy to do something else.”

Kelly practices what she preaches. Unable to drive, she moved to a small, community-focused town with easy access to shopping and services. She also bought and uses an adult tricycle, which helps her travel faster. Though she admits it's not as fast as driving, it's faster than walking and enables her to have more personal freedom. She continuously develops her network of interdependent contacts and is on a first-name basis with practically everyone in town. Kelly is frequently called on by local and national television shows, newspapers and magazines for her expert opinion on plus-size fitness.

She tells others, “After the accident, I thought my dream of helping people of all sizes to lead healthier lives was dead. At first, I thought my disability was an insurmountable obstacle that I could not overcome. Well, I did not overcome it. I embraced it. My head injury was the best educational experience I have had since graduate school!”

Kelly Bliss, you are this month's Victorious Woman honoree because you proved that physical disabilities aren't death sentences. You shaped your challenges into victories and, in the process, have shown us that each of us can create happy, healthy, productive and satisfying lives no matter what our circumstance or size.

Congratulations, Kelly Bliss!

Like victory itself, your courage and determination is amazingly contagious. Keep spreading your message until everyone catches it!

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You can learn more about Kelly's twelve workouts on DVD and video, Fitness with Bliss and the Plus-Size yellow pages at www.kellybliss.com. To read about other Victorious Woman honorees, go to <http://www.victoriouswoman.com/vwmonth.htm>.

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