

HOW I DID IT

Gloria Horsley, Founder and President of Open to Hope Foundation

By Dr. Gloria Horsley and Dr. Heidi Horsley

A single phone call on Easter morning in 1983 changed my life forever. Just 13 words: “Your son and his cousin have been in an automobile accident and neither survived.”

Those words would rock my world and begin an amazing journey from desperation to hope, healing and a life of service.

At the time of my 17-year-old son’s death, I was a clinical nurse specialist at the University of Rochester Medical Center and on the faculty of the nursing school. I had worked with hundreds of bereaved families. I had even published articles on grieving. In fact, just a week before Scott died, I met with a young man recovering from a car rollover that killed his brother. I told the boy and his parents, “I don’t know what you’re going through, but I have some information that I think might help you.”

Now, my words came back to me. It was my turn to experience the pain. My husband and I had lost our only son, and my three daughters had lost their beloved brother. I realized I didn’t have a clue what that family was going through.

Grief changed me quickly, both physically and mentally. I was totally unprepared. I lost weight, couldn’t sleep and was overcome by obsessive thoughts of the car accident. It is like being suddenly kidnapped and transported to a foreign land without luggage, passport or the language to make sense of what’s happening.

My clinical knowledge gave me something of a roadmap for where I would be going, but I still had to take the trip, along with other bereaved parents. It’s a club no one wants to belong to. At the time, there was little in the way of grief support. Programs like hospice were in their infancy so Phil and I were on our own, embarking on a lonely journey with no plan of action.

It took time and energy, but as the years went by, we again found joy and purpose in our lives. When our three daughters left home we moved to

California. Phil started his own business and I opened a private psychotherapy practice. Over time through reading, writing and telling my story, I had eventually found a new language and new pathways to help me steer a course toward hope.

Then, as I approached what I thought was my retirement, my life again changed in unexpected ways. As a volunteer with [The Compassionate Friends](#), I began to do an Internet radio show to give bereaved parents a voice. Parents not only told their stories but also discussed how they had gone on to not only survive but thrive. The show was a great success and was posted weekly on The Compassionate Friends website. I had signed up for 13 shows and toward the end of the contract, I received the following e-mail: “Dr. Gloria, I noticed that you only have two more show listed on the website. I hope you’re not going to stop, as you are my lifeline.”

I was so moved that I continued on for the next five years and was eventually joined by my daughter, Heidi, a clinical psychologist who wanted to give bereaved siblings a voice. As time went on, Heidi and I were surprised by the number of e-mails we received from listeners looking for hope and support. Many had not only lost children, but spouses, siblings, and parents as well.

In 2005 Heidi and I started [The Open to Hope Foundation](#). Our mission was to help people find hope after loss. Our motto became: “Lean on our hope until you find your own.” At this point I was age 67 and starting a whole new career. I had found a project that I was passionate about and that gave my life a whole new purpose and meaning.

Today, Open to Hope Foundation is the largest and most trafficked grief Website on the Internet. We have over 300 regular contributors, who have written over 3,000 articles. We’ve produced over 350 radio shows, 100 YouTube forums, two self-published books, and we plan to publish seven others—all focused on grief, loss, hope, and healing. We also have an international calendar where people and organizations from around the world can list their upcoming workshops, camps, and events related to grief and healing.

This is how I did it and what I've learned it takes to be a social entrepreneur:

1. Embrace change and find your passion

I've learned so much about loss and life since Scott's death. I have learned that if you open yourself to hope, out of loss can come new growth and opportunity. You can open yourself to all sorts of possibilities and develop passions that you had long forgotten. Surf the Internet to see what people are doing in your area of interest. The Internet is a vast resource to help you realize your dreams and to get in touch with your creativity. Be the change you want to see in the world.

2. Get yourself a mission statement

Mine is helping people find hope after loss. I would suggest that you get together with 3 or 4 friends and or family members and have them spend the day with you talking about your passions and possibilities for expressing them. Have a large pad of paper where you can put key words and ideas. Some questions to get you started. What are some words that express your passion? Is money a motivation or are you mainly interested in helping others. By the way you can do both. You can produce a good product that sells and benefits the world. Your statement should be brief, clear and should fit on the back of an envelope or napkin. Practice giving people your mission statement in ten words or less.

4. Consider whether you want to work in the for-profit or non-profit world

The time is now for you to start thinking about starting a new business or a new foundation. Starting a Foundation is fun and interesting; however, it is also time-consuming and expensive. There are extensive government regulations, and if you start one, I suggest that you have a lawyer on your board. Try volunteering first with a Foundation that expresses your passion and go from there. I volunteered with The Compassionate Friends before starting my Foundation.

5. Find Role Models

I have run across many people in my journey who inspired me and were role models and mentors to me. Several years after the death of her young son Kim, a housewife, started her own business creating beautiful garden spaces for others. She markets her Inviting Spaces business on the

Internet. Rosanne, whose daughter died of a drug overdose, volunteers as a chapter leader for The Compassionate Friends. Michelle Neff Hernandez, a young widow, started Soaring Spirits Foundation to help widows cope, and twice a year runs Camp Widow and Widower. Others, like our friend Candice Lightner, form national advocacy groups. Candy created MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, in honor of her daughter who was killed by a drunk driver. Reg Green, a journalist, whose young son was killed in Italy by bandits, has moved the entire country to start an organ donation program.

6. Market Yourself Relentlessly

You have to put yourself "out there." Volunteer to write for others blogs or sign up to host a Blog Radio Show. With the technology available to us today, it is actually easy to start you own radio show. I started with Voice America on-line radio. You pay them and they guide you through the process. There are also many other blog networks advertised on the net. There are women's networks and networks where there are pictures of you as well as sound. I currently pre-record my own show in-studio and post it on my website weekly. You can also self-publish your own book. Take those great ideas and put them down on paper. Again there are many services out there to help you publish your book. One option is Amazon's service that will take you through the entire process and you can list self-published books on Amazon. The Open to Hope Foundation self-published two books last year. Creating your own website or blog is also important. There are services that will help you create inexpensive blogs and websites just look on the web. Ask friends and get references as some web design services are easier to work with than others.

Most of all, have fun and enjoy the journey.

Please visit our on-line community at www.opentohope.com where you can listen to my radio show, watch our YouTube videos and read our articles. I would be interested in hearing about what you are doing and answering any questions you may have.

Dr. Gloria Horsley MFC CNS Ph.D. is the Founder and President of the Open to Hope Foundation, a multi media web based resource for the

bereaved. Gloria is an internationally known grief expert, psychotherapist, and bereaved parent. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, and has worked in the field of family therapy for over 25 years. Gloria co-hosts the Internet radio show, "Open to Hope," and has authored a number of books and articles. She is the co-author along with her daughter Heidi of Open to Hope: Inspirational Stories of Healing after loss and Open to Hope: Inspirational Stories of Handling The Holidays. She has been on a number of radio and television shows including "The Today Show".