

# Can a Horse Really Fly?

## The possible dream

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When I was a kid, I remember a gas station on a busy street in our town that always fascinated me. It was a quaint cottage-looking building with a fieldstone front; and it sat cross-wise on a corner lot. But even more interesting than the station itself, was the sign that branded their fuel. It was a symbol of a magnificent flying red horse. Aside from the red suckers the owner gave the neighborhood kids with the same symbol, I wasn't sure what the symbol meant.

The symbol stuck with me just as much as the cliché my mother repeated to me every time I started a sentence with the words, "I wish..."

She would respond, "If wishes were horses, than beggars would ride." That cliché was a mystery to me just like imagining that a horse could fly. What kind of an answer was that?

Today, in the adult world, the cliché takes on a whole new meaning and maybe the flying red horse does too. Perhaps, both were meant to be illusions of "hope." Without hope, beggars wouldn't be wishing for a ride...and horsepower couldn't be magically transformed from ordinary fuel to extraordinary power to soar.

There is a personal power, born from hope, that is far greater than any we could manufacture or harness in any living beast. The potential and the accomplishments of ordinary people in uncertain situations are transformed and hope becomes the "possible dream."

It is this kind of hope that gives griever a triumphant kind of "super" strength to overcome, reach out, and move forward. Dale Carnegie said: "**Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.**"

### Choosing to live beyond

In my journey through grief, I realized that little glimmers of hope continued to lead my husband, Gary, and me forward, like the carrot dangling in front of the burro. I couldn't name what those glimmers of hope were specifically, but I am certain they were the underlying efforts of family, faith and friends who visibly and invisibly provided support everyday.

Many years have passed since I had these initial thoughts about my grief. Sometimes, it feels like yesterday, and at other times, it seems so long ago. Nothing could have prepared me for the impact of grief and the evolution of a "new me." The quality of life after such an experience is not determined by the experience itself, but rather how one responds to that experience. We had to make the choice to either grow from our experience or slowly let it drain our spirit and destroy the rest of our lives.

That choice—to survive—is the most important choice we ever made. The word "survive" comes from the Latin: SUR meaning "live" and VIVE meaning "beyond." *To live beyond.* I wanted to live beyond, live through, and live above this tragedy that threatened to destroy. This was an unplanned trip in the journey of life. Unplanned trips are those inconveniences that happen when you thought things were running smoothly. Sometimes those inconveniences are so

traumatic that they become life-changing events. Accepting the “ride” is about making choices, taking risks and allowing your heart and your head to work in unison.

### **My wishes became horses**

Over time, my wishes became horses, and I learned how to ride. I wished for a day without tears and the endless hours began to accumulate until there was a whole day without tears. I wished that God would take away my pain, and I found that when I allowed Him to share the burden of my loss, the load became lighter. I wished I didn't have to grieve alone, and I found many others who also suffered the death of a loved one. I wished for an easier time facing each working day, and my co-workers began to accept my pain and talk to me without judging my situation. I wished my husband would grieve like me, and I found that even though we grieved differently, we each had feelings that shared the same depth of pain. I wished for a way to express my feelings and God inspired me to write. So I published the *Wings* magazine for ten years and then kept on writing. I wished for renewed meaning in life and found meaning and purpose are rooted in helping others through grief. I wished for a day of sunshine, and the clouds would break letting the glorious stream of light chase away the gloom.

### **Suggestions to prepare yourself for the “ride”**

Like other great journeys in life, a journey begins with a single step.

- **Begin with “baby steps”**

In grief, the first step is small. It is called “accepting the pain.” Test yourself in the world that demands that you “forget” and “move on.” Gradually, return to work, school, church and social events that require mingling with others and answering difficult questions. Adjust your tolerance for those who discount your grief. You control what you say and how much you are willing to share.

You are special. You have loved and lost. The pain you feel is because you have loved deeply. No one can take away your relationship with your loved one who died.

- **Evaluate your priorities.**

What really matters most to you now? Will it make a difference tomorrow if you do something or not? Does your choice have a direct, lasting effect on your personal spiritual growth? Consider things in life that have greater value than ever before such as relationships, personal time, family, spirituality, health, etc. Choose which is most important to you and work to preserve things that matter.

- **Do something that makes you feel good.**

You have been hurt. This means taking time to do something because you really want to do it. Redirect your energy to accomplish things that give you personal satisfaction. Do what you love to do—as long as it enriches your life and feeds your spirit with positive energy.

- **Think about options.**

What can you do that's different than you did before? Is there something you have always wanted to accomplish that you never did “just because.” Think about ways to change events or situations that are uncomfortable. It doesn't mean you have to quit having family gatherings; you might just have to change how or where you do them.

- **Don't sweat the small stuff.**

It's easy to get "lost" in all the things we can't change. The "shoudda, woudda, couldda" thoughts can bring you down to the level of feeling like a victim. When that feeling comes over you, change your focus almost immediately.

- Discover support.

Seek out people who care, people who will listen. Form a stronger relationship with your spiritual self and God.

- Take care of today—today.

Live one day at a time. Don't set your expectations so high that you have to struggle to meet them. Focus on what you can reasonably get done today and be patient with yourself. Each day you will get stronger and smarter about your grief.

I believe in the power of hope. I believe that hope, like faith, is not seen but dwells deep within the human soul and feeds the spirit of optimism, which is soul food. I also believe that given the right circumstances, a horse could really fly. There is a parable about two men sentenced to death by the Emperor of Persia, many, many years ago.

***One man knew the Emperor loved his white stallion and, in exchange for his life, he promised that he could make the horse fly within one year. The Emperor wished to be wealthy and famous and pictured himself as the only man in the world who would own a flying horse. So he agreed to the stay of execution for twelve months.***

***The second prisoner looked at his friend in disbelief and wanted to know why he would agree to such a crazy scheme. "Even if your greatest wish was granted, you know you can't make a horse fly. Why would you ask for your anguish to continue when you know that a year from now you will be put to death anyhow?"***

***The wise prisoner answered. "I have actually given myself four chances for freedom. First, the Emperor might die in the next twelve months. Second, I might die. Third, the horse might die. Or fourth, I might just teach the horse to fly."***

Hope can turn your troubles into triumphs. There will be both challenges and opportunities. You may step back two steps and forward only one step. One door may close and another may open. You will laugh and you will cry. You will be humbled by memories and challenged by the task of overcoming personal sadness and fears. But you will move forward. When you take "baby steps," you give yourself the gift of hope.

Who knows? You might even teach a horse how to fly.

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