

Share Hope in Meaningful Ways.



www.mobiletorch.org

The Torch

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The Beginning

Remember to breathe.

When the pain from the death of a loved one overwhelms your heart and constricts your throat, remember to breathe.

When you lose your job and none are to be found, remember to breathe.

When the bills pile up and money is scarce, remember to breathe.

As the year of divorce slowly moves forward and sadness and feelings of failure threaten to suffocate you, remember to breathe.

There have been times in my life when my brain seemed to cease functioning. My thoughts were scrambled into a jumble of incoherent, illogical streams and I frequently found myself unable to figure out, much less take, the next step, or any step at all.

I learned then the importance of stopping and reminding myself to breathe. I realized I was literally, without even realizing it, holding my breath as if that could stop the pain from hurting so badly.

I discovered if I stopped moving and focused my attention on breathing, my brain calmed down and my body relaxed.

Try it right now - take a deep breath and hold it for fifteen seconds - for one quarter minute focus your attention only on breathing or, in this case, not breathing.

As you slowly exhale, feel the tension leave your muscles.

After I remember to breathe, I force myself to recall other painful moments in the past when everything worked out fine. And I know somehow it will be okay in the end. And it always is.

In the past nine years, I have had more heartache than I ever expected I could endure. I am grateful for my true friends and family who stood by me, supporting and praying even when I had nothing left to give.

But in the midst of the pain and heartache and troubles there have also been blessings.

My friend Sarah and I worked together at a church in a neighborhood we prayed for often, which in turn caused us to develop a love for the people who lived there. The church provided weekly dinners on Wednesday nights for the first

few years after I took a job as the children and family ministries' director. The dinners were intended to be fundraisers for various ministries of the church. As those things go, however, the dinners were found not to be very lucrative and volunteer helpers were scarce, so they were discontinued.

The next fall, when the children's club (which I led) started up again, neighborhood children poured into the building as usual. Not too many weeks passed by before the children began asking me when we would be offering dinner on Wednesday night again. I have to admit, I was taken by surprise. The decision to stop serving the weekly meals had been made purely based on the fact the dinners did not serve the purpose they were intended for - to raise funds for ministry. The fact children and teens who lived in the neighborhood came early to eat dinner before Awana and youth group had gone unnoticed - and they were hungry! I started praying and thinking about how to resolve that issue - and a ministry called CT SCAN was born.

I had been searching for an ongoing service opportunity for the children and teens of the church. I wasn't finding anything in the community, so when I started thinking about the logistics of facilitating a meal program run by children and teens FOR children and teens I started to get excited. I had a conversation with my co-worker and friend, Sarah, and she brainstormed the name and helped develop the ministry and we took off! By the following fall a group of teens and children had fundraised and collected food donations. The church kitchen was licensed and CT SCAN began with a spaghetti dinner and 15 participants. That ministry continued weekly for six months. Teens and children repeatedly stepped up to the plate and faithfully served. On the final night of CT SCAN over 40 people were fed. The ministry stopped when it was really starting to boom and I was devastated.

The ending felt desperately painful and sad but, as often happens, Sarah and I did not realize it was not an ending - it was actually a beginning. It started with an extended period of growth and a spiritual coming of age. We both experienced homelessness, despair, frustration, anger and fear over the course of the next few years. Our friend Kelly was there - supporting, encouraging, praying and crying alongside us. We were enduring the painful process of molding, squeezing, and shaping which would prepare us for ministry to come.

During the time when Sarah and I were searching for Hope and scrambling to take care of our mental, physical and emotional needs, we never stopped thinking about CT SCAN and wondering how we could continue such a promising ministry as that one. We looked at buildings and dreamed of kitchens. We talked about meeting with community business owners to see if we could find someone willing to finance our undertaking. We were financially and emotionally broke, but spiritually on a road to healing and vitality. We prayed constantly for an opportunity to present itself.

One day, when Sarah and I were eating dinner she told me she had an idea for how we could continue CT SCAN. She suggested instead of looking for a building where we could set up a kitchen, we consider purchasing a food truck, which would allow us to bring food and Hope to the people, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Such a blessing to have a friend who is gifted to think so radically outside the box! At first, I didn't see how we could possibly make it happen. There were so many questions and things we didn't know - Where do you get a food truck? How do you license it? What would this ministry look like? How would we run it? After thinking and praying and talking about it for weeks we made some decisions.

First, we decided it was not viable to continue operating the entire ministry as CT SCAN. It was a very different thing to have children and teens running a ministry from a stationary kitchen within the confines of a church setting. The decisions and responsibilities of facilitating a mobile ministry would be too great of a burden to place on their shoulders. And besides, they couldn't even drive a food truck! But we strongly believe CT SCAN is a necessary and vital opportunity for children and teens, so we decided we would offer it as a sub-ministry of our undertaking.

We also chose - because we had long dreamed about becoming a beacon of hope to people - to name the new ministry The Torch. Torches represent light - whether they are flashlights or burning fire. People always move toward the light when they are surrounded by darkness. We had felt the darkness of despair, fear, sadness, and worry ourselves and yet had experienced Hope in the midst of it and that was what we wanted to share with our world.

Next we decided we would start looking into what we had to do to become a nonprofit organization. We had no clue how to go about an undertaking so large. We discovered the permits and licenses and forms we had to fill out and tackled the work. We learned the first thing we had to do was to become incorporated in the State of Michigan. I cannot describe how amazingly wonderful it felt to open the envelope containing our official State of Michigan incorporation paperwork.

We heard from everyone we consulted one of the biggest hurdles to overcome would be receiving approval from the IRS as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. We learned it could take up to three years to get approval and there were very strict guidelines and rules we would have to follow. We researched, studied and filled out the forms. We were prepared to wait and pray.

We knew our dear friend Kelly would be an intelligent resource, helper and balancer for our strong personalities (although hers is just as strong, we deeply valued her third perspective and point of view) so we met with her and signed her on. When we received the IRS determination approving us as a tax-exempt organization just *two months* after we applied, we took it as a solid affirmation from God we were on the right track.

What follows in this book are our stories sharing our Hope and why each one of us carries The Torch.

Sarah

I grew up a tom-boy, proudly playing two on two baseball and football in the backyard with my older brother Marshall, and two older cousins, Josh and Buck. We would battle for hours on end and always leave “the field” covered in dirt, sweat, and oftentimes, blood, as each of the games resulted in a drag out fight and many vicious blows. I dreamt of being a shortstop for the Detroit Tigers when I grew up and just assumed my brother and cousins would be part of the World Series-winning Tigers’ team with me. We would restore the roar of Detroit baseball, and bring back the golden era which featured such amazing athletes as Jack “The Cat” Morris and “Sweet Lou” Whitaker! I had no idea how growing up competing and fighting daily as we played backyard baseball was going to prepare me for the battles I would face as an adult.

My love for sports and my competitive nature continued into my teen years and so I played every sport under the sun in middle and high school. Sadly, my baseball career came to an end before it even began, as I had five shoulder surgeries on my right shoulder (my dominant arm) before the age of 28. I now bring the term “throwing like a girl” to an entirely new level of pathetic.

The only thing I have ever loved more than sports was my country. I bleed red, white and blue, and well up with tears and pride when the American National Anthem is played. Since my duty of restoring the glory of the Detroit Tigers fell to the true professionals and those who could actually hit a 98 mph fastball, I took my patriotism and desire to compete, and joined the United States Army. Even though my time in the military was also cut short due to more shoulder injuries, the lessons I learned and friends I made will stay with me for a lifetime. It is a time of my life I would not trade, or change, for anything. One of the first lessons taught in basic training is to never go anywhere without a “battle buddy.” I was blessed enough to cross paths with Rhonda and Kelly after my time in the service, and in them have found two “battle buddies” I know I can always count on and who have stood by me every step of the way.

Lately, people ask me why I want to start a non-profit organization, why I would turn down high paying jobs with good benefits in order to pursue The Torch, and why I would take on all which will inevitably go along with this

endeavor? My answer is simple - because I was the least of these, as stated in Matthew 25:40. The Bible speaks often of helping the poor, the needy, the homeless, the unwanted - and all of these are roles I have filled. One of my lowest points in my life in the past two years came when my car broke down and I had to resort to renting a car to get to an appointment. The rental car I got was literally one step away from being in the junkyard itself and not much to write home about - which I could not have done either, because at this time I was also homeless. I ended up sleeping in the rental car that night, and around 3:30 in the morning, I received a text message letting me know my grandmother had passed away. About an hour later, a man tried to break into the car, not realizing I was sleeping in the back of it. I began to cry. As if that night had not been brutal enough, I knew I would soon have to go to my grandma's funeral, and bury my second grandparent in two months, as my grandfather had passed away just a few weeks prior. The next day I picked up my car, drove it to a parking lot, and spent the last dollar in my bank account on a bean burrito from Taco Bell. That night Kelly drove to the parking lot in the pouring rain and literally dragged me to her house, where I would live for the next month.

To answer the numerous questions as to "why" - I feel with all that is within me I have been created and made for such a time as this. I feel it is my duty, my obligation, and over the past two years it has become a consuming *desire* to help people both locally, and globally, and to share the Good News with them.

I carry The Torch because I hit rock bottom and then kept falling.

I carry The Torch for anyone who is struggling to stand on his/her own two feet and needs someone to come drag him/her out of the storm.

I carry The Torch for anyone who has served, or will serve, our great Country. You are not forgotten and I want you to know I appreciate your sacrifice every day of my life. Because of you, I am free and can write this book.

I carry The Torch for the disabled and anyone with a handicap. I have a vague understanding of what you may be going through and know how badly it hurts, on a daily basis, to see your dreams lost and to not be able to do what you used to do.

I carry The Torch for my niece and nephews, three people whom are perfectly created and just by being alive have taught me true unconditional love. Because of them, the world is a better and more beautiful place.

I carry The Torch for my grandparents. I was blessed to be raised with all four of my grandparents and to be able to share numerous memories with them. I was able to see each of them fight in their own regard and I want them to know the time spent with them was, and is, cherished. Because of their influences and the lessons they taught me, I will humbly help others the way I know each of my grandparents would want me to.

I carry The Torch for those struggling to make ends meet. For two years I could not work due to a shoulder injury and was forced to live off \$376 a month from disability pay from the Army. \$4,512 a year can only buy so many bean burritos and pay so many bills. Somewhere along the line though, I realized my \$12 a day, while well below poverty standards in the United States, still made me among the richest people in the world. I could not shake the images of the beautiful, helpless people in Haiti who I was fortunate enough to meet, work with, and fall in love with. I became laden with guilt about the fact I had so many pairs of shoes while others had none, and the fact I complained about being hungry on any day, when I knew millions of people were literally starving to death. I carry The Torch for people worldwide who are living in poverty. Food is not optional and no person should go hungry or thirsty.

I carry The Torch because life is hard. Life can be brutal. Life can be unfair. Life can make no sense. And because I was literally at the end of my rope, without a dollar to my name, and felt betrayed and hurt so deeply there were days all I could do was cry and wonder how people could be so cruel.

I carry The Torch because along the way, through all the surgeries, the hurts, and my own missteps and mistakes, I found true Hope. I found more than two Earthly “battle buddies” who believed in me more than I believed in myself, I found a Heavenly “battle buddy.” I found a God filled with grace and mercy and who willingly looked past ALL my numerous mistakes and saw only my potential. I found more than a reason to “get by” I found a reason to truly live and to help awaken people to a life they could have as well.

I carry The Torch because it has been carried for me - by veterans, by grandparents, by friends, by strangers who gave me a home to live in when I was homeless, and always by a loving, forgiving, God.

I carry The Torch, proudly, humbly, with honor, pride and a promise to all who read this - you are not alone. I will do whatever I can to help you get back on your feet, to listen, and to provide Hope.

I carry The Torch for you.

Rhonda

The first half of my life as an adult was perfect. Yes, perfect.

I became a Christian believer in my early twenties and found my niche in the church working with community children in a Wednesday night outreach program at every church I attended. I was so motivated; I even initiated the program at one of them. I was a leader, teacher, mentor, promoter, planner and advocate for those kids and my volunteers. For many years I stood up week after week and taught Bible lessons to the children in the programs. On the outside, I was a mature Christian who had it all. I lived in a lovely home and had amazing children of my own who accomplished much. Although I never consciously thought about it, I rested assured God was pleased with all the efforts and accomplishments I made and so He blessed me with His favor.

Then one night, I found myself teaching a moving lesson which was bringing leaders and children to tears. As I looked out at the crowd it was like God removed a veil from my eyes and I realized in shock how detached I was from my own lesson. I was teaching His Words but not EXPERIENCING them. I was not applying what I knew and I certainly had left God out of the teaching. I was relying on my own skills and strengths and I was doing it in the name of God!

Shaken to the core, I made a commitment to Him it would never happen again. I disciplined myself to read His Word and pray daily. For the first time ever, I prayed many prayers which went beyond just asking God to meet my needs. That moment and those commitments were the beginning of true life training I would need to hang on during some very dark days to come.

Several years later - I had trained myself well and once again thought I had it all. I viewed my life as smooth and relatively worry-free because I prayed and read my Bible every day. I thought God's promise He would not give me more than I could handle meant life would be filled with joy and lacking in sorrow, except for a few bumps along the way, as long as I kept up my end of the bargain - reading and praying daily. My assumption was anyone who did not have the wonderful life I had must surely have some hidden sin in her life or certainly did not read her Bible and pray every day as I did.

Oh the smugness of my limited point of view as I squished God firmly into my personal vending machine!

But then, my world was shattered when my sister died unexpectedly and my ideas of what it meant to be a Christian believer began to undergo a radical change. Suddenly, no matter how hard or long I prayed, no matter how much I fasted, I did not get what I wanted.

Debbie did not come back to life.

My body went numb. Everything felt out of place. And along the way, I kept forgetting to breathe.

For three years I was a visitor on Earth, passing through life separate from those around me, barely able to feel, so deeply was I hurting.

People said ignorant things to me during that time. I was told by one individual I couldn't possibly miss Debbie since we lived so far apart. Others said I should take comfort because it was God's will. I was also asked if Debbie was living a good Christian life before she died - with a clear insinuation if she had been she would still be alive.

The fact of the matter is evil is in this world. Because of that, bad things like death, sickness, pain, and suffering occur. They happen and nobody is immune. If Christians walked around in protected bubbles, and were never allowed to experience the painful parts of life, everyone would want to be a Christian - not because Christ satisfies a deep need - rather, they would do it because they wanted to live inside their own protected bubbles so they would never have to suffer.

Eventually, as with all wounds, I began to heal and a result of that process was I found a new me. Losing Debbie taught me true empathy for my fellow human beings.

Never again would I brush off someone else's pain with a banal and rehearsed "Christian" response. I learned to listen and prayed I could help to bear my fellow human beings' hurts.

My perfect life never returned. Over the course of the next several years my world was rocked by the intrusion of pornography and divorce, and other very real, but seldom addressed threats to Christian believers. Suddenly, I wore a scarlet "D" and I wasn't entirely surprised when I had to leave my church home. I

knew the drill. I had been on the other side many times. It was okay for Christians to get divorced at another church and come to whatever church I attended - they could join in and serve and participate with the body.

It was NOT okay for the people who attended my church to get divorced and try to stay. Until I walked in those shoes the hypocrisy of that completely missed me. Not to mention the fact at the very time when people are going through possibly the deepest emotional, physical and mental pain of their lives those who claim to represent the only Hope in the world turn their backs. I am ashamed I ever identified with that facade of Christianity.

Now, I know it's very tempting to misunderstand here. I am NOT saying divorce is good or okay – but my experience has been there are a lot of sins residing comfortably in the church which are only lightly addressed, if at all - sins like obesity, gluttony, pride, greed, gossip and a feverish pursuit of wealth - while those who divorce receive a double dose of guilt and condemnation. The fact is sin is sin is sin. We do not live in a perfect world. As lovely as it might seem to picture a Utopia in which the Christian divorce rate is zero - the reality is it won't happen in a fallen world. And God made us. He knows us intimately. He still loves. He still forgives. He remains faithful.

At that point I found myself homeless, hurting, physically ill with Mono - AND without a church family to pray for and support me. The rumor mill among the Christians I knew (always couched as “prayer requests” of course) went rampant. I found myself attacked through email and Facebook by people I had not seen or heard from in years. The world was upside-down and inside-out and nothing made sense.

How could these things happen? I **loved** God! Deeply. I had given myself wholeheartedly to ministry for over twenty-five years! I prayed and read my Bible *every day*! No matter how I looked at it, I had done the right things, I had done *good* things.

Or had I?

A two-year process began in which I was squeezed and molded and changed. I found hope in God in ways I never had before. He helped me understand my faith in Him is not to be grounded in how pleasant I find my

circumstances to be. Nor is it to be based on the approval I receive from the Christians around me. Or promises of things to come.

My faith and hope in God come from relying on Him fully to meet my needs, love me, and give me peace no matter what my life holds.

I've met many people who have been hurt by the Church. I've met many who distrust Christians and are wary in Christian presence. It hurts my heart to know that is the case. It breaks my heart to know there are people living in this world who have never felt the touch of unconditional, accepting Love. They are trying to make sense of life on their own and find the pursuit to be fruitless.

I carry The Torch for the homeless, hungry, divorced, hurting, lonely, and weak. I carry The Torch so that every time I enter a neighborhood - lives will be touched. And when I leave - lives will be better. I carry The Torch to show people there *is* love in the world and they matter so much to me I will sacrifice and work hard and pray for them.

I carry the Torch because I think the Church tends to sit waiting for the lost to come through its doors; but many people need Jesus to come to them. They have been hurt, disillusioned, disappointed and are afraid or wary or simply uncomfortable passing through church doors. They need Hope.

I carry the Torch as a symbol of Hope.

I carry The Torch because I so deeply care about the lives of the people around me.

I believe, therefore I carry.

As long as there are people in need, I will carry The Torch.

Kelly

I carry the torch because it was passed to me; by loving parents, extended family, church family, youth leaders, and camp counselors. Each had a role in my Christian life and helped shape me by word and example. In short, it's all I've ever known. That doesn't mean it's been a walk without trials and tribulations, because it hasn't been. There have been plenty of times my torch has been hidden under the proverbial bushel basket. Death, abuse, divorce, and personal choices dimmed it many times. But the Bible is true in its promise when it says "Raise up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it". It was never, and will never, be extinguished. A lesson I learned several years ago, however, taught me about passing it on and liberated me as a Christian in the process.

Growing up, I learned the Great Commission – as Christians we are to go forth into the world spreading the love and story of Christ – carry a torch for Him if you will, to pass on the warmth and light to others. Unfortunately, for most of my life I harbored a warped and myopic understanding of that responsibility which left me feeling more guilt than motivation.

The passing of the torch, in Christian lingo, is often referred to as witnessing. For years, when I would hear talk of "witnessing" and our call to "witness" to others my blood would run cold. Because "witnessing" to me meant the actual activity of bowing my head alongside someone and leading them through the sinner's prayer as they asked Christ to be Lord and Savior of their life. This was, in my mind, the one and only way to pass the torch. I struggled mightily with being called to do something which was greatly out of my comfort zone. I often visualized myself a failure when the day came and I stood before Christ and He asked me to account for the souls I'd witnessed to. Although I understood we were to be examples of Christ in our everyday lives, I tied witnessing directly to reciting that prayer. I have no idea where I got such a notion, but I carried it and the guilt that accompanied it with me for a long time. That's why I remember clearly the day I was able to set that false idea aside and the freedom it provided.

In a Bible study one day I learned much like there are different personality types, there are different ways of witnessing. More importantly, each is just as

important as the next and not all of them culminate in the last step of a person giving his/her life to Christ. It isn't necessary to be directly involved in the person making the ultimate choice for Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. If I simply light someone's path and leave her with a spark that's fanned and nurtured by the next in line, I am a witness for Christ! This revelation was such a spiritual re-birth and turning point for me!

I realized when I gave of my time, talents, efforts, energies – really doing anything in the name of Christ - I was carrying the torch and witnessing! I began to think in terms of the Olympic runners who carry the torch on its journey. Most people envision the last runner sprinting into the stadium and lighting the final torch which signifies the completion of the torch's journey. But before it gets there, it's involved in quite a trip. To the point: is the last torchbearer any more important than the second or third along the way? Aren't they all necessary? I came to realize while I may not be the last step in leading a person to Christ, if I played any part along the way I provided a vital link and contribution. I am a torch bearer, spiritually bound to fellow carriers with the same goal, the same commission, the same passion, but unique in my own place, qualities, and abilities.

What about feeling equipped to pass the torch? One of my favorite Bible accounts is of Jesus healing a blind man in the book of John, chapter 9. This particular example of Jesus healing the sick sticks out to me. Sometimes Jesus would simply speak and people would be healed, other times He would touch them or they would touch His clothing, but this time was different for a couple of reasons. Number one, the blind man didn't ask to be helped. I think this is really important. It reminds us people might be afraid to ask for help or perhaps, as this man was blind from birth, they don't realize what they're missing out on to even know what to ask for.

Secondly, and most significant to me is *how* Jesus healed the man. He spit in the dust and made mud which He then placed on the man's eyes. Think about that . . . He spit on the ground and made mud. Why? Clearly this wasn't a necessary step for Jesus. He could have simply spoken it and it would have been so. I think the answer to the why is to show something as rudimentary and simple and DIRTY as mud can be used for a higher purpose. If Christ can use mud to do

something as spectacular and miraculous as creating sight where none existed, how much more can He do if I let him work through me?

So I carry the torch because it was passed to me and I'm called to do so. My qualification to carry it comes from the knowledge that Christ can use any vessel in any condition to carry His light and message. My worthiness to carry it comes from being the least of these; all are worthy. My ability to carry it comes from His strength to bear it – not my own. My willingness to carry it lies in knowing that others passed it to me. Carrying the torch for Christ affords me the opportunity to express love and light the path to salvation for others. What bigger blessing could there be?

Final Words

The great writer Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” At The Torch, we believe in forging an entirely new path and traveling a road which has never been taken. We believe in being bold, taking risks, getting our hands dirty and in fighting alongside those in the trenches. We want to provide love and hope to all people we meet; whether you are a single mom struggling to buy diapers, or a successful business person. We realize nobody is immune from the hurts and troubles of life and we want to be there during your time of need.

As founders of The Torch, we carry “the torch” for different reasons. We are three different people, with three different personalities, and three different journeys through life yet we share one common goal - to help those in need. We share our personal stories so you can get to know us on a more intimate level, to bare our souls, and let you in to see our hurts, struggles, mistakes, and that we are as human and flawed as anyone else.

Now it is your turn. We want to hear your story. We want to get to know you, what you have been through, what struggles you are currently facing, how we can help, and why you carry The Torch.

We want our paths to cross your paths, so we can get to know you, to love you and to help you. And we are coming.

Soon.

To a neighborhood near you.