

Getting a Grip

By 2008, Frank “Oz” Osborne '96 (B.S.) was desperate to find something — anything — to alleviate his pain. A skiing accident 11 years prior had him airlifted to a spinal trauma center with a broken wrist, arm, back and neck, and left him with severe nerve damage. After a decade of physical therapy and 30 surgeries, recovery eluded him.

Searching for a panacea, Osborne had reached the point where he was willing to try alternative treatments, even bee venom therapy. For a time, he would drive to Lancaster, Pa., to catch the insects and later have friends or family use them to sting him intentionally.

“I dabbled in alternative medicine, because when you’re desperate, you do whatever it takes,” says Osborne.

That treatment, like so many before, didn’t succeed.

But in March 2008, he found a new way to relieve his pain that would change his life. During a physical therapy session, the former pharmaceutical marketing major tried a soft-tissue approach in which metal tools are used to massage away pain and scar tissue. The effects were nearly instantaneous.

“Within minutes, I had more range of motion in my neck than I had in 11 years of doctors’ appointments, injections, physical therapy and other treatments,” Osborne says.

Hopeful and enthusiastic, he contacted the company that made the tools to acquire a set but was disappointed to find difficulty in accessing them. Frustrated, Osborne decided to take matters into his own hands. He decided to manufacture his own set of instruments with the singular goal of making the best product on the market.

“I’ve been an entrepreneur since the day I was born,” says Osborne, “but in a million years, I never thought I’d go into manufacturing. I literally started by Googling, ‘How to manufacture.’”

Going undercover as a patient to therapists who used rival products, he learned the tools were slippery and found that clinicians wanted a less complicated



The Hawk statue outside the Ramsay Basketball Center watches over Osborne '96 (left) and MacNeal '96 as they test their HawkGrips on campus.

business model. Based on the feedback, Osborne designed his instruments with cross-hatch grips to make them easier to hold, and he simplified the purchase process.

“The quality of our instruments is top-notch, and we try to treat our customers like gold,” says Osborne. “Word of mouth is why we’ve been so successful in a short amount of time.”

He drew inspiration from his *alma mater* to name his product line, HawkGrips. His parents, Frank '63 (B.S.) and Peggy Ann '67 (B.S.), are also Saint Joseph’s alumni.

Located in Conshohocken, Pa., HawkGrips has grown from a small startup in 2010 to a company whose product is now used in every major physical therapy chain, renowned hospitals, the training rooms of all major league sports and on Hawk Hill. HawkGrips is expanding internationally, with sales in 22 countries. There’s even a set on Air Force One.

Not that the path to success has been easy.

“If I weren’t passionate about my personal recovery from the injury and motivated to help others, I would have quit long ago,” Osborne says.

His friend and former college roommate Sean MacNeal '96 (B.S.) joined

the company in 2013 after working in the field of finance.

“We’ve know each other for 20-plus years, and trust is a huge factor in our partnership,” says Osborne, who calls MacNeal a major partner in the company’s success.

“What the instruments did for Oz and can do for other patients is inspiring,” says MacNeal.

HawkGrips now offers continuing education courses for clinicians in physical therapy, athletic training, chiropractic care and other areas. The company recently completed courses for the Rockettes, the New York Yankees and Walter Reed Medical Hospital.

Although the physical effects of the accident that changed Osborne’s life are not readily apparent anymore, his recovery is ongoing. With the aid of his own product, he improves every day.

“It’s been an amazing transformation,” says MacNeal. “Seeing the instruments help him made me believe in this business and want to be a part of it.”

“I know firsthand that HawkGrips can literally change lives,” says Osborne, “and my mission is to make sure that every patient can experience the same level of success that I have.”

— David King '08