



Case Study

Carl Rogers
(1902–1987)

Katharine is scheduled to attend her 20th high school reunion next month and is looking forward to it. She had missed her 10th high school reunion purposefully because she had felt like such a failure. She was afraid that her old classmates would have accomplished much more than she had. Even worse, she was afraid that they would feel sorry for her.

Just before her 10th reunion, Katharine had been divorced, and she was working as a secretary to support herself. Katharine had married her high school sweetheart the year after they graduated. She had always wanted to be married; as a child, she dreamt of it. So, when her boyfriend asked her to marry him, she happily agreed. But marriage was not everything she had hoped it would be. In high school she had dreams of also owning her own business, but her husband disapproved of her taking business courses at the local community college and discouraged any attempts she made at earning money on her own. He wanted a wife who stayed home and took care of him and his house. The marriage was disappointing also because even though they tried, she had been unable to become pregnant. The marriage ended when her husband began an affair with a coworker and asked Katharine for a divorce so that he could marry his new love. Katharine was devastated.

She had no husband, no children, and no career. She had never imagined herself in that situation. In high school, she had always thought she would be one of those women who had it all: a career and family life. Now she was a secretary in someone else's business with no family possibilities in sight. To make matters worse, Katharine had gained 30 pounds the year after she was divorced. She had always been slender and had no intentions of going to her reunion looking the way she now did.

A co-worker noted Katharine's depression after her divorce and suggested that she accompany her to her Women's Support Group. The support group changed Katharine's life. The other women in the group listened to what she said and seemed to understand what she was going through. As she continued to go to the group, and as she learned that they would not pity her or make fun of her, she opened up more and discussed her feelings. Eventually she told them about her high school dream of owning her own business. She had been reluctant to discuss this with them at first because her ex-husband had always made fun of her when she brought up the possibility. Instead of criticism, she received support from her group.

They encouraged her to take a few business courses and discussed with her what type of business she could open. When they found out that she was artistic, they suggested that she try making and selling some crafts at various craft shows. Katharine did just that, experimenting with various floral arrangements, Christmas decorations, and knick-knacks on weekends and evenings. Although these items sold, she did not sell enough of them to be able to support herself and start her own business. She didn't find her niche until she started woodworking. She began making Victorian-looking Santas out of wood and hand painting them. They had Katharine's own unique touches. She was surprised to sell out her inventory on the second day of a three-day craft show. This gave her the confidence she needed.

Katharine built up her inventory and rented a small storefront where she began to sell her Santas, along with other hand-made items that she sold on commission from other artisans with whom she had networked. Eventually she was making enough money to be able to quit her secretarial job and devote all of her attention to her business. Her items became so popular that she had to employ two other people part time to organize her inventory and fill online orders that she received from the website she had developed advertising her product and business.

Opening her business had other positive effects as well. It had kept her so busy that she did not always have time to eat, so Katharine lost 20 of the 30 pounds she had gained after her divorce. Socially, she saw more people such as her "regulars," customers who came back repeatedly and collected her Santas. In fact, one customer she met at her shop (also a wood-worker) asked her out, and their relationship had blossomed to the extent that they married. She also felt needed because she had two coworkers who depended on her. She depended on them as well, and they occasionally came up with good suggestions for the store and website, and their handling of the inventory and website orders allowed Katharine more time to craft her Santas. She even became active in the local Chamber of Commerce. Katharine no longer feels like a failure and is confident about attending her 20th reunion.