Dible said he and Chicken Soup Enterprises co-owner Hansen met at a 1973 seminar Dible was conducting. A former aerospace executive, Dible had at that time just launched a successful publishing company that focused on small business how-to books, Entrepreneur Press, which was later bought out by Prentice Hall for, Dible says, “a tidy sum.”

In 1998, Hansen phoned his longtime friend from an airport lounge and explained that he had just finished speaking at a state dental meeting. Hansen said he and Canfield believed there was a market for a “Chicken Soup for the Dental Soul.” Was Dible interested?

Well, yes. As a matter of fact he was, and before long Dible – who is not a dentist but has authored dozens of books – was given a green light to begin “Dental Soul” story acquisition.

His outreach to dentists began with a “call for papers.” Online, he harvested the names of 750 organizations of general dentists, dental specialists, hygienists, and dental assistants at the national, state, and component level.

He then launched a “story contest” with a grand prize of $2,000 for best story, and had announcements placed in association newsletters and journals nationwide. Initially receiving more than 1,200 stories, Dible winnowed the pile down to 212 semi-finalists – 85 authored by dentists. With those same 85 dental professionals acting as judges for the final round, 61 finalists were finally selected and the contest winners were identified.

There followed a six-hour “editing blitz” and marketing discussion with Canfield, and “Chicken Soup for the Dental Soul” seemed well on its way to bookstores nationwide.

Then, two months later, “Dental Soul” hit a serious snag. Apparently Health Communications Inc., the publisher of the more than 150 other entries in the “Chicken Soup” oeuvre, had not been alerted that “Dental Soul” was in the pipeline. And they were not happy.

“These stories are all about the MOUTH,” Dible said they told him. “Besides people in the dental profession, who wants to buy a book about TEETH?”

They called “Dental Soul” a ‘niche market’ book and said they weren’t interested in shipping half a million copies to retailers only to have 400,000 returned for credit as unsold within a few months.

Bottom line: Dible’s contract for “Chicken Soup for the Dental Soul” makes him the exclusive distributor of the book which he cannot sell through retail outlets. About half of “Dental Soul” sales have been through dental supply houses.

The balance has been sold by Dible’s DMD House through press coverage, advertising, trade shows, website promotion, and word-of-mouth.

What Dible finds most gratifying is feedback he receives from previously dental-phobic patients who say they’ve overcome their fear of dental offices by discovering, through Dental Soul stories, how caring the profession really is.

At the recent funeral of a dental school faculty member, Dible said, mourners were comforted by the reading of one of the deceased’s favorite “Dental Soul” stories. Grateful patients often buy copies to give to their favorite dentist.

Marketing-savvy specialists often buy cases to give to every team member of referring practices. And parents buy copies to give to family members graduating from dental school.

So despite the skepticism of major publishers and a somewhat disadvantageous distribution system, Dible says he’s managed to reach almost every dentist in the country.

And that’s niche enough for him.

For more information or to purchase copies of Dible’s dental books, visit: www.dmdhousebooks.com.