



▲ "We wanted people to get goose bumps," says Hansen (right) of the inspiring tales he and Canfield put in their bestseller.

SPOON FEEDING

Chicken Soup for the Soul turns warmed-over wisdom into the hottest self-help dish du jour

AS A BROTH, IT'S BEEN SCIENTIFICALLY shown to be good for you. As a book series, *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *A Second Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul* may be mere placebos for the common coldness of life. But commanding the top two spots on *The New York Times* self-help bestseller list, they seem to be making a lot of people feel better—especially their authors, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, motivational speakers from Southern California.

Each book compiles precisely 101

inspiring stories and maxims ("a sacred number," says Hansen) by philosophers as diverse as Kahlil Gibran, Robert Fulghum and Gloria Steinem. "We both love using really good stories to illustrate points in our seminars," says Canfield, 50. He and Hansen, 47, who own separate businesses, became friends after meeting on the motivational-lecture circuit 16 years ago.

Encouraged by people who had heard their speeches, Canfield and Hansen decided in 1990 that it was

time to put their stories, along with others', into book form. Although they typed in the title of their unsold book at the top of a *New York Times* best-seller list ("That was one of the visualizations we did every day," says Canfield), about 30 publishers passed before Florida's Health Communications Inc. put out the first *Chicken Soup* in June 1993. After a slow start, it hit No. 1 39 weeks ago. "What we're saying with the book is, we should have faith in our capabilities," says Canfield.

With combined sales of 3.1 million copies so far, the two books will net the authors, by their own estimate, \$3 million each. Canfield and Hansen plan to ladle out a cookbook and are visualizing another seven volumes of *Chicken Soup* wisdom. How about just putting it on bouillon cubes? ■

Photograph by Steve LaBadessa