

AUDREY GRUSS AND THE HOPE FOR DEPRESSION RESEARCH FOUNDATION



Audrey Gruss

Being both European born, Audrey Gruss and I quickly became friends after we met in Wellington, Florida, years ago during her husband Martin's polo-playing days. Audrey is a woman in charge. Her achievements in philanthropy are remarkable.

A graduate of Tufts University with a B.S. degree in biology, Audrey's career flourished in the marketing world at Revlon, J.P. Stevens, and Elizabeth Arden. She co-founded the Terme di Saturnia skin care line for Saks Fifth Avenue. After marrying Martin Gruss, owner of the international high-goal Pegasus polo team, and owner of investment firm Gruss and Company, the couple created the Audrey and Martin Gruss Foundation.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Foundation has raised multimillions to fund projects in education and cultural arts worldwide, including the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, the Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center Theater, New York Botanical Garden, The Horticultural Society of New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and

the Audrey and Martin Gruss Heart and Stroke Center.

In Palm Beach, Audrey is on the board of The Hospice Guild and joins me on the Board of the Palm Beach Preservation Foundation. She is a Founder of the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts and a member of the Benefactor's Council of the Society of the Four Arts. And she helped raise \$38 million toward a merger of Good Samaritan and St. Mary's hospitals.

In Europe, Audrey serves on the American Friends of the Victoria & Albert Museum board in London, the International Council of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris, and the Advisory Board of FAI, Italy's leading architectural preservation group.

In 2006, Audrey called me about her newest focus, the Hope for Depression Research Foundation (HRDF), to find a cure for depression, which deeply affected her mother, Hope, whom I met on numerous occasions in Greenwich. She was a lovely lady.

Ava: Audrey, what were your mother's first symptoms?

Audrey: My family and I don't recall any sudden differences, but we noticed she slept much more, became withdrawn, didn't want to go to social events and stopped smiling. My mother had a wonderful personality. She loved to sing, dance and write poetry. All that stopped.

Ava: What steps were taken to improve your mother's condition?

Audrey: My mother was hospitalized, treated with electroconvulsive therapy and medication, such as tricyclics, but we weren't told much. I consulted with my mother's psychiatrist and several leading psychopharmacologists. I found there were no new medication categories since Pro-

zac was introduced in 1985, and that only 50 percent of patients respond to existing SSRI-type medications. I saw the need for additional depression research funding.

When we held our first HDRF Luncheon Seminar, the word "depression" was scarcely spoken in public. Today, we have made good strides in raising awareness.

Ava: Please tell us about the importance of the Think Tank you founded.

Audrey: The neuroscience research process is glacially slow and bureaucratic. I wanted to form a working think tank. It took five years to engage key neuroscientists to collaborate in a Depression Task Force. Scientists today still do not know depression's root causes. They are looking for underlying biological mechanisms. They have identified specific brain circuits and a handful of genes and molecules that might act as biomarkers for potential new medications.

Ava: What is the process to bring a new medication to market?

Audrey: There is no way I can be specific. The first part of the process is "Proof of concept" through laboratory "discovery research." This can take years and millions in research grants at different universities. Then small clinical trials for 2-5 years before Phase I and Phase II FDA approval. Some existing medications have taken decades and cost tens of millions by the time they appear on pharmacy shelves.

I certainly hope depression will ultimately become a disease of the past, but it will take many years and more research funding. We are the only research organization focusing solely on depression, and we need much more private funding to solve the complex mysteries of the brain.

For more information, visit hopefordepression.org.



Ava Roosevelt is the author of *The Racing Heart*. She is also a Palm Beach philanthropist and wife of the late William Donner Roosevelt, grandson of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.