

FROM JENSEN DRIVE 2 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

Joie Rasberry's Story of Struggle, Strength, and Survival

The story of From JENSEN Drive 2 PENNSYLVANIA Avenue began in the back of a Goodwill store on Jensen Drive in Houston, Texas. For its founder, Joie Rasberry, half-price Sundays meant shopping for 10-cent books while her mother bought \$1 shirts and \$3 jeans for the family. In the back, near the musty dressing rooms and dusty glass candy dishes, run-over shoes and purses wreaking of disinfectant became Rasberry's audience. There more than 30 years ago among the discarded remnants, a gallery of second-hand merchandise shaped her company into the powerhouse that it is today, one that is built on the premise of hope, promise, and a desire to want more and do better. That pursuit of excellence is what prompted Rasberry to take her talents as a speaker, writer, actress, radio news personality, and educator to another level. It was to be a means to an end but has turned out to be her life's calling.



Rasberry knew she wanted to go back to college, but faced with family obligations and financial limitations, she was forced to choose between the better life she sought or maintaining the one that had become so familiar, so comfortable. Leaving behind lucrative jobs in Corporate America, she went back to school at Texas Southern University and turned her 30 years of speaking engagements and keynote presentations into money for tuition and books. "It was the hardest decision I've ever made," said Rasberry. "But that is what separates the unwilling from the risk-takers. Whether I sank or swam, it was up to me."

Rasberry started receiving invitations to speak from around the world. What has set her apart from the pool of other motivational speakers is her genuine testimonies of struggles, and how she rose valiantly to every occasion, surviving some of life's most painful moments. Rasberry shares how addiction, domestic violence, incarceration, and mental illness showed up in her family time and time again. She talks of burying a sister, burying her father, caring for her mother who suffered a heart attack and stroke, and helping to care for family members, all while trying to earn a degree, live a productive life, and show others that nothing is too hard for God. Rasberry states, I suffered a lot of loss, but I've also gained a lot of wins."

Her honest, no-nonsense approach has propelled her into the boardrooms of companies such as Halliburton, United States Department of Interior, and Anheuser Busch to college classrooms at Julliard, University of California, and the University of Wisconsin. Rasberry's speaking engagements include international appearances in Johannesburg, South Africa, Prague, Czechoslovakia, Rome, Italy, Paris, France, London, England, Vancouver, Canada, and abroad.

Rasberry donned the red carpet at the White House and performed for President George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice, Dr. Rod Paige and Coretta Scott King, widow of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The same people who laughed at me when I told them I was quitting Xerox to go back to school were the same ones who had to welcome me back when I was invited as the featured speaker for a board meeting," said Rasberry. "Sometimes, you have to be willing to face failure in order to make your dreams come true. You must see yourself at the finish line even before you get there. You must see yourself as successful, well accomplished, and highly favored. Anything else just won't do."

Today, Rasberry handles not only speaking engagements that cater to women, but she also speaks to youth on the value of education, along with training CEO's and leaders in the workplace. Drawing on her experience as a Speech and Debate instructor, Rasberry coaches and trains executives, celebrities, entertainers, professional athletes, aspiring politicians, and ministry leaders in the art of public speaking and presentation effectiveness.

Her breadth of knowledge also extends to the arena of education. Rasberry recognized early that there were scores of young people in America's schools who are not able to verbally articulate their ideas and who lack the basic fundamentals necessary that promote good speaking habits. She has taken on the challenge of teaching speech and debate to students in workshops around the world, in addition to her national speaking engagements.

"It troubles me to know that there are students who have no hope for the future, or who can't think beyond the right now," she said. "That tells me that as a nation, we aren't doing all we can to make sure that the American Dream means something to the kids in urban, depressed areas," shares Rasberry.

"Success has not been instant, but rather, a gradual process. There is no magical formula for succeeding. For me, success has meant doing what others refuse to do and going where others would not go. I remember as a child, being asked to speak for all kinds of church programs, school events, civic meetings, special-interest groups, family reunions, retirement celebrations, birthday parties, and even funerals. It was these hundreds of speaking engagements that gave me not only experience but exposure. The networking opportunities created from my speaking at the request of others as a child have taken me from a once free speaker to an adult who is able to command lucrative speaking fees. There are no shortcuts to glory. You just have to be willing to pay your dues," said Rasberry.

Her smile is quite serene as she reflects. "Of course, I was embarrassed like most kids my age having to shop at Goodwill, the neighborhood thrift store right in the heart of the ghetto, rather than having a chance to shop at Foleys or Macys. "It wasn't that we were poor. Both my parents made good money. They were just misers," states Rasberry. "The most amazing part of it all is I would have never thought that those old second-hand books from the ole' Goodwill Store would have catapulted me onto life's top shelf.

I remember filling my mother's shopping cart with the readings of Shakespeare, Robert Frost, Edgar Allen Poe, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Leo Buscaglia, Les Brown, Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Zig Ziglar, and others. I loved reading because reading introduced me to a whole new world. I can laugh now because what appeared to be a curse turned out to be a blessing in disguise," she interjects.

Raspberry's ability to connect with all people, regardless of environment or age, has made her one of the most sought-after speakers among business, education, social and non-profit groups. It has also enabled her to hold in high regard the sacrifices made by her family, the unpleasantness of life, those old glass candy dishes, shoes, and purses that served as her audience when she was a young girl shopping with her mother at Goodwill, and the absolute beauty there is in struggle. "Struggle builds character," she said. "And every detour I had to take along the way helped me get from JENSEN Drive 2 PENNSYLVANIA Avenue."

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