



## **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 15 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 maintain the one that had become so familiar, so comfortable.

She chose to use her natural business savvy. Leaving behind lucrative jobs in Corporate America, she went back to school at Texas Southern University and turned her 15 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."

Within months of starting the company, Rasberry started receiving invitations to speak from around the country and the world. What has set Rasberry 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. 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 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.

Most recently, 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 have to see yourself at the finish line even before you get there. You have to 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, men and youth issues such as the value of education, but also concerns over business worries in an age of corporate scandal and downsizing.

Drawing on her experience as a worker in Corporate America, Rasberry has spoken at length on Employee Value and Human Relations, Business Communication Strategies and Cultural Diversity in the Workplace.

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, debate and theatre 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."

"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, has 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 back. "Of course, I was embarrassed like most kids my age having to shop at Goodwill, rather than having a chance to shop at Foleys or Dillards. "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 Goodwill would have catapulted me on to 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.

Rasberry's ability to connect with all people, regardless of environment or age, has made her one of the most sought after speakers among business, educational, 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.*"

*Rasberry continues to serve as keynote speaker for schools, universities, businesses, churches, foundations, companies, corporations and gala affairs. Labeled by Ebony Magazine as "one of the greatest young speakers of our time," Rasberry's customized, honest, compelling, no-nonsense speeches and theatrical presentations continue to leave audiences spellbound. Rasberry's inaugural CD and book, From JENSEN Drive 2 PENNSYLVANIA Avenue, speaks to the heart of every man, woman and student. It is a compilation of speeches set to music that delve deep into the human spirit, as it deals with some of life's most pressing issues.*

<p>Joie D. Rasberry 11206 Dalebrook Street Houston, Texas 77016 (866) 331-5722 Toll Free joie_rasberry@yahoo.com www.joierasberry.com</p>
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