

Rene Godefroy
Speaking Hero May 2008



The Power of a Story

By Terri Marie

The Journey

He was under a truck, wedged between three tires of a big rig in an attempt to cross the border into the land he'd dreamed of for so long – The United States of America. After four hours of a very painful ride, Rene Godefroy reached the point of giving up. I asked him why he didn't. "Survival has always been the thing for me. I was supporting my own weight on my hands and elbows. It got to a point where I said, 'I don't really know if I can take it any longer.' But that's what we say to ourselves throughout the journey all the time. Whether you own your own business, or you work for somebody – there's going to be some point where you will be thinking about giving up. Because you have the thought, doesn't mean you have to entertain the thought. Right after I said that I began to think of what lies ahead for me - the future in America. Then I began to think of the people in my village who were counting on me. When you have a "why" or you have something that you are looking forward to, you can do it."

Everyone loves a story like Rene's. It's similar to Dottie Walters story - the power of an indomitable spirit. Rene uplifts thousands of people each year during his many speaking engagements around the world, from the National Speakers Association (NSA) to corporate events.

After coming to the states and working various jobs from carpenter to washing dishes, Rene ended up at The Renaissance Hotel, working as a doorman and parking cars. It was there he discovered something that Dottie Walters also loved...books. "Whenever I'd see a book, I'd go to the bookstore and buy it." Hungry for knowledge, Rene would devour books. Rene also ordered tapes from Nightingale Conant and attended seminars like "Unleashing the Power Within" and "Personal Power" by Anthony Robbins. Rene decided he wanted to try speaking. "I had fears and doubts, thinking I could give Americans advice since I didn't go to high school or college in America." But Rene did it anyway.

When Rene got his first check for \$1500, it became a huge motivator." I still have this check to this day. I made a copy of the check. I'm looking at it right now. So every time things were tough and it appeared as if I was not going to make it, I just look at my check and say, 'There's somebody who paid me

\$1,500. There's somebody else who would be willing to pay me another one and another one.' I tell people all the time to be hopeful. Think about what lies ahead for you in the future."

Back to Rene's Story... the Very Beginning of It

Born in Haiti in a small village, Rene's mother left when he was nine months old. He became very sick due to a poor diet and little medical care. Those starving children you see on TV? Rene was one of them. When he was 7 years old he left the village to be with his mother, sister, and brother in Port-au-Prince, living in a shack infested with rats and roaches. "I slept on the floor with my brother and sister. The rats and roaches were crossing us all night. Many nights I was just terrified to go to bed."

Rene became involved in theater in a small Catholic church. The group was invited to perform in Montréal Canada. "America was the finest land to me, but going to Montreal was great because I was closer to America - the land I dreamt about. I'd say, 'One day I want to go to the United States. I wanted to come here to eat lots of rice and chickens. I'm sick of rice and chickens now. Life is GOOD today in America."

The Promise

"I found a way to come to this country. It wasn't easy. There was a price I had to pay." Wedged between those three tires of a tractor-trailer, covered with ashes dust and smoke. Rene made a prayer. "God I promise you, if you help me make it to America safe, I will do something with my life." God needn't have worried about Rene.

"I'm a US citizen today and a very proud one. I'm not a burden on the government. I believe that everything I will ever have and everything that I will ever be in this country is going to be by my own volition. I dare to believe that I can step out and take massive action to make it happen."

Rene went to Miami and taught himself English, learning 3 words at a time. "I was writing them on my hand," Rene said. He eventually left Miami for Atlanta, Georgia with a parish council group, living in a run down apartment and working at a K-mart warehouse. "I was not making much money at all. I was loading boxes in the truck but I was making progress because I came underneath the truck. Now I was inside the truck." How's that for positive thinking!

Eventually Rene got a job taking care of an elderly Jewish man. He and Rene became good friends. The man died in Rene's arms. "I took great care of him. One of his children helped me get a job at the Renaissance hotel." Rene worked at that hotel for 14 years. It changed his life.

Working at the hotel put Rene in direct contact with some of the world's best speakers. Rene learned from many of the top speakers like Les Brown and Jim Rohn, "They each awaken your awareness to different levels," Rene says, Once Rene made up his mind to speak, destiny took over. He got that \$1,500 check in 1998. In 2000, Rene was on the big stage. That's fast. Rene says, "I just learned how to speed up the process. "

Rene's Number One Speaker's Trait

"The ability to tell stories," Rene says. "Because at the end of the day, they really won't not remember the points you made. They can buy a book and read those points. But what they can't get are the personal stories we use to wrap around the points we're making. That's what will make the message stick. Most people will say, 'I don't have a story because I wasn't born like Rene, in a poor village in Haiti, or I didn't climb Mount Everest.' That's not true. We all have stories. The stories that really connect us with our audiences at a deep level are not the big stories, but the little pebbles, little stories and vignettes."

“That’s the beauty of it. You paint a picture. Everybody comes and looks at the picture. They draw their own conclusions from the picture. You share the story. You’re talking about your grandmother, your cousin, your dog. Somebody sees their dog in the story. Somebody else sees their cousin in the story because they had some kind of connection with their cousin. Somebody sees their grandmother in the story. Everybody gets something different from it. You’re just never going to please everybody in the audience. That’s why I say to speakers, ‘The time to start your speaking career is NOW’ because there are people that I’ll never ever be able to connect with for whatever reason. For some people it’s just because the way I sound, my accent. Maybe I look like an ex-husband.”



Rene’s Gift

“Village Hero” is Rene’s gift to Haiti. It is an orphanage with 28 kids and a health clinic in Haiti. “I’m still struggling to get my 501C, which means I have to find every little penny that I have to support some of the projects. In December I went to have dinner with the kids. It was the best Christmas dinner I’ve ever had. They sang for me. They danced. They performed. I served them. It was awesome. I believe that God took me out of the village so that I can reach out to the village. There are going to be a few chosen ones. We have to be wise enough to understand that we are not chosen to drive a nice car, or live in a nice house, or live a self-centered life. It’s because at some point, we have to reach out and make a difference.”

A Free Demo Leads to an NSA Keynote

Here is a Huge Gift for You From Rene
“How to Get Your Demo Video Made”

Be sure to listen to the whole story on the audio at www.heroesamongus.blogspot.com to find out how he did this. This is the short version.

1. Get the hotel manager to donate a room and finger food in exchange for free staff training
2. Get speakers to agree to speak and train on that day
3. Get gift certificates and door prizes and publicize the event
4. Get an audience to fill up the room
5. Arrange for a videographer

“It’s something everybody can do, Rene says. “They can go to the local hotel and set a meeting with the general manager. Offer them a \$100,000 package. Each speaker agrees to do some kind of training for the hotel staff so you can get that room. Trust me, you can get bodies in that room. And you can create that video.” By the way, Rene gave the speakers some of the money back because he had money left over!

In 2000, Mark Mayberry, well known in NSA, heard about Rene's story and requested his video. Rene got an email from the president of the NSA saying, "Congratulations. You have a great future in this business." The NSA chairperson for the conference also called Rene and said, "I just saw your video and I'm just so excited. I want you to be in my program. You're going to be on the big stage." I asked Rene how he felt. "I felt GOOOOD!"

I have to tell you how I met Rene. It was 2006. I was taking a conference from Declan Dunn and Jody Colvard north of Atlanta and had to get to the train station, a long cab ride away. I'd just met Rene two days earlier. When he found out I was going to take a cab, Rene offered to drive me. He insisted. That's the kind of man Rene is. On the seat of his car was a book...his own. He gave it to me.

Rene's Hero

Rene's hero is Sidney Poitier. "His family migrated from Haiti to the Bahamas. He and I have kindred spirits. He's my hero. When I see all that he went through to be where he is, that's just incredible. He's my inspiration."

Rene has a great message and an incredible story. He wants you to find your message and tell your own story. If Rene believes in you, how can you not believe in yourself?
From Haiti to speaking in a land he once dreamed of, Rene is a true speaking hero.

Live like a hero!

Terri Marie

RENE'S SPEAKING TIPS

- **Don't Take Every Bit of Advice You Get**

"I don't believe that we ought to take advice from everybody. Depending on what level of success they're at, their advice may not be applicable to me or you or to somebody just starting out."

- **Use Your Own Style**

"There are some speakers who say you have to say something to upset the audience, to stir up something. I'm a nice guy by nature. I can't go out there and try to be in my audience's face. It's not good advice for me. Fortunately for me, I understand what it is to start from scratch. I have not distanced myself from that. I go to national conventions all the time and see the newcomers. I'm fully aware of the stretch, the sacrifice they make just to be at the conference. I look at them and feel where they are. I understand that they will be successful. They will make money if they can just hang in there. I just never forget what it was like for me when I started."

- **Get Into NSA by Going to Meetings**

"Depending on where they are in their speaking career, they might not be qualified to join NSA. I wasn't when I started either. I started going to meetings. Go to the local chapter of NSA. Join as an apprentice. I get calls from people who want to pick my brain. They want to take me out to lunch. I don't have time to have everybody take me out to lunch and pick my brain or I probably wouldn't have a brain."

"When they go to the local chapter they get to ask us questions and have lunch with us. Get involved. Then once you meet someone at that level you can say, 'Is it all right if I call you for 10 minutes if I have a question?' You limit the time. Then slowly work your way to getting to know the people so you can ask them questions."

- **Volunteer**

“I started volunteering from day one on different committees. I’d carry the books or take care of the audiovisual. I just wanted to be there and make myself useful so I can be a part of the click so to speak.”

- **Keep a Journal for Your Stories**

“Little things connect us with our audiences. Why? First, my audiences were not born in a village. They really can’t identify. But the little stories – right off the bat, they can identify with those stories. Early on I took some classes in storytelling. I’d buy tapes and read books. Life is storytelling in the making of it. You can’t wait to go tell somebody about the speaker you’ve heard. You’re not going to say “This speaker called out 5 points and I want to share them with you.’ No. You’ll say, ‘I heard this speaker. He told this story. It was amazing.’ Above all when I share my story, I’m giving my audience the permission to be open to their co-workers, to their friends, to share their stories so they don’t have to be embarrassed or afraid or ashamed. Really focus on the stories. Trust me. No matter where you grew up – no matter what situation – you have stories. There’s no such thing as ‘I don’t have any stories.’”

- **Learn From Every Speech**

“My best advice is to record every speech from the beginning, even if you’re speaking to your local civic club.”

- **You Are Your Own Coach**

“I believe in mentoring. I believe in coaches but I believe ultimately I am my best coach. I know when I walk away from the platform whether I did good or not.. Right after the speech I know. I don’t really like feedback from the audience. I get my feedback while I’m on stage from the reactions I get. If they are laughing at my humor, if they are reacting, or nodding, if I’m asking them questions and they’re raising their hands, I know I’m doing well.”

- **Practice**

“Speaking or telling a story is like learning a new step or a golf swing or dance move. You can be awkward for a long time but you keep practicing. Once you get the step, like in a dance, you know you’ve got it. You feel it in your body. You know that’s it. Don’t let people tell you, ‘You’re not there yet.’ You know when you’re not there. You just keep going back and keep tweaking. Keep working it. Spend a lot of time working on the speech because it’s the only marketing tool that you actually have.”

- **Knowledge is More Valuable Than Money**

His latest book “Kick Your Excuses Goodbye.” has a wonderful twist. One of those speakers from the Renaissance Hotel wrote the foreword to Rene’s book. Rene had helped him with his bags. The speaker asked him, “I have \$5 for a tip or a book. Which one do you prefer? Rene said, Of course, the book.”

“I was a janitor in America. Whenever I would go to the office to pick up the trash, I’d look at the letters in the trash can because I didn’t speak any English. I wanted to learn English, but more importantly I wanted to learn how to write letters. I’d take the letters, collect them and come home. I’d read the letters to myself so that I could listen to my own voice.”

- **Learn From Everything – Be Curious**

Rene takes things from all sources and repackages the info for his audiences along with a lesson. Look for the best in everyone. Then emulate the best. “Probably my biggest strength is that I learn from people. I ask questions. When I go to meetings, I seek out people. I’m not a pest. I’m very professional about it. As you might know, I have a lot of contacts with big names in the industry. But I don’t pick up the phone. I go to the conventions where I know they are attending. I get to go to lunch with them.”

- **Staying Power**

“I was watching an interview with Chef Boy R Dee years ago. He said, ‘By the time I realized that I didn’t have enough talent to be a chef, I was already too successful.’ What I got out of it was that if you stay in it long enough, you may not be the best, but you will succeed at it. Staying power is the key.”

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