

THE COURAGE TO SPEAK

by

Rhonda Hamilton

## Preface

I am proud to be the author of this introductory piece of work. It represents my most important work thus far in the literary world. This piece is a smaller representation and testament of my larger body of work, which is forth coming.

“The Courage to Speak”, was created specifically for the 2015 “Inspire”– The Seeds of Prosperity Women’s Conference.

I was invited to speak at the conference which primarily caused some hesitation on my behalf. As an author I am more inclined to write about my thoughts and feelings rather than to profess them aloud in an audience filled room. However, as a woman and child of GOD, who has just recently been delivered, I had to humbly accept my call to duty.

There truly is healing in helping others. To be a part of someone else’s manifestation of purpose and cause simply by sharing parts of my own journey and story has already proven to be an amazing experience.

We are all beautifully flawed. There are many things that will hinder our abilities to speak. It is important that we as a community always remember to uplift, network, fellowship, and support one another in order that our true purpose and being can be exalted.

One day along this journey I looked up and my self-employed business owner labeling, was replaced with that of author, advocate, care giver, and conference speaker. I realize now that my courage comes from knowing that I am not alone! In my own words, this is my testimony.....

## The Courage To Speak

I searched my soul for the answers, please God why is this my reality? Surely this had to be a mistake, how did I get here? And suddenly I recalled...

*“I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears...Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.”<sup>1</sup>*

I was so consumed with the “why me”, that I never ever considered, “why not me?” All that I had struggled with to become who I am today and all the sacrifices that I’ve had to endure came down to that one defining moment in my life. It was time to close the doors of my Real Estate brokerage, for good.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 18: 1-3, 6 & 35.

### A LOOK AT THE PAST

I vividly recall the feelings of defeat that encompassed me as they began to dwell deep within; the journey that I was about to embark upon was involuntary and needless to say very inconvenient. I suppose my testimony could be that of many. Surely it wasn't as painful as I thought when I came to accept the realities that I wasn't the only owner whose business had failed and whose doors had to be closed. In fact scores of small businesses had closed as a result of the Wall Street melt down and bailouts during that time. However, the humiliation of failing and the fear of not knowing what would come next consumed me almost daily. I began to feel powerless as if my own worth was somehow diminished.

### LOOKING FORWARD

As I struggled with the context of how I intended this message to be received. There are many who will relate to the struggle of a successful trip back from such a journey. There are others who have yet to encounter such an experience. I offer my account of what I now know to be my greatest life lesson thus far. We are all destined for greatness. We all possess within us the ability to achieve the unobtainable and to reach heights unknown. The journey to success does not come with a road map and often times it is flawed. We have to be convicted in our decisions to succeed because even the strongest of men or women will be tested. It is these moments of trials that I found myself persecuted the most. The many nights of tears, prayers and of searching my soul trying to understand what it was about my steps or missteps did nothing to alter my reality.

I wasn't jaded by the materialistic aspects of what a career such as mine could have afforded me because in my mind and my work ethic, I was truly a professional's professional. I've always been about doing the work and yet still I wasn't spared from such shame. I felt as if I had been betrayed and I began to question my gift, I began to question God.

*"I have even from the beginning declared it to thee: before it came to pass I showed it thee: lest thou shouldest say....Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shown thee new things, and thou didst not know them.....For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction....Harken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last."*<sup>2</sup>

#### GRACE AND MERCY

God's mercy and His grace sustained me through my darkest hours. I can confidently say that had it not been for [His] his mercy on that fateful Friday afternoon when I found myself being evicted, I would not have the courage to utter these truths. I had been living in a state of disbelief. Sadly enough the wonderful trinkets and treasures that adorned the walls of the condominium where I resided were still neatly hung. The knock on the door from the Sheriff's Marshall validated that which I already knew to be true.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 48: 5-6, 9-10 & 12.

The reality of me not being able to save me after all the years of saving everyone else was so disheartening.

“How will I get these things out of the parking lot with no money in my pocket”, I wondered? I stood there watching my things being carried down and gathered all around me, in the middle of that snow filled afternoon. They don’t evict people in these types of weather conditions. I stood there thinking, “how is this possible?”

It is His’ grace that shielded me as an” angel” appeared in the form of a friend of a friend who feverishly raced to my side. The span of what must have been three hours of loading things for storage while also putting things out for trash kept me oblivious to the silent onlookers and passersby. It has proven to be hard for many of us in this life to avoid keeping up with the Jones’, or not to fabricate the images of ourselves that we would have others to see. When you are truly appreciative of the opportunities to have been given such a testimony, I personally feel that you only have one responsibility and that is to keep it real. My courage today comes from a place that only God’s grace and His mercy could have brought me from.

I speak of the Sheriff’s knocking on the door but the truth is that there have been many moments that I should have known God’s awesome power and the enormity of His abilities and yet I still questioned my direction. “What would tomorrow bring?” “Who should I call?” “What next?” I could not fathom it, for the first time in a long time I did not have the answers.

I have always had the gift of gab and in this moment I was speechless. Oh the merciful nature of our Lord and Savior, when I speak of His mercy and His grace and how He has carried me through moments that even I still had the nerve to question, “how.”

### THE UNDERSTANDING

We are all such beautiful and divine works of God, it seems impossible that we would lack anything as vital as “The courage to speak”. However, it is my spiritual connection and continued growth which fuels my determination to speak. Initially I didn’t realize that I had a testimony. I continuously asked for God’s patience and pleaded with him not to give up on me. I constantly prayed for deliverance.

*“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever. And say ye. Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>*

I was inspired to speak! I realized that my living was and is protected! I woke up one day along this journey and realized that [He]he had delivered me. Please understand that my deliverance did not come in the form of some astronomical amount of money in my banking account, nor am I speaking of some fancy new car sitting in my drive way. I was so bound by all of the events and circumstances that I felt had defined my existence during this journey.

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<sup>3</sup> *Chronicles 16: 34-36*

The symbols of relief that I thought needed to be obtained in order to prove that I was no longer going through, was far from that which I received in my deliverance. I received such gifts as Self Awareness, Self Appreciation, Self Confidence and Self Re-assuredness. I bare witness that in the face of any unforeseeable circumstance, it is his grace and mercy that moves mountains and delivers us.

*“For great is thy mercy toward me and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.”*<sup>4</sup>

### THE COURAGE

God is so awesome that I did not realize my transformation had already taken hold! My courage to speak comes generationally from deep within. As a proud woman who was raised by a God fearing, strong willed and family oriented woman, I promise you that words like weak, weary, and woeful just were not acceptable. I thought I knew strong. I thought I knew struggle.

However, my journey was inevitable because there was someone that had already lit the torch for me. There is someone that had sacrificed and is still sacrificing. I was foolish enough to believe that this journey was just about me.

I now realize that the gift of unconditional love that has been bestowed upon me was not only from my Father and Savior Jesus Christ, but also from my mother and biggest supporter, Regina Fleming.

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 86: 13



My courage to speak comes from the wisdom of knowing that my story is no longer mine to hold. It is not acceptable to simply feel embarrassed or shameful any more. I felt that giving in to these emotions hindered my ability to help others. I had to accept that this was bigger than me.

I realize now that Rhonda L. Hamilton's journey was and still remains to be a culmination of the strength and determination of a teenaged mother. A mother who at a very young age, was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and left to entrust that the universe would take care of the child that she found herself incapable of caring for; given the multifaceted world that she herself as a young woman would find herself navigating in, some thirty-six years later. I realize that there are many women with their own testimonies who are seeking the courage to find their voice. I know that had it not been for His grace or His mercy, my courage to stay the journey and not succumb to the perils of this life, such as suicide, drug abuse, drug over dose, alcoholism, a life of crime, etc., my story could very well be different.

I thank God for keeping me and for nurturing me. I thank God for recognizing that I had grown to a place where I did not know my own worth. I thank God for interrupting my pattern of living.

I was foolish in my beliefs that any level of success and or failure could and would define my worth and value in this world. I could have still been bound by that type of thinking. My courage to speak comes from knowing that I have been delivered.

I know that should I ever have to endure another knock on the door from the Sheriff's Marshall again, I am courageous enough to accept whatever the consequence.

### FINDING THE STRENGTH

I realize now how amazingly strong I am, for I have been tried and tested and my vision made clearer. I was born so that my mom would have a purpose, I was chosen so that I would become aware, I have been delivered because there is still much work to be done. Our journeys have already been determined and if we are fortunate and pay attention along the way, we will witness his grace and mercy first hand working in our lives. I have chosen to stand up and conspire to inspire. I thank God for the courage to not just speak, but to testify and justify on behalf of the many folks that are still struggling to find their voice.

My courage to speak comes from knowing that I am My Mother's Keeper!

In finding my voice, I found my hero. I found my purpose. Every day I learn something new about my mom. My inspiration comes from knowing that I am a descendant of one of the strongest women I have ever known.

She inspires me and therefore I will forever commit to inspire others! My life was terribly interrupted and I am forever grateful that I was worthy and chosen for such a task.

I AM MY MOTHER'S KEEPER!

Mental Illness is currently debated in many diverse circles and cultures throughout mainstream America. Whether the points of view are scientific, psychological, political, and or religious in nature, the fact remains that I was blessed to be able to have a seat at the table and my courage to speak will forever be embedded in assuring my mother's quality of living.

We all are faced with certain truths and responsibilities in this life. My truth was revealed during one of the most unsettling periods of my living thus far. I encourage anyone who is struggling to make peace with the circumstances that this life has afforded them, to be still and to let God lead you.

*“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”<sup>5</sup>*

I feel as if I have an opportunity to do even greater things. I have a renewed sense of self and purpose.

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<sup>5</sup> St. Matthew 16: 25-26

I now understand whole heartedly that, “to whom much is given, much is expected”. My resolve for speaking and being my mother’s keeper has elevated me to new heights that only God could have engineered.

The effortless manner in which my thoughts appear and align themselves daily with such consciousness and clarity exemplifies God’s conviction to my success.

In order to be heard I realize that I must remain humble and be willing to also listen. We are all works in progress. I am encouraged that mine and my mother’s life one day could somehow be further enriched simply from having found the courage to tell “our story”. There are countless others whose journey forward will bring forth much contemplation of preparedness and acceptance. I am now stronger and realize my responsibility to seek out opportunities to uplift and inspire my peers, whenever possible. The challenges of this life can sometimes be so overwhelming, that we are convinced that we are alone. We build ourselves up so high in that which is going on, that it seems impossible to utter the word “help”. Often times we are fearful of the ridicule that comes with letting others in on our pain.

Retrospectively speaking even Jesus was exposed to public persecution and humiliation. If we allow ourselves to become consumed with the things we have absolutely no control over, we further delay our deliverance, in my opinion.

*“Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me....If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it...If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth; give I unto you; Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*<sup>6</sup>

The fundamentals like trust, friendship, and forgiveness become necessary life lines in your survival. You trust that trouble will not last but for a moment. You also trust that there are those that would like to help but simply cannot. You trust that you are doing a great job covering up what you are really going through. You trust your true friends who will tell you the truth even when it hurts.

#### THE GIRLFRIENDS

I thank God for blessing me with the wonderfully talented and kindred women that I am fortunate to call my girlfriends. My girlfriends have earned my respect and the right to forever be called friend. I could fill volumes with the many accountings of relationships gone wrong. However, I would rather honor the sisters in my life who have proven to be ride or die in my ongoing saga.

The many nights of laughter, guidance, and basically holding me down whether monetarily, spiritually, or otherwise, did not go unnoticed. My mom will always be my honorary girlfriend.

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<sup>6</sup> St. John 14: 6, 14-16, 27

The growth that our relationship has experienced while discovering all of our new strengths continues to be insurmountably rewarding.

It may sound like a cliché until you find yourself repeating affirmations on a daily basis. The hardest thing I had to learn to do was to forgive myself as so many others have struggled with. It takes time figuring out the psychology of why this one act can cause such discomfort.

Superficially, it was hard for me to accept failing on such a public stage in such a public way. I had to learn to own my failures. I had to face those hard truths about myself and my decision making. I had to wear that badge of courage while facing defeat.

*“Praise Ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord; that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house and his righteousness endureth forever. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness; he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man showeth favour, and lendeth; he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved forever; the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 112: 1-9

### THE PATHWAYS TO A NETWORK OF ANGELS

We all need someone or something to remind us of who we are especially when we have lost our way. I recall recently drafting a list of names of all of the people along the way who lent a helping hand, said a kind word, or offered their time and or money to show their support of my ability to pull through my rough time. I call it my “Network of Angels”. It would give me no greater pleasure than to gather them all in a setting and present them with small tokens of my appreciation. They each represent precious pebbles that came together to form the rock that supported my Salvation, through and through.

GOD BLESS “My Network of Angels”, whose many shoulders, when aligned side by side one after the other would represent the wall of love and support provided as they graciously heeded my call.....

*“MY Network”*

Miss Slaughter

Mr. Jones Jr.

Mr. Corbett

Mr. Liggins

Mr. McLaughlin

Mr. & Mrs. Adkins

Mrs. Walker

Mr. Lathan

Miss Hightower

Miss Grooms

Mr. Simms

Mr. Greer

Mr. Lutu

Mr. Townsend

Miss Williams

Mr. Woods

Mr. Donnelly

Ms. A. Long

Mr. Spann

Miss Gales

Miss Stamp

Mr. Freeman

Miss Long

Mrs. Harrison

Mr. Fleming

Mr. Sample

Mr. & Mrs. Vaughn

Mrs. Spann

Mrs. Patrick-Lanier

Mr. Clark

Miss White

Mr. Jones

Mr. Hawkins

Mr. Lemply

Mr. Mingo

*This space is reserved for an unnamed, but not forgotten angel.*



*“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.. Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.”*<sup>8</sup>

### TRUTHS UNTOLD

There is nothing too great for God! He will deliver you regardless of the circumstance or the painful moments that you discover. I rejoice in the wonderful feeling of knowing that I have a redeemer and friend in Jesus. I still feel shameful for believing that I could do anything without calling on His precious name. If my living thus far is to serve as the living testimony that moves or calls another being to act or call out his name, then to God be the Glory!

Please understand my life by any means is not the model for what I believe he would have it to be. My life is a true testimony of a child of God who believes with her heart, walks by her faith, and will forever profess with her mouth all of that which God has blessed me to bear witness.

My intellect compels me to find answers. My wisdom demands clarity. It is my compassion which employs me to speak.

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<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3: 14-15, 24

*“In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorrupt-ness, gravity, sincerity. Sound speech, that cannot be condemned that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”<sup>9</sup>*

### INSPIRE THE SEEDS OF PROSPERITY

I am a daughter, sister, friend, niece, cousin, significant other, and I am a beautifully flawed woman. I am just like many women in and around the communities that I serve. We are all seeking to take care of our homes, children, families and one another.

Although we come from different walks of life, points of view, upbringings and philosophies, it is our belief in God and the opportunity for eternal happiness which governs our actions. Embrace your challenges. Be grateful for the trials and tribulations and the uncomfortable moments that arise. Your journey is not without purpose.

Seek and you will find. I pray that the manifestations of good will, good stewardship, and courage bind themselves forever within your spirit.

You have a voice. We all have a voice. Do not be afraid to call on his name. He will not forsake you or leave you. Yours is a story worth telling. Will you be courageous enough to give God the Glory? Will you have the Courage to Speak?

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<sup>9</sup> Titus 2: 7-8

*“For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.....Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him...The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”<sup>10</sup>*

*Amen.*

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 33: 4-5, 8, 11-12

**M.I. Mother's Keeper, “*Mental Intelligence Advocates*”**



M.I. Mother's Keeper is a Washington, D.C. based organization which cares about the many issues facing our Mental Health Community. We believe that by helping to improve the general public's awareness and education through outreach and social networking, we will help to improve the quality of living for our "Mentally Intelligent" citizens.

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