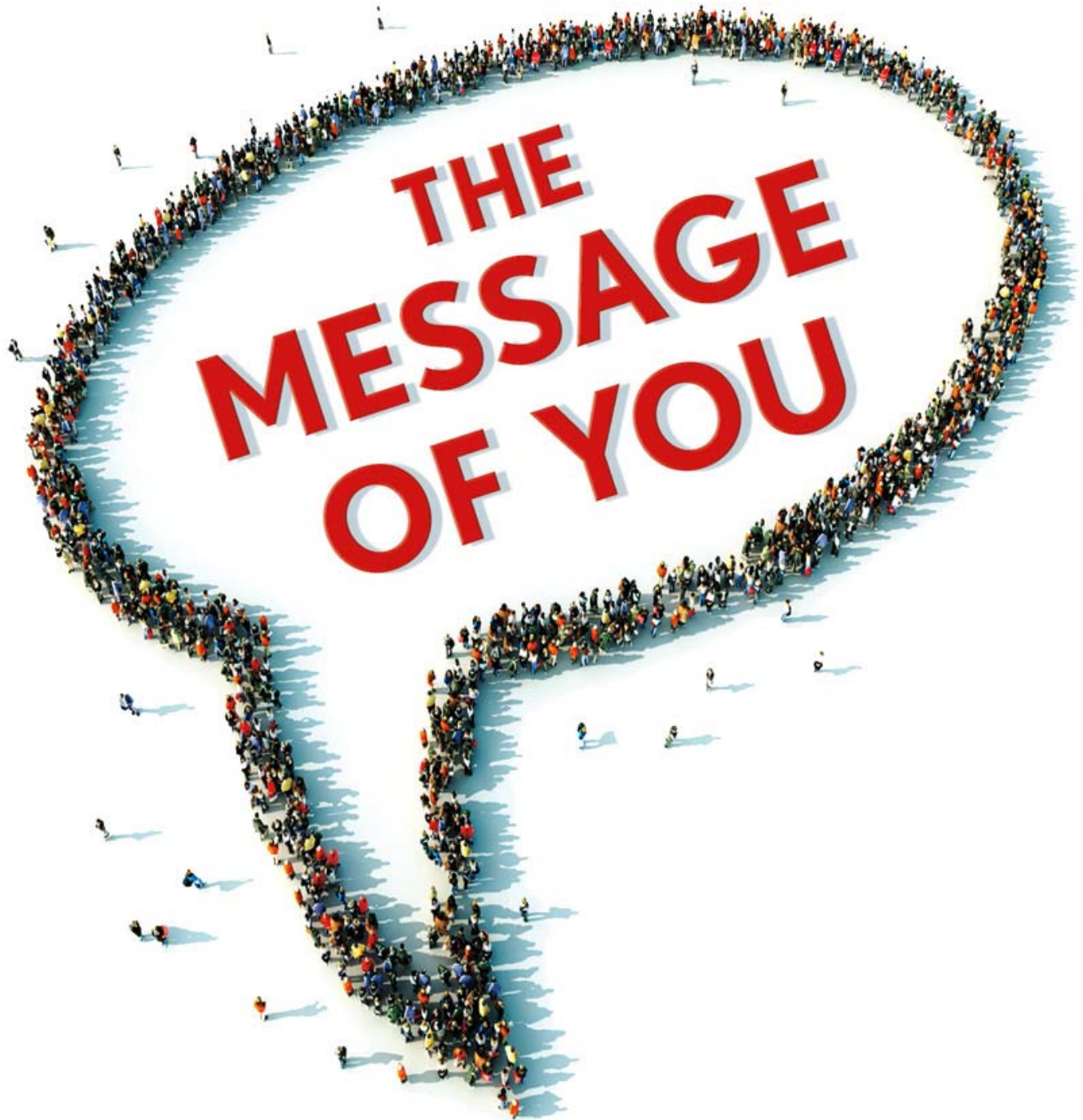


**TURN YOUR LIFE STORY INTO  
A MONEY-MAKING SPEAKING CAREER**



**JUDY CARTER**

**BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE COMEDY BIBLE***

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"As a WWE wrestler, I originally contracted Judy to become funnier while cutting promos in the ring. While she was helping me punch up my wrestling promo delivery, something bigger happened; Judy helped me find a message that is very meaningful to me and turn it into a speech called, "Find Your Strength." I'm now able to give back to my fans by speaking at schools. With Judy's help, I'm truly making a difference in young people's lives and, along the way, my own."

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# THE MESSAGE OF YOU

TURN YOUR LIFE STORY  
INTO A MONEY-MAKING  
SPEAKING CAREER



JUDY CARTER

St. Martin's Press  New York

THE MESSAGE OF YOU:  
TURN YOUR LIFE STORY INTO A MONEY-MAKING SPEAKING CAREER.

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*To my sister, Marsha Carter,  
who, in spite of not being able to speak,  
was a great communicator.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This book started off as a traditional speaker's book. You know the kind—how to stand and project your voice, how to memorize a speech, what to do with those nervous hands of yours. But in the process of writing this book and working with my students to fine-tune the exercises, it became something bigger—less about the speaking industry and more about defining the Core Promise of a speech and, even greater, how to find The Message of You.

My Speaking Workshop was formed of an eclectic group of mothers, stand-up comics, nurses, lawyers, and business owners. There were thirty students in all and they plunged in, headfirst, to uncover their Message.

On showcase night I sat and watched as, one by one, each student courageously stood up and told his or her individual truth. Their messages, the Messages of Them, were a powerful wake-up call for the audience. They were *inspired* to respect themselves; to take responsibility for their actions and lives; to believe in themselves; to find courage. They were *taught* how to get rid of clutter, lighten up, and find their own style. And they were *entertained* immensely, from laughter to tears.

But that showcase night didn't just shake the earth underneath the audience; it also rattled the souls of the students. One of them, Naomi Lopez, the mother of a child with behavioral issues, had never spoken in front of people before. Her Message was her journey with her child, "From Burden to Blessing." She might not have been a "professional"

speaker, but when she told her Heart Story there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Afterward, she wrote to me:

I am proof that *anyone* can do this. I want to spread the message that we parents are not alone. I went from a person who *never* performed or wanted to be in the spotlight, to a person with a message I want to share with whoever will listen to me. Sometimes God has dreams for us that are bigger than we can dream for [ourselves]. This class has been life changing. Thank You.

Within a few days, Naomi booked her first speaking engagement.

Wow. That was my first indication of the life-transforming power of The Message of You. I became even more excited as other students wrote to me of the changes in their lives. Then my own Message shifted. It happened on my birthday—a very special one, because it marked the date that I became older than my mother was when she died early in my life. Living longer than her made me aware of how finite existence is, and how I was now in a “bonus round” that I didn't want to screw up like I had so many other stages of my life. I felt optimistic since I had fallen in love and gotten married a few years before. The security of finally finding a loving life partner freed me emotionally to give more to others. I recommitted my remaining years to making a difference in other people's lives.

I volunteered to give my speech “Laughing Your Way out of Stress” for the newly wounded soldiers in the spinal injury unit at the VA hospital in Long Beach, California. My student Judy Oliverio is a nurse there and she told me, “The place is so depressing for both the patients and the staff. We all need to be inspired and to laugh.” I felt honored to have had the chance to speak to these heroes.

Driving to the gig, I panicked. It occurred to me that saying “Hey, just laugh it off!” to a twenty-two-year-old who had just learned he will never walk again might be a bit insensitive. My Message didn't fit and I didn't have another. There was no backup plan. These people were already in pain. I didn't want to make their lives more miserable by literally adding insult to injury.

When I got to the hospital, I saw they had decorated a large multi-

purpose room with the banner, “Laughter is the Best Medicine with Judy Carter.” The colorful party balloons strung throughout underscored the bleak mood. On one side of the room, people were sitting in chairs and staring blankly at the floor, looking depressed and tired—and that was the staff. On the other side of the large room, looking like members of a rival gang, were spinal cord injury patients, many of whom were attached to ventilators. They were mostly young men. There were also some burn victims, wrapped from head to toe in yellow Lady Gaga-like gowns.

I was introduced to Nick Mendes, a soldier who was paralyzed from the neck down in an IED explosion in Afghanistan. He whispered “Hi” as the machines pushed air in and out of his lungs. His father, Dave Mendes, who had moved into the hospital to be near his son, took me aside and said, “I’m glad you’re here because Nick has stopped doing his physical therapy. He’s falling into a depression. The nurses tell me that if he doesn’t do his therapy, he could die.” Nick was twenty-two years old.

My speech seemed more and more pathetic and anemic to me. My mind was scrambling to come up with an approach, a great joke, or a story, that would make them feel that I understood, but nothing came to mind. I was out of my league. How could I ever, ever understand their pain? What could I possibly say to alleviate their fear? “Hey, lighten up!” wasn’t going to cut it.

The VP of HR got up and read my introduction. It was too late to leave. I had to go on.

I walked to the center of the room with nothing in my head. I took a breath. It was quiet. All I could hear were the ventilators breathing for the soldiers who could no longer even breathe on their own. I opened my mouth to speak, and to my utter surprise a story I had never told came out of me. I didn’t think; the words just came. It was as if I was taken over by a Message that I had never written, that I had never told, but it was a Message that I had lived and a Message that had been inside me, waiting to be expressed.

I told them that my older sister, Marsha, was a quadriplegic from birth. After my parents died, I found a six-person group home for

Marsha, where she had professional nursing care as well as classes and weekend outings. She lived there until she died a few years ago, in her late fifties. When I arrived at her funeral, I was shocked. I expected to see a few people, but there were over a hundred mourners. People I didn't even know—her teachers throughout the years, her nurses, her caretakers, her friends. Then, one attendee after the next spoke about how my sister gave meaning to their lives. Story after story was told about my sister's humor, her warmth, her love of dirty jokes. There were people there who spent their holidays with my sister rather than with their own families. I had no idea. My sister Marsha—who couldn't talk or walk, who was fed by a tube in her stomach and solely communicated with facial expression and gestures—had the ability to turn strangers into friends. She had the ability to make a difference in other people's lives.

As I told this story, I felt the mood in the VA hospital change. Everyone was feeling the same pain, yet it was better because we were all feeling it together—both staff and patients. I went on to share my Eureka Moment about my sister. I realized that, even in her limited capacity, she gave more to others than many of us who are fully functional. Her life stood for the message of caring—giving others the gift to be a better person. To be their best self. Marsha gave other people meaning in their lives because she enabled them to become better than they had imagined possible.

Then my Message came out of my mouth. It was something I had never consciously thought of before, never had put into words until that moment. I walked over to Nick's bedside. I held his hand, put my face very close to his, and told him, "All our lives have purpose. We might not know what it is, but you must believe that you do have a purpose. You can inspire others. You can help others. That's why you must get well—your life has meaning." I realized that I was the vehicle, a transmitter for the Message, and the Message was bigger than me. I then started delivering my comedy material and, having developed trust, they started laughing. Or rather, laughter exploded out of them, as it does from people who haven't laughed in a long time.

I started my career as a stand-up comic because I wanted laughs, I

wanted love, and I wanted attention. But through teaching others to find their message—the Message of You—I found how much better it feels not to be “wanting” but “giving.” There is no greater feeling in the world than to know you’ve made a difference in someone else’s life.

A year later, I wanted to check in and see how Nick was doing. He’d been discharged and was living on base at Fort MacArthur, San Pedro, with his father and a caretaker. He was breathing on his own. He was sitting up straight. He was wheeling around in his mouth-operated electric chair with plenty of attitude. As he worked with his therapist to regain movement in his arms, he was cracking colorful jokes. I’d repeat them here, but then this book would be banned from schools. As I laughed and blushed, Nick told me he realized from my speech that “if you’re not laughing, then you’re not living.”

After one of his therapy sessions at the VA hospital, we spent some private time together and he told me, “When I was first injured, a doctor told me I would never walk, that I would never move, that I would never be able to do anything. He was an A-hole.”

Then Nick told me that he wanted to write a book. I asked him what his Message was and he told me, “I never truly appreciated the power of family. Without my family, I would be lost.” Then this very young man looked directly into my eyes and said with the wisdom of a sage, “See Judy, you and your body can do more than you think, more than you can imagine. I’ve learned never to quit. Never give up.” Nick is now devoted to his physical therapy, as he wants to regain use of his hands so he can give that doctor the finger. A noble goal. A succinct message. To have been a part of Nick’s journey has been a humbling and inspiring honor for me.

I’m looking forward to being part of your journey as well. The Message of Me is helping you to find The Message of You and I know, together, we can make a difference.

Hopefully, it would have made my sister and mother proud.

PART ONE

# DISCOVER THE MESSAGE OF YOU





## CHAPTER ONE

# YOU ARE THE MESSAGE

Okay, I'm going to say something shocking. Ready?

Your greatest speech has already been delivered in front of a live audience.

And that speech was delivered masterfully and powerfully by you.

You may be staring at this and wondering how you missed this great moment, or thinking I've lost my mind. Hold on one second and think about what I've just said:

*Your greatest speech already exists, even though you don't know it.*

It's in the advice you give to your friends; in the lessons you teach your children; in the stories you tell your family. You've given parts of your speech when you helped your sister build her Web site, or when you shared the story of your immigrant grandparents' journey to America. The Message of You speech has expressed itself in the volunteer work you do, the way you run your business, the way you just know which color suits you, and which doesn't. It's in the stories you share that inspire others to tell the truth, conquer their fears, and lead happier, healthier, and wealthier lives. Your greatest speech is in the stories you tell every day because at the core of those stories is The Message of You.

The Message of You is a distillation of all of your experiences, both personal and professional, that have formed the narrative or meaning of your life. The wrinkle is, The Message of You is usually not obvious. Most of the time, the meaning of our lives is invisible to us. We can't be objective about our own journey. We can't see how our life influences

others. We are so busy living we don't take note of the steps we took to find success. Yet, these are the very things that make people want to listen and know more about us. The good news is, not only can you discover The Message of You, but you can also develop it to inspire audiences, enhance your current profession, and launch a successful money making career as a professional speaker.

I can prove it.

Chastity Davis had a problem. It all started with a simple dinner in Vancouver, Canada. Chastity Davis, BC Hydro's marketing manager joined her boss for a quick meal after work to talk about their upcoming convention. After a second round of drinks had been ordered, Chastity relaxed and opened up, sharing stories from her childhood. Chastity was a member of the Tla'amin Nation, one of the indigenous tribes of Canada. As she spoke about her passion for healing the earth and the words of wisdom she'd inherited from her ancestors, her boss looked her straight in the eye and said, "This is exactly what our convention attendees need to get inspired—you! I want you to be our closing keynote speaker."

Chastity's first thought was, "Absolutely not!" After all, it was one thing to share the dramatic and highly personal tales of the abuses suffered by her parents over dinner with her boss. It was quite another thing to stand on stage in front of five hundred of her colleagues and share those same intimate details. Chastity shook her head no, but her boss was persistent. "Chastity, it's only thirty minutes and all you have to do is just tell your story. Your message is exactly what everyone needs to hear. You'll be great."

Maybe it was the feeling that she could really make a difference in the world, or maybe it was that second glass of wine, but Chastity said yes. Then she did what all speakers, professional and amateur, do: she procrastinated.

One week before she was scheduled to step on stage, she realized she'd better write something to say—and quick! She sat down with her laptop and started writing. She wrote about her life, her parents, and the history of her people. Hours passed and, exhausted, Chastity gave up. She now had twenty pages of single-spaced, disconnected anec-

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