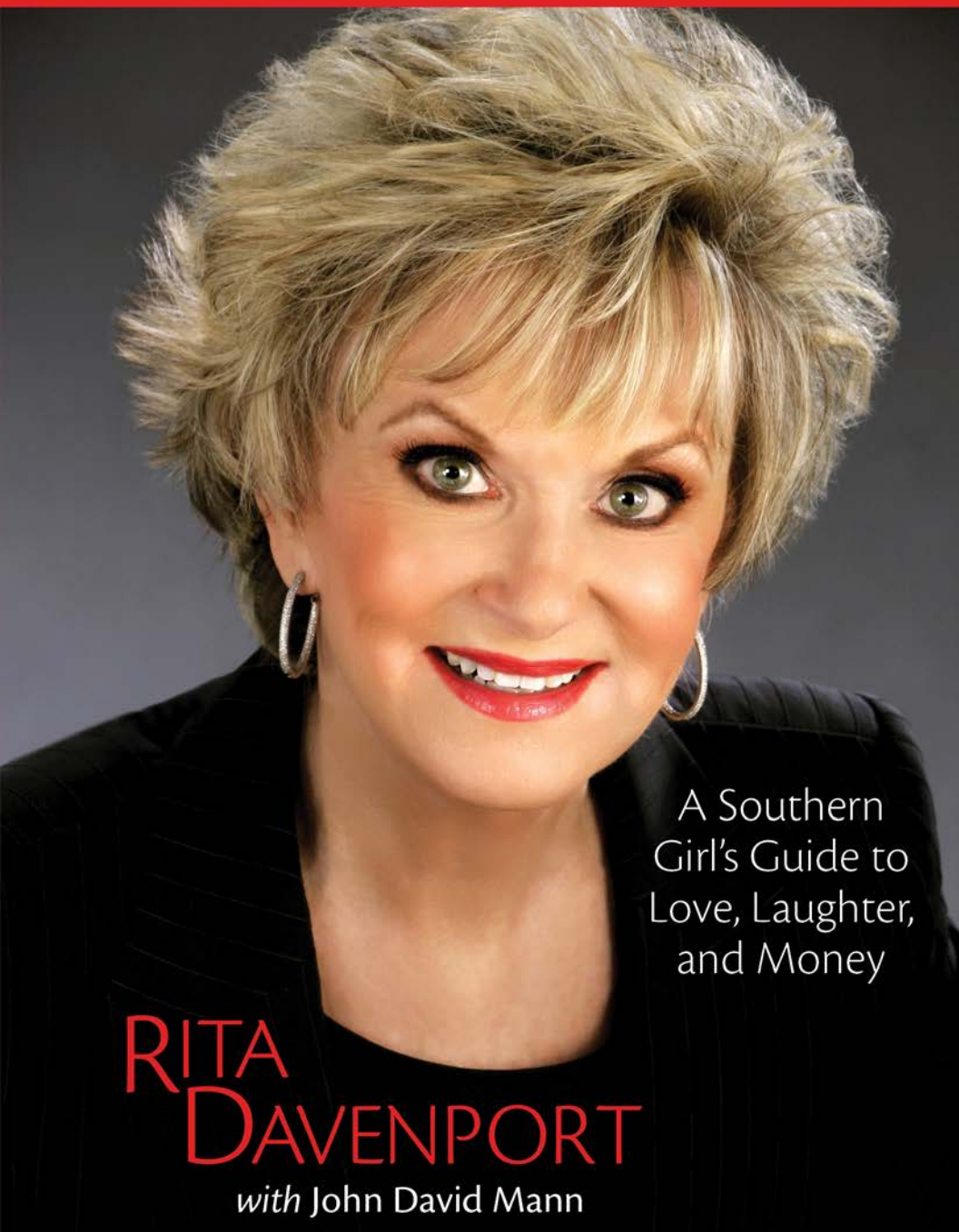


# FUNNY SIDE UP



A Southern  
Girl's Guide to  
Love, Laughter,  
and Money

**RITA  
DAVENPORT**

*with John David Mann*

FROM THE PUBLISHER OF *SUCCESS* MAGAZINE

# Funny Side Up

*A Southern Girl's Guide to  
Love, Laughter, and Money*

# Praise for Rita Davenport and *Funny Side Up*

“Rita and I have so much in common. We both hail from Tennessee, raised in families so poor neither of us had an indoor pot to piddle in. Both of us were tiny back-country blondes with great big dreams, girls who grew up in poverty but never saw it as anything but a minor inconvenience. We both shared bushels of determination, and neither of us was ever willing to accept what folks told us we couldn’t do. Rita shattered the proverbial glass ceiling, and used the shards to make the cutest li’l sequin dress. I love the girl! And you’ll love *Funny Side Up*!”

—Dolly Parton, entertainer

“Rita Davenport’s impact on the world is unparalleled, and seen through the hearts of the thousands of people whose lives are fabulous today because of her love and guidance.”

—Sharon Lechter, coauthor of *Three Feet*

*From Gold and Rich Dad Poor Dad*

“Inside each person is the seed of their potential—their acorn. Within your acorn lie all your possibilities, your ‘greatest gifts,’ as my friend Rita Davenport puts it, just awaiting your commitment to grow them. I have seen Rita awaken the potential in many people who are successful leaders today. Let her inspire and guide you as she has so many thousands of others!”

—Jim Cathcart, bestselling author of *The Acorn Principle*

“Rita Davenport is a true leader who has inspired others throughout her career with her great insights into how to live a successful life—and how to have fun doing it.”

—Tom Hopkins, author of *How to*

*Master the Art of Selling*

“If you are ready to experience vastly more sunshine in every aspect of your life, read my friend Rita’s brilliant new book *Funny Side Up*. Even better, read it, absorb it, use its wisdom in your life—and share it with those you love and bring the sunshine into their lives, too!”

—Mark Victor Hansen, co-creator of the bestselling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series

“Rita Davenport has been there and done that. Raising herself from rags to riches, she had her own successful television talk show and became the top executive of a large worldwide company. She is a natural storyteller with a highly motivational message. There’s an old saying: Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and you feed them for life. Rita’s book teaches you how to fish! Read and be rewarded.”

—Calvin LeHew, founder of The Factory at Franklin and coauthor of *Flying High*

“Rita Davenport is an icon in the self-empowerment movement. Her insightful, entertaining, and heartfelt words will help you to reach deep within yourself, expand your vision of what is possible, soar to new heights, and live a life of meaning and significance.”

—Les Brown, CPAE, bestselling author of *Live Your Dreams*, National Speaker’s Association, Hall of Fame Speaker, Toastmasters International Golden Gavel Award

“A remarkable collection of insights that teaches with humor how generosity, humility, and thankfulness will take your business and personal relationships to the next level. You’ll be moved, uplifted, and educated by a talented teller of real-life tales about what’s really important in life and how to measure success. You’ll find yourself laughing, crying, and nodding in agreement.”

—Jeanne Robertson, CSP, CPAE, past president, National Speakers Association

“This priceless gem speaks to the heart of true success and fulfillment. By chasing our passion, not our pension, we all can receive the gift that comes from knowing that all life—present and future—has been nurtured by our individual contributions.”

—Denis Waitley, author, *The Seeds of Greatness*

“Don’t waste a minute of your time reading Rita Davenport’s new book... *unless* you are totally committed to being an even more effective salesperson, leader, and individual! You’ll laugh, you’ll cry, you’ll be energized and inspired, but you’ll *never* be bored by Rita’s amazing wit, wisdom, and wonderful true stories. Few people can hold a live audience the way Rita can, and even fewer people can put that skill into a book—but Rita has done it!”

—Joel Weldon, CSP, CPAE, award-winning speaker, recipient of the Golden Gavel and 2006 Legend of the Speaking Profession

“In these days of pop-up celebrities and twenty-five-cent teletherapists, Rita Davenport is the real deal. This lady has seen it all, done it all, and knows what she’s talking about. Curl up in your favorite chair and spend a few hours with one of the most inspiring people I have ever met. She’ll warm your heart, make you laugh, and touch your soul—and you will never be the same!”

—Connie Podesta, CSP, CPAE, author of *10 Ways to Stand Out from the Crowd*

“Rita Davenport has such a depth of experience and wealth of good ideas that I listen to whatever she says and read whatever she writes. Her ability to teach great truths with warmth and humor make her a powerful communicator. I’ve learned from her, and you will, too, if you read her excellent new book. I recommend it.”

—Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE, award-winning speaker and author of *The Fred Factor* and *You Don’t Need a Title to be a Leader*

"No one I know in the world of motivation and personal growth comes close to having Rita Davenport's gift of being world-wise brilliant and side-splittingly funny at the same time. The strategic life lessons she doles out in *Funny Side Up* are so well-laced with laughter that you get the message and learn something powerful and important before you even realize it. An important book—beautifully entertaining and enlightening!"

—Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D., bestselling author  
of *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself*

"Rita Davenport is one of the most powerfully authentic people I have ever met. In a world full of smoke and mirrors, she needs none; her wisdom and insight are among the best of the best. Be careful—before you know it, she will change your life!"

—Keith Kochner, founder, Mentorship  
Mastery and Mentorfish.com

"I have known Rita for more than thirty-five years. She is funny, charming, honest, self-effacing, ambitious, caring, heartfelt, and fabulously successful... and she has dedicated her life to helping, inspiring, and supporting others to become their best selves. Pick up this book and join the millions who love and adore Rita. You will be blessed to have her in your life!"

—Dian Thomas, television personality and  
bestselling author of *Roughing It Easy*

"*Funny Side Up* is one of the most inspirational and well-crafted books I've read in a long time. Rita Davenport, who has literally gone from rags to riches, has a compelling story that will motivate you to become the person you would like to be. And don't let her mellifluous Tennessee accent fool you for a moment: she is a powerful and eloquent speaker who can evoke emotions from deep sadness to soaring inspiration—and in the next heartbeat have you laughing so hard you can barely breathe."

—Dr. Art Mollen, author, *Dr. Mollen's Anti-Aging Diet*

“Rita Davenport blew into my life when I was losing myself. I saved my grocery money to buy her audiocassettes, and my car became a rolling University of Rita. Through her I learned to love myself, which is what FLYing is all about: Finally Loving Yourself. Rita’s message touched my heart. She changed my life with her words, and she’ll change yours, too.”

—Marla “FlyLady” Cilley, coauthor of the  
*New York Times* bestseller *Body Clutter:  
Love Your Body, Love Yourself*

“Funny, charming, honest, self-effacing, caring, and fabulously successful—this lady walks her talk as she leads with her heart. I’ve been friends with Rita over thirty years. After a great deal of prodding, she has decided to put her story down on paper. I’m sure you’ll be as thrilled as I was when you read her remarkable book. The message and tools in this book will help to improve not only your organization and your career, but your entire life.”

—Joe Larson, CSP, CPAE, former president of National  
Speakers Association and winner of the Cavett Award

“Rita Davenport has more energy than Hoover Dam on Red Bull. She has enjoyed multimedia success and has inspired thousands along her journey. And the motivational kick-in-the-butt from Rita’s live speaking engagements make Knute Rockne and General George S. Patton seem like pacifists. Rita Davenport could write the *alphabet* and sell more copies than *Gone with the Wind*. I will be the first to buy a copy of Rita’s new book... and I will be the first to charge her \$34.95 for this quote.”

—Dave “Morning Mayor” Pratt, host,  
KUPD’s *Dave Pratt in the Morning*

# Funny Side Up

*A Southern Girl's Guide to  
Love, Laughter, and Money*

by Rita Davenport

with John David Mann

SUCCESS



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## *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to you, the reader, and to my family, friends, teachers, mastermind group, staff, and peers, with great joy, appreciation, and love. You all know who you are and you're way too humble to need recognition.

To Mama and Daddy and my brother Ray: from where you sit in Heaven, I'm sure you can see how much I truly miss you.

To my sister, Euphiazene, and my brother-in-law, Lucion: you both taught me to listen with my heart and speak from my soul.

To my husband, David: everything I am and will be, I owe to you.

To my sons, Michael and Scott, two of my greatest teachers: I love you.

To my granddaughters, Reese and Claire Ray: you are the light of my life. Remember, it costs nothing to dream—but everything if you don't.

To anyone else who finds yourself in a place in life where you are looking for your *why*, when the question of *why* seems unanswerable: you are never alone.

Now the journey begins, and I get to share all you've taught me...

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## Foreword by Darren Hardy

I may not know you personally, but I know something about you, maybe even a few things.

For example, I know that you were born. I also know that *when* you were born, you were a powderkeg of potential, a supernova of big dreams, boundless imagination, and daring intentions.

How do I know that? Because this is true of every one of us. On the way to launching us into life, a lion's share of possibility is poured into each of us, along with the gifts, the talents, and the passion to bring it to fruition.

And then it begins.

As growth gets under way, circumstances crowd in around us, sometimes so chokingly close that they make it hard to breathe. Disappointments and discouragements take root and grow, competing for sunlight and nutrients with the vines of our own best aspirations. We become singed by myriad slights and burned by the hurts of painful experiences.

I've written a number of books on developing one's self personally, because the subject fascinates me and is instilled in every fiber of my being. I've studied successful people for nearly twenty years, and I've known hundreds of high-profile people who have achieved big dreams. I've learned that dreams can be challenging, can sometimes feel intimidating, and are *always* worth the SUCCESS they can bring. And I've learned that dreams are fragile things, too. So many people have had their dreams knocked right out of them.

Perhaps that describes you.

If so, if there is even a part of you that yearns to “be more, have more, learn more, and earn more so you could share more,” then you’ve come to the right place.

By the way, I put those words in quotation marks—“be more, have more, learn more, and earn more so you can share more”—because they are not mine but are one of a thousand trademark phrases from the remarkable spirit known to the world as Rita Davenport.

Rita is one of the most successful women I’ve ever known, but possibly not for the reasons you might think.

Yes, she has led an amazing career in broadcast, interviewing hundreds of celebrities on her own television show. Yes, she has been a bestselling author. (I don’t know any other authors offhand who have penned bestsellers about time management and about sourdough cooking.) Yes, she has served as president at the helm of a company with an astonishing success story. She is as powerful a leader as she is hilarious, as personable as she is dynamic and unstoppable.

The reason I say Rita is one of the most successful people I know is that she has inspired so many to step out of their limitations and to become what they always knew, deep down, they could become. I know that’s why she’s written this book, and I suspect that’s why you’re reading it.

As you browse the pages ahead, I hope you will remember something.

Rita’s story is so engaging and entertaining that it’s easy to just sit back and enjoy the ride. Her journey—from Tennessee poverty to Arizona fame, from a speech defect to the national arena where she became one of the most sought-after motivational speakers in America (with Southern twang alive and well)—is a wild ride indeed, and seeing it leap from the page is *almost* as funny as hearing her tell it live from the stage.

But while you’re being entertained, don’t let the point of it all slip past you unnoticed. Because there’s a method to her madness. Rita isn’t here just to tell her story. She’s

telling you what she's done for only one reason: to show you *what's possible*.

Rita does a lot of things well, but she does one thing *exceptionally* well: she inspires people to be their best. She has done this for literally millions of people. Now she's here to do it for you, and I'm honored to be the one making the introductions.

Dear Reader—please meet my friend Rita Davenport.

Rita—my new friend Dear Reader.

I know the two of you will get along famously.

**Darren Hardy**

*New York Times* Bestselling Author  
and Publisher of *SUCCESS* magazine  
[www.darrenhardy.com](http://www.darrenhardy.com)

## A Word from Your Copilot

A few years ago a friend and I wrote a book titled *The Go-Giver*, and in the story there was a character referred to as “the keynote speaker.” This woman was an amazing speaker, with an extraordinary capacity to be both profound and hilarious at the same time, and she had touched millions of lives with her story. When the protagonist, Joe, hears her speak about authenticity, it signals a turning point in the story.

We named the speaker “Debra Davenport”—and that was *not* a coincidence.

When Bob Burg and I wrote *The Go-Giver* I’d already known Rita (not Debra) Davenport for nearly a decade. I met her first in the nineties, when I interviewed her for a magazine cover about phenomenally successful female company presidents. But by that time I had already known her *by reputation* for many years. It seemed that everyone I knew and everyone I talked to had heard of Rita, most had heard her speak, and all had some variation of the same thing to say:

“Oh, Rita Davenport—I *love* her!”

The outpouring of affection and admiration that seemed to follow this woman around made me wonder if she was something like Mother Teresa. When I met her, I found out: yes, she was exactly like that—if you can picture Mother Teresa with lightning-fast and screamingly funny delivery in an outrageous Southern twang ... and wearing terrific outfits.

Fast forward.

In mid-2011 I get a call from my friend Reed Bilbray, at

SUCCESS, who wants to know if I have some time to work on a book project with them. Alas, I reply, I am really and truly jammed, half a dozen projects on my plate, couldn't possibly take on another one, very sorry, love to but no can do.

Then he tells me it's a book with Rita.

And that's that. (I can't very well say no to a character out of one of my own books, can I?)

It's hard to describe just what a pleasure it has been to listen to Rita tell her life story and then weave the bits and pieces of it, together with her perspectives on life and living, into the book you're now holding in your hands.

The reason I'm excited to see this book finished and on its way out into the world is that I already know what kind of impact it will have on people's lives. Rita has a sort of Socratic Midas touch. Socrates asked his students questions until they found the answers inside themselves. Rita does something like that, only she interacts with people until they discover the *gold* inside themselves. And when she talks about "a rich life," she's not just talking about financial abundance, but about the abundant richness of human experience, accomplishment, connection, fulfillment, and love.

Every phone call I've had with Rita ends the same way: the last words I hear as I'm about to hang up are, "Love ya!"

That's how she ends every phone call with *everyone*. And she's not kidding.

Love ya too, Rita.

**John David Mann**



## Before We Get Started...

... let's put this one right out on the table: I talk funny.

Not that what I *say* is always funny. Although I do put a lot of importance on humor, because I think it helps us keep things in perspective, and even when it doesn't succeed in doing that, at least it keeps us sane. And if it doesn't do *that*, it still makes us laugh—and laughing is good for you. It's a proven scientific fact that laughter increases endorphins<sup>1</sup>, lowers blood pressure<sup>2</sup>, helps regulate cortisol and epinephrine, the stress hormones, and boosts immune function.<sup>3</sup> It also causes weight loss and raises sex hormones. Okay, I just made that last part up. But it *could* be true. Makes sense to me, and until there's science that disproves it, I'm goin' with it!

But no, what I mean is, I *talk* funny.

I was born and raised in a Tennessee home so poor we had no indoor plumbing, and unless you were born and raised there too, I don't talk the way you talk. As an adult, when I moved to Phoenix, Arizona, and pursued a master's degree in child development, I worked with young children at the college daycare center. Soon after I arrived, parents were calling the program administrator and saying, "Uh, Dr. Ferrone? This is really strange, but ... our children are speaking *Southern*." Imagine that! I do not know how that happened.

On top of that thick-as-molasses Shake 'n' Bake accent, as a child I had a speech defect. My favorite dress was one my aunt had sewn for me out of some big old fifty-pound feed sacks when I was six. I went around the neighborhood bragging about it, except I couldn't say *feed sack* and instead

it came out *theed thack*, so for the next few years, to the people of Flat Rock, Tennessee, I was known as Theedthack. Those years are behind me now, nobody calls me Theedthack anymore and, while there are those who might disagree with this next statement, I no longer have a speech defect. But you could put me in a basin and scrub me all you want and, thankfully, the Tennessee in me is still never coming out.

My point is this: I talk Southern.

Think Dolly Parton, then speed it up from 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  to 78 rpm and take away the guitar, and you've pretty much got me. Which is interesting, because I once dated the guy who ended up marrying Dolly Parton. I never understood what he saw in her. I'm kidding, of course. Dolly came to Phoenix one time and said she wanted to meet me and offered to be on my television show. I think it was because I was one of the few girls her guy had dated before her, and she was curious to find out just who I was. I said, "Well, Dolly, you're probably wondering what he saw in me. I'll save you the trouble of trying to figure it out and just come out and tell you the truth: I wore a padded bra." She said, "I figured. He told me that's what he guessed." I said, "Well I'm glad he wasn't naïve!" Dolly and I had us a good time together. But we'll come back to Dolly Parton in another chapter, because she has a story to tell here, too.

The reason I mention the speech defect, the hillbilly accent, and the mile-a-minute resting rate of my natural speech patterns is that it all makes this fact very clear: from the very start, God was playing tricks on me. Why do I say that? Because in the course of my life, as you'll see, I eventually discovered that He had put me here on this earth to be a public speaker.

*Hello?* A public speaker—with a speech defect? And who talks Southern?

It's a little bit like hiding Easter eggs. I was given a gift—only after being hard boiled and painted with all kinds of spiffy colors, the darn thing was hidden long before I even knew it was there, and hidden so well I nearly missed it altogether.

Now you might think this book is about my life story. And yes, there will be bits and pieces of my story in here, at least enough so you can get an idea of who this person is talking to you from these pages. But this book isn't really about me: *it's about you*.

And right here, this is the part where you come in. We'll get to my story in a bit. For the moment, I'm more interested in getting to *your* story.

## Chapter 1

# WHY ARE YOU HERE?



Why *are* you here? I know there's a reason. None of us are here by accident. What is your gift? And what are you supposed to do with it?

I fervently believe that every single one of us is sent into this world with a unique purpose. Not only that: I believe we are each sent into this world with a purpose *and* with all the talent we need to fulfill that purpose. And by *everyone* I mean *you*. But you've got to find those gifts within yourself—and you have to have the courage, the passion, and the belief in yourself to let them shine through.

Oh, and if you're not sure you know what your purpose is, don't worry, because you were born with clues built right in. If you played hide-and-seek when you were a kid, remember what your friends would say when you started getting close to finding the right hiding place? "You're getting warm." Finding your purpose is a lot like that. When you start getting closer, you get warm. And when you get real close, you get hot. It's called *passion*.

## It Starts with Passion

Every recipe has its key ingredient. If you're going to bake a cake, you start with flour. To make an omelet, you start with eggs. If you want to create a rich, fulfilling life, the ingredient you start with is *passion*. A rich life is one where you cannot wait to get up in the morning and set about whatever it is you're doing that day.

A friend of mine was shopping at a food store one day and the clerk, a friendly young man, got to talking with him. "Do you mind if I ask, what do you do for work?"

"I'm a writer," my friend replied.

"Really. Do you like it?"

"I don't just like it," said my friend, "I *love* it."

The young man stopped what he was doing, put down the package he was wrapping, and stared at my friend. "Really," he said. "I have to tell you, I ask that question to every customer who'll talk to me. I've asked it more than a hundred times. You know how many of those people told me they *love* what they do? One ... *you*. That's it!"

Can you imagine that? One person in a hundred wakes up genuinely looking forward to the day's work. That's a tragedy. On the other hand, it's also an opportunity, because you get to *be* that one person in a hundred, and when you are, you become a magnet to the other ninety-nine. Let me explain how that works.

It's been said that enthusiasm is the presence of God within. In fact, the word itself comes from the Greek *theos* for God and *en-* for *within*. But you don't have wait to be struck down on the road to Damascus or hit by a bolt of inspiration from above. The passion of genuine enthusiasm is an energy you can generate yourself. How? Simple: by focusing your time, effort, and energy on those ideas, activities and pursuits that get you excited. Hey, it's not rocket science.

Stay with me, though, because there's more here than meets the eye. When you feed your soul by spending time on things you love, that you are excited about, your enthusiasm becomes contagious. Being around someone who's passionate about what they're doing rubs off on

other people. It catches like a wildfire (the good kind) and warms them. It makes them want to be around you more and gravitate to that positive energy you're exuding. You become a magnet for that positivity—for greatness—and it's wonderful. I want you to think for a moment about the people you've known or respected who had a true, inspired passion for what they were doing in life and the journey they were on. It makes you feel good inside, doesn't it? Empowered? Energized?

Do you see where this is leading? You'll never accomplish the things you're capable of and live your life to the fullest entirely on your own. It takes a support team of others who buy in to what you're up to. (We'll talk more about *that* in chapter 9, because it's a crucial piece of the whole picture.) So how do you find those people? You don't have to: they will find you. The people, resources, situations, and circumstances you'll need to fulfill your purpose will all be *drawn* to you—so long as you're *on* purpose.

I've often been asked, "How is it you always seem so enthusiastic? How do you get that way?" Let me explain how this works: you don't *get* that way. You have to *start* that way. Successful people don't gradually become excited about what they're doing after they've been doing it a while and it starts to show some results. They don't start feeling the passion once the world recognizes them for what they're doing, or after their idea or their pursuit starts generating some reward. That's not the way it works. *First* you find your passion for who you are, for where you are and what you're up to, and *then* the success you're seeking becomes gravitationally drawn toward you.

"But what if I just don't have that passion to start with?" you ask? Don't worry: *you do*. You may have misplaced it, or forgotten it, but trust me, you've got it. And it's important to find it—because you'll never work a day in your life unless you'd rather be doing something else.

Here, I'll prove it to you.

## How You Started Out

Do you consider yourself athletic? How would you rate yourself, say, as a swimmer? Average, below average, maybe a little above average? So-so? Terrible? Well, I've got news for you: whether you know it or not, you are a world-class super-Olympic gold medal swimmer.

I'm not kidding.

You know how I know that? Because I took anatomy, physiology, bacteriology, and chemistry in college, as part of my science minor. And here's what I learned: we all start out the same way, as tiny sperm cells. In order for you to be born, assuming your daddy had an average sperm count, you had to have out-swum some 200,000 other sperm. And it was uphill all the way.

Now, I do not know what motivated you, but that little tail was wiggling like mad, and you were screaming, "Out of my way! Out of my way! I want to teach school! I want to dance! I want to be in real estate! I want to be a journalist!" or whatever it was you were screaming at the top of your little sperm voice.

You know who the losers are in life? It's simple, and I'll tell you how you can recognize them. They're not as tall as you are. In fact, they're not even as tall as the thickness of one of your eyelashes. They're the sperm cells you left behind in the Fallopian dust. You haven't heard much from them lately, have you? No. But out of 200,000 (or 600,000, if your daddy was above average), here you are.

Do you suppose it was just an accident that you made it across that ovarian finish line? Just a random thing? You suppose the other 199,999 sperm were all way ahead of you, but they just had the bad luck of stubbing their little toes on the last lap and stumbling? Nuh-uh. They lost because you were out in front, pure and simple. You were unstoppable. You know why? Because you had something that would not allow you to be anyone but the sperm at the front of the pack.

It was no accident. You had purpose. You were *on* purpose. And you know what? You're still that same

person today. That's all still in you, raring to go and eager to shine, and it's time you *let* it.

### **The World Steps Aside for Those Who Know Where They're Going**

Have you ever been in a public place when you desperately needed to use the bathroom? Imagine this scene: you stride into a busy, crowded corridor full of people milling around, all going different directions, all with things on their minds, none of them paying you any attention. But you really, *really* have to go to the bathroom. You know what happens? Even though you don't say a word, when people catch the look in your eyes, let me tell you, they'll step aside and let you through. I'm speaking from experience here.

All of life is like that: if you really, really have to do something, anything, people will step aside and let you at it. But you've got to decide where you're going and have a seriously intense drive to do it. You have to be clear about your intentions. You've got to get your *ask* in gear!

Og Mandino, best-selling author of *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, once shared this story with me:

A young man traveled to India because he'd heard there was a wise old man living up on a mountain who held the secret of success. He climbed all the way to the mountain's peak, where he found the old man gazing out at the world. "Sir," he said, "could you teach me the secret to success? What do I have to do to be successful?"

The old man looked at him and said, "Son, come with me," and they climbed down the mountain until they reached a river.

Suddenly the old man grabbed the young man by the back of his shirt collar, plunged his head



under the water, and held him there, kicking and thrashing, until the poor kid felt he was on the verge of drowning. At that point, the guru pulled him out and hauled him onto the riverbank, where he sat, spitting, coughing, and trembling. The older man waited until the young man had recovered enough to listen, and he said, “Son, when you want to succeed as bad as you wanted to breathe just now, that’s when you will have achievement in your life.”

When you want something so bad you feel like you’ll drown without it, and you put your whole heart and soul into it, you will become great at it, and people will be drawn to you.

### **If You Don’t Have the Skills, You’ll *Gain* the Skills**

In 1982, a seventy-seven-year-old great-grandmother named Editha Merrill had triple bypass surgery. Technically speaking, she did not survive the surgery—that is, she fulfilled the clinical definition of death while on the operating table. However, the surgical team was able to resuscitate her, and she pulled through.

When she came out from under anesthesia, her best friend was standing there holding her hand. “Editha, we almost lost you,” she said gently. “Honey, you almost didn’t make it. They told us you actually *died* in surgery!”

Merrill looked up at her and said, “Well, why *did* I make it? I’ve got nothing to do and nothing to live for. My husband’s been dead for twelve years. My son lives miles away. I’m all alone. Why didn’t I just go ahead and die?”

“Editha,” her friend replied firmly, “God’s not through with you yet. I don’t know what it is, but there’s something you’re supposed to do.”

A little more than a year later, Editha’s friend’s words took on a prophetic meaning. While she and three neighbors were taking a short flight from Phoenix to Sedona in a little four-seater, one of the group, a man named Bruce Turner,

suffered a heart attack from which he would never recover. As shocking as that was, there was a detail that made it even more frightening: Bruce was also their pilot.

Although Editha happened to be sitting in the copilot's seat, she was no expert pilot. In fact, she was no kind of pilot at all. She had no more experience behind the controls of an aircraft than you or I. But what was she going to do? She flew the plane. With a flight instructor on the ground talking her down, Editha piloted the craft for two hours, including a rough patch through some clouds that cut their visibility to zero. When she landed back at Luke Air Force Base two hours later, the entire staff of the base was outside screaming and yelling, waving handkerchiefs and flags (so they would know which way to run if the plane didn't land safely, I guess), as the little Piper Cherokee floated in and made its perfect three-point landing. Editha cut the engine and the plane rolled over onto the grass. The emergency crew drove up and the driver stuck his thumb up in an A-OK sign of victory. Editha grinned and echoed his gesture, sticking her thumb up in the air as well.<sup>4</sup>

I don't know about you, but if I were in her place, I would have been *sucking* my thumb. One of my friends said, "I'd have had rope burns from my rosary." When I told my friend Joe Garagiola, the Major League catcher and baseball announcer, what had happened with Editha, he said, "Rita, if that were me, I would have had a laundry problem you wouldn't have believed!"

I had a chance to talk with Jack Seeley, the flight instructor who talked Editha through that flight and landing, and I learned from him that the last time she had been in an airplane had been fifty years earlier. "Rita," Jack said, "if I'd known that the woman I was talking to on that radio was seventy-eight years old, I'll be honest with you, I'm not sure I even would have tried to help. I'd have figured, no way would she be able to fly that airplane, let alone land it." Good thing he didn't ask her how old she was. (See? There's a reason it's not wise to ask a woman her age. Besides, a woman who'll tell you her age will lie about other things, too.)

Editha Merrill's friend was right: she had a purpose. That was the reason she didn't die on the operating table. She was supposed to land that airplane. *She* was supposed to save those other people's lives.

Did she have the skills to do it? No, she sure didn't. But she acquired them, and pretty darn fast, too. If she could do that, at seventy-eight, do you think you can learn the skills you'll need to fulfill *your* purpose?

Because let me tell you something: you have a purpose, or else you would not be alive today. You want to live a rich life? Find out what your purpose is, get crystal clear on it, and throw yourself into it.

When I say you have a talent, you may question that. But don't—because you do! I questioned it about myself for years. I didn't intend to do what I've done for a living. I intended to be Tina Turner. Unfortunately God didn't give me Tina Turner's voice. (He had already given it to her. He also knew I wouldn't have put up with Ike for a second.) I got over it.

What do you love to do? What are you passionate about? Whatever that is, dive into it and get good at it. No, get *great* at it.

## **No Compromise**

Once you discover what your purpose is, you can't let anyone else tell you differently. I'm not saying you should stick your fingers in your ears and close your mind off to other people's perspective. Sometimes people see things in you that you don't see in yourself. But when it comes to the core of your being, the very soul of who you are and why you're here? *Your* voice is the only one you can trust.

When people tell you that you can't do it, give yourself the gift of tunnel vision. Don't listen to them. Listen to yourself, because you've got the answers within you right now.

You've already got everything you need within you to be outrageously successful. Everything. A scientist once told me something I thought was fascinating: you have the atomic components and energy within you that's equivalent to the

force of an atomic bomb. It's a question of how those elements are focused. I said this once in a speech. Afterward, a woman came up to me and said, "Do I really have the energy within me, like an atomic bomb?" I said, "Yes, ma'am, you do." She said, "Well, you know, I thought I was having a little gas, but I didn't know it was that serious." Funny what people hear from what you say, isn't it?

I interviewed the Oscar-winning actor Dustin Hoffman once years ago at a press junket, and he told us he had a list of people who had all told him, back when he was starting out and struggling to get a foot in the door of the acting world, that he was ugly, he was scrawny, he sounded stupid, and wasn't ever going to amount to anything. "I keep that list with me," he said. "You know why? To remind me that other people's opinions are just that."

All the people on that list knew, I mean they *knew*, beyond all shadow of the slightest doubt, that Dustin Hoffman would never make it as an actor. Other people's opinions. But Hoffman made sure to stay in control of the one opinion that mattered: his own. That's worked out pretty well for him, don't you think? It will for you, too.

Are you every bit as successful, right now, as you know you could be? If not, what's holding you back? I'll tell you what's holding you back: other people's opinions. You've been handed a script that's been programmed into you by family members, friends, teachers, and all kinds of people you've come into contact with, and you're following the script. You've bought into their story. You're thinking, "Yeah, I'll never be able to do that, it's just not something I'm capable of," because somebody else told you that.

I know, because I was handed a script, too. (I'll tell you all about it in the next few chapters.) We all were. But that story isn't your story, it's a story others made up for you. They weren't necessarily trying to ruin your life. In fact, the chances are good they were only doing their best to help, doing what they thought would be in your best interests. I've raised two sons, and I know how tempting it is to look at someone you love trying to figure out what they're supposed to do with

this thing called *their life*, and think, “Here, let me help you with that...”

But good intentions or not, they don’t know your story. I don’t know what your purpose in life is. Who does? *You* do.

*It’s a simple three-step process:*

First: Find out what it is you want to do. What you were put here to do. What speaks to your soul.

Second: Start doing it. Go for it. Throw yourself into it, body mind and soul.

And third: Keep doing it no matter what. Don’t compromise. The only time you fail is when you quit!

## **Life Is Choice**

Life is all about choices. Life itself *is* choice. That’s what distinguishes things that are alive: they make choices. Plants grow toward the sunlight. Dogs run after the sticks you throw. People pursue careers and create circumstances.

Editha Merrill had a choice. She could have said, “We’re doomed, no way can I fly an airplane—I’m seventy-eight, for Heaven’s sake, and I’ve never even touched one of those controls before!” Or she could make a different choice. She chose to land that darned airplane. Dustin Hoffman had a choice too. We all do.

This may be hard to hear (or, if you’re a more visual person, hard to *read*), but humor me and just take it on, for a moment, as a what-if-this-is-true, a possibility to consider: *You are where you are, right now, because this is where you’ve chosen to be.* You can blame all kinds of people conditions and circumstances, but even in those situations where it might seem like you had no choice whatsoever, you are still given a free-will choice about how those people and circumstances will affect you, and about where you go from that point forward. That is a gift we all have. You are where you are because of the choices you’ve made, whether you’ve made them with full intention and your eyes wide open, or made them sort of by default, backing into the corners of your life because you didn’t think there was any other way to go. You can think of them as active choices

versus passive choices—and making active choices has it all beat, hands down.

In fact, for me that is the definition of genuine success itself: *success is living every day the way you choose*. It is living with the clear understanding that you are making your own choices, and embracing those choices fully.

You've probably heard it said that success is not a destination, it's a journey. Well, yeah ... but not just *any* journey! Walking over to the corner for a pack of gum is a journey, but I'm not sure that's a very vivid picture of *success*.

No, success is that unique journey where you spend each day living your authentic life, being your authentic self, in hot pursuit of the very reason you were put on the planet in the first place.

### **My Life in a Nutshell**

Here are the simple facts of my life. We'll get into some details here and there later on, but while I've still got your attention I thought it would be polite to give you the general lay of the land.

I started out as a sperm cell. (I think we've covered that part!)

Next, I was born into a very poor family and grew up in Flat Rock, Tennessee. Like I said, no indoor plumbing. We'd have to go out to the street to fetch water, and when it was time to give that water back, we'd go out the other way, to the outhouse. My sister, Euphiazene, was eight years older than I. (She got married at the age of fourteen, when I was just six, started a family four years later at eighteen, and recently celebrated her sixty-second wedding anniversary.) My brother Ray came along two years after I did. All the way through school, until I left home myself, I slept in one room with my mama, and Ray slept in the other room with our daddy. It was a small house, and one built for small aspirations.

Except for mine. "For some reason," my sister says, "you were not like the rest of the family." I never accepted my

obvious destiny as a poor-town, don't-accomplish-much housewife. My high school guidance counselor told me to forget about college—"You're not college material, Rita," she said, "just concentrate on finding a good husband and having a family"—but I ignored her advice. (Except for the husband and family part; I did pretty well in *that* department.) It took some doing, but I eventually wormed my way into college and managed to graduate with honors in just three years—and was even president of Kappa Omicron Phi, a society for academic excellence, thank you very much. At that point I got married (there's the husband part), moved out of my childhood home, and more or less began what I suppose you'd call my adult life.

My career as an adult falls pretty much into four parts.

For my first seven years or so after graduating from college, I worked as a teacher, social worker, and consumer service specialist, which is basically someone who helps people understand how to conserve energy and use the stuff they bought.

For the next fifteen years I hosted and produced a national-award-winning daytime television show in Phoenix, Arizona. These were the pre-Oprah, pre-Sally Jesse Raphael, pre-Jerry Springer days; on the national daytime talk scene, Phil Donahue was king. My show was called *Open House*, then *Phoenix at Midday*, *Cooking with Rita*, and finally *The Rita Davenport Show*, which came within a stone's throw of being nationally syndicated. (Close, but no cigar, and I'm grateful it didn't quite happen, because my life would have turned out very differently. More on that later, too.)

By this time I had written a few books that had done pretty well, and also carved out something of a career as a public speaker. The year I finally left the show to speak full-time, I flew however many frequent flier miles around the country it took to give 118 speeches, which works out to almost one every three days.

But I didn't stay in that career, either. Upon leaving the television show I also found myself dabbling in the world of direct selling, becoming an independent representative

for a company that sold a line of skin care products. The dabbling got serious, and within six months I was No. 1 in sales and sponsoring. A few years later I was president of that company, a position I held for more than twenty years. When I joined, we were doing close to \$4.5 million annually; we soon began experiencing tremendous growth, and two decades later it was just shy of being a billion-dollar company.

Those are the four chapters of my life: teacher and social worker, television host, speaker/author, and company president—although I'll have to admit, as different as those careers sound, it's really been pretty much the same social-worker path the whole time, just in different disguises. I have a passion for helping people, and especially, for helping people discover how great they truly are and what extraordinary riches they have to share with the world. That's my purpose in writing this book, as I'll bet you've already figured out.

I give you my story in a nutshell to make a point: *if I can choose to be successful, then anyone can.*

People sometimes think it's false modesty when I say that. It's not. It's the absolute truth. There have been so many strikes against me, the odds that I should make anything out of myself were just ridiculous.

The other day I went to have my eyes checked. After examining me for a few minutes, the doctor pushed his chair back on its little rolling wheels and said, "Rita, how on earth do you function?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you have the weirdest eyesight I ever saw. You use one eye for near vision, and the other one for far vision."

"Is that unusual?" I asked. It sounded pretty normal to me, but hey, what do I know?

He shook his head. "Not by itself, it isn't. But I've never had a patient with this many degrees of difference between their two eyes. I've had one who had three degrees of difference. But you've got *five*."

I asked him what exactly that meant. He shook his head



again and gave me a look. "When you read something, part of your brain shuts down. And when you're looking out and seeing something in the distance, another part of your brain shuts down. I don't know how you drive, how you park a car, or, frankly, how you do *anything*."

Well, I don't know how I'm doing it either, but apparently it's working for me. I know this: when I'm about to give a speech, I have to take a minute to center myself, so I know exactly what I'm going to say. I go off by myself somewhere backstage, turn up the palms of my hands, and say, "Lord, tell me what you want me to include in my speech today. I know I couldn't do this by myself. There's got to be someone out there who needs a special message. Give me whatever's needed for this group, and I'll do my best to be your messenger." And I'm always grateful when I get the feedback that somehow I said exactly what someone there needed to hear.

When I speak, I tend to go off point and tell stories, and I'm never sure just where they're headed. ("I've noticed," I know, I can hear you saying it.) Most of the time, I do manage to find my way back to where I started and finish making my point, but in the meantime, who knows where we'll wander. It keeps my audiences on edge, wondering, "Okay, is she ever going to finish that thought she started ten minutes ago?"

There's method to the madness, though. It keeps them listening. I learned this from the late great Jack Benny, who was famous for doing this. He could talk to audiences and wander so far off that you'd swear he had no idea what he'd been talking about, when all of a sudden he'd lead right back to the place where he started, almost as if it was by accident. He was brilliant at it.

I interviewed him on my television show many years ago (not long before his death, as it turned out) and I asked him about that. He said, "You know what, Rita, it keeps my audiences more in touch. They think, 'We better keep listening—who knows, maybe the *next* one will make sense.'"

That's how my mind works. It just constantly jumps

from one thought to another. Now that I think about it, I suppose my life has done this too, to some degree. But it's all been in the service of one single-minded goal: to serve as best I could, and do what I was put here to do.

### **The Music in You**

One thing I *don't* want to do is reach the end of my life, face God and say, "Oops. Sorry about that—I know I didn't do that great a job, but you know, it wasn't really what I wanted to be doing anyway..."

How many people trek through life following someone else's script and never get to fly the plane they were supposed to fly? Or spend years wandering off the point but, unlike Jack Benny, never find their way back?

You've no doubt seen the great classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*, where George Bailey thought his life made no difference until, when he was on the verge of suicide, Clarence the angel showed him how much worse off the world would have been without him. As funny a character as that angel is, by the way, has it ever occurred to you why he's called *Clarence*? The name simply means *clarity*. In other words, you have your own angel Clarence, and it's right there inside your head. It's called *clarity about who you are*. How many people commit a slow version of George Bailey's suicide, taking years or decades to let their lives drain away without tapping into the passion of their true purpose?

But if you do touch that purpose and do what you believe in, what you feel passionate about, I can promise you this: you are making a critical difference. There is a greater plan afoot here, and you're part of it.

I'm not a card player, but I have a theory about life and cards. When we're born we're dealt a hand of cards, and each card represents the gift of a talent. You can accept it, love it, and use it, apply it in your life and share it with the world. Or you can abuse it, ignore it, or let it lie fallow. It's your choice.

And you can't reach over and grab my hand of cards,

either, or someone else's hand. No, you've got to play out your own hand. And if you'll take the time to sort through them, you'll find there's at least one ace in there. So find it. And play it.

The people who scream the loudest on their deathbeds are not the ones who regret what they've done. They're the people who regret what they didn't do. I've had quite a few people tell me, "Rita, you do too much." And they may be right. But I would rather wear out than rust out—and I know a lot of people who are rusting out right now. They're dying with their music still in them.

Don't leave this life with your music still in you.

You have a talent. You have a purpose. When you feel good about yourself is when you are using the talents you were given, pursuing the purpose you were put here to fulfill.

Here's what I want you to get from reading this book. I want you to know that if you want it bad enough, the world is *yours*. The world steps aside for the person who knows where they're going. You've got to decide what you want, what you're willing to give up to get it, what your priorities are (in my life it's God first, family second, career third), then get to work doing it—and don't let anyone or anything deter you from your path. I know that sounds simple, and in a way it is. The problem is, we forget it, or it gets drowned out by all the negativity thrown at us. Life circumstances and challenges make it seem complicated. But it really isn't.

There's such sadness and apathy in the world today. So many people don't think there's any chance of making anything great of themselves. But there is not only a chance of it, there is a *certainty*. You can accomplish greatness if you want it bad enough. You have a gift. And when you use it, you *are* a gift.

Before we go on with the rest of this book, I want you to know one more thing: *You are not alone*.

There have been times when I was so frightened, so

out on a limb, so convinced I didn't know what the heck I was doing and there was no way I could get through it all. You may have had experiences where you felt that way too. One day during my first week in television, I was doing an interview (and this was live, not taped), and one of the crew members gave me a signal by crossing his arms in front of his chest. I had no idea what he meant. My first thought was, he was telling me my blouse had come open. Turned out, he was indicating that I had only thirty seconds to finish the segment before we went to a break. I don't remember how I closed that segment, but I do remember this: I was grateful to learn that my blouse was still buttoned.

That same week, I was getting ready to interview the wonderful character actor Eddie Bracken. (You might remember him as Norval Jones, the hero of the Preston Sturges' screwball comedy *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*—or the sympathetic Walley World theme park founder "Roy Walley" in *National Lampoon's Vacation*.) I was terrified about being around such a celebrity, and in an effort to mollify my nerves by talking about it, I said to Eddie, "You know, I'm always nervous in the beginning of an interview. I just started in television, and I really haven't had any training or much experience. I'm not as nervous once we're both in the camera's eye, 'cause I figure the viewers have already seen me and now they're looking at you—so I kind of relax once we get to a two-shot. But when I'm by myself, I'm nervous as all get-out."

I'll never forget what happened next. We all knew Eddie Bracken as a character—genial, ruffled, scattered, befuddled, hilarious. But this wasn't a movie character. This was the authentic person.

Eddie put his hand on my arm and said, "Rita, don't you know, you are never alone. Do me a favor. Put your fingers on your pulse right here. You feel your pulse? You know what that is? That's the presence of God in you. It's right there, you can feel it. And whenever you wonder where it is, just know this: we are all a part of God. He is always with you."

I'd been going to church my whole life, but I have to tell you, at that moment, my life changed. A kind of calm that I had never experienced came over me.

Now I'm not trying to impose my own spiritual views on you. You believe whatever you believe, and that's the way it should be. I'm not saying you have to believe in the same God I do. That's up to you. My point is just this: *You are not alone.*

You are a child of God, born into this universe a unique part of a world so vast, so limitless, so abundant that it's really quite beyond our comprehension.

I know this: if it were up to me to run the universe, no one would be terribly happy with the results. Hate to break it to you, but the same thing probably goes if it were you running things. That's just not our job, which is perfectly alright, because thankfully the running of the universe is being handled just fine. We don't need to worry about that part. We just need to get down to doing *our* part.

So, just what *is* your part?

Why are you here?