

AN INSPIRATIONAL LIFE STORY

Motivational Speaker Overcame Rough Times to Achieve Success

By Ryan Foust (NEWS-TIMES CORRESPONDENT)

The journey from poor farm girl to a successful entrepreneur wasn't easy for Daphne Clarke-Hudson. From the loss of her mother to homelessness, she's been through it all. But surviving those trials are what made here what she is today a talk show host, community volunteer and head of a company whose purpose is to help and inspire others. Clarke-Hudson grew up as the only child in Jamaica. After her mother died when she was 13, Clarke-Hudson's father sent her off to live with an aunt during the week to attend school.

"My aunt had three children, and she treated them better than me. She didn't treat me kindly," she said. Often, she would keep Clarke-Hudson out of school to help run a grocery store. Eventually, someone told Clarke-Hudson's father what was happening, and she returned to live with him to attend her old school. But she missed too many classes and failed the country's high school entrance exam. Despite the setback, Clarke-Hudson continued her education and eventually graduated from nursing school, finding work as a nurse while attending public health school.

Married with a son, Clarke-Hudson moved to New York in 1985 to join her husband. "When I came I got a rude awakening. I realized my husband was leading a double life. He had somebody here he was living with," she said. "So I went ahead and divorced him." Clarke-Hudson found work as a caregiver, and she took classes in order to pass the New York nursing exam on weekends. It was while riding the train to one such class that she began talking to a woman who told her about Mary Kay cosmetics. "This lady told me that this company give you a car. Because I was walking, it sound good to me," she said. Confident in her people skills, Clarke-Hudson signed up, even though she had never worn makeup. Still, she said, "I got business cards, and I was so excited

because it said Daphne Clarke, beauty consultant."

She eventually moved on from Mary Kay and began working for a company that sold knockoffs of designer perfume. Because of her experience with Mary Kay, she was quickly promoted to manager. By the end of the first year, she was ready to strike out and start her own branch, but the relocation money never came. "All I had been looking forward to was this perfume business that they had promised me, and I didn't have that anymore," she said. "Now we have nothing. I think I had \$250 in my savings account."

With little money, no apartment and unable to pay the bill on her storage unit, Clarke-Hudson stayed in a local shelter and later with Amos House, eventually finding work at a group home for the mentally challenged and later with Danbury Children First. Saving her money, Clarke-Hudson eventually saved enough to purchase a home in New Milford. It's a long story with more details than Clarke-Hudson can remember. But the lessons she learned along the way are something she says she will never forget.

"Now I choose to empower people because I have gone through so much. All these little ditches; I don't see them as failures. If I were to do it again I would not omit one of these things because they have made me who I am," she said. At Danbury Children First, Clarke-Hudson worked as a parent school coordinator, acting a liaison between the Danbury School system and its parents. She also worked as the Danbury Housing Authorities' drug elimination coordinator. Looking back at the many jobs she has held, Clarke-Hudson can see a common thread. Nearly all of them placed her in the role of helping people.

Still, she never considered that she could make a career out of motivating people to succeed. "I wasn't thinking that was a career that people was

paying for," she said. But then Clarke-Hudson visited a life coach and took a personality profile that told her she would make a good motivator. She then wrote to ten people, some in Jamaica, some in the United States who had known her for years, asking them to write about how they saw her. "It was as if they sat around a conference table. They didn't talk to each other, but they all saw me as a motivator and gave examples," she said.

Convinced, she opened Clarke-Hudson and Associates in 1998. The company offers motivational presentations, career consultation, team building programs and other services geared toward helping people understand and meet their potential. Last year, she launched her own cable television show, "A New Day: Your Personal Guide to Personal Empowerment." The show, which first aired in September, has run for nearly 50 episodes, featuring state and local politicians, storytellers, artists and others.

"I don't deal with topics. I deal with stories because each guest comes with a story," she said. "It's just a blessing. People come up to me and they thank me for the show," she said. "I thank God for the opportunity to be a coach, to help people. I'm still a work in progress, but I can help somebody else."

"A New Day: Your Personal Guide to Personal Empowerment" airs at 7 p.m. Saturdays and at 12 p.m. Thursdays on Charter. It also airs at 6 p.m. Mondays and 10:30 p.m. Thursdays on Comcast. ■

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