

The Story Behind this Photo... by Tracy Theemes



The journey to the TEDx stage was not an easy one. Two years ago, I tried out and was turned down. This was a devastating failure for me and brutal on my self-esteem. It left me questioning my purpose and led me into a spiral of self-questioning and doubt. It was a major turning point in my life.

Then a year ago, I was approached by a TEDx organizer who had seen me speak about dating and the inequality between men and women. They asked if I might be interested in applying to talk about that topic. My first reaction was “No way, Jose. Not a chance.” I could not put myself through that level of disappointment again. But after much soul searching, reflection and prayer, I finally decided that it was my response to the previous outcome that was the problem, not the actual failure itself. So, this time I figured I would either get a chance to succeed or another opportunity to practice failing. Sounds funny right?

Most people I know are frightened of appearing ridiculous, or being publicly ashamed or screwing up. I am no different. But now that I am old enough to have a bit of hindsight, I see patterns emerging. The people I know with the greatest wins have failed. A lot. The stories they share on their book tours are filled with heroism and triumph over obstacles. But I know many of these folks and the versions they tell are often watered down for public consumption. They lost friends, family, their marriage, money, pride, time and much sleep on their way to achieving what they wanted. But one trait I saw repeatedly amongst those who persevered and achieved success. They became brilliant at failing. They had a toolbox of strategies they used to comfort themselves, manage their fears and find courage. They were victors of resilience.

In this photo, the Emcee is pointing to the infamous Ted circle. He is confused that I have walked up to it but not into it. It's almost like he thinks I can't see it. But I know perfectly well where it is. I can see the 900 people in the audience and I know that this will be my 207th time saying this talk. I know what that circle means and what I have gone through to get to this moment. For several important seconds, I hit the pause button. My heart is racing, my palms are damp and I think about where I have come from to get here and what I have gone through. I have a decision to make and it is mine and mine only. I can walk into the circle and let the chips fall where they may. I can risk failure. Or I can go home. For those few private seconds, I savour the choice.

I step in.

Note: if you haven't heard the talk yet, click here to listen <https://youtu.be/lfw8rLDm0Bc>