

Inside Stories: An Attitude of Gratitude Transcript

Scott Simmie: Hey there. Happy to see you again, especially now that things are opening up. Though I do hope you're still wearing a mask in enclosed, public spaces. Listen, I'm especially happy today because I'm about to introduce you to someone I think you'll like. Today on Inside Stories, someone I met by chance six years ago. I was heading back home from the Farnborough International Airshow in the UK and I needed to take a train and then a bus, to get to Heathrow. Well, I took the wrong train wound up behind schedule but as a result, I wound up sitting beside today's guest, whom I felt very fortunate to have met.

Scott Simmie: Joining me on today's Inside Stories is Renaldo Lawrence. Now he's an outstanding children's e-learning educator, an author, a trainer, a public speaker, a father and a man who was drafted by the NBA San Diego Clippers in 1979. Renaldo joins me from the UK today. Renaldo, thank you.

Renaldo Lawrence: Oh, it's my absolute pleasure. I thank you for having me.

Scott Simmie: Listen, tell me about the part of the UK where you live.

Renaldo Lawrence: I live in a place called Woking, which is about 25 minutes from London and about 45 minutes from Gatwick Airport and 20 minutes from Heathrow. So, I can get in and out quickly.

Scott Simmie: What has life been like there during these very unusual times?

Renaldo Lawrence: I think like every place else, pretty chaotic. I think because no one actually knows what's going on. If you look at what's happening with all the different governments, it's been pretty rough. I think the worst thing for me is all the people who have lost someone. That's been really, really tough. And I think also, people's financial situations has taken a hit.

Renaldo Lawrence: But if there is one thing that I've seen come out of this is that finally, I think this has given people a chance to sit back, stand back and look at life for what it really is. I think that we ... At 100 miles an hour life hopefully, is over. People can actually think and look at people more for who they are and what they are than just for what they've got. I think that's what this happened out of this.

Scott Simmie: We won't know of course, until perhaps a year or two or more from now. Human beings sometimes by nature, we slide back into old habits pretty easily. How do you think we can try to avoid doing that and take the positives that have come from this and use those going forward?

Renaldo Lawrence: What I believe in firmly, that if we look at all the situation that's going on now with the Black Lives Matters. If we look at all the situation going on with the L ... What's it? LBQT community. If we look at all of that, what's going on. I think now we are beginning to have a world that how it should be. Where people are looked at for the character and not for the color of their skin or what they are. I think, you have mentioned about slipping back.

Renaldo Lawrence: I think what we have to do as humans, is we have to check each other all the time and we have to make sure. And I think if you work for somebody else, I think it's up to those individuals to make sure that their companies check you. To make sure that you're not falling back. Apple is an amazing company. I just saw what Tim Cook did the other day with the \$100 million to the various organizations. Just the thought of what they're trying to do and a lot of other companies. I think it's just amazing. I think each one of us as individuals, we need to check ourselves as we're [inaudible 00:04:02] and then stop and look back and see just how bad it was. When we advanced a little more in the future.

Scott Simmie: How has the pandemic been affecting your own work? You're pretty busy guy most of the time.

Renaldo Lawrence: Yeah, I'm extremely busy. So I'm going to say something that might be a little controversial but I'm going to say it anyway. I have been very fortunate. No one in my family has been really affected by this. I think the most that is affected, my daughter. She's had a rough time for the first four weeks. She's had a real rough time because she's a social being. She likes to get out. She works with Vogue magazine, social media and my wife had a minute or two but for me, if I'm honest, man, I've lived my best life. I've lived my best life. I've been able to because I'm a teacher and because school was out, I've been able to almost finish my second book. I've got my website up, we'll be selling various clothes and whatever.

Renaldo Lawrence: I'm doing a program now where I'm teaching parents with autistic kids how to use the Google platform, so they can better help their students. I help the kids and I'm doing quite a bit like that. I'm really taking a sort of like help other people view of the world now.

Renaldo Lawrence: Not that I didn't before but I think I've had time now to sit down and actually look at what's going on. My life has been now about servitude. My life has been ... I am grateful for everything that I've got. I'm grateful for every breath that I take. And I think the thing with me is it's imperative that I look for ways to be grateful. I look for ways to help other people and that's just the nature. That's my mother and me.

Scott Simmie: So this idea of living with gratitude and being of service of some sort. Is that something that's been with you your whole life and if so, where did it come from?

Renaldo Lawrence: I caught the back end of Mr. King's life, Martin Luther King's life. I remember my mom and I remember my grandma, especially. My grandmother used to bake pies and my grandmother used to put the pies on the windowsill. I used to always wonder because the pies would just disappear and I was confused for a while.

Renaldo Lawrence: Then one day I just decided to ask her, "Well, what are you doing?" She said, "Well people have a lot of pride and they have a lot of kids, a lot of families in this neighborhood that don't have money. So what I do is I bake from the community and those kids know that they can come take the pies and go back and share with their family." And that stuck with me. It just stuck with me because the idea that one human being can have influence in another human being's life and try to help them progress through their life. To me, that has always resonated with me.

Renaldo Lawrence: My mom is the same way. I've seen my mom literally, I mean, literally give the sweater off her back to somebody who didn't have it. My mom, man, when I was growing up, there were often people when I would come home. People were around the house, my mom would be feeding dinner to. So, when you grow up in an environment like that, giving becomes a habit, trying to make sure that other people feel good about themselves becoming a habit and not wanting anything back. Not even want to tell people sometimes what you've done for other people because that's not ... it's not important what you've done is that you've done it and it doesn't matter if anybody know about it. So that's the kind of environment I grew up in and that's the kind of environment I try to foster with my kids and my family.

Scott Simmie: I know from looking at the book cover of one of your books online, that you didn't have very easy go of it when you were first born. Could you give us ... enlighten us on that, please?

Renaldo Lawrence: Yeah. It's interesting man because as my grandmother said every day, "God is a good God." When I was born, I was born with my insides all schooled up. And even to this day, my blood flows the opposite way that everybody else blood flows in their body. They told my mom that I had, I think it was seven weeks, six or seven weeks to live. And that there was nothing else that they could actually do to help me. So what happened was they said to my mom, "Look, we're going to send him home with you and there's nothing else we can do. There's just nothing we can do." And luckily enough, man, my mom

nursed me and then that six, seven weeks became a month or two months, three, four months. And now I'm here.

Renaldo Lawrence: That's another reason because man, there's a lot of people who didn't make it today. There's a lot of people who are not on this side of things and it is important that I give thanks. It's important that I have been given a chance to have a life. So at the end of my life, I want to be able to say, "Man, what a difference I made. What a difference I made while I was on this planet." I think that's one of the reasons why I suffered so much as a child because I could understand the deprivation. I can understand that the hurt, I can understand what it's like not to have, in a way. Then as I progressed through life, man, things just slowly has come around. So I'm just thrilled. I'm thrilled to be living, I'm thrilled to be breathing. I'm thrilled to just ... I'm just thrilled, man. I'm just happy.

Scott Simmie: Your book has a really interesting title, I Am More Than What You See. Why did you choose that?

Renaldo Lawrence: It's funny that book title because I had another title and I was talking to a guy online one day and then he just texted me and said, "Can you please call me?" So I'm like, "Yeah sure." So I called him and he said, "That's not the name of your book." He said, "That is not the name of your book." He said, "The name of your book is I Am More Than What They See." And I thought, "Wow, okay." So I used that name.

Renaldo Lawrence: The meaning to me is we look at individuals and we just assume. We make up our own mind about people before we actually get to know them. And what I am saying that there is more to me than meets the eye. There's more to you than meets the eye. I think like a book, you have to get in and you have to read the chapters of that book and you have to understand what's going on with the individual characters in that book.

Renaldo Lawrence: I think it's with any human being. You have to get in and you have to find out the sort of path that they've come through. You have to find out the sort of road that they are on and where they're going. I think then, you get to know the individual.

Renaldo Lawrence: It's funny, man because right now I would say I have very few friends. I have quite a few acquaintance but I have very few friends. It's important to me that the people who I consider friends or people that know me, people that know what I'm about. People that have understand and even more important than people that have been down one path with me. So they understand the struggles that I've been through, I understand the struggles that they've been through. So we have some sort of commonality, a common bond between us. So I don't ... I make acquaintance very easy but I don't make long life friends that easy.

Scott Simmie: One of the online reviews of your book, the person who wrote that little snippet mentioned that part of your book deals with racism. I'm curious if you could share with me a bit of perhaps one of those experiences that has stuck with you because I think we're also at a time when it's very important for people who have never experienced racism to understand what that is like.

Renaldo Lawrence: Yes. I think it all comes back to when you see me, you see black but you don't see the person. You don't see the things that I've been through. You don't see the goodness that I've created in the world, you don't see any of that. You just see the person then in a split second, you make an assumption of who I am and what I do.

Renaldo Lawrence: It is quite an interesting man because I could wear a non-suit, just some clothes and walk in a place. You would perceive me totally different than if I had on a suit because all of a sudden with a suit, I look non-threatening. But I think the incident or the things that have really, really stayed with me is, I remember the white toilets. I remember the colored toilets. I remember when Mr. King was shot and I remember going to a rally once for Mr. Jesse Jackson and I remember just listening to him. I

remember the Black Panther Party and I remember the people who were trying to fight for justice but I also remember the lies that were told about some of those people.

Renaldo Lawrence: If you look at the news now and you look at what's actually going on, I think you see a different portrayal of black people than any other race in the world. Most of the stuff is quite negative. I think now, this time that we're going through, I think now, man, it's a point where the truth is coming to life. The truth is coming to life. I think now we're living in a time where because of the support of so many other people of different races, I think this will make a change. I think this feels different than any other time I have ever been through in history.

Renaldo Lawrence: I'm always aware, regardless of I go that people will perceive me differently. So therefore, I have to be the best in the room at what I do, I have to. I have to be the best in the room at what to do. I have to be the best at whatever I put my hand to. I have to and I'm not the best. I have to know how to do the things in order to make sure that I'm successful. So yeah, that would be the one thing I thing that stuck with me.

Renaldo Lawrence: But the other thing, man, that's stuck with me is this. My grandmother said to me, she said, "Son love knows no color." She said, "Love only knows the heart." And that's the thing that has stuck with me. That's the thing, man, that I try to keep with me each and every day, that and prayer. I pray a lot for the people who just have hatred in their heart, man because how do you go around every day just hating? what a waste of energy, what a waste of energy just to hate. It's just such a waste of energy for me so I don't have time for that foolishness.

Scott Simmie: Just give us a snapshot of what your book is about.

Renaldo Lawrence: My book is about ... it has, I think it's 13 chapters. Each one of the chapters is a combination of what I've experienced in terms of living my life. For instance, I have one chapter in there that I dedicated to my mother and one of the best things that ever happened to me is on my mother's 92nd birthday. I was able to give her the book with her chapter and she was able to read about herself.

Scott Simmie: That's fantastic.

Renaldo Lawrence: And she was able to read about how I felt about her, although I tell her all the time, but to see it in print. The other thing about the book is, my grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren will know that I existed. They will know something about me and they will know that I existed on this planet.

Renaldo Lawrence: To everybody within to the sound of my voice, if you're not writing your own story, you're doing the world with the disservice because every single moment that you spend on this planet, every single opportunity that has presented itself to you, every single individual that you've met. You deserve to write your stories so you can share with the world. All of us have common stories, all of us. They just come in a different view. And I think that by writing your story, you possibly could help the next human being.

Renaldo Lawrence: So my book, I have quite a few ... like I said, 14 chapters, that's it. Like I said, man, one of the chapters in that book was boy, get off of my pavement. That chapter has all to do with learning about responsibility and learning about things that don't belong to you.

Renaldo Lawrence: So one afternoon, myself and some cousins who came down from New Jersey Were outside playing. So as you do as a kid, I decided that I was going to show off to everybody. So I jumped on this pig and unbeknownst to me, the pig was pregnant. Then all of a sudden, everybody stopped laughing and started scattering and I wondered what was wrong. And my grandfather walked out the house. My grandfather, he was quite angry but he settled down and he just said to me, "Do you understand that that pig, that you were riding is our food? That pig, that you were riding feeds a lot of people in the neighborhood. That pig that you were riding is the source of nourishment for so many

people. So you got to understand this, you got to understand that you need to think before you act. You need to understand the ramifications of what you do because whatever you do, it has an effect on other people." And that was a powerful lesson for me.

Scott Simmie: Tell me a little bit more about how the power of stories can be a useful tool to convey something much bigger.

Renaldo Lawrence: I think it's extremely important that, if you just set up and just give people information, there's not a great chance that they're going to remember. Or if you wrap that information in the story and make that story relevant to somebody else's life, then they stand a much better chance of actually understanding what you've spoken about. And so, to me, it's important that regardless of what you do is that you tell stories.

Renaldo Lawrence: Even when I'm in the classroom. I tell a lot of my stories from my life in the classroom and I make it where whatever I'm telling them has something to do with what we're studying. So then they can say, "Oh, I remember this happened, Mr. Lawrence said that's what happened in his life." And I think it's important that all of us, that we use story as a medium of getting information out there. We're also getting relevant information out there and truthful information out. So I think story is extremely important. And the great thing about story, man, you can always go back and check whether it was the truth. Especially with video and everything these days.

Scott Simmie: Well, this is a hopeful time and we're talking about the sweeping civil rights movement that we're seeing. It's also a difficult time when we frame it against the pandemic that is still going on globally. Now restrictions are loosening in many places but it's still not an easy time for a lot of people. And there's a lot of uncertainty that we're all facing. Do you have any message or advice for people who may be struggling, who just think life is really difficult right now?

Renaldo Lawrence: Number one, please look after yourselves. Just because things have opened up doesn't necessarily mean that it's safe. Number two, please wear masks if you're in public places. It's very, very important but I think more than that, I think what you need to do is understand. First of all, regardless of your situation, you're a human being and you're magnificent. If you was to think of all the things that are going on in your body at one time, just for you to be able to see. Just for you to be able to hold something. Just for you to be able to stand up. Just when you can be able to walk. Just for you to be able to breathe. You would be so thankful.

Renaldo Lawrence: I think a lot of times as human beings, what we do is we tend to look at the worse. I'm quite sure that there's something in your life, regardless of who you are within the sound of my voice was something for you to be thankful for, there really is.

Renaldo Lawrence: If you struggling with it, one of the things that I do before I go to bed, every single night. I've done for the last five years, is I will write down by my bed, what I did that was positive that previous day. And so the next day when I wake up, that is the first thing after I thank the Lord for letting me wake up. It is the first thing I read because I start my day on a very positive note.

Renaldo Lawrence: I think it's extremely important that us as individuals, that we have to look for the good. I think by looking through the good, you'll be surprised at how much good you can find if you look for it. And I never get up in the morning thinking, "Oh boy, I hope it's a good day." No, I think, "This is going to be a fabulous day." I set the tone for my life, nobody else. I set the direction my life is going in, nobody else. And I start by speaking and I can speak it, you stand a much better chance of getting it than speaking in a negative [inaudible 00:21:56]

Scott Simmie: I am so grateful, speaking of gratitude, that you could join me today and share some of these stories and insight. I am now holding my water glass and a knife. And this sound indicates that we

are into the final wrap-up section of this interview, where I'm going to ask you a few fast questions and look for a few fast answers from you. Renaldo Lawrence. What is the best thing about the UK?

Renaldo Lawrence: I think the best thing about the UK is my family. That I get a chance to see them every single day, that I get a chance to interact with them every single day. That's another thing that's come out this COVID-19, I've found that I really love my family even more. When you're running around every single day to work back and forth, all that gets lost. I think now I've rediscovered love for my family.

Scott Simmie: What American food do you miss most?

Renaldo Lawrence: Oh my God. Macaroni and cheese with some spare ribs and lima beans and some Kool-Aid.

Scott Simmie: Where on the planet would you like to travel to that you have not yet been?

Renaldo Lawrence: I have not yet been. I would like to go to ... that I've not yet been. I would say Hawaii.

Scott Simmie: Who is your personal hero?

Renaldo Lawrence: Barack Obama.

Scott Simmie: What are you looking forward to doing when this is over that you just can't do right now?

Renaldo Lawrence: Going back to an Apple store and just walk into the Apple store.

Scott Simmie: Renaldo Lawrence author, e-learning educator, motivational speaker, father, and actually, my friend from a bus ride to Heathrow. Thank you so much for joining me man.

Renaldo Lawrence: Absolute pleasure. Thank you and can I just say to you, I hope that as what we were talking, I hope that God continues to bless you and I hope you continue to bless other people. Me knowing you from just that short time, I'm quite sure ... well look at what happened now. You're blessing me by giving me an opportunity to tell my story and hopefully this story will resonate with somebody, help them along their path. So thank you.

Scott Simmie: Thank you. Renaldo really struck me when I met him back in 2014 and he's still the same guy. Giving, filled with gratitude, positive and humble. If you're interested in learning more about Renaldo, his website is Renaldo Lawrence, and that's Lawrence with a W .com. You'll also find a link to his books there. I'm Scott Simmie. Thanks for having me over, it's always great to see you. The views expressed here are those of the participants and not those of Bank of Montreal, it's affiliates or subsidiaries.