



**Addie Mathes, CEO  
Prime Power Services, Inc.  
Atlanta's 2003 Woman Business Owner of the Year**

## **Faith, Love, and Leadership**

*Scene 1: Young raven-haired girl and older gentleman sitting in a swing on the porch of a house somewhere in the south.*

*"Granddaddy, why did you nickname me Pidgeon?" asked the wide-eyed little girl as she looked quizzically yet admiringly at the sage, white-haired gentleman.*

*"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Just came to me I guess. But what's really important is that as you get older, you remember what your granddaddy taught you. When times get tough, when life throws you a curve, what did I teach you to do?"*

*"I know," replied the girl, "paint the picture, paint the picture. Then, start walking through what I have to do."*

*"That's right, Addie. One day that advice may come in handy."  
(Fade to black. End of scene.)*

Well, an experienced screenwriter could certainly improve on the script, but the reality is that Addie Mathes' life would make a compelling and bitter-sweet TV mini-series. And who else but Sela Ward, the beautiful forty-something-year-old Emmy Award winning actress - who just happens to be from the south herself - would play the lead role?

### *Real-life - then and now*

In real-life, the businesswoman named Addie says her life story should probably be titled "Faith, Love, and a Lot of Prayer." It could be written by Adam, the younger of her two sons, who happens to be a writer. Adam also recently graduated from college and received his commission as an officer in the US Marine Corps. Her other son, Benjamin, a young actor who already has several TV show credits to his name, lives in New York where he's pursuing his acting career.

As any proud mother would do, Addie lights up when she talks about her offspring. That she adores them and feels extremely close to them is obvious as is the fact that they've been through some difficult times together.

Today, Addie is a secure and happy lady. Despite many personal and professional trials over the years, she's survived and found success on her own terms. Married again about a year ago, she says she's found a terrific partner in business and life.

“He’s my best friend, my lover, and my partner in business. With Richard by my side, I’m enjoying life again and I look forward to growing old together.”

*From liberal arts to switchgears*

When Addie graduated from Agnes Scott in 1978 with a degree in history, she had no idea that she would end up owning a multimillion dollar company, much less one of the leading providers of maintenance services for engine-generators, switchgear, automatic transfer switches, load bank testing and other industrial equipment.

How could she? She actually got married while she was still in college and became a Presbyterian minister’s wife. There was no complex switchgear in sight!

What was in sight, however, were two wonderful little boys. While Addie was completely absorbed in her life as a wife and mother, she also began to work outside her home. Realizing that her marriage was in trouble, she knew she needed to become self-sufficient.

Fortunately, during the difficult decision of getting a divorce, Addie had someone to turn to for help. Her best friend and former college roommate was there for her and provided much needed support and encouragement. The two were like sisters. Happily married and with a successful business of her own, Addie’s friend seemed to have it all.

But life was about to take a terrible turn. Addie’s friend got sick with what was diagnosed as a rare blood disease. While she didn’t know how serious her friend’s illness was, Addie prayed fervently for her recovery. But it was not to be and in the summer of 1987, she passed away. Addie was devastated. She’d never known such a sense of loss.

Someone else that shared the loss was Addie’s friend’s husband, Roger. He had not only lost his wife, but he was working tirelessly to start a business and at the same time, repair complex electrical switchgear by himself. Though a brilliant and creative engineer, Roger was not a strong businessman or operational leader.

Enter stage left – Addie Mathes. She had innate qualities to fulfill both roles. Before her death, Addie’s friend had asked her to look after Roger and to help him if she could, Addie first began working with Roger as an officer manager. Later, he taught her how to build the complex equipment he sold. They decided go into business together and Prime Power Services was born.

In the process of co-founding an innovative business that would become successful enough to serve some of Atlanta’s top businesses, Addie and her business partner became more than friends. She and Roger were married and together, they raised her two sons and grew their business beyond either of their expectations.

Addie's responsibilities included managing the day-to day work as well as staffing, strategic planning, and competitive analysis. The first thing she did was to set about to hire the brightest electrical engineers she could find. As Prime Power grew, the company was clearly challenged by bigger competitors, yet Addie had a plan. She led the process that literally reinvented the enterprise. They shifted away from manufacturing and expanded into servicing the equipment they had previously build.

Did Addie's plan work? Absolutely. She and her team of experts successfully transitioned into a whole new line of business, and kept some of Atlanta's premier companies as clients. She and Roger were honored in 1999 as co-winners of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Georgia Small Business Person of the Year. Not bad.

### *A personal crisis*

But Addie's life was far from rosy. Roger was not well and he hadn't been for years. . In fact, he was dying. Few people knew about his condition, because he never stopped working. But that wasn't his only secret. To Addie's amazement, her husband told her that – although he loved her dearly - he needed to change his lifestyle, even with the little time he had left.

She was thunder-struck, disbelieving what she was hearing. But slowing, the reality set in and she remembered what her grandfather had told her. "Paint the picture. Walk through what you have to do."

"If there's one word that defines me, I think it would be resilient," she said. RESILIENT: the ability to cope, to persevere, to bounce back. That definition definitely fits Addie Mathes. And at this point in her life, she clearly needed her grandfather's advice and all the resilience - and faith - she could muster.

The details of her and Roger's struggle are private and should remain so. But the fact that he found happiness for a while with someone else could not have been easy for her. It wasn't. But she never quit loving him, never quit the company and never quit their business relationship. In fact, Addie was there for him until the end, by his side in the hospital along with his father with whom he had reconciled after a strained relationship.

That Addie Mathes is a strong leader is validated by her business success, her honors and awards, and the respect she has earned among peers and her employees. Eight of her employees nominated her for Atlanta's chapter of the National Association of Business Women's Award in 2003...and she won! Even more important, however, is that she's a woman of strong character and of faith.

This SHERo is a truly multi-faceted role model – for entrepreneurship, for leadership, and for the way she conducts her personal life. Even an award-winning actress like Sela Ward – playing the part of Addie on screen – would find it difficult to do justice to her resilience and abiding faith.

But just think, what a drama it will make! Stay tuned.

By Susan B. Hitchcock, Creator of the Age of SHEroes  
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