

The Journey to Toastmaster of the Year

By Lloyd Gwilliam

In May of 2001 my wife and I moved from Winnipeg, Manitoba to the lovely city of Calgary. I had transferred with Canadian Pacific Railway. Later in the year I noticed that there was a Toastmaster club, Station 29, meeting at our building downtown. This intrigued me, as many years earlier I had been interested in Toastmasters but had not pursued that desire. I attended a few of the Station 29 meetings in early 2002 and finally decided this was something I should take up. I officially joined Toastmasters in April of 2002.

When I joined Toastmasters my goal was to retain my public speaking skills. Through my job at CPR I had been exposed to public speaking as an Instructor years earlier, however I felt that the skill might deteriorate due to lack of exercise. Seemed logical and simple enough. I would never have predicted what was to happen within the next 14 months.

About a month after joining Toastmasters some of my fellow club members convinced me to attend the Spring Convention in Edmonton. I joined Trinda Bowes, Peter Brackett and Steven Yu at the convention. What a fabulous event! The camaraderie, the educational opportunities, and the food! But seriously it was a great event and a real eye opener for me.

Later that month I was nominated and voted in as the Club President. I was impressed that the membership would have that much confidence in me to perform that role. About a month later the Division G Governor, Anthony Chim, convinced me to join his Division G Team as the Public Relations assistant. This opened a new world. Through the course of the year I would journey to Medicine Hat, Lethbridge and points around Calgary helping with Area Contests, training sessions, council meetings and public relations. I started the first Division G website which was paired up with the Division J and C websites I started. I also attended the Area Governor training sessions in Kindersley and Edmonton. All these experiences expanded my personal knowledge and my knowledge of Toastmasters.

In June, two months after joining Station 29, I decided to join a second Toastmasters club. One that met in the evening. It was the 3500 Foot Club, which has been around since 1979. I wanted to be exposed to another type of program at a more senior club. I was not deserting Station 29 but I realized that I could depend on the years of experience from the 3500 Foot members to aid me in working with the very young, two year old, Station 29.

Meanwhile back at Station 29 we were bonding and forming a great team. During the course of the year we managed to build the club from 9 members back to charter strength of 20 working along side our Club Specialist Steven Yu. I made sure we celebrated every CTM, every ATM, every CL, and every event that had a positive meaning. One

meeting I made Strawberry Shortcake for the members and surprisingly enough the Area Governor Darlene Davies. I started a club website and club newsletter which were both used to offer praise to those accomplishments. We managed to reach President's Distinguished through the great efforts of the Station 29 team.

Another proud moment in my early Toastmaster development was when I became involved in the final planning and execution of the Fall 2002 Conference working closely with Carolyn Kaldy, one of the two co-chairs. The highlight of that event, and probably the year, was meeting and spending time with the International President Gavin Blakey. He gave me a special "President's personal gift" key chain which I will cherish forever.

My year as President of Station 29 concluded in June of 2003. I had a great year and learned so much that it was humbling to think where I had started. The proudest moment was when the club voted me Toastmaster of the Year and promoted me to Area. A similar thing happened at the 3500 Foot club in Division G. Through those two efforts I was awarded Toastmaster of the Year for Division J and Division G and ultimately District 42. I received that final award November 8, 2003 at the Fall Conference.

In closing just let me say it's not the destination but the journey that counts. The award and accolades were great but the journey for them and the continuing journey after are far more rewarding. Toastmasters truly is a great organization filled with an incredible amount of positive individuals with whom I will always share this award. I will always thank them for taking me into their hearts and helping me to fulfill my dreams.