

## Testimony of a Test Speaker

By Amy Giang

On March 10, 2003, I attended the SaitSayers speech competition as a test speaker. I had just joined Toastmasters a few weeks earlier and did not get a chance to do my icebreaker yet. The opportunity came so quickly, I did not have time to think much of it. Initially terrified, I was reluctant. However, under the encouragement of my home club, the TechTalkers, I decided to give it a go. Ben, another club member, volunteered to come along, for support.

Since I was participating in an evaluation contest, I could not let the contestant know that this was my first speech. I had to start my first speech with speech #4, because we didn't want to give away any information about my level of speech that would bias the contest. In short, I had to "fake it until I make it". This idea went fairly well. (Some people actually thought that I was on my 9th speech.) JJ Campbell, Ellen Arnestad, Anthony Chim and Keith Lee evaluated my speech. It was an eye opener to be evaluated in so many ways by people who I don't know. The evaluation speeches were very well done! I am able to take so much away with me from these evaluations. My confidence has grown as a result and they have helped me with challenges that I could use to explore newer grounds in public speaking.

After the contest, I unexpectedly received recognition for doing my icebreaker with the SaitSayers. I was overwhelmed by the sincerity and kindness offered by the club. This experience made a mark in my life. Just two years ago, before the TechTalkers chartered, I attended my first Toastmasters session as a guest. I knew I had to do something about my public speaking skills and deal with my inferiority complex. After I found out that new members start by doing their icebreaker (the first speech about themselves that would last 5 to 7 minutes), I was terrified. Being the shy person that I was, I ran for my life and frankly thought I would never subject myself to this near-death experience again. In truth, what I was really doing was denying myself the opportunity to improve my public speaking skills.

Two years later, as part of my New Year resolution, I returned to the TechTalkers. This fell in line with my dream of someday becoming an entrepreneur. I knew I had to do something. At first, I came as a guest. The group has grown and become more dynamic. This time I decided to stay longer. I finally got the courage to open my mouth and did a one-minute speech during table topics. I flourished after receiving so much support and encouragement. Once I got started, I was hungry to learn more and do more.

At the SaitSayers speech contest, I had the opportunity to listen to one special contestant speak. Her name is Marilyn Wilson. Marilyn did her speech on "Family". When I first met Marilyn, I thought she had come to listen. I had no idea that she was a contestant. Marilyn had more challenges than most of us. I was deeply moved by her speech and her courage. She did a seven-minute speech, with no notes and sincerely portrayed her emotions towards the audience about topic of "Family". That day I learnt that it doesn't matter who you are, how disadvantaged or advantaged, you can achieve excellence in public speaking. This is what Toastmasters is all about.