

A Premonition...

By John Snelson

It started in university. That was the first time I had ever heard of Toastmasters. It must have been a premonition...not my premonition, mind you.

The friend who told me about Toastmasters must have wished that I had taken him up and joined, for a short while later I was giving a speech at his wedding. It was dreadful. Even the cameraman stopped filming!

Immediately, I knew that I needed help and a short 15 years later I went to my first Toastmasters meeting here in Calgary. There were so many things that I did not know about the club, but how much else I would learn.

Like many, I thought it was about improving my speaking skills. I still had dreams of one day being a great orator, but that would have just been scratching the surface.

Who would have known that one can learn how to run a business meeting effectively at Toastmasters? How about listening and offering constructive hints? Perhaps, even speaking off the cuff? But still there is much more. There is an opportunity to really get to know people, to share their highs and lows. There is learning the 'trick' of shaking hands with the audience to make a connection BEFORE speaking to them. There are the opportunities to grow by getting involved on the executive, both inside the club and beyond.

For my mind, however, it is clearly about the people.

It is about the Toastmasters that I rode my motorcycle with. We had some great times, exploring Drumheller and Kalispell. We went to the Okanogan, and Vancouver Island, from Nakusp to Cypress Hills. We built a riding schedule in the image of the VP Education's schedule and used Robert's Rules of Order to manage the group that it became. They are great memories.

It is about the Toastmaster who got me involved in the Tosti Awards (www.tostiawrds.com). This was a group of mostly Toastmasters that put together the first annual 'The Omnipotent Story Telling Idol' contest that raised money for Voice Print and created a vehicle for some of Calgary's best story tellers to perform.

It is about the Toastmaster and her husband, also a Toastmaster, who introduced me to her sister and welcomed me into their family with open arms. It is about spending several years, Christmas' and holidays with a great family. It is about spending several terrific years with these great people.

It is about being conscripted to get involved with the Relay for Life. It was EASY, I was told! It involved feeding the participants and volunteers with the Relay for Life, an all night 'marathon' in support of the Canadian Cancer Society. We laughed and worked

and became very, very tired. I stopped counting after setting up at least 10 plates with utensils, but apparently we served several thousand dinners, midnight snacks and breakfasts by morning. There was this feeling about not wanting to see another piece of food but then seeing another grateful smile from a hungry participant that was delighted just happy to be served.

It is about the Icebreaker speeches and getting to really know something about someone that people who had known them for years may not have known. It is watching a new member start out with tentative first steps and in a short period of time, to see them grow in confidence and skills so that they really became so much more than the person who first walked through the door.

It is about learning skills that we never knew we had because someone offered some constructive advice that just made sense. It is about gaining enough confidence and security that I would let someone else win the award for the most ums and ahs at a meeting, and not even think about it.

It is about meeting someone you knew from Toastmasters in a work situation, in the neighbourhood or at the mall and instantly having a connection as if you had shared a challenging journey together, which of course you had and instantly being being connected.

Yes I think that Toastmasters is much more than an organization that helps people speak well.

If only it was my premonition....