

Overcome your fears or they will overcome you

by J.A. Gamache

Speech which won 3rd place on August 26, 2001, in Anaheim, U.S.A.
at Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking (World's finals)

Mister Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand here today because of my grandfather.

Thanks to him I have overcome my fear of competing in an English speech contest. I would have a good reason to be afraid. My native language is French. I don't speak English. I spit English.

Because of my grand-papa today I am able to share with you the most efficient method I know that could help you to overcome all your fears.

First, let me tell you how my grandfather became the inspiration that gave me the courage to break the chains of all my fears.



Avenant Gamache,
my grandfather

"Grand-papa" and I have a lot in common.

For example, we share the same first name: Avenant.

Avenant in French means lovable. That's my grandfather... and that's me too. Both lovable and also extremely shy.

Thinking of our family get-togethers, I can still see him, sitting off to one side of the room, a tin of tobacco between his knees, rolling another cigarette, unreachable in his silence, as if his shyness chained him to his chair.

We were the same: so scared to bother people. For example at movie theatres I would rather sit in the front row than disturb anyone to have a decent seat. Have you ever watched a movie from the front row?

When Avenant passed on, he was 92 years old. I will never forget that day. When I entered his hospital room, he had just died. I was alone with him. He had become so thin that I could hardly recognize him. For a moment, I thought, I was with a stranger. I wanted to touch him, but all I dared to do was to rest a finger on his big toe.

- Thank you Grand-papa, Thank you for giving me your name. I am so proud to be called Avenant. Bon voyage.

Then it struck me. Like him I was chained by fears, waiting to die. No money. No real love. No achievement to be proud of. I was wasting my life and I knew it.

It wasn't until I could no longer touch grand-papa that he really touched me. It was as if I could hear Avenant whisper: "Break free. Break free, son".

But how could I break free? The answer came from a psychologist who told me: make a list of all your fears, start with the smallest one, work your way up to the biggest one and keep track of all your successes in a journal.

So I did it. Was it easy? Of course not. Slowly, I became more assertive as each little success broke a chain of fear.

At the movies. Not only did I challenge myself to sit in the middle of a row, I would even get up and change row one more time! To challenge my fears even more, like you, I joined Toastmasters. Have you ever rehearsed a speech in your car and stopped someone was staring at you at a red light?... Well, now I turn around and give my speech to them!!!

No longer afraid to voice my emotions now I write poems... and love letters. Gentlemen, you have no idea of the power of a love letter until your wife intercepts one!

And here I am in Anaheim, California in front of nearly 2000 friends. This year's theme of "Friends helping friends succeed" is so true. At this very moment, with your help, I am finally marking off the biggest fear from my list: fear of failure. That makes me a winner in the contest of life!

Ladies and Gentlemen, overcome your fears or they will overcome you.

Break free from your chains. Just do like Suzan Jeffers's book says: Feel the fear and do it anyway.

Begin by facing your smallest fear. Celebrate each little victory. Challenge your fears until you have overcome the biggest one.

And when that time comes, you will feel, like me, the urge to shout this inspiring cry of hope from Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty...", Grand-papa I am free at last!

Mr. Toastmaster,

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About J.A. Gamache

A bachelor in business administration, J.A. Gamache is a bilingual (French and English) professional speaker from Montreal, Canada.

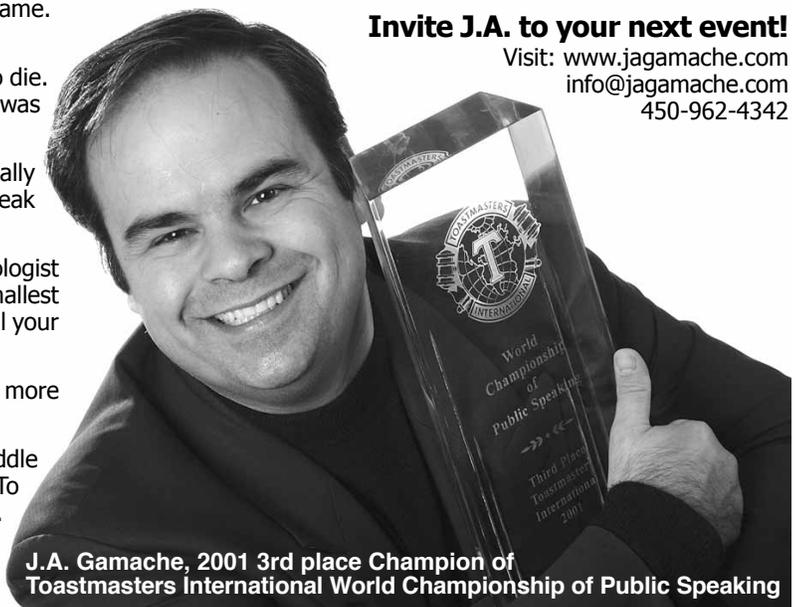
In 2003, He was the president of the Montreal's Chapter of the Canadian Association of Public Speakers (CAPS).

A proud Toastmasters' member since 1993, J.A. Gamache is the only Quebecer to ever win a podium (3rd place in the 2001) at Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking and was a finalist in that same contest in 2005 and 2007. Over 35 000 contestants participate in this prestigious event every year.

His free newsletter "Public Speaking with J.A." is read in more than 50 countries around the world by over 3000 readers.

Invite J.A. to your next event!

Visit: www.jagamache.com
info@jagamache.com
450-962-4342



J.A. Gamache, 2001 3rd place Champion of
Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking