

**Toastmaster Icebreaker Speech**

**Sandy Lillie, 4/5/2012**

## **In Support of Human Connection**

Fellow Toastmasters.... I'm standing here today because I am entering a new chapter in my life, and I want to free up my voice. I don't want to be limited by my fear.

I see each of us – you and me and every one of us – as a prism through which the light of God can shine into the world in a particular way, and I don't want the light that is supposed to come through me, the light that I'm responsible for bringing into this world, to be shrouded over by my fear.

One of the teachers in my life, a man named Richard Unger, likes to say that we can think of life as Earth University, where each of us signs up for a particular major. Whatever our major is, Life presents us with challenges that force us to learn about that subject.

If we're here to learn about Power, for example, we don't get born into empowering families that send us out into the world with a grounded sense of our own power and how to use it. No, we are born into families or situations where power is problematic.

We get to run through the gamut of illusions about power – Does power require physical beauty? Or a brilliant mind? Is it physical strength? Is it power over others? What is power? We may even get to the graduate

level and find the power that is rooted in inner clarity and peace, like the Dalai Lama.

I think that in my case, I'm at Earth University in the Department of Love, majoring in Human Connection. So of course I was born with a nature that has a particularly strong need for closeness and harmony and connection, into a family with all kinds of major ruptures – bitter divorces, several suicides, all kinds of things that broke my heart.

But since I'm majoring in Human Connection, I couldn't just withdraw from other people and shut down inside. I had to try to build bridges of understanding across these ruptures; I had to find places of acceptance. So I was willing to endure a lot of anguish in order to keep my heart open. It was very clear to me that if I shut out this pain, I would become my own worst enemy – I would make it impossible for me ever to have that sense of human connection that is the most important thing in life to me.

I graduated high school in 1966, so I came of age just as the '60's revolution was beginning to explode, and I was very much involved in the events of that time – politically, spiritually, artistically and culturally. I was in Haight Ashbury before and all through the Summer of Love. I went to Woodstock. I hitchhiked through Europe by myself for several months, and spent the summer of 1969 in Czechoslovakia, after the Russian invasion.

I was intensely interested in understanding the different ways that we humans come together with one another in community, and how these

different ways seemed to work. What makes us happy? What makes it hard to be happy?

But my personal journey through all of the adventures of those years was centered on: How can I ever be loved, if I don't love myself? And how can I come to love myself, when I didn't grow up feeling loved?

How can I connect with other people in ways that feel authentic, when I'm so afraid of being judged and rejected? And how can I give real love to other people, not just kindness or surface niceness, but real love that speaks to the core of who they truly are?

I put myself through college and earned my doctorate in Clinical Psychology in 1977, specializing in relationships of course, and over the years I've been challenged to grow and learn in all kinds of ways.

Because I believe in the adage that "Nothing human is alien to me", I've worked with people who've done terrible things, and learned to understand how this happened. Everyone starts out as an innocent baby, so what happened?... I found the parts in me that also had impulses to do such things, and this allowed me to connect to these people and love them and sometimes to help them find their way out of such darkness.

I've worked with couples caught in terrible rage with one another, and helped them find the place of disappointed longing for each other that lies beneath this, so they could begin to reach for what both of them actually wanted so desperately.

I've worked with families with out-of-control teenagers who just want to save their kids from falling off a cliff somewhere, but get lost in endless battles that everybody loses.

And I've worked with companies that want to find ways of working together as a team with shared goals, so that each person feels valued for what they contribute, instead of focused on competing for limited resources or recognition.

I've learned that my own attachment to love and connection can be my greatest obstacle to finding these things. I've had to become much more accepting and comfortable with disharmony and disconnection, with anger and numbness and fear and all the things that keep us apart - to learn to embrace these experiences as part of our human potential, if I want to be a force for greater love and connection in the world.

So now I'm wanting to share what I've learned more broadly than just with the people I happen to meet, or work with in my practice. I want to be able to write and to speak in public.

I know I'm not the only one who's hungry to understand the things that I've been focused on learning, so I don't want my fear to close my throat and cover my light. I want to sing my song out loud, and serve as a source of light in support of Human Connection. And that's why I'm here. Thanks for your support.

