

Here's the speech that I gave in memory of Fred's one year anniversary. I received the blue ribbon for the "Best of Show". It's on a subject that we can both relate to. Enjoy.

As presented by John Crosby to Roadrunner's Toastmaster Club, Tucson, AZ. July 15th, 2009.

"The Gift"

I have to admit that when the Toastmaster contacted me this last weekend looking for my commitment to be here today along with a speech, I said that I would be there, but I was really struggling to come up with a subject and a theme for my speech, "my cup definitely did not runnith over at that point."

Then I was reminded that the next day, Sunday the 12th was the one year anniversary of the passing over of a fellow that had given me the greatest gift that anyone can ever receive. This fellow's name was Fred and the gift that he gave me was unconditional love.

This picture was taken just one week before we had to assist sweet Fred in passing over. What catches my attention is that in spite of the fact that he had 16 years under his belt, (that's 112 in dog years), and the considerable discomfort that he was in, you can still see in his eyes that he had that unconditional love for me and that it was in no way diminished by those 16 years.



You see Fred didn't wake up in the morning, confronted with the question, "Would I love him today?". It was integral to his very being. It was just who he was because Love and Fred were one and the same.

Fred had other wonderful attributes as well that I came to admire through time. His ability to focus on his passions was one such attribute that I greatly admired, and chasing his tennis ball was probably at the top of this list.

One demonstration of his focus occurred when my brother, his new wife and their baby girl Maggie, came to visit me shortly after my move to Tucson. We had all sat down to dinner one night with lil' Maggie on the floor next to us in her car seat. When Fred saw an opportunity, he seized the moment by dropping a none too appealing tennis ball right in her lap. When she didn't respond appropriately by throwing the ball, he barked at her. After all she was breathing, moving her arms and making sounds...so why not take advantage of the situation?! She was a candidate for fetch in his mind's eye. We all had a good laugh and commiserated with Fred's disappointment in lil' Maggie not having quite perfected her hand, arm and eye coordination to throw a ball yet.

When I look back, I realize that it was Fred's commitment to unconditional love that he shared with almost every one that he came in contact with, (except the mailman, and even he realized that Fred's bark was worse than his bite as he would leave dog biscuits in the mail slot when he left). This is what really inspired me.

And as I contemplated this, it made me wonder what if we, the more "advanced" species in this equation, were able to focus our attention less on the externals of life and instead focus more on accessing and expressing that capacity for unconditional love that we have within us, lying there waiting for us to activate it.

Why not give it a try? Because without this love, we are forever poor, even if we do not know it. With this love we are able to become all that we are meant to be.

And is not love the underlying principal behind the Golden Rule? "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." So simple, yet so elusive to so many of us so much of the time.

So let us take this opportunity to declare the worthiness of everyone for love. Not just the people that look like you, go to your church or synagogue, belong to your political party, or clubs, but each and every person. Because it is only love that has the capacity to elevate all of us equally in a way that nothing else can.

So let us choose love ...Choose love over living a life in fear. Choose love over separation. Choose love over destroying yourself and the planet that you live upon.

When you make that choice for love remember that words alone are not enough, because love is not just an intention. Love is a verb, a call to action.

With your permission, let us take a little break from all of these words and try a little exercise. Please close your eyes...go ahead and close your eyes and think of someone that you wish to send your love to. Now draw down into the deepest depths of your being to access all the love that you can find, and then transmit that unconditional love to that person. Connect with how good that feels, all the while remembering that love is its own reward.

Go ahead and open your eyes and while still remembering that feeling. Understand that this was just a dress rehearsal for sharing that same love with that individual the next time you see them in person. Do this without any attachment to the outcome, or without any expectation of getting something in return. Remember that feeling that you had earlier, that love is its own reward. Love is not about an investment or deal making with some kind of expectation of getting a return or a pay back. Love is more about a “pay it forward.”

Remember the Golden Rule? “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” All you need to do is hope that the recipient of your love is so inspired by your action that they do the same for someone else and that they in return do it for someone else again. “Pay it forward”. What a fantastic idea and what a wonderful world this would be if we were all on board with that concept.

I am a witness to the power of love to transform...and each and every Wednesday at 6:30 AM I am reminded of that in our Toastmasters club. For it is your love that makes this a safe place for me to develop my skills for giving a speech in addition to exploring my own personal and spiritual growth.

I conclude by sharing my gratitude with Freddie for all that he has taught me about love, and you my fellow Toastmasters, for not unlike my buddy Fred, have also shown what is possible when unconditional love is present. Let us take this moment to make a choice to tap into that deep reserve of unconditional love each and every day knowing that it is its own best reward. There is no greater gift than the gift of love.