

Toastmasters Speech 1 – “Ice-breaking Journeys” (target 5 minutes)

Good evening all.

As this is my Ice Breaker speech, I thought before I started on it, I'd look up the origins of the term Ice Breaker. Was it something to do with drinks?

Well, for those that didn't know, it harks back to the Northern Hemisphere roots of the language. In winter, rivers often freeze over. So, before a ship could travel down to the trading port, a special ship went into the river and broke the ice for it. Hence an “ice breaker” is needed in order to, literally, “get down to business”.

You can imagine the frozen river screeching and cracking as the ice breaker travelled through it. The image appeals to me, as does the metaphor, as I have begun a journey with Toastmasters. I'm looking forward to this journey, and I decided to reflect on three previous journeys that I have taken, all different, so that you may learn a little about who I am.

I'll begin with a journey across the country, continue with a journey across the world, but finish with a tale of my journey across the city.

I was born in Perth, Western Australia. The oldest of three brothers, I faced numerous hardships to keep my younger brothers in line. All eldest siblings will know what I mean.

Perth is a nice city, a great city. But it is known as the most isolated capital city in the world, and after Uni, with a freshly minted degree in Computer Science in my hand, I found the local high-tech jobs thin on the ground.

So, not only did I move out of home, but I moved across the country to Melbourne, starting work for Telstra at their Research Labs.

The best sort of move to make is one where someone else pays. Moving to Melbourne was made very easy by the fact that Telstra paid for someone else to pack up all my things and ship them over here together with my car. I've never had it that good again.

I chose Melbourne not for its world-famous beaches, or sun-filled summers, but because I knew people here already. I had previously met some Melburnians through the inter-University musical scene – for I am an amateur singer. Leaning heavily towards the amateur.

The only way I was going to sing in front of people, was standing anonymously in the middle of a large group of other singers. Such as the Melbourne University Choral Society, whom I promptly joined up with.

This was fortuitous, as it was where I met my wife, and led directly to the second journey.

Kate and I were married in 2004, and through a quirk of bureaucracy and my ancestry, gained us both the right to live and work in the U.K. It wasn't too much longer before we'd left our jobs and traded Melbourne, Australia for Ipswich, Suffolk.

Ipswich is an amazing town. It was established some fourteen-hundred years ago, and only last month received the award for being the cleanest town in Britain. Who knows what they'll accomplish in another fourteen-hundred years?

Maybe that's a little harsh, but it certainly is a region where you can feel the history. We visited a site that used to be a burial ground for ancient kings. The gold, jewels, and burial boats have been excavated, and most of it is now in the British Museum. All that's left are some dirt mounds that have been reconstructed to show what it might have looked like. And they were the most awe-inspiring dirt mounds I've ever seen.

While living in England we also travelled a lot. We visited Ireland, Scotland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland and Egypt.

Has anyone here been to Egypt?

Taking a cruise in Egypt up the Nile River was one of the highlights of our time overseas. The only ice on that river was in the drinks we sipped, while sitting in the ship-top pool, passing monuments older than Europe decaying on the banks.

But all good things must come to an end. Apparently. So, after a year abroad, we came back to Melbourne.

To our amazement we managed to return to Australia without any extra debt, and in fact brought back some British pounds. This was the start of what we decided would be a house deposit fund, which we continued to contribute into over the next year or so.

Ever since I came to Melbourne, I've lived in the leafy South-Eastern suburbs. Kate and I like the inner suburb vibe, and to be able to walk to a café to feed our caffeine addictions. Unfortunately for us, we weren't going to be able to afford a house in those areas of Melbourne.

Eventually, we did find somewhere we liked, but it was a house in Kensington. The northern suburbs! The opposite side of the river! How could we survive without Chadstone?

We did buy that house, and have moved to Kensington. Despite initial worries, we've found the area is also leafy, near good coffee, and Highpoint is almost as good as Chadstone. No, I can't yet convince myself of that last one. But we are really enjoying it.

People are usually more adaptable than they think they are. Each of my journeys was full of uncertainty but all of them have turned out to be great decisions. There can't be reward without risk – it's true.

If anyone would like to talk to me about living and working in the U.K., good travel destinations, or how our renovation plans are coming along, please grab me afterwards.

Well, consider the ice broken here tonight, but my journey continues.

[5:09]