

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

"Genny, hi there good morning!
Welcome to District 51 convention!
This is your 1st convention!
Greetings Ritchie District 51"

This was the message I received from Mr. Ritchie Chong on the morning of 22 October 2011 at the 19th SAC in Melaka. It was 7.53 am. I was there to be the usher and I asked Joshua Ling, my senior from the Malacca Toastmasters Club, who Mr. Ritchie was. He explained to me that he is a past District Governor. I thought that this could be a general practice of Toastmasters to greet anyone new or a first-timer who attended a convention. As I was executing my duties to line up the DTMs, I met Mr. Ritchie and thanked him for sending me the message. Later, during the keynote session, I received another message from Mr. Ritchie:

"I need to see you in a while.
I have got a good nice easy task for you!
I have all the faith in you!"

I looked at it twice and frowned. At the back of my mind I was hesitating, but nevertheless, I went to look for him as soon as the morning break started.

"Hello, Mr. Ritchie. How may I help you?"

"Genny, there's something you have to do. Don't worry, it is an easy task. You are going to evaluate Gary's speech in a moment. Come, follow me. Let me take you to Gary..."

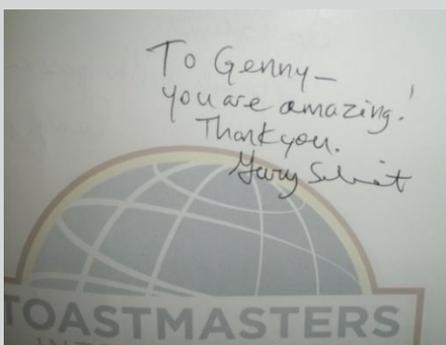
I was speechless and lost for words. I was thinking, "Why me?! I am very new and I don't know much". Before I could say anything, Mr. Ritchie walked to Mr. Gary and introduced me to him. Gary was pleased to see me and both of them were saying excitedly that they had found a first-timer at the convention. But, little did they know, I had never ever taken up any evaluation role in my normal club meetings and so far I have only completed CC#5. I smiled and listened to Gary's instructions. He briefed me further that I had to do this in front of all the people in the convention hall, as he passed me his CC manual and got my details. Gary looked at me and assured that he would stand by me when I evaluate his speech. I just could not believe it. I was stunned. At that particular moment, I wished that I was an ostrich and I would want to bury my head or hide under the table, but there was no way out. It was overwhelming.

Initially, I panicked. I thought, "What was I suppose to say and how should I evaluate the speech? My God! I had to evaluate Mr. Gary Schmidt, the Past International President????!!!" I tried looking around for some help but was short of time as the first plenary session had started. Everyone had entered the hall and I sat there thinking hard on how to evaluate Mr. Gary's speech. Then, the second plenary session started. It was Mr. Gary's speech on "The Secrets of Successful Leaders". I had to listen intently and carefully because I am partially deaf. Despite my disability, I manage to capture Mr. Gary's speech entirely and wrote down my evaluation on the spot in his CC manual.

Then, the moment of truth came. Mr. Gary surprised the audience by saying that he was being evaluated and he introduced me as the evaluator. I calmly walked up to the stage and towards Mr. Gary, shook his hand and took over the lectern. As I was walking, my mind was too preoccupied that I hardly feel nervous. In my mind, I had faith in myself that I can do it, and Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Gary had faith in me too. I also believed that my fellow members from Malacca Toastmasters Club had faith in me. I remembered what my club members would always say to encourage me – "Just be yourself and tell from your Heart", and my club motto – "Reach Out for Excellence". I braced myself and looked at Mr. Gary who stood beside me, and I looked at the audience as I gave my honest evaluation on his speech. At that moment, one of the skills that I picked up from Toastmasters had come in handy, that is being spontaneous. I recalled that Gary said it took him 20 years to get an autograph from Mark Hamil; whereas, I said to the audience I took only 2 minutes to get Mr. Gary's autograph. I had created an impact on the audience and it was definitely a memorable moment. Right after that, almost everyone in the hall came up to me, and congratulated and praised me for having the courage to step up and evaluate a PIP. My team members and members from Malacca Toastmasters Club were proud of me, as I made history in the Historical City of Malacca for being the first ever person to do so in Toastmasters District 51. I will always remember this for the rest of my life. With my deepest gratitude, I would like to thank all of you. I sincerely appreciate your encouragement and support.



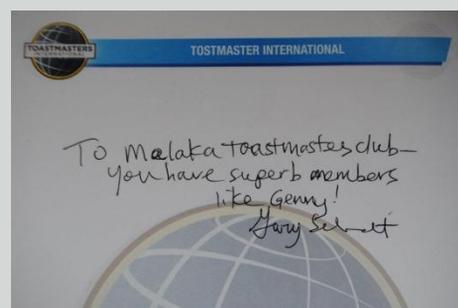
Photo with Mr. Gary



Mr. Gary's autograph for me

I truly respect and admire Mr. Gary for being so humble and open to an ordinary member like me. It really shows that he is a great leader. I believe that this particular act which he had portrayed is one of his "secrets" to a successful leadership. I also have to thank Mr. Ritchie for giving me this opportunity to present myself, as well as giving me "the push" by assuring me that I can do it. If all senior leaders like them were able to nurture and connect to a person like me with their humble approach, I think the Toastmasters International organization will grow tremendously and more leaders will be made. From this experience, I was truly inspired by Mr. Gary and Mr. Ritchie's nurturing leadership approach. They have certainly gone "beyond boundaries" in reaching out to members. I feel more confident and empowered now, and I am looking forward to do more speeches and serve Toastmasters International by nurturing more upcoming leaders.

The entire 3 days of the 19th SAC has "awakened" me. It was a great learning experience for me as a newcomer or "newbie" in Toastmasters International. There were so many skills to be picked up and learned. For those of you who are reading this, you have made the right choice in joining the Toastmasters International organization. Do "take the plunge" when you are given the opportunity to lead. I assure you that the Toastmasters programme will benefit you a lot. I finally learned how to evaluate a speech from a few seniors who shared their views and pointers, from the opinions of Mr. Gary and Mr. Ritchie, and especially from the contestants in the Evaluation Contest on the final day. I wish to be granted a second chance to re-evaluate Mr. Gary Schmidt; I will definitely do it again. ☺



Mr. Gary's autograph for my club

Genny Ong Gek Siew
Malacca Toastmasters Club