

## 13 steps...

The night was dark, overcast, raining and the wind was howling. There were 13 steps, in a darkened entrance, down into the basement. I know! I counted them twice as I went down, went back up and then screwed up my courage and went down again.

I descended slowly, hesitantly for the second time, reached out and nervously placed my hand on the door knob. My heart was pumping (fast ☺), my legs were shaky and my breathing short and labored. Was I making the right decision? What would I find on the other side of the door? Maybe I should just turn around and go home? How would I react? Would they like me, help me or reject me? Ok, Hooey, go for it!

I put a forced smile on my face, turned the knob and opened the door. I stood there for a minute... took a deep breath and stepped into **Toastmasters of Today!**

I still remember my first visit that Tuesday in May, 1991. I was nervous and shy. Now, anyone who knows me will find that hard to believe, but it was true. This was a scary moment. I had just come through a devastating and debilitating divorce. Frankly, I didn't feel very confident in myself or my abilities. Remember your first visit to a Toastmasters meeting?

Perhaps, like me, you felt a little nervous or intimidated by members who could get up and seemingly speak without notes or nervousness.

I was there, reviving, and finally acting on a dream of being a professional speaker and someday being able to stand on the big stage sharing my ideas, inspiring and investing in the lives of those in the audience.

What I found at the bottom of those 13 steps was a supportive, friendly group of people who befriended me and became my champions, coaches and cheerleaders. Perhaps you have had a similar experience? Perhaps you have played a similar role in the growth of a Toastmaster friend or member. That one step into the room, following the 13 down made an amazing difference in my life, and my career.

I have been a professional speaker now for over 10 years. In 1998, I had the distinct pleasure of walking across a Palm Desert stage to be inducted into the TM Hall of Fame as the 48<sup>th</sup> Accredited Speaker in our history.

As I share when I had the privilege of keynoting the Region IV conference this June... *"I may have walked across that stage by myself... but I did not get there by myself!"* It took those first 13 steps and the loving, supportive investment of hundreds of fellow Toastmasters to move me toward that goal.

What is your next step? How can you make a difference? As Rowena Romero said in her world finalist speech in Toronto... "Step into the ring!"

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**Bob 'Idea Man' Hooley, DTM, A/S** is a former D21 (BC) Governor who became the 48<sup>th</sup> person in Toastmasters history to earn our coveted professional level Accredited Speaker designation. He has been inducted into TM Hall of Fame on numerous occasions for his leadership and contributions. He is the D42 Executive Leadership Coach. Visit: <http://www.fullofhooley.com> or <http://www.ideaman.net>