

## **Speech: Postcard**

***Winner, Semifinal Contest, World Championship of Public Speaking, 2007. This speech is special. The speaker talks to each of us, reminding us of what's really important as we go about our lives. I first heard this speech over a dozen years ago and I've never forgotten its image and its message. I suspect you won't either.***

*A speech by Vikas Jhingran (June 16, 2007)*

Have you seen the Taj Mahal?" Jamie asked.

I was used to this question.

As soon as someone found out I was from India

This was the second question they asked me-

The first one always being

"Did you have an arranged-marriage?"

And so I had a prepared answer.

"Isn't it beautiful?" I replied.

The truth was that I had not seen the Taj Mahal

But I was too embarrassed to admit it-

So I learned to describe it from a postcard.

Mr. Contest Master, fellow Toastmasters,

And anyone who claims to have seen a monument based on a postcard-

It works!

I had a great discussion with Jamie about the Taj Mahal

But this was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Two years ago when my wife and I visited India

We planned a trip to the Taj Mahal.

Both of us were so excited.  
We told everyone about it-  
All our relatives and friends knew we were going to the Taj Mahal.  
When my favorite Uncle Jay found out we were going to the Taj Mahal  
He had just one piece of advice-  
"Be careful of pickpockets.  
They are like magicians.  
They can get your wallet out even when you have your hand on it."  
And not just him-  
All my aunts and cousins said the same thing.  
So when I was at the Taj Mahal  
That's all I could think about.  
In fact, every 30 seconds  
My hand would automatically drift to my back pocket  
Just to make sure that my wallet was there  
That afternoon-while standing in line to buy a drink  
I got engrossed in a discussion with my wife and our guide  
And - just for a few minutes - my mind wandered-  
And when my hand went back-  
My wallet was gone!  
How could this be?  
I had been so careful.  
I turned around and shouted-  
"Someone stole my wallet!"  
In just an instant the hundred or so people around us were galvanized-  
Their eyes darting from one corner to another for anything suspicious-  
The thief could not be far.  
As I was desperately looking around  
I heard the voice of my driver "Sirji, Sirji"  
"What?" I shouted.  
"It's in your hand!"  
And sure enough it was in my hand.  
I immediately realized what had happened.  
I had taken it out to buy the drink  
And when my other hand touched my pocket  
I immediately assumed that someone stole it-  
Because that's what I had been thinking about the whole time.

I can never forget this incident because of two reasons-  
One - my wife won't let me -  
It has too much entertainment value for her-  
And second because of how I felt that evening.  
I had just spent the day  
In front of one of the most beautiful structures built by man-  
But I couldn't recall the touch of the radiant, white marble  
Or the elaborate carvings on the pillars.  
I didn't remember  
The smell of the flowers that surrounded the structure  
Or the details of the spectacular dome.  
It was almost like I had just seen a-postcard.  
My day felt incomplete-  
Like I had missed something  
But it took a phone call to make me realize what.

It was the 15th of March last year.  
It was early in the morning and the phone rang -  
My mother was on the line.  
"I have bad news Vikas.  
Uncle Jay passed away."  
I was shocked-  
My favorite Uncle-  
Gone.  
"But mom, the doctor gave him six months  
How could he be gone?"  
"Well doctors can be wrong you know-"  
"He can't be gone, mom."  
"He's dead, Vikas"-  
"But mom-I was almost done with my project.  
I finally had some time to call him."  
Tears rolled clown my cheeks  
As I remembered the wonderful years  
I had spent with him when I was a kid.  
I saw myself playing in his small house in Calcutta-  
Those hot summer days I spent playing in his backyard.  
His caring hug-his gentle smile.  
As these images raced across my mind

I realized for the first time  
That I had lived my whole life like a-  
Postcard.  
Flat and incomplete.  
I had always been so busy building the future  
That I had never lived in the moment -  
The moment that had the smell - the touch-  
The sound - and the emotion.  
The moment that is gone in a snap-  
Forever -just like Uncle Jay was gone-  
Forever.

Friends, there are too many of us  
Who live our lives worrying about our wallet-  
And forget to enjoy the magnificence of the Taj Mahal in front of us.  
Not realizing that if we fail to capture the moment-  
The sound, the smell the touch and the feeling -  
What remains is-  
A picture without a soul-  
A memory without emotion-  
Just a postcard-----  
Your life is much more than a simple--postcard.

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*Brian Woolf's comments: Not only is the speech's message simple and compelling but its overall craftsmanship is superb, right from the curiosity-arousing title and opening words, where he introduces himself and puts himself down "(I was too embarrassed to admit it.)" And his conversationally-told story just keeps unfolding. We "see" each vignette he describes. We feel his emotions of fear and flatness, smiles and sadness, relief and regret. And admire the way the message is strengthened through the repetitive use of key words such as postcard, Taj Mahal, wallet, and moment.*

*This speech together with Vikas's District and his winning World Championship speeches, are among 11 favorites reproduced in my book, "The Speaker's Toolbox."*

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*And there's more where this came from...*

Visit Brian Woolf on the web for his complete collection of  
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[www.brianwoolf.com](http://www.brianwoolf.com)

Email: [brian@brianwoolf.com](mailto:brian@brianwoolf.com)

Tel: +1 864 458-8277

**BRIANWOOLF.COM**