

Speech: The Challenge

A speech by Verity Price (August 24, 2021)

Semifinal Winning Speech, Toastmasters(R) World Championship of Public Speaking, 2021. Some speakers easily and effectively connect with audiences with a comfortable blend of their conversational and body languages. Verity Price is one of those gifted communicators... As you will see and read.

Raise your virtual hand
If when you were a teenager
Your mother ever gave you
Unwanted advice?
Raise your other hand
If you later realised
She was right?

Contest Chair
And fellow former teens -
When I was teenager
And my parents would pick me up from school
The children would shout
Verity - your grandparents are here.

You get the picture -
They were OLD.
Their idea of heaven -
A loooooong walk on a crowded beach -
Was my teen idea of hell!

My skinny dad
Would put on his old baggy tracksuit
And a straw hat.
And my grey-haired mom
Would borrow
His other baggy tracksuit
And then
Tightly tie on a headscarf.
It was like watching
A Halloween horror show -
Of a scarecrow
Taking a witch
For a walk!

Like any self-respecting teenager
I just walked f-a-a-a-r behind them
Until - I would bump into mom
Who was always
Picking up pieces of plastic.
It drove me MAD!

Moom - you're so embarrassing!
And you're never, ever going to make a difference.
With the patience of a saint
Mom would take a deep breath
And then say -
Verity - I know you find me mortifying
But until I am gone
I will challenge you
To always leave the world better
Than you find it.

SURPRISE!
A teenage - ignored - her mother!
But I did not deter Mom.
At home - at work - on the beach
She was always leaving things better
Until - after 47 years of marriage -

My dad - her soulmate -
Suffered a stroke and died.
My Mom was lost -
Without my dad she was broken
And it broke my heart
When I realized that she was filling her emptiness
With wine.
The more bottles littered our home
The more unrecognizable my Mom became.
Eventually
Our only hope was for her to check into rehab -
In my dad's baggy tracksuit
And her headscarf.

Crazy roommates - tattoos - nose rings!
This - was mom's Halloween horror show.
But
This - was where mom got better.
And then do you know what happened?
She took on the challenge
To help her crazy roommates get better too.
My embarrassing mom
Was suddenly the most popular person in rehab!
She was their shoulder to cry on
Their cool granny to confide in
And soon - their Uber to AA meetings.
Picture Mom - in her headscarf
With her tiny car
Crammed with recovering addicts
All trying to educate her
Into the virtues of rap music.

It's 11 years since my mom and dad were reunited
On a celestial beach.
Her life never made the headlines
But there were looong lines of people
At her memorial -
Many with tattoos and nose-rings.

We put out this book
For them to share memories of her.
And story after story
Spoke of all the ways she'd left them better.

*I loved how she always cleaned up, even if it wasn't her mess.
Your mum was the cool gran I always wanted
Sheila driving me to AA meetings is the reason I'm still clean*

You know what?
Her beach
Would've written the same story.

And my story?
It took losing my mom
For me to finally realize
That in all those years I'd been trying to ignore her challenge
She's been subtly shaping who I've become -

*My home is littered with recycling bins
If someone asks me for help - I can't help myself but to help them
And on the beach - well, mom is having a laugh
Because I cannot go for a walk
Without picking up pieces of plastic.*

It drives my family mad!

This world is littered with problems.
Plastic - Pollution - Poverty -
And a lot of other words that start with a P
But ask yourself -
Would any of these problems exist
If those before us had left their world better?
Given that you're on mute -
I'll going answer for you.
NO!

If you think about it
All the good in this world

Is *because*

Someone looks - at their stretch of life

And they choose - to leave it better.

There are the obvious names -

Martin Luther King - Mother Teresa - Mandela

But I'm interested in the not-so-obvious names -

Yours - Mine - My Mom's.

You know what I've realized?

You don't -

Need to make the headlines

To leave a legacy.

It doesn't matter if

You're a great leader

A little old lady

Or a bad-tempered teen.

All that matters

Is when it comes to

The people and places

On your stretch of life

You say yes to a simple challenge.

A challenge that thankfully

Doesn't care

Who you are - or how you dress -

While you take it.

It just cares

That you choose to

Always leave the world

Better than you find it.

Raise your virtual hand

If you're up for the challenge?

Contest Chair!

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*Brian Woolf's comments: Verity speaks as a Country and Western singer sings - a simple story with a message, crossing a landscape of emotion-infused ups and down, that is rich in repetition, rhyme, and well-timed pauses. In The Challenge, her subtle skill with emotion and connection was heightened by inserting "my" when describing her mom and dad versus just saying mom and dad and in her freshly crafted, emotion-generating words and phrases, such as "reunited on a celestial beach" and "filling her emptiness with wine." Also, in her numerous smile-creating, conversational lines. In addition, nearly every paragraph has a easy to visualize vignette, described in simple words, which helps us later recall the contours of this memorable speech. (This speech is available to view on YouTube - [click here](#) - and other presentations can be seen at YouTube (type **Verity Price** in the search bar) or by visiting www.iamverity.com)*

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