**TOASTMASTER SPEECH**

**FOR**

**CHERIAN THOMAS**

**".... SO I THINK I CAN DANCE?"**

Hello ladies and gentlemen and distinguished members of the Toastmaster International Association **(please revise if this salutation is not correct)**. I stand before you as a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of truth and justice through the written word, and like the internationally renowned newscaster and reporter Christiane Amanpour, I too am a journalist and believe that effective and compelling reportage can make the world a better place. For years I have worked tirelessly in the pursuit of sharing crucial information on all manner of subjects with the intention of keeping people interested and engaged in world and local issues. My fingers have much practice with typing and they have the ability to rhythmically dance across a keyboard in strokes and swipes like no other. Sometimes they're faster than the human eye... **THERE**!!! Did you see that? Or was I too fast for you? **(Don't even make a hand gesture and wait for the laugh**) The cadence of the clacking keys creates a mesmerizing cacophony of......wanting to type more!!! The motion has become part of who I am and in fact I've been told that sometimes I type while I'm sleeping....now **THAT** is interesting!!! I've heard of sleep walking, but sleep **TYPING?**  **(Wait for the laugh**).

But as we know, life has a way of offering reality checks. Sometimes they can be deposited and they clear and are negotiable within a few business days. Sometimes those reality checks stop us in our tracks... Or shock us into searching for new paths. One day, as I was writing my latest missive, which, by the way, I could type with my eyes closed... As if I knew the process so well I could be sleeping... And apparently sometimes I was... I had what the French would call a **(clap your hands one time really loud when you say this**) **COUP DE FOUDRE**.... A veritable **THUNDER CLAP** of inspiration.... If my fingers could be so lithe and graceful on a keyboard...surely my feet could glide just as expertly and convincingly across a dance floor!!!! Yes!! That's it!!! I will become a ballroom dancer!!

**HUH**??? ***So I think I can dance?*** Why not? How hard could this be? Fred Astaire made it all look so natural and Heaven knows I AM rather suave and debonair (**Pretend to slick back your hair and dust off your jacket lapels while checking your finely groomed nails and wait for the laugh**). As a writer, I live a life of the mind... With awareness and foresight I am trained to recreate scenarios and experiences borne of my lush and fertile powers of observation..... Surely these skills will come in handy as I will my feet to inherit the rhythm that I **KNOW** lives within..... It's CLEAR that I have "TWINKLE FINGERS.".. I must ALSO have "TWINKLE TOES!!" Right?? I immersed myself in completing some due diligence. As any reporter worth his byline would do, I researched thoroughly... ballroom dancing, ballroom dancing clothing, ballroom dancing shoes, ballroom dancing "parlance," ballroom dancing swagger.... Before long I felt confident that I had the drill down pat. And speaking of twinkling, I studied the subtleties of the brush twinkle as compared to the promenade variations and all of the other steps that need to be done in a proper fox trot. I painstakingly researched breathing techniques to get me through a quick step. I ardently studied the nuances between a simple classic waltz and a Viennese waltz. I did mirror work to channel my inner Latin Lover for my steamy Argentine Tango and my devastatingly seductive and triumphant paso doblé. (**Do exaggerated hand gestures and movements as you mention the steps and dances)**

And then I remembered.... ***SO I THINK I CAN DANCE???*** I also remembered a quote from Fred Astaire's most famous and graceful partner, Ginger Rogers, who once said, "Part of the joy of dancing is conversation. Trouble is, some men can't talk and dance at the same time." (**Wait for the laugh**) Uh oh... Flashback to when I was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years old. The annual school dance. Everyone said .... As kindly as possible... That I had two left feet.. HUH? I looked down and saw I was able to wear one left shoe and one right shoe and my feet SEEMED be normal, but it was true.... Back then, the rhythm gene did not course through my veins. While others in high school would "rock around the clock" I more than likely moved as though I had the weight of the world... strapped to my feet!! Come to think of it, my hand placement and arm extensions were kind of awful too.... What's the expression that comes to mind? **HAM HANDS (just plop your hands with a flat thud on your hips and maybe shake your hips a little and wait for the laugh)**

And then it occurred to me... as clear as day.. I'm not an awkward, insecure, inexperienced teenager. I am an adult who no longer has to be limited by the constraints of youth and ignorance. If there's something that intrigues me, that offers to bring light and adventure to my life, that presents a challenge for me to metaphorically and literally **stretch** in new and different ways, then why wouldn't I want to do my best to learn and expand my horizons? So many of us find that in our lives as adults, we establish ourselves in our careers and our daily routines and get identified and labeled by what we do instead of being acknowledged for our potential to be who we choose to be. With education and practice, our spheres are limitless.... Well let's say only limited by our own considerations.

I found a ballroom dancing school. I got the shoes and I made sure there was one left one and one right one and that they stayed shined and ready to take me through my moves. My progress was slow but every beat that I hit successfully, every time I **DIDN'T** drop my partner and **DIDN'T** get whacked in the face with a stray elbow turned into triumph. Slowly but surely, through practice and passion for my new "career," I improved. ***"So I think I can dance?"*** transformed into " hmmmmm maybe I **CAN** do this" to... Yes, I **KNOW** I can dance!!

And as with every valuable and precious lesson we learn in life, this was not about ballroom dancing. In discovering that I wanted to learn to ballroom dance, a part of me was reborn. I went back to the time of my youth when I was....and I know this is hard to believe with this **stunning and graceful specimen of a prince** that stands before you so confidently now (**wait for the laugh),** lacking in confidence and curiosity, and I found the opportunity to relive a piece of my life with a rewritten script. With maturity and wisdom I discovered that the strength of the human spirit cannot be ignored. As the song goes, "Feed your mind... The rest will follow." My newly discovered interest in dance has revived my interest in life. My exploration brought back my interest in research, observation, and movement and instead of doing my journalism by rote, or "in my sleep," I discovered a new appreciation for the opportunities I've been given in life and I know I'm lucky to have them. I may not be this generation's Fred Astaire, but I now ***KNOW that I CAN dance!!*** Thank you all!