

Here is the text of my Humorous Speech for my Toastmaster Contest.

I've left it as is.

It was approximately 1 minute too long.

The red light came on toward the end of page 5.

I learnt a lesson here!

PS. The font is large because I wanted to leave my notes on the lecturn to glance at if I needed them.

Normally I would say Goodevening Toastmasters, contest judges, distinguished guests, but tonight, in all sincerity, I can't.

Because there is a void.

I am seeing a void.

Wait. It is paper. A piece of paper – white and blank. Bare. Empty and utterly despicable. It is the enemy.

It's mere presence is a reproach. Its name calls, gawps, gapes.

It insinuates and if you listen carefully you can hear it snicker.

Paper.

Google fear of paper and you'll find there's a word for it.

Papyrophobia.

I found it in an alphabetical list.

It was right under papaphobia (which is not French for fear of fathers but is, as millions of Catholics know – fear of the pope) and above placophoboa (fear of

tombstones) and the motherlode of them all for those who can't discriminate or choose what they want to be frightened of - phobophobia – fear of phobias.

But this aside what I want to know is why so many intelligent and otherwise rational people, myself included, suffer so piteously from fear of empty pages?

I've seen them reduce grown men to tears. That's after hurling their pens into the furthest corner of the room, contemplating an ultimate act of defenestration involving themselves and their computer...

Is there a support group?

Papyrophobia Anonymous – a 12 step plan, a prayer?

More importantly, can you get ACC for it?

What's its common name?

How many celebrities suffer from it?

I can see it. A double page spread in the Women's Weekly.

Before and after shots. Quotes in side bars.

Rachel Hunter – I'm a dreadful romantic. Whatever I do in life I want to fall in love with a man. Oh, no.

We're talking about paper, right? Sorry. That was the romance quote. I need to change it, Don't I? Paper.

My life is a blank sheet and I'm an old fashioned girl. I

want a man to do the writing.

Enough.

You understand the dilemma.

This is the archetypal Catch 22.

And I could be a famous writer or at least a good one, as good as any you could name, the new Mansefield, NZ's answer to that appallingly successful Harry Potter woman...IF it weren't for my crippling fear of paper – the ultimate in Writer's Blocks. In fact, that anybody writes at all is a sign that they don't have it as bad as me.

Mine is bigger, better, super sized. I suppose I could take some satisfaction in knowing my suffering is superior. It will not tolerate compromise. It has integrity.

But I'm not a wimp. In any other sphere I seldom take no for an answer, (unless it's convenient).

And on this occasion, for you my Toastmaster friends, I've made an exception. For you I will wrestle with the demons.

I will wheel out the Dugdale Home Remedy Plan version 6042.

You've heard of the song 'Climb Every Mountain – forward every stream, follow every by-way until you find your...

OK. So this will be easy and your participation will help – sharing the experience is critical for overcoming it. Empathy, you know.

Clean every bath room,  
scour every loo  
vacuum every carpet  
until ...

No. Not doing it?  
Let's try the play – the Shakespearean one.  
Enter Lady Macbeth, dishevelled, distraught...  
'Out damn spot...'

Why is it that so many remedies, my own included, for  
writers block, fear of paper, hinge on cleaning?  
I might be a woman but that doesn't mean cleaning is  
in my genes. I've disappointed myself. How desperate  
can I get?  
How can I forget I loathe housework.

Exit Dugdale Home Remedy Plan 6042.

Enter 6043.

The library.

On a good day the library is good. It does what it  
should. It behaves – books are to be seen, read and  
not heard – It's a beautiful quiet respite.

But on a bad day...

Those smug books in their snug shelves.

When I want to feel the total gravity, the weight and

size of my plight, nothing does it better than to cower in the literature section – a cringe overseen by towers of books.

Books full of sheets of paper full of words. Words bursting through their bindings -thousands of them, millions of them.

Famous ones and favourite ones: Chekov, Mansefield, Lawrence, Munro (Alice not Marilyn)

Even trivial ones silently smirking their success. Mills and Boon, Sweet Valley High.

But who wants to be in such company? Not me. It's all or nothing.

And while it's nothing, there's still the possibility of something more than:

'Darrin reached out his muscled arm. Dannielle saw it flex and ripple. She smelt his musk as he folded her to his manly chest.

'Can we have a house in Churton Park?

I want white tiles in the bathroom and a little girl called Roquelle.'

'Yes, yes', he said.'

Toastmasters, Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, let me summarize for your deliberation.

The case of fear of blank paper is a complex one.

Papyrophobia strikes at the heart of writers everywhere.

It can extinguish, nay, spontaneously abort a word of inspiration at the very moment of its conception.

On the one hand we have the bright white gasp of

opportunity – the blank piece of paper – pregnant with possibility – infinite in scope.

On the other – the page written on – committed to.  
Writer's block is negotiated – temporarily hefted to one side.

But is it good?

Does it mean anything at all?

That I leave you to decide.

I rest my case.