



Highlighter

Mid-Atlantic SCBWI Newsletter

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Stage Fright is Your Friend

by Joy Jones

Pick up a pen and your prose flows. Place your hands at the keyboard and your fingers fly, forming fine phrases. But ask you to speak before an audience? Your brain freezes and your heart fails.

School visits, book talks and writing workshops help you generate additional income for your writing career. A book signing where you do a presentation rather than loiter behind a table will be far less boring and will motivate more people to buy your books.

But what to do about that knee-knocking terror that strikes you when you think about facing an audience?

Well, I'm here to tell you that stage fright is your friend. That uncomfortable, uneasy feeling you get at the prospect of delivering a speech is actually a great thing. Here are a few user-friendly ways to think about stage fright.

Think Power

Usually, just before I have to address an audience, I get an intense, unsettled sensation in my chest. However, whenever anyone asked me if I felt nervous before I had to perform, I always said, "No." And I was being truthful because I did not think of that sensation as fear. I regarded it as the strength needed to project my voice, remember my lines, and focus my attention. Eventually, I realized that what other people called anxiety, I called energy—the positive energy that supplies the *oomph* you require to deliver your message. So when you feel nervous, think power, not panic.

Think Confidence

You do know that public speaking is the number one fear of most people, don't you? So any time you stride to the front of the room to speak, you have automatically won the admiration of nearly everyone in the room. They want you to succeed, they know you've got guts. They'll forgive you if you forget a point or stumble over a word (if they even realize a mistake was made). You're doing something they're too scared to do and they will reward you with applause once you're done. It's a win-win proposition for you. So speak up and conquer your FEAR: Face Everyone And Recite.

Think Excitement

What do you use to protect you from the rain? An umbrella. What do you use to protect you from the sun? A parasol. We think of sunny weather and rainy weather as opposites but we use the same tool in either situation. Only the term used—umbrella vs. parasol—differs. The same could be said of fear and excitement. It's the same thing but labeled differently depending on the situation.

A scary or suspenseful movie is enjoyable precisely because it is scary. Just as learning to ride a bike, starting a new job, or facing that blank page contains both thrill and risk, so too we can redefine that risky, edgy experience that is public speaking as charming instead of alarming. Stage fright? Nah. Stage excitement.

Joy Jones is a Washington writer and the author of the children's book, *TAMBOURINE MOON*. *Stage Fright Is Your Friend* is adapted from an upcoming book by the same name. Visit her on the web at www.JoyJonesOnline.com.

Illustration by Jennifer Smyth Church; www.jennifersmythchurch.com for "Goose on the Loose" storybook app by Byrne Publishing. (7)

