This document is being published as a courtesy to members of Toastmasters International, throughout the world. It is a full script of the speech with which I won the 2003 World Championship of Public Speaking, including my staging notes.

The purpose of the staging notes is to help the readers to fully understand the manner in which I used the stage, since that is an element of speech delivery that can be (but rarely is) used to full effect, in order to heighten the impact of a particular speech.

For those who are interested, I am available to partner with you to help make your next meeting, conference, or convention a success by delivering a high-impact, highly effective keynote address. You can contact me at speaking@jimkey.com.

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Please contact Key & Associates at 469-366-4395 or KeyNotes@jimkey.com to submit a request.

I hope that you enjoy the speech as much as I enjoy presenting it.

Make it an AWESOME today, for a BETTER tomorrow!!

Jim Key
2003 World Champion of Public Speaking

http://www.jimkey.com & 469-366-4395
"Never Too Late"
by Jim Key

Stage props: Two chairs in middle of stage;

**Narration**
The theater is quiet. The aroma of overpriced popcorn permeates the air. You settle in for the perfect family outing, and then it happens: the film you are watching takes a sudden emotional turn. You try to resist, but you can’t help it! Before you know it, your eyes begin to…sweat.

You may not care that people see you crying, but the last time it happened to me, I was thankful the theater was dark!!

But my young daughter, who doesn’t know it’s okay to whisper, pierced the darkness with: "ARE YOU CRYING?"

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, and anyone who has ever gotten misty at a movie: Never ignore inquisitive children. The longer you do, the louder they get! In a matter of seconds, my daughter shouted, “WHY ARE YOU CRYING, DADDY!?"

The movie my family and I were watching at that time was “The Rookie”. On the surface, it’s about the oldest rookie in baseball, but on a much deeper level, it’s a story of reclaiming life’s missed opportunities. When the movie ended and I realized what a great teaching opportunity I had, I turned to my two sons, and said “Guys, what did you learn from this?”

Imagine how proud I was when my 16-year old said…“ I learned that my dad cries at the movies”.

My 12-year old took the question, and his well-being, a bit more seriously. He said, “I learned that it’s never too late to follow your dreams”. …it’s never too late to follow your dreams.

Why does it sometimes take a child to remind us of that? It’s because children are uninhibited
Walk slight stage right  dreamers. Last year, I spoke to an elementary
school assembly, and asked “If you could have
any job in the world, what would it be?”. One
little boy blurted out, “Oooohhh! I’d be the guy
that rides on the back of the garbage truck”!!

Very, Very, VERY Animated!

Walk slight stage left, gesture back to stage right

His passion was proof that he knew something
most adults have forgotten: dreaming is fun, it’s
natural, and it’s necessary! Every notable
accomplishment in human history… began as a
dream.

Large gesture

Move far stage left

Do you remember how you dreamed as a child?

Back then, we had a wonderful innocence, and
could gaze into the future, and imagine all sorts
of possibilities. Then we turn our focus to
adulthood. Many of us find that by the time we
get here, we hit a wall and stop dreaming,
because we can’t see past next week. Why?

What happened!?

Returning to center stage

Somewhere along the way we learned a painful
truth. We learned that failing to achieve our
dream hurts.

Slight stage right

We encounter critics, who ridicule and crush our
dream, and it hurts. We hear an inner voice that
cries out, “No more… I can’t take being hurt
again”, and we convince ourselves it’s better to
give up our dreams, and simply do what we’re
supposed to do, instead of longing for what we
were meant to do.

“Roughly” at center stage

Ladies and Gentlemen, we were meant to dream!

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest
dreamers of our age, said, “The time is always
right to do what is right”. That means if it’s right
for us to dream as children, then it’s just as right
for us to dream as adults.

Gesture stage left

The question is: do we have the courage to
dream?

Large gesture stage right

Ladies and Gentlemen, we were meant to dream!

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest
dreamers of our age, said, “The time is always
right to do what is right”. That means if it’s right
for us to dream as children, then it’s just as right
for us to dream as adults.

Large gesture stage left, slight step left

I know a remarkable teen-aged girl who does.

Large gesture stage right, slight step right

Her name is Nicole, and you should know that
she is hearing impaired, vision impaired…and
three years ago she survived a stroke. If

Center stage

anyone has the right to give up on dreams and
accept “reality”, she does.
Walk back to chairs & **stand up on the chairs**

Large gestures

Large gestures (still standing in chairs)

**Sign language**, along with spoken words

Instead, I’ve watched Nicole redefine reality not according to her physical limitations, but according to the size of her dreams. As part of that, two years ago, I saw her stand on a huge stage before almost three thousand people, and perform the sweetest song I’ve never heard. She sang it with sign language that I didn’t just see, but deep inside, I felt it! Instead of hiding behind justifiable excuses, there she was, teaching me:

“It’s never too late to follow your dream.”

Step down from chairs. Walk to slight stage left

Back to center stage

Ladies & gentlemen, what do you dream? …or is the better question: What **did** you dream, and why did you stop? If you have ever let a dream slip away, I’m here to tell you, it’s not too late. If you can summon the courage to overcome your circumstances and your experiences and your critics, your dream can live!

“Roughly” at center stage

Whether your dream is to make beautiful music, or to not get caught crying at the movies … if you dream of changing the world, or just riding on the back of a garbage truck … … if you forget everything else I’ve said, it would **thrill** me if you remember this!

Sign language only (no spoken words)

[**It’s never, too late to follow your dreams!**]

Motion to Contestmaster ➔

[**Silent**]

**Speech fact notes:** For those who have asked: **Yes**, all of the stories in this speech are true. They **ACTUALLY** happened. Specifically, “Nicole” (her actual name) is a very real, and very special person. I’ve known her and her Dad, Mom, & brother (Steve, Renee, & Chad) for many years. The event at which I saw her perform that song onstage as I described was the 2001 National Fine Arts Festival, held in early August 2001, Kansas City, Missouri (USA). To Nicole’s family, who helped her become the remarkable young lady she is, and to Nicole, who has deeply inspired me, I owe a huge debt of gratitude.

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