

Strike While the Iron is Hot

Laila Aamir

This story is about an unforgettable moment of my student life. This one incident changed my life. It transformed the biggest fear of my life, the fear of public speaking into a real strength. After this incident I realized that an inferiority complex is nothing but a state of mind. It can be overcome by a little practice and the right kind of guidance.

I am a very talkative person but only at home, with my friends and with the people I personally know. I am very reserved with strangers or in new places and situations. During my childhood, I was considered a sharp and smart student, always scored high grades but at the same time I was very quiet and shy around my relatives and my teachers. I was scared to talk in public or with strangers and even in my class, probably due to a lack of self confidence. But this problem has abated considerably, although some of those germs still linger on...

This was how it all happened. Mrs. Tahira was one of my favorite school teachers. I still remember that day when I was in ninth class. All of us boys and girls were gathered in the Chemistry Lab. Mrs. Tahira was explaining the theory and the procedure of preparing HCL gas to us. As soon as she finished her lecture, she told us to perform the practical, which we completed successfully.

At the end of the session she decided to take a quiz based on what she had taught us that day. I answered all the questions that she asked me correctly. Sure of what the answers had been, I was happy to speak in class. However, a group of boys were unable to reply correctly, so Mrs. Tahira did what teachers often do in such situations; ask another student to explain. The only problem was that she asked me to explain the theory and procedure of the practical *to this group of boys!* I was more than a little reluctant to

address them, so I tried hard to squiggle out of the situation. I said no. What Mrs. Tahira taught me at that time has changed my attitude towards life.

She said, “Look, if you will not do it today, you won’t be able to do it ever.

Be confident, I know you can do it. Accept this as a challenge. The decision is yours...

Do it now or be silent forever.”

I took a minute to reflect on her words and then I agreed. I accepted the challenge as an opportunity. As I began I was very nervous, but after the first few minutes of explanation, I was relaxed and explained the theory and practical to the group of male students in detail. I also responded to almost all of their queries. The teacher appreciated my initiative.

As soon as I finished, I enjoyed a sense of accomplishment and realized that my fear of public speaking was unreal, something that existed only in my mind, in the absence of any real danger. The truth is that later on I could speak at public forums; I could also convince people of my view point. It would never have been possible without the opportunity offered me by my teacher and the confidence that she showed in me. Even today, remembering that incident gives me goose bumps and I thank my teacher for teaching me a lesson that no book can ever teach. I do not know where she is right now but wherever she is, I always pray for her health, happiness and prosperity.

The author is teaching at The Aga Khan University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences