

# Dananjaya Hettiarachchi's Winning Speech

## Speech Transcript:

**You** and **I** are not very different from this flower. Just like this flower is unique, **you** are unique. All of **us** have something special that makes **us** as beautiful.

**Do you know what makes you special?**

Now the answer to that can be a little difficult to find because sometimes, life has a cruel way of **picking out your pedals, breaking you in two and throwing you into the trash.** [VV]

**Now when you're broken**, it's very difficult to feel special. Mr. Contest Chair, **my fellow flowers.** [H] [VV]

**I** can remember the first time **I** broke. **I was 17 years old. I had already flunked high school and managed to get myself arrested.**

Now, **I** wasn't afraid of the cops. But there was one person **I** was very afraid of and that was **my momma.**

Raise **your** hand if **you** have **an emotional mother**...let **me** see. [VV]

Put them all together...**you get my mom. I** can hear her **scream** outside the police station, **even the cops were afraid.** [VV]

She came up to **me**...**held the iron bars. Looked into my eyes. And I saw a tear coming down her face.** [VV]

Now **I've** seen **my** momma cry before. But mothers cry 3 types of tears. **Tears of joy. Tears of sorrow. And Tears of Shame.** [VV]

And when a son sees a mother cry tears of shame, that's a life changing moment. She looked at **me** and said son, "I want you to be a better man!" [ST] [VV]

That night when I drove home, my dad was waiting for me at home. Now my dad is a cool dad. Raise your hand if you **have a cool dad. Put them all together you get my dad.** [CB] [VV]

My dad came up to me and said “son, it’s okay. You flunked your exams, you already got arrested, that’s fine, **you get that from your mother’s side.** [VV]

I want you to start working immediately.” And I said “Okay.” So, my dad took me to meet one of his friends called Sam. [ST]

Now Sam **was an accountant** who had an accounting firm and had generously decided to make me his personal assistant.

And there he was. **He looked like a teddy bear.** But this man was special. I looked at him and he looked at me, and then he said the most amazing thing. [VV]

He said, “Son, **I see something in you, but I don’t know what it is.** If you decide to work with me, I can help you find that something. [VV]

And I was like “WHOA, that’s the first time in my whole life somebody **has ever told me they see something in me.**” [VV]

And I started working for Sam. And every day after work he used to tell me stories about the world. **About history about culture about philosophy.** And it was much more interesting than what I **learned about in school.** [VV]

And I discovered I can dream. And I started dreaming **ladies and gentlemen.** **After one year** I went back into high school completed my exams and went into college. [VV]

**After successfully completing college** I found a great girl. **But not a job.** [ST] [VV]

I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life, **have you ever had that problem?** And when you’re lost, it’s difficult to feel special. So, I went back to my cool dad. “Dad, I feel lost,” he said, **“you are like your mother.”** [CB] [VV]

So my dad introduced me to this **strange club** that had a **strange name**, with **strange people, talking.** On the first meeting they told me to do **something called a Table Topic.** I aced it! [VV]

But while I was speaking, I see a **strange man seated in the back row, humble, simple, the unfailing quality of kindness in his eyes.** [VV]

As soon as I finished, he walked up to me looked at me dead straight in the eye and said, “Son, I see something in you, but I DON’T KNOW what it is! [VV]

If you come here twice a month maybe we can find that something.” [CB] [ST] [VV]

And ladies and gentlemen I discovered I could speak, and I love speaking. And that led me to become a teacher. [VV]

I know what it’s like to not have enough money in your bank account. I know what it’s like to worry when the bills start coming in. [VV]

And sometimes, in the middle of the night I wake up my beautiful wife and I ask her, “honey, why did you marry me?” She says, “I saw something in you. But I still don’t know what it is.” [ST] [VV]

Ladies and gentlemen today I’m a dreamer, I’m a speaker, and I learned the unfailing quality of unconditional love from my wife. [VV]

I was broken, and I’ve been broken, lost, and broke many times in my life. But the people in my life were able to reach into the trash can and make me whole again. [CB]

If it was up to me, I would have never been able to do that.

And this is why, if you have great people in your life, no matter how broke, how lost or how broken you’ve become, they can piece you back together. [CB] [VV]

Ladies and gentlemen, when I look at you, I see something in you, but I don’t know what it is. [VV]

## **SPEECH STATS:**

**Word Count: 878**

**Speech Length: 7:17**

**Title: I See Something**

Click [here](#) to watch the speech

## COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 22**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **3.02 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **39.9 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 4**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: **“I see something in you, but I don’t know what it is”**

Other variations when quoting his wife: **“I saw something in you, but I still don’t know what it is.”**The title is a variation of the Foundational Phrase as well.

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 18**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal). Talking *to* the audience will be more “you/your” focused. This could mean abstract ideas, “imagine this…” hypotheticals, concepts that describe how something works, etc. Those will naturally use more “you/your” words.

- **“I” or “Me” or “My” or “Myself” - x 76**

The original reason for tracking this stat was the thought that it might be useful to compare with the amount of “You” focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

The theory was, if this number was much greater than “You” focused words, it would show that the speaker was more *“me, me, me”* focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I’ve found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told. That doesn’t mean that the content of the stories is *great*, but personal stories are by no means a bad idea.

\*\*The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **“Ladies and Gentlemen” or “My Friends” [MF] - x 5**

The speaker used “*Fellow Flowers*” and “*Ladies and Gentlemen*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 6**

Descriptive physical characteristics of people and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene.

Physical in this case is what was heard, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that “*We were at my house*” is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 9**

Humorous and other. Most of the humorous moments were callbacks to *something* or *someone* from the speech journey. Foundational phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well—I included them in the total. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases, there were 3 callbacks.

Grabbing the rose out of the trash at the end of his speech was a callback to the beginning of his speech when he threw one into the trash. There was also a callback shortly after he ripped the rose and threw it into the trash. When he said, “*Now when you’re broken, it’s very difficult to feel special.*” he used a hand gesture to direct the audience’s attention to the trash can.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 7**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for misdirection to make a joke or not.

- **Questions [Q] - x 2**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not). I did not include questions from in-character or speaker’s internal dialogue.

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. However, even benign questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as “My Friends” or “Ladies and Gentlemen” does.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 2**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker's life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These help to prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- **Stories [ST] - x 5**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may not be entirely true, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else's. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales or things like "Imagine you are..."

In this speech there was a single journey, but it was broken into smaller parts.

It started with a wake-up call when he got arrested, and then the true wake-up was the disappointment from his mother.

From there his dad navigated him through the journey. First to the Accountant, Sam, who taught him he could dream and elevated him through college. Then, his dad took him to Toastmasters where he met the Strange Man that ultimately taught him that he could speak, which led him to become a teacher.

There was also a small humorous story which featured his wife insert his foundational phrase. These made up the entire journey.

- **Vocal Variety [VV]**

Vocal Variety is a combination of vocal elements. Short of measuring the speaker's voice in decibels, this section will make note of the most apparent changes in the speaker's voice throughout the speech. Varying the voice means that the speaker may get louder, softer, use a higher pitch, lower pitch, use inflection, talk faster, speak with rhythm, slow down to a crawl and even purposeful pauses.

\*\*Note that the total amount of changes which make up Vocal Variety are not counted like the rest of the Color Key sections. Instead, this section is intended only to highlight the most salient changes in the voice and to give you successful examples of Vocal Variety.

I condensed them into categories below and provided some examples for each:

### **Raise Voice [Louder, Higher Pitch, Inflection]**

- *"Put them all together...you get my mom. I can hear her scream outside the police station, even the cops were afraid."*
- He said, *"Son, I see something in you, but I don't know what it is. If you decide to work with me, I can help you find that something."*
- *"If you come here twice a month maybe we can find that something."*

### Lower Voice [Quieter, Lower Pitch, Softer, Whisper]

- *"She came up to me...held the iron bars. Looked into my eyes. And I saw a tear coming down her face."*
- *"I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Have you ever had that problem?"*
- *"And when you're lost, it's difficult to feel special."*

### Speed Up [Speak Fast, Quick Burst, Rhythmic]

- *"And I was like "WHOA, that's the first time in my whole life somebody has ever told me they see something in me."*
- *"And I started working for Sam. And every day after work he used to tell me stories about the world. About history about culture about philosophy. And it was much more interesting than what I learned about in school."*
- *"As soon as I finished, he walked up to me looked at me dead straight in the eye and said, "Son, I see something in you, but I DON'T KNOW what it is!"*

### Slow Down [Talk Slow, Slower Rhythm, Pause]

- *"Now the answer to that can be a little difficult to find because sometimes, life has a cruel way of picking out your pedals, breaking you in two and throwing you into the trash."*
- *"Now I've seen my momma cry before. But mothers cry 3 types of tears. Tears of joy. Tears of sorrow. And Tears of Shame."*
- *"And I discovered I can dream. And I started dreaming ladies and gentlemen."*

\*\*\*Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.

## Observations:

- **Technical Showmanship:** He used the politician's handshake when [shaking the hand](#) of the contest chair. It's intended to show warmth and sincerity to the one you're shaking hands with, but I'd say it's more of a play to the audience than anything else. The audience sees the handshake on the big screen and thinks "Awe, what a nice fellow! I like him." Or *something* like that. Don't just take my word for it, though, the [2003](#), [2005](#), [2013](#), [2016](#) and [2017](#) champions did this as well.
- **Props:** Dananjaya used a rose prop (and trashcan) at beginning and end of speech.



- **Powerful Sentences:**
  - *“Now I’ve seen my momma cry before. But mothers cry 3 types of tears. Tears of joy. Tears of sorrow. And Tears of Shame. And when a son sees a mother cry tears of shame, that’s a life changing moment.”*
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
  - **Gurus:** Mom, Accountant guy (job), Toastmasters guy
  - **Side Characters:** Dad and Wife were side characters. Side characters are part of the stories but don’t directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn’t a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story and in this case, the many diff characters gave the aura of him having “people in his life” which bodes well for his overall message.
- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** His way of tying up the speech was with the use of the rose. He pulled pedals and ripped it in half in the beginning, and then tossed it into the trash. At the end of the speech he picked a fresh rose from the trashcan to represent people putting him back together.

## Feedback / Criticism:

- **Incongruent?** The part about being broke seemed to be randomly tossed in. It could make sense because those times when you don’t have money can be tough and leave us feeling “broken,” but his premise and foundational phrase were about not knowing your path.
- **Stories:** Now I can’t say this is a bad thing, but the small stories really had no meat on them at all. I suppose they left more up to imagination instead of being overly detailed. In either case, they worked well.
- **Words:** When he introduces “Sam” he says “Called Sam” instead of “Named Sam” which is uncommon for English in the U.S. (The contest was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, though...)
- **Under the Radar:** When he says, “Today I’m a dreamer, I’m a speaker, and I learned the unfailing quality of unconditional love from my wife.” There could be a problem with the “I’m a speaker” bit. It’s like talking to a prospect and referring to yourself as a salesman. Part of the aura of good speaking is not letting the audience know that you’re a “speaker” – On the other hand, it did slightly tie in with his part about him learning that “he could speak” which ultimately led him to become a teacher. So, technically relevant.