

Sir Stephen's Step Down Speech
South Plains Leather Fest February, 2006

A step down speech...what do you say for a step down speech?

I am not sure I know...but I will be doing my best tonight to give the impression that I do as I speak on behalf of myself and slave catherine.

slave catherine does have some personal remarks she would like to make but she has asked for permission to speak briefly at the conclusion of the speech.

After much, much writing and rewriting of what we had to say, this ended up being both the shortest, and at the same time the most difficult to write, of all the presentations we have worked on in the past two years.

Work...there's a word you don't hear much in step down speeches, but the past year, the past two years really, have been work...a lot of work...work that stretched us both as Master and slave and in all areas of our lives...work that we did because we believed in the value of the work for ourselves and for the contribution we hoped we were making to our community.

Work is, I think, typically assumed to be drudgery, but work performed in the name of something you truly believe is not a burden, but a joy. It was our pleasure to work on behalf of this...our community.

And, to whom do we owe a debt of gratitude for this joyful work:

- Master Jack – more about him in a minute
- Master Taino
- Master Jim
- slave Marcia
- Mark Frazier
- Organizers and volunteers of all the regional events that act as feeder contests
- NY Leather Family
- MAsT Metro NY and Central NJ
- And finally, our thanks to the community at large for opening their arms, their hearts and souls to us

Stepping down is a time to look back and evaluate what we brought to the community – for that is the first obligation of a titleholder

We hope that we have fulfilled your expectations of us

We know that there was a risk in accepting us as the M/s couple – we are perfectly well aware that we are not the poster children for leather lifestyle

We heard, in our interviews, and elsewhere, the questions about would we, a couple who gave the appearance of a het couple...perhaps even a couple better suited to attending a Donna Reed retrospective than a leather event...would we be able expand the understanding of M/s relationships and dynamics in the gay/bi/trans community, at leather events, etc.

We made it our goal to reach out to such venues – not just the venues that knew and understood what the M/s dynamic, and by extension, our titles, stood for.

We would like to believe that we succeeded in some small measure:

- Spoke to the general membership of TES, a SM focused group
- Spoke at the TES Queer SIG
- Spoke to GMSMA
- Attended Thunder in the Mountains
- Attended & supported Folsom Fringe (now the owner of the NW region)

It was also a time to assess what the experience brought to me:

- What lessons have I learned
- And to acknowledge that I am not immune to the pleasure one gets from being singled out for an honor

As an aside I would like to mention two lessons learned two years ago when we were first approached by Master Jack with the proposal that we run for the NE Master/slave title.

Let me state, for the record that we had no intention of running for a title...ever.

We said no to Master Jack, as politely as we could but...in my Household Protocols I had written Goals and a Credo that clearly articulated a Household commitment to Community Service...and...I had published these statements for public consumption in a Tri-fold about my Household.

Master Jack knew that and he played the community service card.

The first lesson learned:
NEVER PUT ANYTHING INTO WRITING!

Master Jack assured us: it wouldn't take up hardly any of our time at all.

The second lesson learned:
NEVER TRUST YOUR FRIENDS!

Master Jim and slave marcia – have now informed me and slave Catherine that the commitment has just begun! Master Jack most certainly never told us about that!

But, as I said at the beginning...I owe Master Jack and many others my thanks, because, seriously...

My life has grown so much larger...it no longer feels like my life is just about me and slave catherine...but rather that we are truly connected to, and our well-being depends upon, our connection to the whole community. We have learned that we are a part of something much bigger than we could have imagined.

I have discovered that I have a love of teaching when I am teaching about things that I love – M/s relationships, lifestyle and dynamics. As presenters & educators we often talk about learning more from you than you learn from us. For us that transition occurred as more and more our presentations grew from lectures to interactive workshops...we opened up opportunities for those attending our workshops to speak and respond. From our point of view it was enormously successful and we truly stopped being “the teachers” and became the students to all of you. The depth of your experience, joy, sorrow and sharing far exceeded my own personal experiences or knowledge...and in your willingness to share openly and honestly about such things you brought to me far more than I brought to you.

My thanks to slave catherine who really urged me to make that transition

I had no idea, two years ago, what I was in for, and I want to thank slave Robert who organized the first Master slave panel in Phoenix at SWLC. It was very reassuring to me to hear about the concerns and doubts that other Masters and slaves experienced as they embarked on their titleholder years.

Thank you all for being patient with me as I groped my way towards my understanding of what it means to be a titleholder.

Clearly there has been an impact on my personal life...some of it joyful...some of it stressful, all of it resulting in growth. Growth is not always pleasant...it is just growth and it brings what it brings.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the impact a titleholder can potentially have on the community.

After two years of learning I think I finally do see the potential inherent in a title...all our titles...especially our educational titles. I see that those who step forward for such titles contribute to the pool of committed, motivated educators and innovators in our community. Just look around at all the past M/s couples who are here today and who continue to participate and contribute. Certainly titleholders are not the sole source of such people, but we are growing in numbers. I and slave catherine were proud to earn

this title...we are proud as well to now join the ranks of those who have held the title in the past.

Title competitions and the awarding of titles are community rituals, and like all good rituals they force us to pause in our daily routines and focus on who we are, how we have chosen to live our lives, and why we should continue to do so.

I and slave catherine are here tonight, participating in the ritual that marks the end of our title year. We have paused to reflect and in this pause we have reflected on the lessons learned in the past years. But this is a moment to consider how well will continue...so...are we here tonight to step down? No, we are here today to step up...step up to the plate and assume the mantle of responsibility that comes with being a previous title holder. For the sake of the love and acceptance you have all been so generous in giving to us... for the sake of the commitment we really do believe we owe to this community...this community that makes it possible for me to live our life together as we choose...we commit to remaining active...to continuing to participate in our local groups...to organizing new events and activities...to continuing to make ourselves available for service at events like SP...Master Jim and slave marcia, you keep threatening us with a lifetime of servitude on behalf of the community...we am here tonight to tell you that we hope you are not just kidding...because we are serious.

Thank you all for you attention.

Now, slave catherine would like to close with some of her personal thoughts and reflections.