

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the years I've delivered a few speeches and at least three of them have been as a best man. I have to tell you none has been as difficult to write as this one.

I wondered why I was struggling with it and came to the conclusion that it was in part because there were so many things that I didn't want it to be or had been told..... it musn't be:

- I didn't want it to be hackneyed, trite or platitudinous;
- I don't do slushy sentimentality;
- Having in mind the last time I delivered a speech in this magnificent room at the end of my time with Victim Support when I got some flack because I was controversial I decided I'd better not be controversial;
- I'd been told..... that I musn't try to outwit the best man;
- I didn't want it to descend into cheap jokes and stories.

So it didn't really leave much scope. I've therefore decided on the straightforward approach.

Firstly, I'd like to express thanks on behalf of Bette and myself to all those who have contributed to making today successful and special.

When Bette told me we were getting married we discussed a wide range of options in respect of time, form of the wedding, church or civil, town hall or hotel, form of reception, place of reception, and so on.

We decided that that we wanted it to be celebrated in a dignified but relaxed way and where if something went awry we could laugh at it and where the planning could be all part of the fun.

I think that we have achieved that.

The organisation of a wedding, even one on a comparatively small scale such as this, involves **so many issues and decisions** and so many people; some of those do it as part of their work and many do it voluntarily.

Whatever they do and however they do it it is important and **contributes to the success** of the whole. We have been **blessed** in being helped well by so many.

One of the **key** people today has been George Dobbs, the Vicar of St Aidan's. Bette and Jess have come to know George through their **attendance** at St Aidan's. I came to know George because he often **officiates** at some of the many funerals which I organise. I knew he did funerals; I didn't know how he was at weddings.

George has a **gentle humour, an unstuffy dignity and a calm, reassuring manner** and for Bette and I that has made the organisation of and the actual formal part of the day so very easy to enjoy.

To George, in absentia, I offer our thanks as I do also to all those at St Aidan's who contributed to the service, especially Elizabeth Milne and the choir for leading the very important musical element of the day.

On the occasions in the past when I have mused on the **possibility of marriage** I have always thought that I would like to hold the reception here at the Town Hall and so it has come to pass. The Town Hall is unquestionably **a gem** and offsets so many of the negative things about the town and what more splendid an environment could one have in which to hold a reception?

Dorothy and her staff here at the Town Hall have bent over backwards to help in the organisation of the reception and Bette and I express our thanks to them for their ideas and implementation and to the catering staff for splendid refreshments.

I would like to say thank you to Martyn Warburton for being my best man. I have known Martyn for about 10 years. We met professionally through our mutual involvement in the affairs of older people and have gone on to enjoy a good and supportive friendship which culminated in our spending an uproarious day Tank Driving last year- Bette says as Captain Mainwaring and Private Pike – I'll leave you to work out which was which

I decided on Martyn as my best man when several years ago to celebrate my 25 years in the law he presented me with a very witty framed poem about my time in the law. From that moment onwards he was in the frame for this job.

Thank you Martyn for your support generally and particularly today.

As many of you will know Bette left the public sector earlier this year and in September joined the private sector by becoming the Practice Director at A. H. Sutcliffe and Co. Her first action was to hive off a secretary for herself and in particular someone who could assist in wedding preparations. To all members of the Sutcliffe team who have been involved in doing anything towards the wedding thank you. Special thanks go to Chrys Brook and Nikki Girardier for their sterling efforts in preparing in so many ways for the wedding including coming down here this morning to make final arrangements. Nothing has been too much trouble for them. It has been much appreciated.

Three other things without which a wedding would be incomplete are:

- the cake,
- the photographs
- and in more recent times the video.

You will probably have spotted **Jessica's boyfriend, Rob**, flitting here and there taking the stills photographs whilst keeping in mind **Bette's command** not to fuss or keep her standing around for too long and also **Derek Shellard** who has been unobtrusively making the video. Thanks to both of them for their activities and we look forward to seeing the **end products** and being able to savour the bits that we might have missed or which we were too mesmerised to take on board.

The **cake** presented a slight problem. It was important to us that the day should be as inclusive as possible. However, we do have a number of guests with specific **dietary requirements** including intolerances of dairy products and gluten. Our appointed cake maker, Nikki Girardier's mum, experimented and came up with a cake which is not only **fabulous to look at and eat** but is able to be **eaten by everyone here**. Many thanks to **Mrs Spencer** for her care and skill in producing such a marvellous confection.

**To you, our guests**, thank you for coming along today to support us. Some of you have come **considerable distances**: the prize for distance travelled must go to the Davies family from Oban in

Scotland, closely followed by Rob from London and Geoff and Ann May from the North East.

Speaking for myself again, my **most fulsome appreciation** for the organising of today must go to Bette.

On top of **changing jobs**, becoming an **estate agent**, doing **training** and **masterminding** a complete reconstruction of the firm Bette has, in parallel, been **pushing forward** the planning and the implementation of the wedding. Whilst I know she has enjoyed doing it nonetheless it has been demanding but it has paid off magnificently and I am sure that today **will stay happily in our memories for the rest of our lives.**

Mention of Bette leads me nicely into the second aspect of my speech which is to say how **very fortunate** I have been in finding Bette.

My (and I know her also) only **regret** is that we didn't meet earlier. Had we have done so my parents may well have been **alive to meet her and Jess** and I am confident they would all have got on wonderfully well and would have had a very special relationship.

Although Bette's father, John, isn't alive and able to share the day with us, on a **positive** note we are fortunate that Bette's mum, Edna, is able to celebrate with us today and has been able to participate in the preparations for the wedding. **Thank you Edna** for your support and also for your acceptance of and kindness to me

Bette and I met at a gastronomic extravaganza organised by the Lancashire Dining Club on a Sunday evening in October 2001.

We talked about things as diverse as Harry Potter and ethics. Bette still tells everyone that I coned her by saying that I had read Harry Potter. What I actually said was that I was reading Harry Potter.... And that remains the position today. I am still reading Harry Potter. However, it was seemingly sufficient to impress a bibliophile from Bury and her even more bibliophilic daughter.

It was Bette's one and only visit to LDC. She was awoken early the following morning..... by a text message from the very forward man she had met the night before. At the risk of descending into cliché – the rest is history.

Bette has enriched and transformed my life in so many ways.

- She has taught me, for example, that there are books other than computer manuals; that it is possible to sleep in a bedroom without a computer; that it is possible to throw away defective electrical appliances and old clothes; that I do have the will power to pass Costco without going in
- She has so many qualities: her pulchritudiness (and for those who didn't do Latin – it means beauty but is not as slushy); her intellect; her resourcefulness; her steadfastness; her loving, supportive and encouraging nature; and perhaps above all her integrity. From our very first meeting we established that that quality was one which was of importance to both of us and it is one which colours everything which Bette does – with Bette there are no hidden agendas.

Thank you Bette

- for coming into my life
- asking me to marry you
- for looking so radiant today
- and above all just for being you

In addition to those qualities, 5 televisions, 23 electric leads and 4 fan heaters, Bette brought **one more thing** into my life and which represents, in business speak, **added value**: Jessica.

A **ready-made family**: no nappies, no disturbed nights, no terrible twos – just an intellect, a charm and a warm and loving personality and, oh, just a **teeny bit of teenage angst**.

At the start of our relationship, someone **proffered the advice** that I must be careful not to interfere in the relationship between mother and daughter; that has not been an issue at all. The three of us have got on swimmingly since day one and perhaps **bizarrely Jess** moved to Owl's Hoot a month before her mum; I think she was sent as the advance guard to commence the **domestication process and the cultural missionary work**.

I was **greatly moved** when early on Jess asked if I would adopt her.

Having explained that there were certain **legal impediments** to that, she settled for telling everyone that **she has adopted me** and I that **I am her dad**. To **cement the bond** between us, as most of you will know, Jess has taken the quite **momentous** decision to change her name to Ashley. I feel **very humbled but greatly honoured** by that decision. Thank you Jess for coming into my life so easily.

Finally: Three thousand years ago Homer, in his Odyssey, must have been referring to Bette and I when he wrote:

“There is nothing nobler or more admirable than when two people who see eye to eye keep house as man and wife, confounding their enemies and delighting their friends.”

We know by the messages of goodwill, the generous gifts and by the attendance those of you here today that we have done both those things and especially the latter.

Thank you.