**WEDDING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JEMBER ASFAW**

Hello everyone! Today is a glorious day!! We've gathered from all parts of the world to honor and acknowledge life and love, family and friendship, and seeing all of you here is a beautiful affirmation of the power of connection. Of course we are here to celebrate the marriage of two wonderful people, my son, Amha, and my (**Do you want to say “our” to include your husband?**) newest daughter, Leam. Today these two are the nexus… the hub… the point of connection and joy that we all have in common and it is almost overwhelming to think of how we, as we've traveled from far and wide, have all become true citizens of the world.

I imagine we've heard that “Love is gentle, love is kind…” judging by the representation here today, I also must believe that Love is a premier member of some very generous frequent flyer programs! (**Wait for the laugh**)…. And with this diverse crowd representing so many geographic areas, I have to believe that love is also clearly **patient**…. All that travel…. Just to be here in this very rare moment in time. It really is an honor and a privilege to share this with so many genuine children of the world. I want to acknowledge so many of you… To Leam’s family, (**Name Leam’s mother, father, and any siblings she has)**, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you are **our** family now, and it is our honor to congratulate you and to thank you for raising such a wonderful, sweet, thoughtful and brilliant daughter. I want to thank you for caring for Amha as you do and for taking care of him and Leam when you visited their home. We were so happy to meet you when you came in to New York for the wedding in December and we are very proud of our extended family…. Namely **YOU**!! Your journey from Israel and your family’s journey from parts of Europe to be here today reaffirm the importance of family and connection. To all of Leam’s relatives that have traveled from Israel, Germany and other areas of Europe, we are so happy to be able to share these moments and create such touching and lasting memories with you. To James Faller, I know you almost as long as I know my own son! You and Amha became friends when you were just five years old. I've had the privilege of witnessing both of you evolve from adorable, wonderful little boys to the fine young men you are today. I am so happy that you and your fiancée Aimee are here with us at this celebration. Alan, you too were an important part of “**Amha…. The Kindergarten Years**” and the two of you have continued that friendship through college and beyond. Thank you for being here and representing Canada ( **If you want to make a joke you can say**) … and even though your Prime Minister Trudeau is currently the “heartthrob of the western world,” I know we would take your presence over his any day! (**Wait for the laugh**). George, your generosity and good will are only surpassed by your graciousness in providing this gorgeous property. All of this hospitality, great food, beautiful atmosphere, and, of course the feeling of love that is clearly in the air, is intoxicating…. We are so blessed to be able to call you “friend.” Thank you.

I am also so happy to be here today with my husband, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for being by my side through all the times we’ve shared together…. (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**)…. Look around, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I told you that someday all of our challenges and tests would all be worth it! (**Wait for the laugh**). To my cousins, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, thank you for traveling from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to be here with us and thank you for representing our family.

As the expression goes, it's time to address the “elephant in the room.” And by that I mean there is someone, who was not able to be here today, but whose presence is large, indestructible…. Someone who is with us no matter where we are, no matter what we do. Amha, you know your sister Tigist is **completely** here in spirit and love. As most of you probably know, Tigist and her husband… who is also Amha’s classmate, Radimaker (**is this his name? Please correct as needed**) have been busy growing their own branch of our family tree. Our grandchild Semay is still working on her (**is the baby a girl? Please correct as necessary…. I don't see it in my notes)** travel etiquette **(wait for the laugh**)…. After all, she’s only a little over one year old…. But I am quite sure she will be packing her own bags and setting off to visit Uncle Amha and Aunt Leam before we know it!

Circumstance has thrown its challenges and redemption my way throughout my life, but by far my greatest blessing has been to be mother to two precious children. To have been honored with a son as intelligent, resourceful, considerate, loving, and caring as Amha has been one of the great gifts of my life. Amha was very young when we suffered the loss of his father, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, (**you can add this if you feel it's appropriate**) but I do believe he watches over Amha and Tigist and he is very proud today. To paraphrase the English filmmaker Michael Apted, “Give me the child and I will show you the man.” Ever since he was a little boy, Amha has expressed his curiosity and concern for others and has demonstrated his compassion in so many ways. At the age of three, he used to ask guests to read magazines to him. Then there are memories of us at Heathrow Airport…. I forgot to pick up one of our pieces of luggage… and there were important possessions inside. He helped save us from disaster…. At the ripe old age of FOUR… and he refused to get into the car until he showed off all of the things I forgot…. nice! I remember the time we went back to Ethiopia. We stayed at a very lovely lodge in the south and we hired a tour guide to visit the hyena caves…. Without realizing there were hyenas present…. **Now we know why hyenas laugh** … (**Wait for the laugh**)… when Amha was at college, we all learned what it was like to have ENORMOUS phone bills. Luckily, being the natural problem solver that he is, Amha became a resident assistant and was able to begin to take on his own responsibilities. He had a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for understanding, and on top of that he was truly a blessed child…. Or maybe I was a blessed mother. I don't remember him ever causing any difficulty or giving me a hard time. I know I make it seem as though Amha is perfect, and in so many ways he is, but even in the ways he could use some work, he is charming, earnest, and endearing. I will never forget the time his grandparents were in New York Hospital and Amha took it upon himself to act as translator for the doctors. Let's just say, it's a good thing someone eventually showed up to assist in the translation because his instructions were, well…. HILARIOUS!! Knowing my son, I am sure he learned a great deal since then…and it's his patience, heart, and spirit that shine through…. whether he's visiting the elderly, working with clients, calming down his mother, or connecting with his soulmate.

Everything happens for a reason, and the way Amha and Leam met is no exception. After he completed college, Amha volunteered for UNICEF for six months. From there he found a “real” job at human rights watch…. Apparently Amha was prepared to expand the meaning of **human observation** because seated at the next cubicle was a young woman named Leam. They met as colleagues, formed a friendship, and finally, after eight years of brief yet long distance demonstrations of love and patience, they married at City Hall in New York on my birthday, December 16th. Now that they're finally together for more than just a few weeks at a time, let’s hope they still like each other!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I have a very strong feeling they do!

And I love having Leam as my daughter-in-law. By joining our family, Leam brings her spirit, her culture, and her family’s traditions to blend with ours, and our growing family represents the best of all that true humanity has to offer. While Amha has always been sensitive, intelligent, and caring, since he has been with Leam, I see a maturity and discipline that I can attribute to their relationship and now marriage. Individually we all know how special these two are…. Together, they are unstoppable!

Although in some ways it has been a challenge for me to accept that geographically our son is far away, I know and trust that his marriage and life choices are blessed and come straight from his considerable heart. I know that no matter where his life and path with Leam might lead him, he will always be my devoted and precious son and he deserves all the happiness this world can provide.

Finally, Leam, Amha, I want to thank you both for being such fine, loving people. Individually you are wonderful…. Together you are a beacon of light, love, and integrity. Thank you for sharing that light and love with all of us. You've shown us that no matter how far one goes…. No matter who one meets on the path, home is where the love is and where the family is. You have both dedicated your lives to admirable and humanitarian causes. You've found yourselves apart from each other and from those you love, but still you persist to make this world a better place in which to live…. And thanks to your combined love of life and all that entails, you've brought all of us along on the journey, and for that we say thank you, we love you, and may all your wishes, dreams, and goals come to be….. may you both find health, happiness, humor, strength, patience and an over abundance of love through life. Congratulations, my children!