**DUAL RETIREMENT SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JESSICA SELLERS**

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends, family, fellow Air Force comrades, and distinguished guests (**If you feel there is a more appropriate order or protocol, please revise**), we are gathered here today for several reasons, all of which are unique and notable. While, for all intents and purposes, we are here to celebrate and acknowledge the careers of two stellar members of our ranks as we congratulate them both as they retire from their military careers, the true purpose of this gathering is to celebrate love... love of service, love of our country, and **LOVE** with a **Capital “L.**” These proceedings are as special as the two people we recognize and salute today and it is my tremendous privilege... and pleasure to have this opportunity....

The novelist Jane Smiley, reminds us, “A love story, at least a convincing one, requires three elements - the lover, the beloved, and the adventures they have together.” I think we can all agree that accurately describes our dual retirees, MSgt B and A. F, and while the original and primary purpose was to honor these two distinguished Master Sergeants, we have the added good fortune to witness the renewal of their marriage vows. Our guests of honor today have served with dedication and with seemingly limitless accomplishments, and in acknowledgement to one another, as they begin the next phase of their life together, they will also reaffirm their commitment to one another.... we’ve got a lot of ground to cover.... (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) Let’s see how fast I can talk!! (**And wait for the laugh**).

It is believed that Mohammad Ali said that, “Service is the rent you pay for living on this earth,” MSgt’s B and A F, have dedicated their lives to the service of their county, their community, their family and to one another. They have unflinchingly kept their word in just about every (**I didn’t want to be “too” superlative... you can adjust as you see fit**) instance in which they have been involved, and every situation and cause they have adapted has been immeasurably and positively impacted. As their experiences mounted and their individual and combined tenure built momentum, these two dynamos worked diligently to leave their positive mark through their military service.

Here are some highlights that just begin to chronicle the contributions these two have so selflessly achieved:

* Combined, the two individuals have volunteered and committed over 800 hours to community involvement activities raising over $56,000
* Managed a combined $122 million dollars’ worth of medical and command and control equipment
* Saved the Government over $738 Million Dollars
* Won a total of 8 awards at almost every level, Squadron, Wing, NAF and MAJCOM
* 2x deployments
* 2-lives saved

This is what the Air Force is relinquishing today as these two retire after combined service of nearly 40 years.  In instances like this one, I generally prefer to step through career achievements, but today I feel it’s only fitting to acknowledge the love story that inspired and motivated these two, and in turn, a generation of colleagues, mentors, beneficiaries, and family. While both A and B have served for twenty years, they came from two different places.... A hails from Miami, Florida while B. grew up in St. Louis , Missouri. A joined the military when she was twenty-one because she was “looking to do something different,” while B joined because his mother said he **HAD** to find something to do.... they both enlisted, almost simultaneously, in the Air Force, and while B found his way into radio communications, A went into medical. Somewhere, somehow, destiny provided a nexus.... otherwise known as Offut Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska. They had mutual friends, and while one only gets **ONE TIME** to make a first impression.... welllllll, let’s say that in this case, we may have to hold out for second and third impressions!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) ... you know that myth about.... “Love at first sight?” Or the one about “Love is patient, Love is kind?” .... not so fast. For the record, at that first encounter, A thought that B “**talked too much**,” while B was **CONVINCED** that A was **MEAN**!!! ... they had no idea what the future would hold... or **DID THEY**???

Somehow they got past those first impressions and for the duration of A’s training in Omaha, apparently, **SHE** got less mean and he started to **listen**.... because they started dating in those nine months. The next phase of their careers proved rather effective and highlighted the truth of the saying, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” As A returned to Kessler and B found himself PCS’d to England for a year and a half, they realized that although the long distance had tested their relationship, it galvanized their bond. **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED**!!! .... (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**).... and **YES**... they both continued to get their **WORK** done as well... (**and wait for the laugh**). With the determination of a man known to “**TALK**,” B was able to score a PCS to Keesler, assigned to the 81st Training Squadron, and with his newly attained rank and promotion, he proposed to A. In June of 2001, they married in a beautiful church in Miami and returned to serve at Keesler.

Four years later, Hurricane Katrina hit, leaving a swath of unimaginable devastation. Reports at the time detailed winds of 105 miles an hour that lasted for upwards of twelve hours with gusts around 140 MPH... that was tracked **BEFORE** the weather station blew away... flood waters were said to be higher than three feet in many buildings and eight feet deep in the Keesler Club. Damage was estimated at around half a **BILLION** dollars. By the grace of God, A and B were not on base at the time... they were vacationing in Miami, and while they could not go back to Keesler for a month, they began to work offsite...on building their family. Their son, Elijah was born sixteen years ago.

2006 found the F family overseas, stationed at Kadena AFB. B was now a SSgt and served as a Radio Systems journeyman and later training NCO attached to an AFSOC (special ops comm team) and A. as the NCOIC of Donor Operations in the Okinawa Naval Hospital. Together they were raising a family, going through school and being hailed as emerging leaders, light years ahead of their peers. Even so, they found time for each other. Dominque was born while they were in Japan. Promotions ensued and then....

The Air Force moved the family to Grand Forks where newly promoted TSgt A. F was assigned to the 319th MDS and TSgt B F was attached to the 319 Operational Support Squadron as the assistant NCOIC of a Combat Crew Comm unit. While simultaneously obtaining his Bachelors in IT. Grand Forks was the hardest assignment for these two by far, and aside from the Floridian being forced to endure the harsh snow, they were both challenged in every way. B cross trained and then was sent to the Deid where he, of course, performed exceptionally. Thankfully the AF was kind enough to let them only hang out in Grand Forks for a year.

Ensuing assignments found them in Barksdale AFB where B Was assigned to ACOMS and B served in the 2nd Medical Group. ACOMS is also where I had the privilege to meet this dynamic couple. I quickly learned that Sgt F. was the “go to guy” if correct information was needed quickly or a tough task needed to be conquered. Through every phase, no matter what, Sgt F acquitted himself with enthusiasm, spirit, and alacrity. It’s no wonder he was named the outstanding Spectrum Ops NCO of the year for 8 AF. A was simultaneously leaving her own distinguished mark by working over at the 2d Medical Group was the NCOIC in charge of laboratory services overseeing operations for the busiest laboratory in Air Force Global Strike Command and providing services to **over 68,000 beneficiaries**.

Today marks “the beginning of the rest of their lives.” This incredible couple have demonstrated the kind of strength and power that can be generated through love and commitment. They have served their country, they have created and raised a beautiful family, they have literally been out, dedicating their lives to saving the world.... so... what’s next? .... let me start with some suggestions.... How about a few nights’ sleep?!?!? (**Wait for the laugh**). A beautiful and wonderful way to start fresh is with this poignant vows renewal. As you recommit to one another, you will reconnect to those inner voices that allowed you to see beyond the young guy who “seemed to talk too much” and the young woman that, at first glance, “seemed mean!” Back then you both looked inward to find your own truth, and your guts simultaneously and accurately found each other. As you look inward once more, think beyond your current purpose... of being the “**family Uber**,” (**Wait for the laugh**), keep on your path; place one foot in front of the other, and savor the life and connections you’ve so carefully built.... and while we know you **SAY** you’ll miss your Air Force family, we’re not that far away... (**Hold up your index finger and say**) In the words of ET.... we’ll always be **RIGHT THERE**....

Before we get to the important stuff... I want to extend congratulations to your families.... to your parents for raising such stellar examples of humanity, love, commitment, and service, and to your children, Elijah and Dominique... you two did a **GREAT** job training your parents!

On behalf of your family and friends throughout the US Air Force, **THANK YOU** congratulations on your brilliant service and may your “re-upped” commitment to each other continue to inspire and encourage all of us!! Congratulations!