**BEST MAN SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MARK PAULSON**

Hi everyone! For those of you that may not know me, I’m Mark and it’s an honor and privilege for me to be standing as best man for Walt at his wedding to Kristen.... actually, it’s a privilege to be standing **ANYWHERE.**  Has Walt taken any of you on any surprise hikes lately? More about that in a bit.... (**Wait for the laugh**) but first I want to take a minute to congratulate Kristen and Walt on their marriage. Walt and I have been friends since we were kids, and if there’s one thing I know, it’s that he has been climbing hills and mountains for his entire life.... both metaphorically and physically, and each climb takes him to new realizations... new discoveries... and new insights to share with his friends.

Yes... Walt and I met in middle school in Michigan. Back then we loved to do sports activities together... who can ever forget the time we decided to take a free karate lesson... taught by Mr. Ung... he told us he trained Mr. Miyagi ... from the “Karate Kid” movies... **IMPRESSIVE**!! He asked our names and after we told him, he repeated them a few times.... “Mar... Wal... Mar... Wal... **Wal....MAR**... **WALMART**!!! Wait a minute!!! You’re **WALMART**!!!” (**Wait for the laugh**). If only we were... we would have gone straight to the **REAL** Mr. Miyagi for lessons!!! We always found a common ground for our friendship.... and as I said earlier, Walt is the kind of person that encourages climbing to new heights... not allowing the pain of the journey to stop anyone’s progress... and always searching for new vIstas. I’m not usually so “deep,” but there was that one time..... I traveled to North Carolina to go with Walt to attend “**Burning Can**.” In a way, I guess you can say our friendship is like “**BRO-CHELLA**...”. We may not see each other as often as we used to, but when we get together, it’s always entertaining... worth the trip... with unexpected side shows and maybe even some life lessons thrown in... Prior to the festival, Walt asked if I wanted to do a “light” hike... “Sure, why not?” I thought, so I threw on some boat shoes, ready to “walk.” Remember... I’m from Michigan... degree of difficulty ranges from easy to mostly easy... or so I thought. We walked about a mile on a groomed gravel road... the path... like life... started to get a little steeper...**NO PROBLEM**! **I GOT THIS**!!! When I started missing the socks I neglected to put on, I asked Walt how long the “walk” will be, and he advised about three miles... **CAKE**!! ... can do!!! Well, the groomed gravel evolved into a one person wide dirt path winding up the side of a mountain... (**say this like a little whisper or “aside**) ...don’t say anything, but I began to question Walt’s ability to gauge distance... I needed some kind of reassurance to give me an idea of what exactly lay ahead.... but as there are no guarantees in life... there are fewer from hikers descending the mountain.... in **FULL HIKING GEAR**. Best guess from my spontaneous focus group research... oh about three miles... **FIVE MILES LATER**.... and **NO ONE** can tell me **I DIDN’T** have **SKIN** in **THIS GAME**... we reached the top... **WHAT A VIEW**!! It **WAS** worth the pain!!! My feet were rubbed raw, but in a way, Walt’s reputation remained in tact... he’s someone that seems to underestimate the magnitude of a project or a challenge, but his skills and talent are shown in his ability to motivate people and to get others to stretch past the boundaries that would have limited them. I’m not gonna say that Walt reminds me of Jack Nicholson, because let’s face it.... **I CANNOT** stretch **THAT** far, but he **DOES** remind me of the line in the movie, “As Good As it Gets,” “You make me want to be a better man....” Thanks, Walt, for the encouragement and “push.”

And now, as Walt officially becomes Kristen’s husband, a new era begins.... now Walt has someone to inspire **HIM** to be a “better man...” Actually, it’s happened already... and although Kristen and I are at the beginning of our life long friendship, I have already noticed the positive effects their relationship inspires in Walt... and it’s great!

There’s an expression I heard... it’s from a much longer, heavy, English poem so I’ll make this simple... “I am part of all that I have met.” (**I didn’t mention family so if you want, say this sentence**). We carry the influence and inspiration of our family and friends with us wherever we go, and they have a piece of us too. Walt, your friendship, encouragement, and motivation have been an important part of my life for more than half of it! Every time we get together and hang out, I learn something new... I shed layers of skin **LITERALLY** and grow new appreciation...I exceed my boundaries... and between the craft beers at Burning Can and the great meal tonight, it’s probably safe to say I’ve stretched my **pants** too (**Wait for the laugh**)... but it’s all in the name of friendship, understanding, and sharing experience.

So now Kristen and Walt, you two get to face “that mountain” together. The two of you are doing great as a loving, understanding, “team” so I would only have one small bit of advice for you... don’t forget **bandaids**... **(Wait for the laugh**)

(**If you want to propose a toast you can say**) I’d like to invite you to raise a glass as I propose a toast:

To Kristen and Walt.... may your life together be like a unique craft beer.... smooth and clear, delicious, good for you, a perfect blend of interesting tastes, and slightly mysterious... may your thirst for each other... and life, be satisfied each day with health, happiness, and more than you might ever wish for! Congratulations and thank you!