**MAID OF HONOR SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DYMALIA RIVERA**

Hello everyone...if anyone here doesn’t know me, I am Dymalia, the happy, proud, cousin and Maid of Honor for our beautiful bride, Amanda. It’s really great to be here and I am sure that all of us agree when I say that we are all so happy to celebrate this marriage... Amanda, Juan... and of course, Mia, Melania, and Jayden, congratulations!!! (**I suggest mentioning the children because they are all officially a family now...**). It’s so great honoring one **BIG** happy family!!!

Amanda, although we are related by blood and are cousins, for the first part of our lives, geography found us in different parts of the world... I was growing up in New York, and you were **living it up** in the **warmth and sunshine**... I mean **growing up** in Puerto Rico.... You **KNOW** that as a New Yorker, I **HAD** to make a comment about the weather, **RIGHT**??? (**Wait for the laugh**)..... But that’s all behind us... because somewhere, somehow, we met in the middle... right here in Florida... and while we were connected through aunts and uncles, as we got to know each other better and better, the bond between Amanda and me grew **stronger** each day...I am proud to say our connection runs deeper than cousins... tighter than friends... we’re more like sisters and that’s **MORE** than just fine with me!!

Amanda and I rekindled our friendship a few years ago.... I guess you might say it was at a time when we were both old enough to really appreciate each other.... Amanda was in her mid twenties and I was.... let’s just say.... a little bit older and hopefully a good, guiding influence. At that young age, Amanda had her hands full with three young kids.... and she had experienced loss the likes of which none of us should ever know. (**Turn to Amanda and say**) .... but if there’s **ONE** thing we know about the women in our family, Amanda... It’s that we are strong... resilient... loving.... and we watch out for each other. Life keeps testing us and Amanda has shown that each time she is tested, she gets back up and is stronger .... she learns from those challenges and she basically shows them “who’s boss.”. She rented a house and the landlord sold the property.... **WE CAN HANDLE THIS**! Her fiancé (**Is this Juan?**) has a job that keeps him away from home for weeks at a time??? **WE’LL FIGURE THIS OUT TOO**!!! Amanda has three small children at home but **KNOWS** how important it is to have an education and to secure a decent job as a medical assistant.... **WE WILL MAKE THIS WORK**!!! I have spent the better part of the last several years really getting to know, love, encourage, and support my cousin... my **SISTER,** Amanda and it has been my privilege to be a part of such an important, life changing, sisterhood... Amanda, while you might think I was there, supporting and helping **YOU**, I have to admit, most times it was the other way around... you’ve taught **ME** what it means to love with a full heart, to be open to possibilities... to honor commitments... to want to live life with passion... to take whatever circumstances we find in our path and learn... grow... improve from the experience. You’ve shown us what vulnerability looks like and you’ve taught us that a broken heart **CAN BE HEALED** and it can love again. I know that life hasn’t been easy for you and as I said, **NO ONE** should have to face the loss you endured at a very young age, but we’ve also learned... together... that God is good... and he sent you Juan.

Juan, I want to congratulate you on your marriage and on the beautiful family you and Amanda have brought together and now officially share. Knowing how you love Amanda and experiencing your acceptance of Mia and Melania as your own has been nothing less than heartwarming, and of course, Jayden is the “glue” that completes the picture. Watching you grow together, spending time with our combined broods... kids, babies... dogs... grown ups... just proves that family is all that matters. John and I love watching your family develop just about as much as we have loved raising our own.

If there’s one thing that we’ve all learned... on our own and from each other and those that have taught us and led the way, it’s that life is messy. No one is perfect.... someone I know describes people as “divinely human.” That sure sums up this group!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) ... But one thing is for sure..Some of us may fight.. some of us might not understand one another, some of us may have expectations of other family member that aren’t realized, but remember... each one of us does the best we can with what we have. As you officially begin your lives together, remember you are **PARTNERS**... remember the “love, honor, and most of all, the **RESPECT** part. Remember you are in this **TOGETHER** and there’s a whole cheering section... namely all of us... to see you through... remember you have three beautiful children who look to you for love, guidance, protection, and wisdom. They are watching... **honor them**. As I was thinking about what I wanted to say tonight, I came across this quote... “Family is a unique gift that needs to be appreciated and treasured, even when they’re driving us crazy. As much as they may make us mad, annoy us, curse at us, and even more, these are the people that know us best, love us, and want the best for us.”

To Amanda and Juan.... here’s to a lifetime filled with love, respect, health, happiness, and more than you might ever wish for. Congratulations and God Bless!! Thank you all!!