**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**SAL MERCADO**

Hello everyone!!! It’s just great to be here.... to celebrate this milestone birthday for a young lady that means more than the world to me. It’s even **MORE** special... if that’s possible, to share this moment with all of you.... friends, family.... **all** ... so many!!! witnesses to the “coming of age” of a young lady that never ceases to impress me.... teaches me something new every single day... whether she realizes it or not... Stephanie Giselle Mercado.... today is **YOUR** day and I could **NOT** be prouder than I am **right now**.

Fifteen years ago, on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, 2004, the world changed forever.... really, the world is changing... moving... evolving constantly, but for us...we received, what we truly believed, at the time, was the greatest gift imaginable... a beautiful, healthy, baby girl. Little did we know that was **JUST** the **beginning** of our blessings. Every day since then, I stop... for just a minute... and I thank God (**Do you feel comfortable saying this? If not, you can say thank Heaven or something similar**) for the light that this young lady brings to my life.

This “Sweet 15” is a celebration of life.... a marker... a milestone... a dividing point between being a little, sweet girl, and becoming a unique, poised, dynamic young woman. In life, we experience many rites of passage. This celebration just might be the first one that you are becoming old enough and wise enough and observant enough to really appreciate. And even though, when a girl goes through the stages of a young life, from baby to toddler to young soccer star (**or name her favorite activity as a little girl**) to tween, to this moment, at every stage, we, who love you, witness amazing growth. Stephanie, long ago, there was a song.... the lyrics said, “You must have been a beautiful baby... but **BABY**... **look at YOU NOW!**!! Over the years, I got in some good practice... of being observant.... trying to be a good, positive role model, doing whatever possible to see to it that you had... and have, the best life any young girl could imagine. Given the beautiful poised, young lady we see today, somewhere, somehow, we must have done something right!! The young lady we all love has blossomed into a person I am always proud to call my daughter.

When I look back, I can’t help but wonder where the time went.... it wasn’t **THAT** long ago that we had to figure out.... without the aid of a “baby whisperer” when you spoke your special...unique “language... “. What a day of discovery when we realized that “Chaby chaby” was a great new word for **STRAWBERRY**!! (**Wait for the laugh**). There were many colorful creative expressions and observations we witnessed as you grew up and when we put them all together, they add up to... the one and only... **YOU**. in addition to your unique “vocabulary,” we also see a young lady who is a well-mannered, strict, respectful follower of the rules... I think it’s incredible that you would not even jaywalk... I see someone who is spunky and energetic, a real go getter, you’re funny,,.focused... and you know what you want out of life.\_ and every characteristic you possess makes me prouder every day.

Stephanie, I know how busy you are all the time... with school and friends and all of the activities you love doing so much, but in addition to all the fun you and your friends are having here today, there’s something that’s even **BETTER**....at least I think so... I have a **CAPTIVE** **AUDIENCE**...and another minute to share some fatherly advice for you to take with you, hold close, and think about as you enter adulthood... so here goes...

Never forget the following:

* **Life is for learning**... every single day, in everything we do, we have a chance to learn and grow. And while you do not know **EVERYTHING**... **NO ONE** does, keep an open mind... be observant, respectful and tolerant, and realize that you actually know more than you think you know. Use your knowledge wisely. Remember that understanding and appreciating the power of common sense is key.
* **To whom much is given... much is expected**.... we can already see that you’re becoming a great example as a person of integrity. Remember your heritage and all of those strong, wise people that came before you... your parents... your grandparents... continue to do us proud and lead by example... for those who **DO** and **WILL** look up to **you**.
* Don’t **EVER** give up.... nothing is so tough that it can’t be endured... take the challenges that present themselves, one step at a time... face your fears... and conquer them.... there was a famous actress named Audrey Hepburn, who wisely pointed out... “**NOTHING** is impossible... the very word says it all. **I’M POSSIBLE**!!”
* **Know that beauty is fleeting.**.. our physical characteristics change with time... standards of beauty shift with trends... but to be **truly beautiful**... on the **INSIDE**... is your greatest gift...
* And **above ALL, NEVER EVER FORGET** that I will **ALWAYS** be by your side...

Happy **SWEET 15**... Here’s to many more meaningful celebrations!!! I love you!!! Thank you all!!