**WEDDING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**GENE SWIONTEK**

Hello everyone!!! On behalf of the my wife, Mary, I would like to thank you all for joining us and sharing our joy during this very special moment for our family. It is such a pleasure to have the chance to extend a warm welcome to all of you... friends, relatives and all who have joined us, to celebrate Claire and Stephen’s wedding. When I look around the room and see how many friends these two have, I am even **MORE** proud than usual as I realize that each one of you is a reflection of the goodness and kindness that this couple radiates. I know that Claire and Stephen live their lives to share, be there, and give back to their family members, friends, and community, and this crowd is living proof of that love... for each other, and for all of you. We’d like to extend a special note of thanks to those of you that have taken the time and made such a tremendous effort to travel from far and wide to be here today.  Your presence and enthusiasm for this couple brings even greater joy to this wonderful celebration. This wedding signifies the growth, extension and connection of two families, and as we are so excited to officially welcome Stephen to our family, Mary and I also want to warmly welcome Stephen’s mom, Pam and the entire \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ family.... May this be the **first** of many memory making events we share!!

It’s probably no secret.... I mean, I have been **BEAMING** for the past several hours... (**Wait for the laugh**), however, I must admit that I am the proudest dad in the world to have accompanied Claire down the aisle today. Naturally, at times like these, life events tend to take us back in time... to other life events and moments that stay with us, warm our souls, and remind us just how awesome it is to be a parent.... our children start out as innocent little beings and blossom before our eyes, and one day, if we’re very, **VERY** lucky, they turn into beautiful, kind, compassionate, purposeful adults. I guess you might say that Mary and I hit the jackpot with Claire.... One of my earliest memories was when Claire was just a baby. As it turns out, I was very close to Claire for the first eighteen months of her life...she was home with me while I was between jobs.  That actually turned out to be a real gift... a very positive time in my life. As she grew up, Claire was an earnest and dedicated student. Another memory I have is when she had to give a speech in middle school.  She chose to speak about Sybil Ludington. As it turned out, she did a great speech **totally from memory**.  All the other students used note cards, which Claire didn’t know were available to her, but she tackled the challenge and expressed herself with poise and determination. As parents, traditionally, it is our job to encourage and motivate our kids. Sometimes we have to do things, well, that we may not have thought we would enjoy, and sometimes those predicaments teach us to keep open minds. That’s what happened when, back in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Claire and I went on a work tour through our parish when she was a teen.  Mary was originally going as a sponsor, but they needed men instead.  **Uh oh... Lucky me?!?!?** I reluctantly signed up.... and guess what??? It turned out to be a **great time**.  I remember that several of the teens were apparently looking for mischief and got into trouble one night, but Claire chose not to join in. I was proud of her for thinking independently and for doing what was right.  Oh... and we **BOTH** enjoyed the trip so much that the two of us signed up again for the next year!!! ... one small hitch... I later found out that she signed up for a **different** trip than did I. Oh well... lesson learned... Communicate clearly!! Time flew by and then it was on to the college search.  I remember I asked Claire which colleges that she applied for did she wanted to visit.  When she said none, I asked why, and she replied that she didn’t want to go to any of them unless she was accepted.  We know Claire, and guess what?? That turned out to be **a lot** of potential visits, as she was accepted to **every** college to which she submitted an application!! All of these seemingly simple memories have stayed with me... it’s those little moments that form a life and mean so much as we recall the past and look to the future of this amazing young couple.

Modern times inspire modern connections, and Claire and Stephen first met online on [bumblebee.com](http://bumblebee.com) (**Do you mean Bumble???**) back in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I guess we can say they were both pretty busy as **BEES** around that time, so their first date was not until August 24th, at the Greek Isles.  Clearly, they hit it off, and were engaged two years later, also on August 24th, at another fine restaurant, this time near the beach in (**Pacific Palisades??**) Palisades California, so at least **ONE THING** is very clear... their relationship has already proven they like and appreciate.... **great dinners** (**Wait for the laugh**).

 ... and now we have a terrific son-in-law.... who is so much more than a good eater and an appreciator of fine dining!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Stephen passed the Illinois bar in February.... and I passed it on the way into the room here (**Pause and wait for the laugh**).  Stephen is new to the full-time employment world, new to really having to answer to someone, but the wisest thing I would say to Stephen is that it doesn’t matter how many times a married man changes jobs, he will always end up with the **same boss (Wait for the laugh).** Fortunately, he picked a good one... I know... she was **trained** by **the best**...**(Wait for the laugh).**

To Pam, Stephen’s mom ... while I know you probably think there are cultural differences.... “Midwest differences” over California, fortunately, we can easily see that love and marriage is universal.  So while Stephen is from California and we can debate the “pop versus soda,” philosophy... or the “beach versus lake” theory.... or the gorgeous, swaying palm trees in the balmy breeze versus the Lake Shore blizzard effect.... um... I better quit while I’m ahead... (**Wait for the laugh**)... Stephen and Claire now have their whole lives to compare, debate, and enjoy both...

I am pleased to formally welcome Stephen into the family, although, as far as we’re concerned, he’s been part of our family for quite a while already. Stephen’s mom has also warmly welcomed Claire into the Kirst’s, and it’s great knowing that she is now part of two wonderful families.  During the time that we have known Stephen, we have come to realize just how special he is to Claire. I’m sure you’ll agree they make a beautiful couple.

 Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to propose a toast... As I look at my daughter, now a bride, I can't help but reflect on all the years I was lucky enough to watch her grow and become the beautiful woman she is today. She captured my heart on the day she was born, and I became more and more in awe of her as the years passed. She's my little girl, my princess, and my ray of sunlight, and no matter what her age, she'll always be all of those things to me. Today, as I watch her marry a wonderful man, I'm filled with pride and I am confident that she and Stephen are about to embark on the **real** journey of a **lifetime**, one filled with the love and happiness that can only come as man and wife. May the two of you always treat each other with respect, compassion and kindness.

I would like to invite you to raise your glasses and join me today in congratulating Claire and Stephen in wishing them all the best for a long, loving, happy, healthy, meaningful life together.

Coming together is a beginning.  
Keeping together is progress.  
Working together is success.

Congratulations Claire and Stephen. Thank you!!