**BEST MAN SPEECH**

**FOR**

**CHRISTOPHER BRANCHETTI**

Hello everyone! To friends, family, and guests, it’s great to be here, with all of you, united in one common, joyful purpose, and that is to acknowledge our happy couple, Lauren and Michael, and to celebrate their marriage. I have a feeling we all agree that we’re honored to witness such an amazing affirmation of love! For those of you that may not know me, I am Michael’s brother, Christopher.  It’s been one of the great privileges of my life to have Michael as my brother. To be able to “stand up” for him.... to stand **BY** him, on this, one of the most important moments of his life, is really what this is all about....I’ve always, throughout our lives, done my best to be more than just Michael’s brother... and although I’m technically his **BIG BROTHER** .... and I mean that in the best sense of the phrase... I’ve watched over him, I’ve listened, I’ve commiserated and given the best advice I could think of.... and to be here today as best man, is an amazing acknowledgement... however, it’s kind of ironic... we **ALL** know who the **REAL** best man is...

The relationship that my brother and I have is very special to me.  We share a bond and lots of memories together. For years, since we were younger, I would challenge him to push towards greater accomplishments in whatever he tried, using athletics as a way to fuel and develop his skills, talents, drive, and competitive spirit... I encouraged him to determine whether he was either a **champ** or a **chump**.  Growing up in our family could not have been easy for him, especially since there was what could be described as a relentless, two-pronged strategic plan... pushed by both Dad and me. Looking back, I’d say that something must have worked... Michael has managed to find his way through so many challenges in life, and he also managed to find the means to prevail with focus, courage, respect, and love.  We “guided” him in directions to make some big choices at a young age. We encouraged him to embrace change, using football as a vehicle to present him with a context for challenges that would have a positive, enduring impact on his life... it would eventually create a new group of friends and turn into the career of a lifetime.  Michael, what you’ve accomplished so far in your life is both **inspirational** and **aspirational**... Pardon the pun, but you’ve **tackled** the big stuff and you’ve done it with grace and purpose. Today represents your greatest accomplishment yet... you’ve entered and navigated territory that I, personally, have not yet charted... and now, I get to learn from you!!! With that said, Lauren, I want to officially welcome you to the family!!

Michael, at this point... and I am sure that Lauren already knows this, the most important inspirational element in our lives has been our family. Now that we you two are embarking on **THE** adventure of a **LIFETIME**, and now that Lauren is **officially** one of us from here on out, I thought it might be a good idea to review some stand out moments.... some “**key plays**,” if you will, that have gotten **YOU** to this point in your interesting, active, personal story.... As I think back to where it all started, it’s important to mention some of the **ALL STARS** that have left their mark... There’s an expression I’ve heard that goes, “I am part of all that I have met.” I know that each one of these examples are an important part of who you are, what you do, and how you love.

Grandma Margel & Popbuilt a traditional Italian family, one in which Sunday dinners, family time, and the company of loved ones... your uncles, aunts, and cousins, meant so much to them.  They set the standard of what an exceptional family is about. Grandma Margel loved you so much and was **CLEARLY**... **LOUDLY** proud of you.  i can remember all the times she would yell out your name during football games; “**Go Michael!!!**” as you ran down the sidelines.  I am sure she is with you today, during this special moment, cheering you on and beaming with pride for Lauren. Grandma Lois and Pap Howard were always so proud and loved you so much and showed their encouragement and love as well. Mom and Dad – two of the most amazing people that anyone would be honored to know... two people that embody what it means to be husband and wife, wonderful parents... super examples of partnership.  They have always taken time to show how much they loved us, from Mom’s amazing dinners, to family time spend conversing during meals made with love. I know it was so important in our family that Mom cooked every day, encouraging the time we’d spend together, while you were growing up.  Both Mom and Dad showed what real, unconditional love is about.  Dad might of have given some tough love and Mom a softer love, but together... what a wonderful balance.  Their connection and “multi-faceted” strategy gave us the best example of what the strength of teamwork can accomplish. It was a balance we were taught by example and a master class on how you love today.... the love you return to your family, friends, and the love I know you show Lauren... our family loves unconditionally... and we were, and are, blessed that we learned from Mom and Dad.

Mervis Drive ... that’swhere your childhood all begins.  I am sure you have many fond memories. Michael, I remember the times when you were young, playing GI Joes in the basement. Growing up, you had two passions... History and Football.  You loved everything about George Washington... I will never forget the time that Mom bought you a collector set of the George Washington GI Joe’s.  WOW!!!

And I am **SURE** Christina has some vivid memories too!! ... Like when you were 5 or 6 years old, you frantically chased her around the house, until you cornered her, while she raised the GW GI Joe, slammed it to the ground, and his leg broke off, and your world came to a **SCREECHING** halt.  I also remember just prior to this **CHAOTIC** drama, you somehow managed to pull all the heads off **OVER TWENTY** Barbie dolls that belong to both Jul and T....that incident was possibly the **MOST** stress George Washington experienced since Valley Forge!! (**Wait for the laugh**). And what about that joke we played on Juliana by tying her shoes together, while she was sleeping in your room after a long hard CLO day she had.  **OOPS**!!

As far as Mom goes, I know you’re her baby... the one that can do no wrong in her eyes.  Mom always had your back... all of the things you got away with as a kid, that Dad didn’t know about.  I don’t want to rat on you, especially on this beautiful day, because I may get Mom in trouble with Dad, but I bet he still doesn’t know what happened to the stained glass window going into the mud room, or the hundreds of orange paint balls you dropped on the brand-new kitchen tile... you know... that Mom had 30 mins to clean up before Dad got home from work.   Mom always had your back.. **and the mop**... (**Wait for the laugh**). I think of all the long talks you and Mom had in the car after a game, practice, or school.  I know you have always kept those conversations close to you and cherish them to this day.

And of course, Dad... the countless hours he dedicated to your programs, the local community, and school district to make sure your experiences were the best during your childhood.  He always made every summer so nice for us, taking us on family vacations, so we can spend such important time together.  He pushed you in ways that made you accomplish things that seem so distant, yet achievable.   I know he’s proud of where you are today, as a man, as a professional, and as his son.

And, of course, there’s me... I think back on the times we spent and conversations we had over the years.  I hope they meant as much to you as they did, and do, to me... I believe they do... The times we spent together, as you were growing up, I wanted them to be both meaningful and challenging.  At times of competition, I never went easy on you... like when I ran up the Madden football score on you, during your childhood and early teenage years, I encouraged you to figure out defenses to stop me, the notebooks you went through documenting schemes.  Before Mom had dinner ready, I would challenge you in the backyard to test your body to catch a football...into the shed, the trees, the pond, or the edge of the hillside.  I remember relentless and countless hours you dedicated over the summer and winter months to prepare for football from when you were 9 years old, then embracing such a big change at a young age, switching high schools to West Allegheny. That’s when I took the heat off my little brother, because I knew you were in good hands.  You were challenged, tested, and ready for the next steps and you rose to the opportunity.

Everything I mentioned shows what family is all about...the amazing times shared, love, bonding, support, and passion that grows for one another, knowing you have so much love on your side.

Of course, there’s one more person that I would like to mention, and of course that’s Coach Palko... It’s not possible to recall the monumental influences in your life and not mention the time you embraced one of the biggest changes to prepare for your next steps... a change that I know left a lasting impact on you, and a relationship that always meant so much to you. The beginning of your junior year and through the football season, you would share with me how Coach Palko would always say to the team, “What is **YOUR** legacy?”  I know you really took that question to heart and thought hard about what and how you would establish your own legacy... not only at West Allegheny, but in life.  I think today we are celebrating the beginning of that answer.

Lauren, you complete Michael in the most amazing ways. You laugh at his jokes but not at his style. You encourage his dedication and persistence with regard to his career, and yet you can balance him in the ways he needs that equilibrium the most.  You not only know what is best for him, you **ARE** what is best for Michael. I have never met, or known, a man who is so complete and amazingly balanced in his relationship.  In closing, I speak for everyone in my immediate family here as I share this blessing... "May your love be modern enough to survive the times and old-fashioned enough to last forever."

I would like to invite all of you to raise a glass as I propose a toast... To Lauren and Michael... Here’s to a life filled with happiness and health, humor and respect, abundance and teamwork.... lots of family, friends, good fortune... and more than you might ever wish for... Congratulations! We love you!! Thank you!!