**PERSUASIVE SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ANTONIO FORTE**

Jennifer, today is Valentine’s Day and for most people, that represents a day we devote to love and friendship, candy, flowers, and way too much pink!!! “Galentines,” “Palentines,”.... everyone gets into the act!! Everyone wants to feel included.... everyone seems to want to bare their souls and make their declarations.... at least for a day.... With every special occasion.... as I get older and hopefully more aware, I think about things in different ways.... I want to believe I have learned something in my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years of life, and I **REALLY** want to believe that I am open, willing, and brave enough to take a look back, over my shoulder, to the past.... to think about what I have done, how I’ve treated people, the impact my actions and words have had, and how I would feel if I were given the blessing of a “do over.”. Yes.... I’ve been thinking a lot.

I’ve been thinking about what this holiday really means... How did it start and why? Was it just something candy makers and greeting card printers and florists dreamed up to sell more of all of that stuff, or was there a deeper meaning to all of it??? Well, I checked around and as it turns out, while history and legend tell us it had a lot to do with Saint Valentine, some people tell more details.... back in the ancient days, there was an emperor, Claudius II .... nice guy that he was, he banned marriage.... because he thought married men made bad soldiers..... okay....I can understand the distraction angle.... (**Wait for the laugh).** Now while some folks might get really excited about not having to “get hooked or hitched...” I mean **distracted**, there was a priest named Valentine, and thinking it wasn’t right to deny people the right to marry, arranged marriages in secret. Needless to say, the emperor was **NOT** happy, and our big hearted priest was discovered, thrown into jail and sentenced to death. Wouldn’t you just know, Valentine met and fell in love with the jailer’s daughter.... and guess what day he was sentenced to die? Yes... February 14th... the story goes that he sent her a good bye love letter signed, “from your Valentine.” There’s an old saying that teaches us that “the course of true love never runs smooth....” but this is ridiculous!! (**Wait for the laugh)**. There are other versions of how the celebration began, but let’s just be happy for Hallmark and Cadbury’s (**or name a favorite candy or chocolate**) and heart shaped edible arrangements!!

Like I said, I’ve been thinking a lot.... and not only about St Valentine and his not so great luck. I’ve been thinking about you, Jennifer, and me. I’ve been thinking about how and when we first met... it’s hard to believe that we’ve known each other half our lives, and yet the first time we spoke, on the bricks in college... that memory stays with me like it happened yesterday. So do the memories of our first dates around campus, our mini road trips, our weekend journeys to “taste Chicago...” Looking back on those times, I realize what “they” say is true... life isn’t all about the journey. It’s not about the destination... it’s not even so much about the view... it’s about who is with you on those rides of a lifetime and those ordinary, stay at home and do nothing days.... which, by the way, I think are some of the **BEST** kinds of days.

There are no accidents in this world and in this life. Everything happens for a reason and everything that happens provides lessons that we really need to learn, and as we learn them, we realize that, as much as we might want to believe we don’t need to be accountable for our actions, each and every one of us needs to step outside of ourselves, realize the affect we have on the people around us, and look.... really **LOOK** and figure out how to be a better person. In the end, we all make mistakes. We are “divinely human,” and the degree to which we can own our actions and make amends is what measures our worth as decent people in meaningful relationships.

Now I’m not saying I’m perfect, and **HEAVEN KNOWS**, I’m **NO ANGEL**... (**wait for the laugh**), but I do know this. I have something to say, and I need witnesses. I need witnesses for several reasons:

1. To allow me to speak my piece and be heard
2. To allow me to make a declaration... to share a pledge and to keep that word
3. To give **YOU**, Jennifer, the confidence in knowing I mean what I say. I **really** do.

I know in the past I may have gotten a little “creative” with the truth.... alright... I **lied**... I disrespected you. I didn’t honor what we had. I have also learned that by living through the very real threat of losing you, that would not and could not be something I could bear, because, as you and I both know, our connection is real and I **mean it** this time. You’re **MY** person, and I really want you to believe and trust that I’m **yours**..... Now keep in mind that I have **NO** plans to over promise and under deliver.... those days are in the past.... but I want to give you a little token of what you mean to me...an expression of my (**do you want to use the word “love?” If not say affection**) affection. Let’s think of it as an “**intention**” ring... it is my intention to continue to be by your side.... to provide a sense of safety and trust... to continue to strengthen our bond and connection.... and to prepare us for whatever the future holds for us... together. While I originally wanted to think of this as a promise ring, I want this to be a symbol of my actions... actions that will teach us both how much we honor, respect, and treasure one another.

(**If her family is present, you can say**) I know I am playing to a tough crowd today (**Wait for the laugh**), but I also know what the people here mean to you, and what you mean to me. I want each one of you to know I’ve learned. I realize how blessed I am..... to have you in my life... and to hopefully be in a better situation than St Valentine!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Jennifer, I love you. Will you accept this “intention” ring as a token of my pledge to you?