**WEDDING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**VERN BROWN**

Hello everyone, and thank you for being here on this doubly special and joyful occasion. When I look around at this wonderful party and see your faces… so many amazing people… family, friends, colleagues, **NEW** family… all of you, I am filled with love and hope. Today, we celebrate Aishah and Mariam as they begin a new chapter in each of their lives. Our family has always been close and our daughters have shared so much. To know that they will always share one of the most important days of their lives with their husbands and each other is truly gratifying.

We have heard that time is fleeting, but … **REALLY**… where did the time go??? As a parent it seems impossible that my babies are adults. Old habits and traditions are hard to break…. and still, each night, when I come home from work, I walk in the front door, put on my game face, and half expect my daughters to pounce, ready to battle, play and wrestle…. and then I remember… they’ve both grown up and most of their time, especially lately, has been spent in very adult pursuits… both professional and personal in nature… (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say, if appropriate**) and while they used to have the time of their lives roughhousing with me, lately, the object of their energies has probably been their wedding planner!!! (**and wait for the laugh**). Girls, as I reluctantly come to terms and accept that your childhood is over, I stand firm in the belief that you will **ALWAYS** be my girls.

**YES**. I am now **THAT** parent who, when seeing other parents with young kids, I can’t help but stop them and tell them to appreciate each moment. Aishah and Mariam, you may not realize this….. **AAAAHHHH** who am I kidding??? **OF COURSE** you knew!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) as you grew up, it was sometimes hard for me to let go, to accept that there would come a time that you didn’t want to roughhouse anymore, or, when it came time to volunteer at the marathon you didn’t want your number painted on your faces, even though you loved having your faces painted when you were little. Actually, now that I think of it, you both **STILL** like it, only now, the facial adornment is a little more … **GLAM**… (**If you want, you can say**) As the French might say, “**Plus ça change**…” (**and wait for the laugh**).

 I find comfort in consistency, and as they’ve grown up. both of my girls have shown their skills and smarts when it comes to sports and academics, and whether its football, soccer, shooting hoops, skiing, or snowboarding, and exhibiting their knowledge, everything they do has always made me proud. (**If there is a particularly funny or embarrassing moment, you can say…**) …. Of course there was that **ONE** **TIME**…… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**and wait for the laugh**).

But OH!!! The good times!! We had so many epic soccer moments. One game had Nani and Nana jumping out of their seats when Aishah defied all odds against a better team and single handedly won the game as goalie. Coaching soccer was quite a journey… we lost **EVERY** game the first season and people would laugh when we came out on the field, but as the years passed we became the team to beat and our soccer careers culminated in triumph over the number one team. That game was won with a mind blowing save in a shootout. Aishah saved the last shot against a girl who towered over her in height, giving us a critical victory for the final championship game.

Naturally, playing soccer in the winter meant playing indoor games and we battled on those fields too. Mariam and Aishah were an unbeatable pair. I’ll never forget when Aishah crossed the ball while being elbowed to the ground by another girl that was bigger than her, only to be received by Mariam, who had to maneuver around the next best player. With some fancy footwork, she scored the game winning goal with her left foot strike with seconds to spare.

Over the years my daughters and I have bonded through challenges and hardships. We took on both successes and failures together, always remembering to laugh and to honor our bond as family. We took care of each other when we were sick, during the building of new relationships, and even through the collapse of old ones. Our hearts and our connection as family can never be broken.

I thank Allah for giving me Fatma and Uncle Godfrey who have stood by my side throughout this journey of parenthood. I don’t know where I’d be without them. I look at all three of my children and I see so much of Fatma in them. I am so proud that they share her drive, integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity. She always leads by example and always worked to expose our kids to as many experiences as possible in order to learn and grow and become the wonderful people they are today.

**NOTE: this speech is quite long. I would remove this paragraph. I’ll never forget the times Fatma opened the doors to our home whenever friends or family needed a place to stay. We had my half sister unexpectedly live with us for almost a year. I hadn’t seen her since she was a baby because I was separated from our mom. We knew nothing about her, but she was welcomed. Another time, we heard of a muslim girl who had nowhere to go. Again, Fatma had her live with us for 8 months. And the last time, we had another troubled teen live with us for about 8 months. We made room in our condo so that he could have a safe place to live. All the while, we were teaching our girls what it meant to be the compassionate young women you are today.**

There have been so many experiences… remember when we went to the Dominican Republic? We had a week of excursions and adventures… as we each took a turn with the stomach bug, freaking out the hotel staff by throwing up in the bushes. Why didn’t we just say we were looking for our soccer ball?? (**Wait for the laugh**). … Or when we went to Jamaica and Yusuf turned into a fish and never left the ocean. Thanks to Fatma’s travel privileges, we explored Trinidad searching for the best doubles in town, we drove up mountains on death defying edges of cliffs while Fatma screamed in the passenger seat, we swam in the ocean under torrential rain. We rented private homes with pools and of course, right here at home, we can’t forget the trails and lakes and cliffs that kept us searching and hiking.

Aishah you’ve always set such a strong example for your younger siblings. You’re hard working, meticulous, and organized. It’s no wonder they both look up to you. You’re so much like your mom with your dedication and drive. Poor Mariam learned very early on that if you were studying there wasn’t a moment to spare. Even when indisposed, she would run into the bathroom hoping she’d get a minute, only to catch you with your textbooks on your lap.

Your incredible character and drive are sergeant qualities that will bring out the best in Mohamed and your new family to come. It’s a proven fact… when we make decisions in the house, we can only pretend we’re in charge. Everyone knows Aishah is boss… if she says no….well let’s just leave it at that.

Mariam, the three of you would fight about who shares their dessert with Mom because you knew she would give you more if she knew you enjoyed it. Since you were a child, you’d share your last bite of food. Mariam, you embody that generosity. Humble, kind, and giving, describe this gem, **HOWEVER**, we **KNOW** not to cross you. You have your limits. On the other hand… pun intended, you’re happy to share your artistic gifts with others, and applying henna on people at events eventually got you hired to share your craft at weddings at the young age of 16.

There once was a time when I worried about my daughters finding husbands, concerned that the men they chose didn’t grow up in a muslim family or muslim environment. I prayed, asked for guidance, and put trust in Allah, but as a parent I still worried. The girls were involved with activities and were selective with their choices of friends, but the chosen social engagements rarely gave them the opportunity to meet “marriage material.” All this combined with Aishah and her sergeant qualities and Mariam with her rare strong will … who can forget that famous **EIGHT HOUR** stand off at the **TENDER** age of 6 about cleaning her room… I couldn’t imagine how things… namely **TODAY**… would happen. Well, here we are and here I am, welcoming two more great human beings into our family, Mohamed and Abdullah. My mind is at ease knowing that my two beautiful girls will be taken care of. I feel truly blessed.

Parenting is the most difficult thing we do. We raise our children to be independent, but when one is successful, we loose the things we love the most. I’ve learned so much over the last couple years. It’s such an honour to have these two gentlemen with their unique qualities that complement our daughters. It’s a rare gift that a parent can feel at ease with the men their daughters choose. I’m doubly blessed. It’s reassuring to be able to give our daughters to men that we know will be dedicated to, and love them as we have. I thank Allah for this gift of comfort.