

## Wedding Toast

Once again, it's time for me to deliver the traditional "Father's Toast." I wish I could say this is easier the second time around – but it's not. And for all the same reasons as the last time, with the added poignancy that today, I'm delivering this to my firstborn.

Every child is precious, each one special in her own way. You were our "trial child." Not because you were difficult but because you were first. Everything your mother and I learned about parenting, we learned first from you. From middle-of-the-night feedings and diaper changes to your first childhood illness. From the tempestuous teen years to sending you out into the world on your own -- you paved the way.

I know that was hard for you sometimes. I can still hear your protests of "It's not fair!" when your sister and brother benefited from the more relaxed attitudes we acquired after going through all the trials and tribulations of child-rearing first, with you.

I remember my mistakes. Like encouraging you to play aggressively when you entered the youth soccer league in middle school. I can still see you running off the field in tears when the referee gave you a yellow card for challenging the goalie. (And I'm sure it was equally embarrassing for you that your dad got a warning too - for coaching from the sidelines!)

Remember your first date? We had a huge blow-up over my insistence that he come to the door for the requisite "meet the parents" ordeal. I think that may have been the last date you had for a couple of years. And I can't help but wonder if, many years later, you didn't breathe a sigh of relief that I wasn't around when you and [Son-in-law] had your first date!

I see a woman who has grown to be strong and independent, yet caring, generous and kind. A woman who has learned that sometimes, the best way of showing love is to confront the issues that get in its way.

A woman who has taken what she's been given and made her own way. A woman who's not afraid to set high standards for herself – and demand the same from those she loves.

I think back, many years ago, to when I first taught you how to skate. The skates had double runners – good for little more than shuffling around on the ice. Like training wheels on a bike, they were more conducive to keeping you safe from falling than teaching you the proper technique.

But you persisted, anyway, with that determination to succeed that's your trademark. And eventually, you graduated from these "practice" skates to the real thing...just as you've grown from being my little girl to the accomplished and loving young woman I see before me today.