

# Upfront

I'm a girl-dad. Which – I'm generalizing – is more expensive than being a boy-dad. This truth is most evident when the girl(s) get married. Throwing a wedding is like building a house. There's a budget. And there's the amount you spend. And the two figures are, at best, distant relations. The "budget" is the baby that organically and without fail grows into its much larger self. The same way your kids grow relentlessly, as much as you'd prefer otherwise, before your anguished eyes. These are fundamental elements of the implicit bargain you make with the universe in exchange for the privilege of parenthood.

My little girl got married. My dread was the inverse of her euphoria. Aside from the economics, weddings are not comfortable for me. I'm apprehensive in social settings. I don't drink. I'm not great at small talk. Once I start eating, it's hard from me to stop. I'm not much of a dancer. I rarely tuck my shirts inside my pants. I shave, at most, once a week. My hair was at an awkward in-between length.

When your girl is the bride, the stakes are rich. You're giving a speech...perhaps the most important one of your life. I've observed fathers-of-the-bride (FOBs). Many prep for THE moment for months. Writing and rewriting and rehearsing, time and again. Not me. I'm a deadline-junkie. Take this column: I sit myself in front of my laptop about 90-minutes before our printer's drop-dead time and type. The process works when the outcome is an inconsequential essay. When it's the ultimate love letter to your precious progeny, procrastination is a fool's device.

So, there I was, Saturday, May 4, in my pajamas, at my desk. Hairstylists and makeup artists and young women in custom, matching sleepwear flitted about my house. I sought refuge in my carriage-house office. I was holding a cup of coffee and holding a panic attack at bay.

Fast forward. The wedding reception ended as abruptly as an untimely death. I was relieved. But I was also sad that it was forever finished and elated that it was more magical than my most ambitious dreams. Surprisingly, being an FOB is among the handful of life's most indescribably amazing experiences... When someone opened a door and I saw my

baby in her white dress for the first time... When she handed me a card that I will save forever... When we hugged and I cried... When we stood in shared silence and awe behind the grand doors of the Cathedral Basilica, waiting to walk the pathway to her future self... When we danced with everyone watching, yet it felt like she was the only other person there... When her stepmom and I walked home quietly, arm-in-arm, after the afterparty... And... when I delivered the speech.

I speak publicly often. Always off-the-cuff. This time, I brought paper, with letters in giant font to accommodate old, misty eyes. A stack...probably 15 sheets. I expected a mic stand; I got a handheld. Pro tip: you can't flip through unstapled pages and hold a microphone without something going wrong.

I was coming into rhythm, finishing page one, when the other 14 flew from my hands like a scrambling flock of birds from a tree. Like we had choreographed a slapstick routine, my new son-in-law took to the floor to save me. He gathered and fed me each page as I finished its predecessor. A metaphor for the way I pray he always carefully picks up the pieces of my daughter's psyche when they scuttle unexpectedly to life's floor.

I said many things to my daughter that day. These are among my favorite words:

*Gabby – you were who are you right from your first moment on earth. You have two undeniable, innate qualities...both on display here today... You have always been easy to love AND you make a dramatic entrance...or a dramatic anything, actually...*

*At times, you've doubted yourself. I'm here to stridently dispel that doubt. You are smart. Very smart. And you are incredibly strong. You are wise beyond your years. You are diligent and driven... and you are kind.*

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*Although you're a dreamer, you have common sense. When we – later in life – learned that you had – on occasion – snuck out of our house at night, I wondered how you had navigated out the window, across the roof, and down to the ground...*

*You answered simply: "I never did that...I just walked out the front door."*

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*I can think of two occasions – many years apart – when you literally saved my life.*

*When you were an infant, I came home way*



*too late on an unremarkable Tuesday night...a thing I had done too often.*

*I went into your room, got down on my knees next to your bed, stared at your innocent, perfect face, and asked God to help me be the man our family deserved.*

*After your mom passed away and it was just you and me in our house your senior year of high school...Reversing roles, you calmed me. You gave me the peace to sleep and heal.*

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*You are strong...so strong...like an angel, you turned tragedy into triumph. We were...we are...in awe of you.*

*You carry that strength with you and honor our family every day, as a businessperson, fitness instructor, graduate student...and now...wife.*

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*Gabby and Andrew, I wish you this:*

*When you face challenges, you return to the reasons you chose one another. That you always treat each other with respect. And that you remember you are co-creators, building this life together. You collaborate as you write this script. Do so with open hearts and strong hands to steady one another when you're shaky.*

*And know your families love you, just as God loves you, and we can't wait to see what your future brings.*

My Father's Day present came early as I got to say – out loud – these and other life-affirming things to my not-so-little-anymore girl.

*Scott A. Lauretti*

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