

In recent years I've got quite comfortable knowing that my Best man days were over. So when Mike called me a couple of weeks ago, it was a bit of a shock. The conversation went something like this:

"Hey Max; Me & Caroline are getting Married and I want you to be best man"

"No Problem Mike it would be my honour" "Whens the big day??" - "It's in two weeks". "OH!"

When Mike was younger he was known by his Friends as "Mikee Freedom" a result of not wanting to conform to the "norm". Clearly today not much has changed.

So, wasting no time I set to work; preparing the way every Best Man does... by googling "how to write a good best man's speech"

According to Getting hitched.com's - "a good best man speech can't be rushed and can take 3 – 4 months to prepare"... Mind you the same site quotes "You should allow a minimum of 12 months to plan a wedding".... This could mean one of only two things 1) their website needs updating or 2) I'm Already three and a half months behind schedule.

Fearing the latter, I decided to print off the last best man speech I wrote. Different bride and groom, different crowd – they'll never know! Unfortunately, the last time I was best man was for my brother in law and the jokes about dating the groom's sister didn't seem quite so appropriate today.

For those of you who don't know me; I'm Max - I'm Mike's brother and I'm the Youngest of the six Storey siblings... sometimes referred to by my other siblings as "the baby of the family" or "the pup"... or "the favourite"... depending on who you speak to... If you ever visited our home when we were growing up, you may have heard my parents refer to me by any number of the fond names they had for me: Malc, Matt, Mike, Mark... They'd usually get it right eventually.

Today, it's my absolute honour to be stood here as Mike's best man and to be part of this special occasion.

I'd like to start by extending Thanks to all those who helped make today happen, I'm sure you'll agree it's been a fantastic day arranged in such short time. Special thanks to John, without whom the day could not have happened, Merrilyn who worked tirelessly to get all sorts of things organised and with Anna & Jo made such a fantastic job of the flowers. Jo & Mark – The venue looks amazing. And finally; I'd like to also acknowledge the Bridesmaids – Don't they all look fantastic. I just love Mike & Caroline's style... we may only have two weeks to plan this wedding but we're gonna need a bus load of bridesmaids.

So moving on to the groom: Mike is literally one in a million. He is kind, loyal and generous and most importantly of all, a brilliant devoted dad.

Those that know him better, will also know that he is a creative genius. As a young child I was always fascinated by what Mike would be dreaming up in his room... steam engines, model aeroplanes, hot air balloons. I remember like it was yesterday – As a young child I would literally camp out under his bed for hours hoping that he would come back and continue with his latest project and that I would go unnoticed – It never worked and I would regularly be removed from his room by the scruff of my neck....get out!!

In December 2011 I went to spend a week working with Mike in Germany on a tree contract for the City of Munich. This was a relatively big contract... a week's work for 4-5 people and it was a chance for me to cut my teeth in the tree business. Having spent several days on the ground clearing endless piles of other people's mess, I think it was here that it dawned on me that the tree business was much like any other business: For those at the top, they look down and see nothing but the smiling faces of those below them; whilst those on the ground look up and see nothing but Arses.

At the time Neither Mike or I knew the significance in this trip. For Mike, this would be the last major tree contract he would carry out in Germany and for me it was the best preparation I could ever have hoped for.

The next year was the toughest either of us have ever faced and it was at the point we all lost Ben & Felix's mum Edyta, that Ruth & I decided we wanted to support Mike and the boys in whatever was necessary to help them deal with their new circumstances. It turned out that for me this just meant a change in career but for Mike and the boys it meant moving back to the UK, moving into a new home and starting new Schools.

TreeKit – the company Mike & I set up together, supplies equipment to Tree surgeons and has been operating now for two years. Mike, I am so proud of everything we have achieved together in those two years and where the company is now reflects your enthusiasm, grit and determination.

I am pleased to say that I no longer need to hide under his bed to experience Mike's creative genius. At TreeKit , we sell many products mike has designed and built and there are more in the pipeline... The reality is though that much of Mikes' time has been spent wrestling with the paper work and admin tasks, necessary in getting TreeKit established. His favourite phrase when faced with these tasks is "I can't be doing with this - I just want to make stuff"... Ok, I admit this may have been exasperating at times but deep down I know this is who Mike is... It's who he always has been. Mike I hope with Marianne on board we can get you to that point soon!

Another quality of Mike's that cannot go unmentioned is his devotion to his boys Ben & Felix. The three of them have grown so close in recent years and have developed a bond that is truly special. Ben & Felix, you are absolute Stars and it's been a privilege to have spent so much time with you both while you have helped us build TreeKit.

As for the Bride, Caroline, You look amazing! I know we haven't had long to get to know each other but Ruth & I, along with the rest of Mike's family are looking forward to getting to know you and your great family, more in the coming months and years.

What I can tell you about Caroline is that she couldn't be a more perfect match for Mike. The things they have in common seem endless – I'm sure they will share them if you ask – Just make sure you have a while.

The first time we met Caroline was at a training day we were running at TreeKit. It so happened that Mum, Dad, Marianne Ruth, & Malc were all there and it must've been quite an intimidating moment for Caroline...But she took it in her Stride! She mingled with everyone, mucked in and by the end of the day all those who had met her agreed on one thing – she already felt like one of the family.

I can personally vouch for how smitten Mike is with Caroline. At TreeKit we have lived and breathed this romance over the last few months.

I have to tip my hat to Joe Nisbet & Pauline Dix at this point for individually encouraging the happy couple to take the plunge into dating.... Just Look at what you've started! I hope no one's actually holding you responsible?? This wedding looks expensive

It's not just Mike who is smitten with Caroline. I know Ben & Felix are excited too. Whether it be Gigs in the lounge or Caroline walking on her hands I never stop hearing stories of adventures they have already had together and those that they are planning. I had the pleasure of a brief Camping expedition last weekend where Josh and I were privileged to hear songs around the camp fire from Caroline. For those who don't know, Caroline literally has the voice of an Angel. I know this to be true because Ben, Felix and Josh – not known for their stillness, all listened in silence for the duration until one by one they fell asleep.

Mike & Caroline, today you begin your greatest adventure together; where camping trips and sleeping in trees will be just the beginning. It is clear that God has brought you two together

and that he has a purpose planned for your lives. Marriage is a gift from him; a time for you to leave your old lives behind and begin a new one together. Keep Jesus central to your marriage and he will guide you no matter what the future holds.

On our way home from our camping trip with Mike and Caroline, Josh said to me “Caroline is going to make a brilliant Step Mum”. I think he’s right. Caroline you are going to make a fantastic step Mum. Not only that, Mike and Caroline; you are a fantastic couple and I am certain that the four of you will make a wonderful family together.

So with all that said and done, can you all be up standing, please? And join me in raising a glass to the happy couple, to Mike & Caroline. *TOAST*