

A dozen years ago, when I met Nikki for the first time, she was only thirteen. My husband and I, with our newborn son, had just moved into our very first house, and Nikki and her mom, Brenda, came across the street to welcome us to the neighborhood and offer any help that we might need.

From that day forward, despite the eight-year difference in our ages, Nikki and I became the closest of friends. For me, it was like suddenly discovering the little sister I'd never had. She became our good friend and trusted babysitter. In fact, as our family grew from one child to two, Nikki became such a fixture in our household that we took her on trips with us, and thought of her and her family as an extension of our own.

Four years flew by. By that time, Nikki was a beautiful young woman of seventeen, and old enough to drive. So when she needed some work done on her car, I sent her to a mechanic I totally trusted. He was a childhood friend of mine, a life-long neighbor, and I was sure he'd take good care of her car. I suspected he might even cut her a bit of a break on the price, if she told him that I'd sent her.

The rest, as they say, is history, because his name was Michael...and he is today's handsome groom.

Nikki and Michael clicked immediately. Of course, at the time, that was a bit of a problem, because Michael is nearly ten years older than Nikki. But their bond held strong through the next eight years of changes, leading them at last to this day of happiness and this wonderful new beginning.

After Nikki graduated from high school, she went away to college...but something wasn't right. Rather than stick blindly to something that wasn't working, she came home to re-evaluate her future. As part of that re-evaluation, she came to me and asked me what I thought she would do well. Because of her caring heart and her natural kindness, I suggested nursing.

Well, Nikki took that suggestion and ran with it. She went back to school and became a pediatric nurse. I am so proud of her, and the strength of her spirit, and the warmth of her regard for others. She is a truth-teller, a care-giver, and she knows how to speak her mind and follow her heart. There is a loyalty, deep in her core, that makes her the finest of friends, and I'm confident that it will make her the wisest of wives.

Marriage is about love, and communication, and a willingness to admit that you may not always be right. These are skills that Nikki has in abundance. She is a truly humble person, slow to anger, quick to apologize. I can only imagine how proud Brenda must be, to have raised such a fine and loving daughter. Like mother, like daughter -- they are both the kind of special people who renew your faith in the world.

When I look back over these past twelve years, the pattern is a beautiful one, leading from that first, generous gesture by my new neighbors to this very special day, when my childhood pal and my dear, dear friend become husband and wife. They are so good together, and so good for each other, that I am confident their future together will be loving and bright.

Congratulations, Nikki and Michael. May your joy on this wedding day be just the sunrise of a long and wonderful life together!

Love and kisses, Julie