[Take out paper]

Apologies, I’m going to have to read this, because I’m not very good at remembering words, and Draz was very specific about all the nice things I need to say about him.

I’m going to start a little bit earnestly, but I promise this bit’s short. I just want to say the really magical thing about weddings, is the light they shine on the love two people share. We see how special it is and that gives us perspective on what matters for all of us.

I want to help give some more perspective, because for me this occasion doesn’t just show us what a beautiful thing two people can find together.

It shows and it’s a chance to see how far this wonderful man has come – travelling the world, doing what he dreamed he would, marrying Ilyna, surrounded by so many loving friends and family.

Really I’m here to tell you that this man has come a long way, since the evening 15 years ago, when he emerged triumphantly from the bushes in Primrose Hill, boasting with unjustified pride, that he’d just done a piss… only to discover some months later, when his vocabulary had improved, that the word piss is not the same as the word poo. Those were the glory days.

I was trying to think of how to capture just how uncool we were, back then, before then actually, because by that point, by the time Draz was going round pooing in parks, we were climbing the social ladder.

Before then, it was four of us who hung out, at Haverstock School, where I met Drazen after he arrived in the UK, aged 13, I think.

Here goes.

No.1: We would, in breaktimes, every breaktime, go to the staircase in the school building, screw up a piece of paper and play hand tennis to see how long we could keep the ball in the air.

No.2: We’d go to gokarting competitions over in Mile End for the honour of winning the trophy that we had made ourselves and that only the four of us competed for.

No.3: [Need picture]

Laura, my wife, sometimes says she wishes she’d known me when I was younger. Personally I’m glad she didn’t.

But it’s not actually any of that uncoolness that really marks the journey Draz has come on.

What’s really amazing, and inspirational, to me, is thinking that Draz wasn’t just, like me, out there on the fringes because I did my homework and didn’t get into fights. He did his homework. And I think he only ever got into a sort of a fight with one person, who happened to be Abu Hamza’s son or nephew. Like I said, he’s come a long way. Now he interviews terrorists instead.

Unfortunately, that is the best joke you’re getting from me.

But anyway, what I mean is, Draz was finding his feet in ways that are pretty much unimaginable to me.

He had only just arrived in the country. He’d had to leave his home. He’d had to leave a lot of his family. He was the oldest of three siblings in a new country, with just their mum. In a new school. He didn’t speak much English.

The effort, and drive and strength he put in. And I don’t ever remember him complaining, about how hard it was, or how unfair. He had every right to complain. But he didn’t. He’s thrown himself into every challenge and opportunity.

And genuinely Draz, the journey you’ve come on, culminating in some ways in this occasion, is inspiring, for us all.

I also want to say that Draz has been an amazing, true friend. I was so pleased that he was the first person outside of immediate family to meet my son – he made the effort to get to Bristol the week after he was born.

The real measure of that friendship is how far we’ve moved apart geographically, because I think the essence of friendship is that feeling of getting someone, and knowing that they get you, and however long it’s been since we’ve seen each other, I always just feel that immediately, unchanged, like only yesterday we were getting drunk on Primrose Hill, talking about the future.

He’s had my back countless times when I was drunk, throwing up, unable to get home. Never mind he’d gotten me in that state.

He was there the pretty harrowing time we were woken up by his flatmate shouting, panicked, that a homeless man was in her bed. That homeless man was me. I do not remember how he got us back to his house that night. But he did.

We all know what a great friend, brother, son, uncle he is. He’s going to be an amazing husband in a couple of days.