

Ellie's Bat Mitzvah

Dearest Ellie,

On Thursday at the run-through I told you my main job was to embarrass you and Rabbi Wenger told a poignant story about how his father totally embarrassed him at his Bar Mitzvah. Let's see, what should I do? [ad libbed -- said I wouldn't do that]

Seriously, though, I am very proud of you. I am proud of you for the way you got this bat mitzvah together. You read Torah beautifully. You probably thought this day was forever getting here -- and getting over. Well, you've done it. You've done it terrifically and I'm proud of you.

I'm proud of you for other things as well. I am very proud of the way you have put everything you have into your skating over many years. It shows. And it shows character. I am also in awe of your skating accomplishments. Double doubles. Wow. I don't think you realize how incredible your skating accomplishment are. I remember that shy little girl who first started skating with Sally and look at you now. Do you remember how shy you used to be? I do. And it has been great to see you find a passion in skating. I think it has given you self-confidence and self-assuredness.

I'm also proud of you academically. I don't think you appreciate your gifts there either. More than the gifts it has been great to see you apply yourself to your school work. It will pay big dividends.

Most importantly, I am proud of you for being the compassionate young woman that you have become (even if you are too impressed with designer labels). When I think of being Jewish what is most important for me is what I understand to be the concept of Tikkun Olam. To me it means doing one's part to make the world a better place. Working for social justice. Helping the less fortunate. I have seen your compassion and the way you help people and that is a great thing. The most important thing is not what your gifts are, but what you do with them.

You have a lot of advantages in life. It is up to you to make good use of them. And use them for good. I know you will.

In some ways Bat Mitzvah's tend to be a bit of a fraud. We say, today I have become a woman--I am now an adult, but for most, after the ceremony, nothing really changes. For you, though, your Bat Mitzvah is really going to be a demarcation point. A before and after. Your older brother is going off to college in the fall. That will be a huge change. We are moving out of the only house you have known. That will be a huge change. So, your Bat Mitzvah really does mark big changes in your life; a beginning of a new phase of your life. You have a lot to look forward to. And I don't mean no more Sunday School. You will have your mother and me to yourself. Won't that be fun? Today's are always the first day of the rest of your life. You get to make the most of them and I know you will. It will be a pleasure to see you continue to grow and develop into the even more wonderful person I know you will become. Gottstein and Gottstein or Gottstein, Gottstein and Gottstein will be waiting for you if that is what you want. The possibilities are infinite. I love you Ellie and always will.

Finally, I want to thank Rabbis Wenger and Rosenfeld, Robin and Michael and Deb and Millie and everyone else I'm forgetting to mention for all your help and to all of you for coming and sharing this wonderful occasion with us.