

I'd like to start by telling you a few of the things I see and appreciate about you, Ellie. While it may not always seem like it, I do appreciate your sense of style and your sense of humor. Of course, I enjoy always watching you skate and watching you dance--not just for the way they display your grace, strength, or athletic ability, but as expressions of those parts of who you are. I love watching you laugh and connect with your brother, and the creative way you write and speak for the same reason.

Those are things that are there for all to see and hear, but some of the things I appreciate about you go much deeper. You've always had your own way of looking at the world with a knowing-ness beyond your years. It's as if you've been given a kind of special wisdom through which you observe the world around you, and instantly glean the larger sense of it. There's not much that escapes those sharp powers of observation. I particularly appreciate the way you can always tell when someone is being genuine and when they're not, and that you value what's genuine when you find it. I hope you will continue to trust that wisdom, and always stay in touch with that place deep inside of you that tells you what's right for you. I appreciate that you strive to treat other people with kindness and care for their feelings, and that you know how to be a good friend.

This celebration marks the time for you to truly begin taking responsibility for who you are, and what you do. That responsibility comes with choices to make that, as they do for all of us, will help determine how you learn and grow in the world. As you make your choices, I hope you will choose to risk being wrong, because that's often how we learn the most; to come from your heart, because, along with that sense of knowing-ness you've always had, you also have a heart whose wisdom you can trust;

and to fully appreciate the unique and wonderful person that you are as much as I do. I love you very much.