

## LETTY'S BAT MITZVAH SPEECH

When I began to think about wanting to be Bat Mitzvahed, my first thought was, "Will I be able to do this? Am I too old to study for this difficult task? Will people think I am being foolish? The more I questioned myself, the more I found myself wanting and longing to do this. I wrote Rabbi Abe whom I had met when he was recommended to me to officiate at Sheila's Funeral. He also did the service for her Unveiling, and has helped me many times the past 4 years. I asked his opinion. He was so delighted and encouraging, and made me feel that I could succeed and achieve my life's dream.

So I am now a "Bat Mitzvah girl", or actually, in reality, a "Bat Mitzvah Senior, and I'm so proud of this. It's never too late, and you're never too old to set new goals for yourself, and to accomplish them.

When a Bat Mitzvah girl, or a Bar Mitzvah boy deliver their speeches at their services, the usual thing, of course, is to thank all those that were responsible for helping to get them to this important part of their lives.

Mom, Dad, the Rabbi, siblings, are all thanked. When I started to write my Speech, my first thought was, "i If I list every person that I want to thank, everyone that got me up to where I am today, the members of my audience

would be sitting for hours, starving to death, and wishing I would finish already. If you look around the room I am so overwhelmed with all the many wonderful family and friends who have come to honor me today. I Want to give one big Shout of "THANK YOU" to all of you for always being there for me. I truly do have to give a special "Thank You" to cousins Marilyn, and Rowena. Even though they both live 1500 miles away in sunny Florida, it's as if they live right next door to me. Marilyn has been my right arm throughout the whole Bat Mitzvah planning, and Rowena has been my Cheerleader and rooting section.

And last, but certainly not least, is my special Teacher, "Rabbi Abe."

Without his understanding, patience, and kindness, I would not be standing up here before you.

Now, I thought about what the theme of my speech should be. I choose the Subject of "The Tree Of Life" This tree symbolizes a fresh start on life. It is a universal symbol of growth and strength. of energy, and good health. It represents the connection to one's family and ancestors.

This all has great personal meaning to me. It all began when I was in fifth grade. I had a wonderful teacher, Mrs. Shapiro, who in addition to being my classroom teacher, was also the Glee Club Leader.

For one particular performance she taught us the poem written by Joyce Kilmer, and titled "Trees." This was set to music. I fell in love with the beautiful words of the poem, which I will read to you later, and throughout my life, whenever I would feel sad I would find myself reciting the poem or humming the music to it.

In the poem, Mr. Kilmer explains that we, as people, can write about a tree, BUT, only God can make a tree. We know that God created the first tree and he continues to do so. I look at all the branches on the trees and I feel that each one is a section of my life. Each section holds a circle of memories of all the relatives and all the friends I have met in my lifetime. I feel that Sheila and I were blessed to have so many branches on our Tree of Life. And we were so very fortunate to have been born at the time of year when a new year begins at Rosh Hashanah, when we atone for our sins and are forgiven at Yom Kippur, and the beginning of the Harvest at Succoth occurs. Tree branches continue to grow on a tree, and, God willing, my branches will continue to grow, and I will look forward to making more friends and having more adventures. The important thing is to remain loyal to those whose lives have touched you, and treasure all your memories. As I end my speech I would like to read to you "Tree" by Joyce

Kilmer.

I think that I shall never see,  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest,  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.  
A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray.  
A tree that may in summer wear,  
A nest of Robins in her hair.  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree!

P.S. Phyllis Goodwin presented me with a Crepe Myrtle Tree the week after my Bat Mitzvah. As there was no room to plant it on my property, the Condo Board found a lovely place at the entrance to my development and now, every day, when I enter the gate I wave hello to my special tree. I am having a brass plate engraved to put on the tree. Thank you Phyllis for my Special Tree.

Submitted by  
Letty Sustrin