

Deb's Bar Mitzvah Parent Speech

I'm very happy to be here today. It's one of those moments where you pause and look around in awe at the beauty of life. I look at Nathan and my family and the community and feel so much love and gratitude. This has been an amazing year to watch Nathan grow. Anyone who knows him would agree that he is a pretty chill kid who likes to kick back and play ipad games and read pre-release library books. But I saw him set a challenging goal for himself and work his *ass* off to accomplish that goal. (There's your curse word, Nathan.) And I saw him experience great joy in the process of studying, thinking, feeling, discussing, and writing about Judaism.

Nathan's bar mitzvah is a source of great pride and joy for us. Mike and I come from different religious backgrounds, but we agreed from the start that we wanted to raise our children with a formal Jewish education. Meanwhile, at home, we each wore our own Jewish-colored glasses and did not try to reconcile our religious differences for Nathan. We *shared* our differences and let him take from our Jewish identities what he would until he was ready to find his own.

I'd like to share a little about our background so you know what's under Nathan's hood. Mike developed his faith in the Lutheran church, his values from a Lutheran mother, and his religious practices from church, home, and a slew of east coast Jewish relatives. I was raised in a secular Jewish home by parents who came from varying levels of Jewish observance, and who passed down their Jewish values and knowledge to my sisters and me in our home without much time in the temple. We grew up in New Orleans where we were generally the only Jewish kids in our classes at school, and we dabbled in Young Judea and BBG. Still, we identified strongly as Jews, certainly more than as white or Southerners or probably even Americans. We rarely prayed, but we celebrated the holidays in our own family traditions, and my parents embodied their connection with Jewish history and values in our everyday lives. My dad once told me that when he grew up in Brooklyn in the 1930s and 40s, being Jewish was so woven into the fabric of life that it didn't matter what your personal religious practices were. It was a Jewish world. But he said he thought he may have made a mistake in assuming that the same would be true for us living in the deep South

during the 1970s and 80s. I took that to heart and wanted to make sure my children had it all.

Mike and I started Nathan in Sunday school in Portland when he was in kindergarten at Havurah Shalom, a Reconstructionist synagogue where the religious school was taught by the parents and was very loosely structured. A couple of years later, we switched to Beit Haverim, a reform temple in Lake Oswego, where Nathan had a fantastic religious school teacher who led the kids in great discussions about biblical texts and Jewish history. By the time he was eight years old, Nathan displayed an aptitude and interest in Judaism that made him stand out from the other kids. He was curious and paid attention and enjoyed discussing what he had learned. I remember how excited he was to find a lego graphic novel of the bible at Beit Haverim. Our synagogue shared space with a church, and he found the book in the church library. Nathan took it upon himself to discuss it with the rabbi and ask whether it was ok for him to read it as a Jewish kid and what he should know that separated it from our own tradition.

We came to TBS when Nathan was nine years old. As he shared with you, his learning exploded, and his interest in Judaism deepened. And somewhere along the way, Nathan's knowledge of Jewish texts and prayer bypassed Mike's and mine.

Today, as Nathan lead services and delivered his d'var Torah, it was clear to me that he has found meaning for himself. He has found his own Jewish identity. And to me, that's what becoming a bar mitzvah is really about. In all things, my goal for Nathan is that he has every opportunity that I have had, and more, so that he will have the freedom and the ability and the desire to make choices that will make his life fulfilling and meaningful. I have shared my Jewish identity with Nathan and taught him what I know. I raised him in the synagogue for a formal Jewish education, more personal connections, and the capacity to have faith.

Watching Nathan study and engage in Judaism as he moved towards his bar mitzvah has been deeply meaningful for me, even as he diverges from my own Judaism in some ways, and even *because* he diverges from my own Judaism in some ways. It makes sense to me now

that a 13-year old boy can become a man in Jewish tradition because I see that Nathan is no longer a Jewish child. He has just begun his own Jewish path.

CONCLUSION

Nathan's bar mitzvah is also a special opportunity for our entire family to stand before the TBS community and tell you how much you mean to us. We have been members here for four years. From the very beginning, it has been the most open, welcoming Jewish community we have every experienced. We have become increasingly involved in the synagogue, and we are excited to check out all of the new practices and programs that Rabbi Eli is bringing to TBS. I'd like to add my thanks to Nathan's amazing teachers who have always been so generous with their time and attention to Nathan. Kathi, Joan, Francine, Bob, and Rabbi Eli, you are most definitely part of our family's village, and I'm sure your voices will remain in Nathan's head always. To the entire congregation, I truly appreciate your openness and kindness these last four years.

I'd also like to thank my dear family for all of your support and encouragement for Nathan his entire life. It's wonderful to have my

mother, my mother-in-law, my sisters, nephews, and uncle all here in Salem this weekend. I love you very much. I wish my dad could have lived to see this day. In so many ways, he helped prepare Nathan from the moment he was born. But I take comfort in the fact that my dad knew that Nathan would become a bar mitzvah, and that it made him very happy.

Finally, I'd like to thank our friends, colleagues, and fellow TBS members who came here today to share this special occasion. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate Nathan's coming out as a member of the Jewish community than being surrounded by all of you.

Shabbat Shalom!