

Family, friends and congregation, it is an honor and great privilege to have everyone with us today to celebrate Gaby's Bat Mitzvah.

Gaby, I would like to talk about a story I used to read to you when you just turned two. The name of the story was "Are you my mother?" by P.D. Eastman. I can still remember your big smile when I read the part about the baby bird finding his mommy. As soon as I finished the story, you would implore me to read it all over again, and again and again.

Why is this story so majestic and monumental? The hatchling did not know who his mother was, and it had a powerful need to find her. It is important to know your identity and family history. Our history started almost 6000 years ago.

I will leap into the future to the year 1840, the birth of your great-great-grandfather Moshe Yechiel Senderov. Moshe Yechiel was a Rabbi and had seven children. They lived in Odessa, which was at that time part of the Russian Empire. During that period of time, Jews were targeted and murdered, these evil acts were known as pogroms. One day Moshe Yechiel returned home with his two older children, to his horror he found his wife and five other children murdered. At that point, Moshe Yechiel made a very important decision. He moved west and immigrated to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem his daughter became friends with your great-great-grandmother, Chaya Sara Gindsberg. I have to mention that she was only 14 years old when she got married to Moshe Yechiel. During that time it was appropriate for a 43-year-old Rabbi to marry such a young bride. Today such a wedding, actually.... I am pretty sure that Hugh Hefner would approve such a wedding and give Moshe Yechiel two thumbs up!

G-d remembered Moshe Yechiel's family tragedy and loss in Russia and blessed him with seven additional children. One of those children was your great grandfather and his name was Fievel. That's right! Your great-grandfather was named after a mouse! I bet you had no idea that Steven Spielberg produced the movie Fievel Goes West after your great grandfather's adventures. Except Spielberg has part of the plot wrong. It wasn't Fievel who went west, it was Fievel's father, and he went west to Jerusalem not California.

Saba Fievel was a very special person in my life. I can vividly remember one special summer just before my Bar Mitzvah. Saba Fievel, at his youth, used to serve as a Chazzan at the local synagogue. Since I was the oldest male Senderov grandchild I was privileged to be his first victim ...I mean student. I still have nightmares about trying to learn my Haftarah listening to his scrappy voice that sounded like a cross between Rod Stuart and Judge Judy.

By the end of the summer after a lot of pain and suffering I knew my entire Haftarah. A couple of weeks later, 14 of us, went to Jerusalem and I had my Bar Mitzvah celebration at the Western Wall.

This entire experience without a doubt did represent my magnum opus. Although I did not have a big party like a lot of children have today, yet it was a very meaningful and memorable day in my life. It was a small celebration with my family and I got to do something special that millions of children got to do before me, and millions more will do in the future.

Gaby, this celebration is about your ancestors, and your heritage. You should never have to ask anyone "Are you my mother? ". I will give you this speech for safekeeping and would like you to save it in your tallit bag. I hope you will read it from time to time. In addition, at the bottom of this sheet, I will give you the password to the extended Senderov family website located at Geni.com. In Geni.com you will discover that you have records of 968 blood relatives. Hopefully, you will visit this website and learn more about your ancestors and family, all of whom have brought you to this moment in your personal history.

Mazal Tov!