

Gaby, you are 13 years old and you know what this means? It means I had 13 years to prepare for this speech. In spite of that, it wasn't easy to write it and I was still editing my speech last night. There was just so much I wanted to say to you.

Your father talked about his Bar Mitzvah experiences and his ancestors.

As you know, I have never had my Bat Mizvah. In fact, none of my family members had a Bar Mitzvah or were part of a Jewish congregation.

One of the most beautiful Synagogues in the world is located in St. Petersburg, Russia, where I was born. Unfortunately, for the longest time Jews were persecuted for their faith and the Synagogue remained empty.

Although, my ancestors did not experience the horrors of Pogroms, most of them chose not to practice Judaism. They were afraid of being reported to the authorities or simply of being different.

Gaby, I feel we are very fortunate to be here today to celebrate your Bat Mitzvah in this country, this place where we can feel free.

When you were small, it was such a joy to watch you discovering life.

You always looked at everything with these big wondering eyes.

I wished the years would slow down so I could enjoy those moments for a little longer.

But the years continued to rush by. You have showed so much confidence and daring, especially in 5th grade when you became President of Student Counsel.

You brought so many reasons to be proud of you. You studied so hard for your Bat Mizvah.

I hear a lot of parents say that, but for you it was even more challenging, since you were in such disadvantage compare to other kids.

You had to accomplish so much more in a very short amount of time.

You have amazed us with your gifts of writing, and your incredible imagination and artistic abilities.


Sometimes you remind me of my grandmother Paulina who was an artist and arts & crafts teacher in St. Petersburg, Russia. You have creativity and a constant desire to make new things out of old items, inventing and transforming, while completely covering my house with all kinds of fluff, glue, needles and what not. ...

I was never surprised when you became so interested in sculpting and polymer clay.

It reminded me of another special person in my family, one that I have never met –

my great grandfather, Matvei Gootman. He lived in Soviet Russia with his wife and 3 daughters.

Before World War II, he was a well-known sculptor. Some of his sculptures and fretwork could be still found on the buildings of St. Petersburg. At the age of 40 he volunteered to fight against the Nazis and never returned. Years later, his daughter – my grandmother Paulina – opened her own ceramic studio. She kept her fathers' tools and used them often.

One of the most well-known phrases in Judaism is "Le dor Va dor", which means "from Generation to Generation". You did asked me about these tools earlier, but I thought today would be the best day to present you with these. 

This little toolset should remind you of the generations before you. Use it if you'd like, and always remember to pass on our traditions and memories from one generation to the next.

May you continue to be the incredible and most creative person that you are, confident, intelligent, honest, loyal friend and responsible and loving sister. You should always know that whatever problems you face, you have our unconditional love and support. You have always been mature and wise beyond your years, but you will always be our little girl. We love you.