BAR MITZVAH SPEECH

FOR

MYLES ZLEPPER

Hello everyone!! It’s great to see all of you here tonight (**today?**) to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah of our son, Zachary Benjamin Zlepper. Zachary was named after my grandfather, Benjamin “Boozie” Zlepper, who was a wonderful and kind man-someone who placed family first, loved sports, and knew how to appreciate life and share with others. He was a great boxer and the consummate St. Louis Cardinals fan and I am proud to say that Zachary has inherited many of his namesake’s best traits. Zachary may not be a boxer, but his love of sports and especially hockey, soccer, lacrosse and football, and his fearlessness in the face of any mighty rollercoaster or zip line reminds me of the “**chutzpah**” of my Grandpa Ben (**Use the name you called him**).

We all know that a Bar Mitzvah is a right of passage-a milestone in a young Jewish male’s life. We’ve all heard the stories with the punch line, “Today I am a man,” (**Turn to Zachary and say**) and back in the good old days, Zachary, you would have gotten a nice lunch and a shiny fountain pen and **BOOM!!** Off you would have been sent to conquer the world. Today there seems to be more ceremony, more lavishness…an iPod? An iPad? An Idon’tknow? (**Wait for the laugh**), but there is one obvious truth that I am sure everyone here will agree with and that is that you, Zachary, have shown all of us your “chops” since you were a young boy. Yes. It’s true that technically, today you are a man, but you have always demonstrated talents, intelligence, and compassion far beyond your years, and I am so proud of you. Your interest in military history **inspires** me. …(**If you want to make a joke, you can say, “Please don’t tell me you’re learning to gather intelligence to use against your sister”**), your resilience **astounds** me-from the concussion to the lacerations to the broken hand; you’ve shown us that **NOTHING** can break you!!... And your scholastic achievements just make me **kvell**… I am very, very proud to be your father. Life throws us all curve balls and even at a young age, you’ve taken the challenges handed to you and you’ve shown what you are made of. I remember that after you were hit and got that concussion, you might have been startled, but NO ONE can keep a Zlepper down…You had barely come back to consciousness, and even in confusion, you wanted to get back in the game.

I love that you are always there for others. You are considerate and gracious beyond your years and your Br Mitzvah project-volunteer work with disabled youth in sports made a real difference in the lives of so many handicapped kids of all ages. Your compassion has also been recognized by your class by being voted the Chesed el Emeth representative.

Zachary, that’s what life is all about… getting “back into the game” and giving back to others. You face challenges without running away, and that is so admirable. It is no small coincidence that your Torah portion is the story of “Lech Lecha.” It teaches us that no matter what journeys we are faced with in life, to have faith in oneself is the greatest gift. In this passage we learn that although Abraham was given a seemingly daunting challenge, he was able to follow his heart because of two important reasons: he had faith and he had trust. Faith in the Divine guidance he received which enabled him alone to hear and understand. And trust, that no matter how difficult or dangerous the journey might be, it would be worth it because he would become the man he was destined to become. Zachary, when you moved into the new house, you, like Abraham, listened to your inner voice. You knew the right thing to do, and you did it. You had faith as you let your sister choose the room she wanted, and you also demonstrated trust-that the sellers didn’t leave that nice TV that was previously in that room (**Wait for the laugh**). This is just one example of why your sister, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ loves you so much…. and it’s comforting to this father that you love her too.

So, my son, enjoy this celebration and acknowledgement, because tomorrow, you continue on that journey to become the man you are destined to be. In just these few years you’ve been on earth, you’ve brought so much joy and naches to us. You’ve given so much to your family and friends and in turn, it is clear that you treasure and appreciate all that you have received in life. Remember as you go through life, to trust your inner voice, have faith in your self and know that you will never be alone as long as you keep nurturing that inner spirit and natural curiosity that makes you so special. Each one of us has the responsibility to make the most of the life we have been given, and I know that as you continue on your path, you will choose wisely. You also know that if you ever have a question, I will be there for you, and we’ll solve life’s mysteries together.

Mazel tov and 120 more special birthdays! Amen! Zachary, We love you!