80TH BIRTHDAY SPEECH

FOR

JEFF ROTHSTEIN

Hi everyone! Tonight (today? **Use whichever is correct),** we’re here to celebrate a milestone birthday for a man who has dedicated his life to milestones and moments and to chronicling them. To the world he’s Joe Rothstein. To me he’s “Dad.” The impact he has had on my life is immeasurable, but his way with a word and his passion for documentation allows us a glimpse of what it was like to be blessed to have this man as a father…. at least from MY perspective-more later!! It may not have been all fun and games-and we probably wouldn’t have been mistaken for a quintessential nuclear family…. yes, (**If you** **remember “Leave it to Beaver” you can say**) Wally and the “Beav” even got along better than we did. Let’s put it this way… whoever said, “Either men will learn to live like brothers or they will die like beasts” never spent a Sunday with the Rothstein kids! Fist fights… running barefoot or even naked through the snow… marauding around the house like wildebeests… plotting “PSY OPS” with the purpose of ultimate domination worthy of an Ian Fleming novel… and that was before lunch!! (**Wait for the laugh**)…But apparently we were all blessed with some incredible DNA and with that came our own unique gifts and strengths and somehow we made it through with **barely** any bloodshed. I am here to tell a little about my side… um I mean **reminisce**, about “Growing Up Rothstein.”

On September 13, 1961, Dad wrote a letter to Rich \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**Is Rich** **going to be there? Is Rich still an important person in the Rothstein saga? If so, name him)** heralding the birth of his second born…. that would be me. “…. Jeffrey David Rothstein made his appearance at 2.55 am…. He weighed in at 9 lbs, 4 oz, almost indecently large… I am certainly content with having to shave every morning just to get out of the dirty work of bearing children….” In one brief passage we see pride, empathy, and appreciation. Dad always had a way with words. We also learn that Joe Rothstein isn’t the type to denigrate a little gambling… the then Secretary of State of Alaska, a man named Wade, lent an auspiciously classy aspect to this blessed event… he won the baby pool with a guess of 3.05 am… we go on to learn that apparently I was a good sleeper… let’s face it-at 9 pounds, 4 ounces, what ELSE could I do but lay there?? … And of course, there was the ever-present duck-hunting season hanging over the blessed event and our heads-I guess instinctively I knew I better lay low until after he got some game. (**Wait for** **the laugh**) Glimpses like this into times gone by are so precious on many levels. As we grew up we would learn that no matter how busy he was, he managed to find a way to be a positive and nurturing influence on all of his children…. whether we realized it at the time or not, and having his letters as back up bring those bygone days to life.

Steven was the first-born and then there was me. We wound up being six siblings with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, which probably would have made a swell basketball team if we could have stopped trying to kill each other long enough for practice.

What I remember of my early days is running around the outside of the house barefoot and possibly naked in the snow in the middle of winter, in Alaska. I vaguely remember this really getting to my mother… and not in a good way… but I am sure my dad gave me unspoken approval because we are the guys, and it drove my mother crazy. A win-win! Growing up Rothstein meant a full house, hand me downs, shared bedrooms, fistfights, and very complex psychological operations aimed at the complete destruction of one or more siblings… of course we all survived. After all, we were just kids. We had yet to work on **technique** (**Wait for the laugh**). As if it weren’t already a set up for a fascinating childhood thanks to “Growing Up Rothstein: The Alaska Years,” by the late sixties we decamped for “The lower 48” and set up our new homestead in Mclean, Virginia, a cultural tidal wave on several levels. (**If you want to discuss being Jewish in Alaska you** **can say**) The Rothstein exodus had a multi pronged effect: First of all, I’m not saying we were a **HUGE** family, but eight Jewish people leaving Juneau, Alaska means half the table is empty for community Seder (**wait for the laugh**). Secondly, the neighbors heard an eerie sound… peace and quiet. When we got to Virginia, it was really a whole new world: new neighborhood, new schools, new friends…. of course the siblings were the constant and the catalyst for much exploration as I got older, and between academic study, psychological counseling, and my own experience as a parent (yes-it all comes back), I want to extend apologies to my parents. I know that they did the best they could… especially Dad. By the time we got to Virginia, my dad worked long hours and was gone a lot, but somehow-and I don’t know how he did it-it was too early for cloning… he managed to be there for us. Joe Rothstein has always been a guy’s guy. No matter how busy he was, he was still the Little League coach. He was the football coach. He was the one who got up in the middle of the night to make me some toast if I couldn’t sleep. No matter how crazy his schedule was, he made time for a game of catch. He’s the reason why I was my son’s roller blade coach. Parents may strive to give their kids perfect lives and in the moment it may seem like nothing goes right, but I am here as living testimony that Growing up Rothstein was perfect in its imperfections. Joe Rothstein has a passion for life and it was demonstrated six times over in each one of us. We are truly blessed.

A few years ago, it was **my turn** to reach a milestone, and for my fiftieth birthday my father wrote me one of his timeless, priceless letters. He acknowledged that I was our Grandmother \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s favorite-thanks Dad!! That settles that! No Smothers Brothers petty proclamations like “**Mom liked you best**!!” Now we **KNOW** that Grandma **DEFINITELY** liked me best!!!... Ah… the brotherly ~~compet~~-(**Stop yourself in mid-word**) I mean **camaraderie** will never cease…Also in the letter he tells of all of the memories he has of me and us, through the years. Of course even though they have nine lives, let’s hope the Haskell’s cat in Denver used up all of his… because if he could talk, he, like my dad, would tell of the time I scared the crap (**is it okay to say “Crap” in front of this crowd? If not you can say YOU-KNOW-WHAT)** out of him while he was hanging out on the kitchen counter on the full dish drain… It was loud but it wasn’t pretty (**Wait for the laugh**). Joe Rothstein has a brilliant mind and such a gift with words and capturing memories that it would be foolish of me to **NOT** plagiarize his sentiments right here and now, but I will try to do no worse than paraphrase. That birthday letter takes me back to the time I made that game winning catch while playing center field. As a keen observer of history, he recalled we won against the undefeated Pizza Supreme. As a proud father he reminds, “The joy on your face as you were mobbed by your team is indelible in my memory.” He’s remembered so many other points in my life, from my graduations to the time we were on the Russian River and that fish I caught was so huge and took so much work to reel in that we were afraid we’d miss the last ferry, so we had to cut the line and let it go. Dad, you thanked Robin and me for the Jaguar and lamented the all too brief time spent together… with the car that is, and you thanked me for being there when you and Sylvia needed my support for both the celebrations and the challenges. I did all of those things for one obvious reason…. you are and always have been, an incredible father, an inspiration as a role model, and someone who really needs to be studied. You’ve set the bar pretty high as far as fathers go, and for that I thank you-on behalf of all of us: our family and my family, my children and their children yet to come.

In the letter, you said something and now I’ll turn those words back to you. “Most of all thank you for being such a good and loving **FATHER**, one who makes me proud. You’re a wonderful person and someone, after all of these years and experiences, happy times and conflicts, I can still call my friend.”

Fortunately for all of us, you’re a perfect example that “80 is the new 50.” This is just the **beginning** of the next exciting chapters of “Growing Up Rothstein.” (**If you feel comfortable using a little Yiddish say this-if not, use the word in parenthesis**) The first 80 were just a dress rehearsal. Now it’s time to **REALLY** live… Kick some **tuchas** (ass? **Is that okay to say?)** and take no prisoners…. and I will be right by your side as often as possible in body and always in spirit as you spread your special brand of magic, compassion, insight, and humor. Of course we will always be enmeshed in the eternal conundrum… “Which color is the best color for a state? (**Under your breath clear your throat and go “ahem-RED” and wait for the laugh)**. I cannot wait to see the crowds go wild as **YOU** catch the next **big one** whatever it might be… or when you scare the crap out of some more poor ducks, and raise the roof professionally and with your family, all of whom love you more than you know.

Happy Birthday, Dad…. Thank you for the privilege of being your son. I love you!