**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ELI SCHWARTZ**

Well.... what can I possibly say after all of you have said such kind, loving, funny, and thought provoking tributes?? Give me a minute... or five... I’ll think of something!!! All jokes aside, for those of you that really know me... and that would be **ALL** of you, you **KNOW** that I am rarely at a loss... although I must admit, tonight’s festivities come close to taking my breath away, life is too good, too sweet, too wonderful to pass up on the chance to acknowledge the gifts and blessings I have had, and have, in my life. This gathering here, tonight, is an incredible party, one in which we get to reminisce, dine on some fine food, but most importantly revel in what it means to be **ALIVE**... Believe me when I tell you, I’ve had **PRACTICE** at this... and I know for sure that **THIS** is what life is all about.

Sophia Loren has said... (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say**)... Don’t get nervous, Cookie... she didn’t tell me **in person.**.. (**and wait for the laugh**)... anyway, who **KNEW** she was gorgeous **AND** insightful??? She said, “There is a fountain of youth. It is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.” I must say, Sophia expressed what I have found to be the secret of life....and here we all were taught that Ponce de León discovered the Fountain of Youth... **IN FLORIDA**!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

I have always believed that, no matter what, I have immense gratitude for the life I’ve led... for the gifts I received... whether it is my wonderful family... my supportive, engaging friends, my musical interests, my resilience, my endurance, the strength I’ve been able to summon... in good times and in challenging times... it’s been said that “Gratitude is the emotional putty of relationships... it seals the cracks... “ Tonight, I am overflowing with gratitude and I am truly “**putty**” in your hands.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, “I am part of all that I have met.” I believe that, and it explains why I am probably the luckiest man I know. Each one of you is an integral part of me... what makes me tick... what gets me going... what gives me purpose... what warms my heart, makes me smile, and truly defines love and meaning. I believe our actions have purpose... what we do, who we are, how we commit to our own well being and that of those important to us, determines our quality of life. There are those that remain a part of me... although they are gone... but I would not be who I am today and would not have the capabilities and compassion I share, without having had their devotion and influence.

“Play the piano!!” She said... “**PRACTICE**!!” She said... “She” was my mother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , and although growing up in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as her child wasn’t always a walk in the park on a sunny day, boy did I learn!!! That piano practice was to become a metaphor for my life.... Not only did it provide a “soundtrack” that has remained since I was a kid, it taught me discipline... patience... nuance.. it taught me how to share a gift.... (**Did your brother and sister like your piano playing as kids? You can mention something like..)**... and it taught me that no matter how much I practiced, my sister, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and my brother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ would still speak to me!! (**Wait for the laugh)**. If any two people are the earlier part of me, it’s these two and I am grateful that we can celebrate this milestone together. My first wife, Judy, although gone for all these years, was very much a part of me.. and her goodness and devotion are the foundation that make our children, Jonathan and Leslie so special. And as Jonathan and Leslie have evolved through life, so have their spouses and kids. While we all faced immeasurable grief with the passing of Judy, G-d is good, the universe provides, and sometimes it’s in the form of a “spitfire” named Cookie (**If you wouldn’t describe Cookie as a spitfire, you can say angel or saving grace**)... Meeting and marrying Cookie twenty six years ago proves that there **ARE** second chances in life and that she and her kids, Ross and Jodi, and their respective broods form one big, happy family... you can imagine.. between **FOUR KIDS**... **FOUR SPOUSES**.. and **EIGHT GRANDCHILDREN**... we have quite the “voting bloc” and I am deeply grateful to all of you.. and them... for being in my life. I love all of you.

Life is good. life is sweet.. the “First Eighty “ taught me patience and respect.. humor and resilience... It taught me to cherish life, take nothing for granted, stay actively engaged, keep moving, and always **practice**... I really believe in the adage,”You’re only as old as you feel,” and I maintain my regimens and activities... I’m also learning to blend tradition with contemporary culture. I love to train at CrossFit gym three times a week... with “the kids.”... mostly in their twenties and thirties... all “tatted up” and “rarin’ to go...they’re impressed with me... I marvel at their youthful enthusiasm... in fact, I was thinking of getting a tattoo... mine would be my name, address, and phone number... oh.. and maybe the details of a major credit card... just in case I forget ... or if there’s an emergency... (**Wait for the laugh**).

Well.... I think I’m almost finished with my thoughts and thanks... and if I go on any longer, we’ll be cutting into my **EIGHTY-FIRST**... G-d willing... but I want to leave you with this... one of the realizations I’ve had recently is simple... the older I get, the more I get to laugh, and live, and love, and be with all of you. If I knew it was going to be this good... this special... I would have aged sooner... **KIDDING**!!! To quote Andy Rooney, “I didn’t get old on purpose. It just happened. If you’re really lucky, it can happen to you.”

Thank you all for being a tremendous, meaningful part of my life.... I absolutely could not do it without you!! Thank you! I love you all!!