

Bat Mitzvah

February 13, 1992 was one of the scariest days of my life. I had to get up in front of hundreds of people and read from the Torah in Hebrew, sing in another language, and give a speech. I had been preparing for this all year and even longer if you add the countless hours I spent at Sunday school as a kid and Hebrew school as a teenager. Even though I had been rehearsing, using a microphone in front of that many people is terrifying when I cannot carry a tune and had no real idea of what I was saying in Hebrew -- I had merely memorized my lines and trust me, there were a lot of them.

When my parents came up to bless me before I read my Torah portion, I didn't want them to leave the stage. I wasn't ready to "become an adult." I can now understand how the fear I felt and the preparation it took for such a day did help me mature, but I still wasn't ready to be an adult at the age of thirteen. My students now at the ages of fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and even eighteen aren't ready to become adults.

Purple Easton Softball Bat

I had grown up going to Mariner's games with my family, baseball is in my blood; my dad played adult softball, my brother LOVED everything baseball -- hats, cards, watching it, playing it -- and my mother let us take her every mother's day to watch Ken Griffey, Jr. and Mark Langston launch their careers.

Until I was in seventh grade, my town didn't have a softball team, so I had to play baseball with the boys. I was one of three girls who continued through these softball-less years. The Boys and Girls Club started a softball league when I was in seventh grade and I no longer had to play with the boys. Our softball team wore teal and pink uniforms, which was fitting for the time and my best friend's parents were our coaches. I loved all positions, especially outfield because I would run as fast as I could and get under the ball for a spectacular catch. I was even willing to play catcher when we started playing fastpitch. Throughout high school, I caught every pitch of every game for our team and batted first in the line-up -- I was fast and could sprint to first base beating the throw.

Once my dad took me to Big 5 to pick out my first softball bat, it made hitting even more manageable. Picking up the bat, fitted for my body type, I would stand at the plate and let the first pitch go. I never swung at the first pitch, I wanted to see what the pitcher had in store. I could always afford one strike. There was no rush.

Whistler, British Columbia

Growing up in Seattle, an inexpensive vacation for families was driving to Whistler/Blackcomb in British Columbia six hours to ski. We would caravan with the Cohn family, our cars stocked with

food for the weekend. My brother and Adam would go in the Cohn's car and Maya and I would drive with my parents. We would sit in the back playing Gameboy and making up car games while we walkie-talked our brothers. After the nauseating ride up the mountain, we arrived at the Fireplace Inn right in the Whistler Village. This is when the village ended at the liquor and grocery store by the video store, long before the GAP and other chains moved in.

My parents put us in lessons when we were young and as we grew older, we would tear all over the mountain and meet them for lunch in the lodge at noon. We primarily skied on Blackcomb Mountain, because we could ski in and out from the condo much easier than if we had gone to Whistler Mountain. Blackcomb was pretty big, but we learned our way around quickly. We had all been skiing since we could walk.

When I was eight, our families went in on a condo right off the side of the mountain, close enough to throw snowballs from the hot tub and hit people riding the Fitzsimmons chair up. The New Years we spent in the condo were full of laughs from games of Pictionary, Taboo, and Charades.

Cowboy Coffee

The first one out of his or her tent is responsible for starting the process. They must fire up the cook stove, fill the ancient gallon-plus blue-enameled pot with water, and scoop in cups and cups of grounds. I'm usually a coffee snob, but on the river, any brand of coffee tastes great.

Those of us who get up later, maybe waiting for the sun to just nudge the edges of the red-rimmed canyon wall, will circle around the kitchen. Not starting a fire, chatting about the sounds of the night, what rapids are coming up during the day, any clients or students who are having a rough time. We are all watching the water for any sign that it might have come up or gone down in the desert heat, watching the sky for signs of afternoon rain, and smelling the coffee fumes. The cups in our hands make it clear that we're there for coffee; we're in line. There's always a line.

The best part of the process is the spinning. It's not cowboy coffee without a true carnival-like spin. Our pot had a strong wire coathanger looped into the top and twisted firmly through the holes on the coffee pot. When I was the lucky "spinner" I would walk the pot just out of the kitchen, swing it at the end of my arm a couple of times to warm up, and then use the momentum to spin it all the way around, at least three times. Hot coffee and pot swinging in an arc at the end of the arm - sideways, upside down, sideways, then right side up again. Now, grounds settled to the bottom, we all fill out cups and the only one who really has to cowboy it - eat the grounds out of the bottom of his cup - is the person who takes the last bit of coffee.

Jumpin' Cholla

The Sonoran desert of Mexico is full of Teddy-Bear Cholla, a cactus with long stalks that branch

out of a central skinny stalk, most growing straight toward the sky. The stalks are, smaller around than an average person's wrist. At the end of each branch, somewhere around waist height on me, are round green balls of cactus, covered with sharp spines. On the advice of my best friend, who had backpacked there the year before, I had brought needle-nosed pliers, solely for the purpose of pulling the barbed spines out of our flesh. The cholla were also called jumping cholla and sort of like a jumping spider in a horror movie, the cute little green balls of cactus seemed, of their own volition, to spring into the soft flesh of our 17-year-old thighs. You didn't really even have to touch the cholla to come away speared, all you had to do was whisper or walk within a 3 or 4 inches.

In order to get them out, you had to either brave getting spines in your hands too, or have a buddy with pliers. I was the only one in our group who had pliers, therefore, I was everyone's buddy. The other high school seniors would take turns hiking near me because, since there was no trail, the chances of being cactus-stuck were pretty high as we waddled through the desert with our weighty backpacks.

One night, one of the boys in our group made the mistake of backing into one while using the bushes. He made a huge, howling ruckus. Our leader - the only semi-adult among us - took the pliers and pulled multiple cholla balls out of his bum. At the time I thought it served him right, since he'd been holding his camping expertise over our heads for two weeks so far, egotistical bugger. The rest of us, novices though we might have been, were even more careful about where we aimed our rears and none of us ever topped his record.

We have cholla here - further down the Arkansas canyon, starting at about Wellsville. Every spring when I see them flower bright pink, I remember how painful those barbed spines are. Nothin like having a long, thin fishhook embedded in your body to make you realize that all of nature is not necessarily your friend.

Little Yellow Ten-Speed Bike

I often rode my bike alone. There was a freedom to riding my little yellow road-bike to Cherry Creek to shop, or to a movie, or to meet a friend for lunch at Round-the-Corner burger restaurant. I don't remember the beginning of this day, but I do remember waking up next to a speed-bump in the parking lot of a Sears that no longer exists. There were cars on four sides of me. I don't remember blood, I don't remember if anyone got out of their car to see whether I was OK, and I have no idea how long I was knocked out and lying there on the pavement. I do remember my parents coming to get me from the Wizard's Chest - still the best toy store in Denver. They loaded my small, yellow bike into the sliding side door of the van, loaded me in to the front seat, and I don't remember anything else about that day.

Maybe this is why I have memory problems now? That was only concussion number three.

