Yehi Ratzon milfanecha. May it be your will that we find joy, even in the midst of sorrow.

At some point in the mid-2000s, when it became clear that we were finished having children, I recall talking to my husband, Steve, bemoaning that there were no big personal milestones left to look forward to, having now gone through graduations, marriage and the birth of our children. I recall him responding in part by saying, “there will be their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.” And I wrote it off saying, “yes, but that's for them, not for me. I'll just be planning out the details.” And his wise response was "you'll see."

Fast forward seven or eight years and there I was dutifully planning my daughter, Peninah's Bat Mitzvah. And, sure enough, Steve was right. While it was clearly Peninah's event, I found myself recalling my Jewish roots more keenly and deepening my connection to my own brand of Judaism.

For me, one of the most meaningful aspects of the preparation was learning a Torah portion. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed refamiliarizing myself with the trope. I also loved teaching Peninah the prayer after the Haftroah, recalling my own triumphant feeling of achievement. And making Peninah's tallit with her and my mother, including learning from Rav Claudia how to tie the tzitzit, proved deeply meaningful.

But, as much as the preparations made me feel connected to my Judaism, I could not have predicted how the day itself would affect me. You see, Peninah's Bat
Mitzvah took place a mere five days after the Boston Marathon Bombings and the morning after the city shut down in a manhunt for the suspects. It was a deeply emotional week for the city and for the country. But it was a deeply and differently emotional week for me and my family. Of course, it threw a wrench into many of the last-minute details. But, with the city shut down in the final hours before Peninah's Bat Mitzvah, just when our guests were scheduled to arrive from around the country, our careful plans turned to chaos. As we fielded dozens of calls, emails and text messages from our friends and relatives wondering whether it was safe to come to Boston, we tried to maintain some semblance of calm. I was grateful on that day to have two Rabbis who both sympathized with us and strengthened us with the determination that this Bat Mitzvah would go on "come hell or high water!"

In the end, with the manhunt ending late Friday night, the direct impact on Peninah’s Bat Mitzvah was minimal. Some guests didn't come. But most did. Our florist, shut down for the manhunt, couldn't deliver. But a friend stepped in with a few beautiful arrangements.

Most importantly, the service was joyous. We were surrounded by our loved ones. So many people from the TBZ community flooded into the service that morning, seeking solace and connection after the horrific and chaotic events of the week. Peninah was truly majestic -- honest, natural, funny and confident. My heart was soaring even as I felt raw from the last five painful days. And though it was indeed Peninah's event, it felt truly collective. My husband, my children, my family, my friends, and my community at TBZ: all were vital participants. Upon
reflection, I realized that while Peninah’s Bat Mitzvah was certainly a personal milestone in her life, by extension, it was in mine as well. Because as we age, the personal becomes communal. Though we are often wrapped up in our children’s day-to-day existence, we don’t live our lives through them. Yet, we celebrate in the shared nature of their milestones.

Yehi Ratzon milfanecha. May it be your will that we find personal and collective meaning in the events that define our Jewish lives and that TBZ continues to be a place for us to reconnect to our Judaism, and to each other, in times of joy...and in times of sorrow.