

It took me a long time to figure out how to start this speech but since you are listening to it now I somehow figured out what to say. I know that I wouldn't be giving this speech today without Joshua, Owen, and Alayna who pushed me to do better and to do more. I don't know if they know that they challenged me but they deserve credit for me being where I am today. The past four years of high school have had many ups, downs, and unexpected occurrences.

I know I have much to learn yet, but I have learned many lessons that I hope will carry me forward. Lessons that I would like to pass on to those coming behind me so that perhaps their time in high school can be better. First and foremost, always be yourself. The biggest hole that teens seem to fall into is the desire to be included to the point that they don't remain true to themselves. I have found that even though my time in school has been challenging, I am happier that I chose not to conform to the so-called social norms. I've paid a price for that choice because many of my peers have excluded me from their social groups, but I can look in the mirror and know that I have remained true to myself and the values that are important to me.

Groupthink is a dangerous trend in today's society. Too many people are dividing into tribes based on a focus on differences when we should be coming together as a community of shared values. As a generation we need to find the values from so long ago that encouraged us to work with our neighbors instead of judging them for a trivial difference. I believe that the best way to move forward is for people to find ways to

strengthen their community. Volunteer at the food bank, sit and listen to someone with a different viewpoint and try to understand their perspective and ask that they do the same for you.

To that end, I would advise those following me that in order to remain true to yourself, you need to determine what is important to you. Don't let societal pressures dictate how you should act or think. Determine those values that are important to you and find people who accept you for who you are and not for how you are willing to change simply for peer acceptance. This next part is for the girls entering high school or in any grade, from the wise words of Mr. Grimson "don't dumb yourself down for a boy." If you are smart then be smart. If you are athletic then be athletic but do so humbly.

If you are given an opportunity that gives you the chance to improve yourself or that you believe will do you good then take it. If I hadn't decided to go to Costa Rica with a group of my peers, I would have never been on a plane, I would not have seen the ocean, and I would not have found my desire to travel. Without my trip to Costa Rica, I would not have the courage to go to the Galapagos Islands with a group of students from Meeker that I barely know. Take chances, don't be afraid to do something outside your comfort zone.

I want to thank my family for always standing behind me when times were tough and when times were good. I want to thank all my coaches for pushing me to do better and

to never give up, especially Coach Cowan who would tell me a story during every ride to practice. I want to thank Mr. Long for pushing to get a climbing wall and team for many years until it finally happened. Congratulations to the class of 2020. You will all do great things.