

Twenty years ago, I stood in a school auditorium not too dissimilar to this one, standing where Kitty will stand in a few minutes, giving a probably very similar address.

I was ambitious, driven, a perfectionist. I was the girl who was defined by her achievements, concerned about expectations, and worried that I would let people down; the girl who firmly believed every A* would set her apart. And so armed with my results and one-way ticket to the UK, I was going to change the world because that was what I thought defined me.

Why am I telling you this? Because every time you have knocked on or burst through my door in the last two years, every time you've come for a pep talk, to share your joys, your concerns, chocolate or even when I you're struggling, but you haven't been to see me because you're worried that will make it look like you're simply not perfect, I have completely understood how you are feeling.

Looking back there was advice that would have smoothed the path for my younger self that I would like to give to you tonight:

- Your actions will define you, not your words.
- Always trust your gut instinct. Always.
- Words can build bridges or burn them, so choose wisely.
- Always be honest; the truth only hurts if it's supposed to.
- Pick your battles, it's not all worth fighting about.
- Speak up — find your voice and use it!
- Learn the word “no,” and don't be afraid to use it without guilt.
- Always stand up for yourself. Always
- If it's worth fighting for, fight fiercely.

- Some people are just mean. Just because they exclude you or project negativity onto you, doesn't mean that you have to embrace it.
- If you find a real friend, keep hold no matter how far apart you are.
- Stay in contact with the people who love you.
- Home is who you love, not where you live or where you come from.

- Don't ever chase a relationship, the right one will find you.
- A relationship does not validate your existence.
- The only person you belong to is yourself.
- No matter how much you love someone, don't lose yourself.
- Being the first to apologize does not make you weak.
- The greatest gift you can give someone is your unconditional love.
- Don't rush your happily ever after — ever after is a long time.

- Money will not make you happy, but it helps you to have experiences that can enrich your life.
- Work and work hard. Always make sure you can provide for yourself and don't rely on anyone to do it for you.
- Your academic record is not a confession of your character.
- Read everything you can get your hands on. Knowledge is power.
- Never be afraid to share anything you feel passionately about.
- Travel as often as you can.
- Come home smelly, tired, and with a good story.

- Not every problem is the end of the world; how you perceive them is most important.
 - Don't be afraid to fail. That's how you learn.
 - You get to write your own story, fill the pages with what brings you happiness, not other people's expectations of you.
 - Take life one day at a time. Live in the moment. You have no control over yesterday or tomorrow. All you have is right now, so just be happy.
 - Your happiness is your happiness and yours alone; what feels right is where your happiness is.
 - The world spins on the principle of inherent tragedy. Do not be blind to it, but try and bring joy to others and yourself where you can.
 - Love the world unconditionally even when life throws things at you that make you hurt.
 - Serve others unconditionally, good deeds bring happiness.
 - Humility and subservience are not synonyms.
-
- Love yourself first; not your achievements or talents, just you.
 - Don't compare yourself to others, there will never be another like you.
 - Thinking that you are better than someone else is a waste of your energy.
 - Don't judge anyone, but expect to be judged, by everyone.
 - Expect the best from everyone and know that people will let you down.
 - Someone is always going to be better than you. Get over it.
 - Learn how to accept compliments graciously and try to believe them.
 - Be gracious, gratitude reveals character.
 - It's too much fake tan if you have to ask.
 - Learn how to be happy in your own skin and be content alone.
 - Drink water, wear sunscreen and for goodness sakes wear the right bra.
 - Always walk with your head up. Confidence is attractive.
 - You are beautiful, never let anyone make you feel differently
 - Laugh until you can't breathe.
 - Exercise to be strong and healthy. A beautiful soul needs a sturdy vessel.
 - Do not take sex lightly.
 - Eat the extra slice of pizza. Carbohydrates are not the enemy.
 - Never electronically send anything you wouldn't want printed on the front page on the newspaper. Even if you delete it, it can still be found.
 - Don't fight for acceptance. You shouldn't have to.
 - Don't smile if you don't mean it.
 - Don't swallow your feelings, find a way to let them out safely.
 - There is strength in breaking down. Cry, uninhibitedly.
 - Laughter is good for the soul.
 - So is loud music. So turn it up and dance!
 - You're fooling no one when you try to be someone that doesn't make your soul sing.
 - Love your fellow woman with all your heart and soul.
 - You are more than capable; I promise.