

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.
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- 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.