

Welcome to our incoming juniors and welcome back to all our mighty seniors. Thank you so much for letting me talk to you today. As was mentioned, I am a graduate of the class of 97 and I am a pediatric neurologist and epileptologist. So, I have a super cool job where I get to take care of kids with seizures and epilepsy and I read EEGs which are recordings of the brain's electricity. I use medications, a special diet and sometimes even brain surgery to treat epilepsy. I map the brain's activity and create a handy diagram for the surgeons that says "cut here" or "whatever you do, don't cut here!" Because of my job experience I feel like I'm pretty much a mind reader. So, I'm sure I know how many of you are feeling today.

Some of you may be sad knowing you will be away from your family. Some of you may be happy to be away from your family and both those are completely valid. Some of you may be excited and why wouldn't you be? You are starting a great adventure! Some of you may be mad at your sibling for looking at you in the car on the way here, and some of you may be tired because you got your sleep schedule all out of whack over the summer. I also have strong suspicion that many of you may be feeling nervous or anxious, and that's ok too. And some of you may be feeling a mix of all of the above.

Outside of my amazing mind reading ability, how is it I know all these emotions that are swirling around? Well, it seems like yesterday that I was sitting out in the audience as a new junior, but if my math serves me right it was actually 28 years ago, which doesn't seem possible. I clearly remember sitting in the audience at convocation and being absolutely terrified. And somewhat excited. But mostly terrified. I came in with so many insecurities. I grew up in Cordell in rural Oklahoma with a graduating class of 40. At that time, my school did not offer calculus. There was no physics and only very basic biology. I was convinced coming into OSSM that I was going to be so behind. I questioned whether I was really smart enough and if I actually belonged there. I had a serious case of imposter syndrome.

For those of you who aren't familiar with imposter syndrome, it's defined as "a psychological occurrence in which people doubt their skills, talents, or accomplishments and have a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud. Despite external evidence of their competence, they do not believe they deserve their success." There may be some of you out there today feeling much the same way, but let me assure you, you deserve to be here.

Now, I know what you might be thinking, "what does she know, it's been 28 years since she started school here, things could have changed!" That is a valid concern, I am quite old. But, in addition to being a graduate of OSSM myself, I have also been a part of the admission committee numerous times over the past 10 years. What I have learned from those experiences is how much time and consideration went into admitting each and every one of you. It is not an accident that you are here.

Now, some of you may be looking around thinking, "Ok, so I belong here, but there are so many people who are so much smarter than me." You know what I say to that?? "So what!" "Who cares!" It doesn't

mean that you aren't smart or capable of success or that there aren't great things awaiting you in the future. Comparison is, and always will be, the thief of joy. You don't need to compete with the person next to you. You need to be the best YOU can be. You need to work as hard as you can and strive to be better than you were yesterday.

My 12yo daughter is a high level competitive gymnast at arguably the most competitive gyms in the state. She can do amazing skills like flips over the vault table, and back handsprings on the balance beam and full twisting something or another on the floor. All season she never placed lower than 3rd in her age group and won several times. Yet she came to me during the season crying that she wasn't any good at gymnastics. Ummm, what?? Are we watching the same competitions?? When I asked her why she felt that way, she said it was because one of the girls on her team consistently out scored her. But her reference point was skewed! She was practicing every day with the best of the best gymnasts and it caused her to lose sight of how phenomenal she is. That comparison was stealing the joy she could have been feeling about her successful season.

By coming to OSSM, you all are placing yourselves in a similar situation. You are going to be surrounded by some of the best and brightest students in Oklahoma. Don't let comparison fool into thinking you aren't fantastic.

When I was a student here, I can promise you I was not the smartest student, by any stretch. In fact, one of my teachers lovingly described me as "not brilliant, but fun." I'm kinda ok with that! I was goofy and silly and didn't always make the best decisions. While I was a student here, I couldn't seem to get my light off in time for lights out and I had the write ups to prove it. I was an instigator in what became a large school wide mud fight. And worst of all, I got a C in a class! Dude, physics was hard! But all those things didn't define me or my potential. Yes, I wallpapered one entire wall of my dorm room in write ups, but today I'm in charge of an entire epilepsy program. Sure, I wasn't one of the most brilliant students here, but today when I draw a map of a brain and tell a neurosurgeon where to cut, they actually do it! Anyone who had seen 17yo me slipping and sliding all over the yard covered head to toe in mud, may have found it difficult to take me seriously. But now, parents bring their children from all over the state to see me for my expertise. I was once sitting where you are scared to death and now I've been asked back to be the speaker.

Let me encourage you to not lose sight of how great you all are. You have so much potential to do amazing things if you want and are willing to put the work in. There was a skit on Saturday Night Live before any of you were even born, but your parents might remember it. It was called Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley. Stuart would sit in front of a mirror and tell himself encouraging things like "I am entitled to happiness" and "I refuse to beat myself up." But what I want to leave you with one last reminder which is his catch phrase. "You're good enough, you're smart enough, and doggone it – people like you!" I hope you all have an amazing year and enjoy the rest of your day.