

Students, faculty, family, friends, graduates:

First of all, I want to say I am extremely honored to have been asked to speak at your graduation about being brave. I don't believe I am braver than any of you here today, but my current circumstances have made it appear that way. As many of you know, I was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive adrenal cancer at the end of January. I had surgery to remove the tumor as well as my left adrenal gland and kidney. Less than 2 months later, I began taking chemotherapy pills and was fortunately able to get back to work part time for a few weeks, which I absolutely loved. However, my next scans showed the cancer had spread to other organs so I had a procedure to reduce some of the tumors and quickly began IV chemotherapy. Throughout this process, I have been told how brave I am. My brother compared me to a super hero and I now refer to myself as a warrior. Today, I am going to talk to you about what it means to be brave, how every one of you is also a brave warrior.

There will be many times in your life when you are faced with the choice to be brave or not brave. Actually, it will probably happen every day, or even every hour. If you choose to raise your hand and share your ideas in class, you are being brave. If you choose to say hi to someone you aren't friends with in the hallway, you are being brave. If you choose to wear green when everyone else wears blue, you are being brave. Some of you have great anxiety but you still come to school every day. That makes you brave. Some of you had to move to a new school where you didn't know anyone. That makes you brave. Some of you presented during technology nights or morning announcements. That makes you brave. Some of you ziplined at Camp Hannon. That makes you brave. Some of you sang here today or gave speeches. That makes you brave.

Bear Grylls, from the show *Man vs. Wild*, once said, "Being brave isn't the absence of fear. Being brave is having that fear but finding a way through it." Sometimes when you are brave, you are still scared. But you overcome that fear and power through. I am scared almost every day, but I don't let that stop me. I also don't keep that fear hidden. I tell others about it...and that is what helps me overcome my fears. I was and am afraid to be making this speech. What if I cry? (Well, that's already happened). What if I get too nervous and can't talk? (I guess I take a deep breath and keep going) What if people judge me? What if I have no hair? (Well, it's already falling out). Gosh, what if I throw up?! (Luckily that's not going to happen today). But I decided none of that mattered. I decided it was more important to accept the honor and give this speech, regardless of what happened, regardless of my fears, because I believed in myself. You might be scared about the new ventures in your life, moving onto middle school, but be brave. Know that you will succeed, know the people surrounding you are there to support you – your friends, your family, your teachers, me. Most importantly, believe in yourself. Believe that you are making the right choices, regardless of what everyone else is doing.

When I was younger, my brothers were jumping out of our tree house. They kept egging me on – "Come on, Sarah. Just jump. You can do it." Well, eventually I did jump. And guess what? I sprained my ankle. Does that make me brave? Probably not. It would have been more brave if I did not jump, if I did not do something just because other people wanted me to. I want you to remember that as you move on to middle school. Sometimes, being brave means standing out, standing strong in your beliefs, regardless of what others tell you.

What do I do now to be brave? I share my story with others. I listen to inspirational music. I read books with positive messages. I laugh with my family. I smile and sometimes I cry. Do those things make me brave? No, but they allow me to be brave. They give me a positive attitude, which provides me with the strength I need to be a warrior, and they can do the same for you. Being brave is different for each person and will change over time. Find ways to deal with your fears and embrace new challenges, which will make you brave. Enjoy life. Love. Laugh. Be a little crazy. Reach out to others. Live without regrets and keep looking forward. Be brave warriors. We are proud of every one of you. Thank you, and congratulations to our 2017 Graduating Class!