

January 6, 2018

Dear Olivia Vella,

I remember the day I saw your speech. I was huddling under my blanket in my bed, scrolling through videos to watch on YouTube. I enjoy watching slam poetry, so I wasn't surprised when I saw a video of your speech called "Why Am I Not Good Enough?" pop up. Intrigued by the title, I clicked on it.

I've never related to anything more in my life.

I was in fifth grade at the time, and being not much younger than you were, I faced the same insecurities that you had described. You mentioned how being the "smart girl" made you loved by your teachers and looked down upon by fellow students. You illustrated how sometimes you act a certain way just to please people. But most of all, you talked about how different your inside and outside can be.

I saw myself in the words you were speaking, realizing how many times I had felt the way you said you felt. And once I heard that poem, I watched that video over and over and over again, holding on to everything you were saying.

That's the day I became a whole lot happier.

You see, I've always seemed confident (and frankly, reckless) on the outside. I speak with no second-guesses, I act with no thought, and I even have been told that the way that I walk exudes confidence. I have always thought that when vulnerability is shown to the public, and not your closest friends and family, it is a sign of weakness.

And because of this, others have only seen the fearless side of me, which is bad because that layer of dauntlessness is just a shell. Some of my peers take it as a challenge, acting the same as I do. Meanwhile, the majority of others take my resolute demeanor as a chance to simply rant about all of their worries and stresses to me.

And they never let me rant back.

In fifth grade, before listening to your speech, I had yet to find someone who had felt the same as me. I figured that it was stupid to be insecure about anything. I told myself I was lucky that I was smart and had a great family and had all the things that my "friends" didn't seem to have, and I figured that people would probably act like I'm their punching pillow that they can word-vomit on for the rest of eternity.

But after I had heard what you said, I connected to your speech. I felt that I could relate to someone, and most of all, I realized something.

When you delivered the line, "You are respected," I thought about how much lack of respect I was getting. People were using me, and I say that's not respect at all.

Even though I looked strong and stable and tough on the outside, I was empty and weak on the inside. I was a hollow statue who fooled everyone by my appearance.

The words that you spoke changed everything. From that day on, I stopped letting people lean on me.

Your poem saved me. It allowed me to be happy.

It made me so happy, in fact, that I performed the poem for my speech class two years later. I'm in seventh grade now, and I really couldn't be more pleased with my life these days.

So, thank you Olivia. Thank you. Your beautiful poem had inspired me when I was ten, and it still inspires me now.

Sincerely,

Saimaa Widi