Good Morning parents’ teachers and students,

Today I’m here to tell you a little bit about myself and my journey to where I am today.

I did have a month to write this speech and in classic style I left it up to last night to start it.

In life we all face obstacles, some people more than others, many jump straight over them, but for some of us we get stuck behind them and sometimes for a long, long time.

Something we’ve all heard our parents say is that school is the best time of your life, well for me, school started out the very opposite. I didn’t have many friends, I was bullied constantly, and I struggled immensely to fit in, this is because my obstacle was Asperger’s. Asperger’s is a part of the autism spectrum disorder and effects my ability to interact socially, pick up on social ques, develop and maintain friendships and overall just makes it harder for me to interact with other people as everyone else does. Where life seems like it’s a videogame and I decided to skip the tutorial.

Because I wasn’t properly diagnosed until I was 13, I spent my earlier years of school coming home most days crying to my parents. Most days I felt like the world was against me, I hated school and I felt like I was on my own. This was mostly due to the amount of bullying I faced and coming home with injuries on a regular basis, I didn’t have the simple thought to tell someone or to fight back and best deal with these situations because I was scared to hurt people by doing so, it got to the point where with all of my mothers efforts to teach me social etiquette, and failing, that my dad gave me the advice that if anyone was going to hurt me, to “hit first, and hit hard, and then run” and to be honest, this method worked, a couple times. And I’m not saying that punching people is the solution, but for me this was how I finally stood up for myself and with that overcame a huge hurdle in my life. I finally understood that sometimes in life things wont change unless you make them change.

To help with my lack of social skills I tried using humour to fit in in school, talking to one person and developing relationships was hard for me and I’m still improving at it but I found that in a group, if I could make people laugh that I felt that I fitted in. only problem is that now with this gorgeous mullet I struggle to get people to take me seriously. It took countless therapy sessions and trips to Adelaide to see therapists to help me work on social skills that
most people take for granted and to help me better understand who I am. The hardest part of being socially awkward is having to overthink and say something ten times over in my head before you say it because you’re scared of the reaction you might get, imagine every time you spoke you had to plan what you are going to say and think of all the possible outcomes and whether or not it is worth making the comment in the first place because you fear that people will judge you and reject you, this is life on the spectrum.

The biggest turning points in my life was first moving primary schools and giving myself a fresh start with fresh people which had a huge impact on my life, school became fun and as I had always wanted, I had found a group of people that accepted me and embraced me for who I was. The next turning point was when I finally got diagnosed with aspersers and I still remember running into the car park with mum and yelling “there’s nothing wrong with me, I have Asperger’s” although for most this means little but in our life this was everything, finally we had an answer to why my life had been so challenging and now had reassurance that everything was going to be ok all it was going to take was a bit of time and a bit of effort.

With the support of my mum and dad, my peers and my teachers I have been able to accomplish things a lot of people doubted, I now have an apprenticeship in plumbing, I have a great group of friends that don’t judge me for who I am, I have a great family that have always stood by me, I have a school that embraced me and supported me, I have a basketball community that have been patient with me and worked with me to achieve my passion and obsession. I have surrounded myself with people who take the time and that’s what really matters.

Before I wrap things up I would like to give a quick thanks to all the staff who have helped me grow as a student and a young adult, my year level for showing me plenty of love throughout the years and the Vcal boys for all the hard study sessions we put in after school this year. I would especially like to thanks Sophie cook who without I probably would have been sacked from my job as vice caption. And of course a Big shout out to my number one fan Mrs Opie who only allowed me to get tracked twice in six years, she has been my mother away from home. And to Jackie Gorman, the gorminator for always being spiteful that the saints will soon be premiers.
Something that everyone can take away from this is that through this journey I have faced many setbacks and obstacles and with my determination and great looks, I have been able to overcome and surpass any expectations I had, or anyone had of me.

Everyone in life faces their own battles, and I believe through my experiences that it’s important that before we pick on that awkward kid, or make that cheap comment, or exclude them like they don’t exist, stop and think, how would that make you feel, because you really never know what that other person is going through, we all have a choice on what we do next, because that next move may just change someone’s life, it may not mean much to you to give someone a hand but it may mean everything to them. Because I can say that my life is where it is now because someone stopped, to give me a hand.