

Good evening ladies! And welcome to your very own Ring Ceremony. This is one of my absolute favorite nights of the year at Kent and I am really flattered to have been asked to speak to you tonight.

As this is a ceremony devoted to the passing of the Kent guard from one group of young women to the next, I thought I would speak to you tonight about my own personal relationships with women and how they've evolved throughout my life.

I was lucky to have been born into a family that was made up of more women than men – my dad was thrilled when I finally brought my husband home, because he wasn't quite so outnumbered as he had been – but in truth, my early relationships with my mom and my sister weren't quite what they should have been. My mom worked, a lot, and between travel and long hours at the office, it wasn't unusual for me to go days at a time without seeing her. In contrast my dad was a teacher at my grade school, and ran every aspect of our house, driving us everywhere we needed to go, coming to all our games, doing homework and bedtime and all those things that make you close with a parent. It wasn't that I didn't love my mom... it was that I didn't really know her.

My sister, who was born three and a half years after I was, was just a little too young to be tolerable to me. I loved her... but only in a conceptual way. She followed me everywhere, she liked what I liked, she did what I did... in short, she drove me absolutely nuts. It wasn't until I was a teenager that someone finally told me that all she wanted was to be more like me – which is the backbone of what I want to talk to you about tonight.

In grade school, my friends were all girls, and we got along well, but right around sixth grade, life started to get... dramatic. Who was friends with whom was a constantly shifting dynamic, a pre-teen drama that mystified me even as I was a central player in all its craziness.

Between drama and having my dad as a teacher and coach and involved in every single aspect of my life... boarding school was a no-brainer. And there, too, the drama continued. I saw myself at the time as the sane one, the even-keeled, I've-got-this girl, navigating other people's issues like it was all no big deal. But it was. Some of these relationships were toxic, and even though I didn't see it at the time, I was just as much a part of that as the high-drama friends I'd surrounded myself with. Just before the start of my senior year, around the same time someone finally clued me in on what my sister really wanted from me, I realized that the girls I'd surrounded myself with weren't the kinds of people that I wanted to be *like*. They weren't making me a better person. And in all honesty, I wasn't doing that for them, either. So I stepped back. I removed myself from at least some of the drama. Even though I think it was the right choice, it wasn't much fun at the time, and I know now that I lost some people who had a lot to offer – if only I'd been mature enough to receive it.

It wasn't until I got to college that I met the friends who are still, for me, the core of my life. These were, and are, women I wanted to emulate. The women I wanted to be more like. The women who helped me, step by step, become a better version of myself. And it wasn't just that I'd finally found "the" people I should be friends with. It was that I'd found my own ability to be a really good friend – which is sometimes really hard. I found my confidence, my sense of right and wrong, my own passions and skills. And, as I was better able to stand on my own two feet, I was better able to find the women who supported me, and better able to support them as well.

It's no surprise to me now, as I look back, that this is when I rediscovered the single most important person in my life (husband and children aside of course): my sister. I deeply, deeply regret the years I wasted in finding her annoying and immature, because she is the main pillar in my life today, the person I turn to for support and guidance, the person who knows me the best, the person who has gotten me through what have been some tough years recently.

As many of you know I have three young kids. But in the same four years that they were born, I lost my dad, my grandmother, and my mom. And it was my sister and my women friends who got me through it. They have inspired and supported me, they have shared their own stories of both joy and loss, and they knew, really knew, what I was dealing with.

At my mother's funeral, my sister and I stood together and spoke about what she had meant to us. As I looked out at the packed chapel, I was struck by how many people there were her own female friends. Women she knew as a child, women she went to college with, women she worked with. Those friends came together to support my sister and me as she died and have been enormous influences in our lives in the years since. I saw in the audience, too, the women friends I had made, and I knew from their faces that they were with me, really with me, in what I was going through. And of course next to me stood my sister, the single greatest gift my mother ever gave me.

But then out in the crowd I saw a friend from those dramatic high school days, someone I'd lost touch with years and years before. Someone who had heard about my mom's death and had come for no other reason than to support me – and not the me now, but the me she'd known all those years before. It was her face – one I thought I'd never see again – that made me catch my breath.

At some point in your life you will have your own hard times – we all do. And I don't mean to dwell on my own. I only want to say that, when those hard times come, it is your women friends who will hold your hand and get you through them. Who will, just by being who they are, inspire you to get through the challenges you face and to become a better version of yourself.

So I'll finish by asking you to look around you at the young women here tonight, and also to look within. Surround yourself with the kinds of people that you want to be more like, whose qualities you know will make you a better version of yourself. And be, yourself, that kind of friend for the people sitting next to you. Because sisterhood, real sisterhood, in whatever form it comes, never, ever goes away.