

## Of Lyme, Insomnia, Super-Heroes...and Bacon

*When young people are struck by Lyme, it can take a huge toll on their education. Sometimes schooling must take a back seat to medical treatment—and just getting through the day. Completing high school can be a monumental task.*

*That's why we're so tickled to learn about the valedictorian speech given by Savannah Marcum of Paso Robles, CA. She discusses her Lyme experiences—and other aspects of her life. Here's a YouTube video of it, followed by a transcribed excerpt:*



A year ago I wrote an essay about my deep love and appreciation for bacon. That's not a lie. That's me. That's who I am.

I'm an insomniac, a blogger, a YouTuber, a writer, a music lover, a bookworm, a musician, and many other things. I love super-heroes and sarcasm and singing loudly in the car. My nickname is Mayonnaise. They call me Mayo for short, but that's its whole own story.

My point is, I'm a total and complete weirdo! That's who your valedictorian is; a person who's nickname is Mayonnaise, who writes essays about bacon.

The future of America everyone, feel proud!

Aside from all the silly things I listed that I identify myself with, I didn't list one really big thing that takes up a huge portion of my life. I didn't list it because I don't define myself by it. I'm sick.

I've actually been very sick the last four years of my life. I started my freshman year just as normally and optimistically as every other kid at Paso High, but not even halfway into the first week of school, I got really sick.

I spent the rest of the year in and out of hospitals, seeing countless doctors and being tested for anything and everything they thought I might have.

My friends turned into strangers  
and my doctors became my  
friends.

At a time in my life when my biggest worries should have been about school and friends and boys and silly things like what to wear; I was waiting for test results to find out if I had cancer or a tumor or something that might kill me.

In the blink of an eye I went from all honors classes and previously having straight A's to not even being able to do simple addition, reading or writing. I couldn't even walk 10 feet without starting to black out either, and the summer before I got sick I was in water polo, swimming for hours at a time, and doing over 300 sit-ups per practice. My life and who I was, was ripped away from me and I desperately clung to anything I could that was still me.

Four years later, I'm still sick. I'm immensely better, but I'm still sick. I just don't look it anymore. I'll smile and you'll see my normal-looking exterior and you'll quickly notice my weird, silly, fun personality and you'd never know.... I still have insomnia and bad days. I was in the ER just a few weeks ago too because it was a really bad day.



Five years ago, I would've absolutely believed you telling me I would be valedictorian today. I had a 4.0. I was set up to go into Advanced Placement classes all through high school, then go straight to a university.

After I got sick, I figured out that I had been taking a lot of things for granted.

Four years ago, I would've barely believed that I could even live through my illness.

Just one year ago, I didn't even know if I could finish all my missed credits to simply graduate on time.

Despite everything that's been thrown my way over the past four years, here I am. After years of hell, I'm finally ending this chapter of my life, and it's still the ending I'd always wanted. It ends with me graduating as valedictorian, giving a speech about life...and bacon.

I have Lyme disease. But that's not something I identify myself with. Four years later, it still takes up and controls the majority of my life and it's in every cell of my body, but I am not my illness.

It just took me a while to learn that I get to decide what things I let define me. We all get to make the choice for ourselves. We get to choose how we define ourselves. I will not be defined by my illness.

I want to take just a minute of my time here and use this amazing platform to spread some much-needed awareness for Lyme disease.

All it takes is just one tiny tick bite and your life can be drastically changed. I really encourage everyone to Google "Lyme disease" and learn a little bit about it. I didn't even know what it was before I got it. Researching it and being aware of what it is can save your life.

Next, I want to give a shout out to the Paso Robles School District. I've gone to four different high schools in the last four years due to my complicated health issues.

I have nothing but great things to say about all the people who helped with my schooling. My teachers have been so kind, caring, understanding and so helpful. Because of their encouragement I'm here today giving this speech. Thank you so much. Truly.

I also have to thank my family for their unwavering love and support. I would not still be alive today without the love of my family. Most importantly, I want to say thank you for believing in me when I stopped believing in myself. You knew I could still be all the things I wanted to be, and I'm glad you pushed me to not give up on myself. Thank you. I'm forever

grateful for everything you all do for me.

I feel lucky to be here. I feel lucky just to be alive. I'm grateful for the amazing people in my life. I'm proud to have graduated, and I'm so truly honored to be your valedictorian. This all means more to me than anyone could ever know.

You can't take sole credit for your accomplishments in life. This isn't just my award. I definitely didn't get here by myself. People say it takes a village and it really does. Who I am today is an accumulation of all the things I've been through and all the people in my life. My life isn't what I thought it'd be, but I'm proud of who I am, and that's what really matters.

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Life...is like bacon. Sometimes it's not very good. Sometimes you burn it and you have to start over. But the beautiful thing about that, is the next batch could be perfect. Today is like a really good batch of bacon.

The last thing I want to say isn't just for my fellow graduating class. This is to everyone here, of any age. If you want some really good bacon, get the thick sliced kind. Pan fry it like you normally would, then put it on a sheet, brush it with maple syrup and oven bake it. Delicious. You'll thank me later.

The actual last thing I want to say to everyone is this: live.

Go out and live. Don't take life for granted, because it can change in the blink of an eye.

Don't let anything hold you back, especially yourself. Enjoy the little things, like bacon. Cherish the big milestones in life and the people you get to share them with.

Be fearless. Be shameless. Be happy. And to quote a little band called Journey, "Don't stop believing. Hold onto that feeling."

I hope you all enjoy your new bacon recipe.

Thank you, and congratulations class of 2016.

[Check out Savannah's blog here](#)

Editor's note: Any medical information included is based on a personal experience. For questions or concerns regarding health, please consult a doctor or medical professional.