**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**KEVIN MILLS**

Hi, my name is Shelby Mills and I am a graduating senior at Southeast Valley High School. I am honored to be here and would like to thank everyone for providing me with this great opportunity to share my thoughts with you, and, of course for listening!! The first thing I think about when I think of our senior class is our quote. It’s by Marilyn Monroe and it really has made us all think…. “Against all odds and despite all the obstacles, we are going to make it.” And when I look at my classmates, I can't help but think that there isn’t a better group of people that has gone through so much but has come out on top. I’m really proud of all we did…. together… as a team.. as a group… and since we are here today, we really can say, **WE MADE IT**!!!

Looking back, we can see that, for freshman year, things were lining up for us to reach the goals we set for ourselves. We watched the class of 2019 achieve so much while they were here. They were great role models and as we observed them, we learned the importance of having a good work ethic, always considering those around us, and the true meaning of teamwork. Through their successes, we realized we were setting ourselves up for our own success that would stay with us for the next three years. To this day, we still watch them, and now, as they have moved on to the next parts of their lives, in college and beyond, they’re doing the same thing they did here, beating their own personal bests, breaking records, performing with passion, and maintaining good grades.

I think it’s obvious that the most difficult year any of us have experienced was Sophomore year, the school year 2019-2020. All of our sports teams except the boys basketball team, had an off year. The musical that year was really challenging. I remember we had endured so much disappointment, and just when we thought it couldn’t get any worse, guess what? It did. On Friday, March 13th 2020, after Mr. Ketcham told us, “I’m not sure what the deal is in the world right now, but I’ll see you all on Monday,” he dismissed us, we went to our cars and went home. Over that weekend I remember sitting on the couch with my mom, and on Sunday, we watched on TV as our governor told us the rest of our sophomore year would be canceled, as well as track, baseball, and softball seasons. What was supposed to be a two week break from school turned into an extended summer break. (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say**)…. And we thought our sports teams were having a bad year!!! (**And wait for the laugh**)…[.](http://www.apple.com) But somehow, in our hearts, I believe we really knew… **AGAINST ALL ODDS**… we would **MAKE IT**.

 Even though we weren't able to carry on with a normal summer, we made it work. Rather than spending summer mornings in the weight room group with Coach Swieter, we bought weights off the internet and put them in our houses. If we couldn’t afford it, we did body weight exercises in our rooms. If we couldn’t compete on the track like a normal track season, we measured out distances and ran sprints in the streets and went for long runs out in the countryside. We may not have fully realized it while we were going through it, but those weird times taught us a really important lesson. We learned to “**make it work**.”

We went through that extended summer wearing masks, standing six feet apart, and not seeing our friends as we would have during a normal summer. During what is usually a time to get ready for the upcoming school year, we had to stay at home, however, August came, and we were so excited to return for our junior year! There were modifications, but we were back. Remember, we were learning to “make it work.”

What I also remember about this year is coming so close but somehow falling short. For example, our football team, after a great regular season, made it to the third round of playoffs, only to lose after desperately wanting to make it to the UNI Dome. The cross country team came so close to meeting both its group and personal milestones, only to fall short. Both basketball teams were just on the edge of achieving their goals. So many track athletes were close to qualifying for state, but not everyone who wanted to go, made it.

The summer after junior year, my classmates and I felt a shift in motivation. We got tired of second place, tired of not quite making it, and collectively, we realized that second place was no longer acceptable. We quit cutting corners and doing the bare minimum. If we had to do something, we did it with purpose. We had a mission, and somehow, **against all odds**, we knew we had to work together to **make it**.

Fall came around and with it, senior year. We were ready. The cross country seniors had the best year of their high school careers. Even though sometimes we may not hear about it, the seniors that competed for cross country this season either had the best times they ever ran, or they matched the best times they had set previously. Needless to mention that not only did our football team make it to the Dome, they became state champions as well, and so many of our classmates made all state, and all tournament teams. Fast forward to winter, and we had wrestling state qualifiers, and they also went and competed really well. In track season, so many of us set meet records and school records. We qualified for Drake, and state.

When I think of all the groups of people I have been around in my life, I can’t imagine another group that has overcome so many challenges and done so well. We have been through so much together, and not once did we throw in the towel or give up. We kept fighting. This spirit didn’t just apply to extra curriculars. I learned that, as so many of my classmates opened up to me about their personal battles, they found the purpose and the spirit needed for living their best lives every day

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I may have “come late to this party,” as I didn’t start at Southeast Valley until my freshman year, but I am so proud to be part of such a promising group of young individuals. We faced the “beast,” we were brave and determined, and we did what was needed to succeed. I cannot wait to watch TV with my family, one day, and to be able to look at my kids and say “I graduated from high school with them.” Our graduating class can be proud of who we have become. We have future college athletes, talented actors and actresses, ready for lead roles in musicals, and, of course, **brainiacs**. I have no doubt that as we continue on our paths in life, we will have olympians, professional athletes, respected business owners, politicians, and service members, all achieving goals because, way back, in high school, we learned that, **against all odds**, if we worked hard, focused, and figured out how to make it work, we **really** **WOULD** **MAKE IT**. Thank you!!