

## **Title: Why You Should Give a Speech**

Since I'm the first person giving a Lowell Speech, I wanted to say a few reassuring words to those speaking after me. Giving a speech is an opportunity, not a chore. I'm a complete stranger to most of you, but when I get behind the mic, suddenly I have your undivided care and attention. This podium allows me to convey a greater sense of confidence and authority than I actually possess.

Small talk is much more daunting than giving a speech. You start out with the same list of questions for every conversation [*How are you, classes, did you see the game last night*]. Then there's a point where you've gone through the list, and someone has to carry the conversation into unfamiliar, and potentially uncomfortable territory.

When people ask me about my siblings, I hesitate. You have a sister? Yes, older. What does she do? Oh, she's in school. Where? What does she study....then I try to steer the conversation to a new topic.

As I grew up, my sister was everyone's pride, especially mine. She set high standards for me, protected me from bullies and eating rocks, and made sure everyone knew I was her brilliant baby brother.

She's the sort of person who everyone adores. She has a smile glued to her face, talks with the enthusiasm of a children's TV show host, and brings cheer to everyone she's around.

I want everyone I meet to have this perfect image of my sister, but I know it's a lie.

A few years ago, our family got an unexpected letter from my sister's university. Starting with that letter, we learned many harsh truths about my sister over the next few months. Quote: "Your daughter has been placed on academic probation." A forged signature from her advisor. The flawless transcript she boasted about last semester, also forged. Tuition refunded. More failed courses at two different universities. Reinstatement denied. Sending her off to find her way in a new city all alone. Seeing her dream of becoming a professor replaced with a Starbucks apron.

Truth spreads quickly. My sister's friends soon asked, "Hey, what's your sister doing back home?" My relatives asked, "How can a smart girl like that drop out of school?" My parents asked, "What did we do wrong?" Everyone used to brag about my sister, but then they talked about her with whispers.

At first I tried to help her. For the first time in my life, my parents asked me, "Bryan, what do we do?" I didn't have a good answer. Tried to get her to talk to a good friend but she hung up. Every day, my sister would still beam at me and say everything was fine.

Then I felt betrayed. *Her smile is so fake. Do her best friends even know? Another lie, when can I trust her again?*

I chose to deal with my sister the way most families deal with conflicts: ignore the problem until it goes away. I've never asked my sister to confide her feelings to me. I try to protect her reputation by only telling people a brief profile. *Asian. 5'2". Stocky. Likes cats.*

But when she introduces me to a new face, they already know about all of my accomplishments. When I visit her it feels like there's a new holiday called *My Brother is Awesome Day*. She gives me gifts that make me cringe because they are too perfect.

My parents relearned how to speak about my sister with pride. *Look at how many new friends she's made. School doesn't always give you life experience.* I used to think these were hollow words my parents used to shield their disappointment.

But really, I'm afraid to say these same words because it makes me vulnerable. I'd like to forgive my sister like my parents have done and say to her face, "Alex, I'm proud you've overcome." But then I fear those words will reawaken those years of lies and failures for me and for her. I'd like to tell my friends all about my sister, but I'm afraid they will be harsh judges.

For some strange reason, I've found the Lowell Speeches to be the perfect forum to talk about my sister. During small talk I feel the hot breath of my peers seeping through my shirt, but here in the D-hall, everyone accepts your words. Hopefully someday, I'll have the courage to show my family a transcript and video of my speech, but for now, you all get to be the first people to hear the whole truth about my wonderful, charming, and crazy sister Alex.