Today I want to congratulate you on these past 13 years. For enduring. For suffering. For surviving. All those little things that make up our time at school. Like the majority of you I’d wake up in the mornings filled with dread. Desperately hanging on to hopes of freak snow storms that were so extreme that school was closed for the day. Just the other day my little cousin started his first day of school. He was so adorable with his little collared shirt, clean uniform, shiny little shoes and neatly combed hair. There was only one problem. The poor kid was smiling.

I remember when I was excited to go to school. And I also remember the day when that excitement came to an end. It was year two. The day we were got to create fish artwork. Well I thought mine was pretty great. Like the Mona Lisa of our modern day. I lavished it with every bright colour imaginable and deep concentration and care. I shared my expertise with my fellow classmates encouraging them to go all rainbow coloured. Pleased with my efforts I presented it to my teacher with pride and satisfaction and a grin so wide it probably looked like Botox, and I awaited her reaction. But there was no praise. ‘No. no no no no no. What is this you’ve done it all wrong. Too many colours.’ ‘But it’s a rainbow fish.’ And then she said it. ‘Rainbow fish don’t exist.’

Excuse me, excuse me. You’re kidding right? I put all this time, this effort, this greatness in my drawing and you tell me rainbow fish don’t exist? Rainbow fish don’t exist? Rainbow fish do exist! This is what was going through my head but I just stood there head down, mourning the rejection of my poor beautiful rainbow fish. It’s strange how it’s the little things like that we remember. Despite my sadness and crushing shame, I remember my friend squeezing my hand and whispering to me that she really liked my rainbow fish, its bright colours and all. No matter what. That little moment made all the difference and it is something I will always treasure.

Even though I no longer have the same innocent excitement for school I had when I was five, even though most mornings I wake up thinking ‘today I don’t feel like doing anything I just want to lie in my bed,’ and even though I had my childhood dreams of rainbow fish destroyed, school and life isn’t that bad. And it’s all because of you. All of you. John Lennon was so right when he wrote “I get by with a little help from my friends.” We do need a little help from our friends. We all do.

“So thank you to our parents for helping us with our decisions, giving us support and love. Also buying me a new jersey when I lose it... And my umbrella... And my cell phone... Seriously though I totally agree with Magic Johnson, basketball great, who said about his childhood: “All kids need is a little help, a little hope and somebody who believes in them.” You’ve given us these things...... Finally thank you classmates and friends. You are the ones we have shared it all with. Thank you for all the advice, the encouragement, the explanations that hit home better than any textbook. For the shared suffering, joy and jokes. The big things and the little. Thank you all of you. From each other we have learnt more than worksheets or study or homework could have ever taught us. School isn’t just about learning that a squared plus b squared equals c squared. School is a collection of those moments. Good or bad we hold them with us, learn from them and are encouraged by them. They shape who we are today.

“So who am I now? I am a Christian. Every Sunday I go to church, every Friday I help out with the youth service, working as a sound technician or helping with worship for the Sunday school. My church and Christian faith are a big part of my life and have influenced me a lot. I credit my achievements and any confidence I have to God and relationships I have with Christian friends. I am a student at .... College where I study Physics, English,
Maths, Design and Art. I’ve been part of Stage Challenge for the past few years as well as various other dance and performing groups. I even somehow got convinced to join Chinese Dance. But what do I want to after school? What are my plans after this? Well to be honest I’m not really sure. And I’m actually pretty scared.

All our lives so far for the last 13 years have been planned for us. We turn 5 and start primary. We finish primary but we just go on to intermediate. Intermediate’s done but we still have college. Now College is done and well what’s after that? Go to University, get a job, or travel the world? Who do we want to be?

What do we want to do? What do we want for the world? Our world, our future. All these questions we are faced with. Will we make the right decisions? For us, for our world and for our future. When we were little and imagined our future we generally thought of this ideal world with flying cars and amazing technology. Colour, energy and life. The image is not of cities flooded as a product of global warming, skinny malnourished kids stumbling through streets of waste searching for food suffering the burden of famine and poverty. We didn’t imagine pollution - toxic fumes clouding the sky, or crimes so horrific that prison becomes a place we go to keep away for criminals, a place where we put bars on our windows and lock ourselves inside for protection. War, depression, oppression.

Yet this could very easily be our future. The thing is riding on our shoulders. So how can we determine that our future is better.

It comes down to one word. Love. How do we put a stop to the negative effects we are having on the environment around us? Love. How do we stop disease like obesity, depression and suicide? Love.

How do we stop crime? How do we stop oppression and strive for equality? Love. Love for our environment. Love for others. Love for ourselves and our bodies. Love, it’s something we’ve heard so much from friends, family, and media. It’s become so overused that the very mention of the word probably causes you to groan. But without it what will happen? Is it too ambitious to say love can change the world?

It doesn’t mean that you have to start handing out heart balloons and hugs to everyone you meet, or straight declaring that you love them like forever. In fact I think most of us would prefer you refrain from doing so. In the words of Frank Howard Clark ‘Everyone is trying to accomplish something big, not realizing that life is made up of little things.’ Like telling a friend that you really like her picture of a rainbow fish no matter what.

So think about what you will do today. All those people you will meet or walk past. What if we look past ourselves and look out for others? Next time someone speaks to you stop texting, take your headphones out and make the effort to listen. See a piece of rubbish on the floor? Simply pick it up. Maybe a kid walks pass you struggling to carry a stack of books. Offer to help. Instead of ranting about that super annoying girl in your English class and her boring speech on Facebook or tumblr, use that time and effort to maybe send a message of encouragement to one of your friends. These aren’t big time consuming deeds.

At most they take a few minutes and a little effort. The impact of that time and effort however is not little.

‘It’s not too late to seek a newer world.’ We can achieve a better future. It’s our choice. As Ghandi said ‘Be the change you want to see in this world.’ As you carry on with your lives today remember the people around you. If you want a better future you’ve got to care. Start little. Start now. Start with love.