

Principal, Vice Principal, Members of Staff, Specially Invited Guests, Parents, Students, my Fellow Graduates. Good Morning!

I am deeply honoured and humbled to address you this morning. Let me begin by saying Congratulations to the Class of 2020! We never envisioned that the final chapter of our high school departure would be so uncertain. The Class of 2020 has proven to be one of the most resilient. We were the first of many—the first to complete our syllabus through online platforms, the first to present a very valid excuse for missing Mock Exams, to first to sit CAPE, masked and social distanced. But despite these major hurdles, Naparima College had already prepared us over the years, with the necessary tools and techniques required to withstand these trials.

Almost a decade ago we overcame the nerve-wracking 2013 S.E.A. Examinations, earning one of the well-coveted spots at this noble institution. Remember the sense of pride we felt as we entered the hill on that very first day. With our neatly ironed uniforms—two sizes too big, and lunch bag in hand, we floundered down the hall in search of our classrooms. I remember getting lost that day, walking into a form 4 classroom, everyone towering over me, as I was at that time just two inches shorter than I currently am. We met so many unfamiliar faces—from our seat mates who would eventually become our brothers, to the sleep deprived form sixes surviving on four cups of coffee. But despite the anxiety and fear of the unknown that very first day, we couldn't wait to meet our parents and recount that Naparima College was everything we had dreamed of and more. But for me, my day ended in tears as my mom picked me up thirty minutes late, with the fabricated excuse that there was “traffic”. (For those of you who don't know, I live just two minutes away from school).

Little did we know that we had to face an even bigger challenge that the SEA exam—Miss Persad's singing test. And if asking a group of pubescent boys to sing before a class wasn't embarrassing enough, I was actually the only one in our year to be kicked out of the school's choir. Our lower school years provided us the opportunity to enter uncharted intellectual territory—we bonded over building baking soda and vinegar rockets, creating tie-dye wall hangings, performing original skits, and of course mastering “Let there be Peace on Earth” on the recorder. Drama journals and group projects eventually turned into lab books and weekend study groups as we now embarked on both the CSEC and CAPE journey. How privileged we were to have been taught by such industrious teachers at the most prestigious educational institution in the Caribbean!

Naparima College also fostered within us school spirit through the numerous sports days, marathons, bazaars and rhythm section performances. Remember in 2020 when the unthinkable happened? (And I don't mean Covid). I'm talking about the guidance of Azriel and Daniel who led Flemington house to their first victory in over ten years. We learnt about healthy competition through the staff vs students cricket matches,

interclass sports competitions, and the Naps vs Pres football matches. Clubs such as UNESCO, Interact and Peer Supporters taught us to be our brother's keeper and better global citizens. We appreciated our culture through involvement in the Carnival celebrations, ICC and ACC Clubs, Spanish food fair and religious clubs.

But some of our fondest memories at Naparima College we owe to the staff. We witnessed the talents of Miss Hutton, Miss Seepaul, Mr. Nazim Mohammed, Mr Emmanuel Singh, Mr Nagaur and many others with their hilarious skits at any school concert. We cherished the melodious voice of Miss Doodnath and eagerly looked on at our annual Sports Day for Miss Archer, all bedecked in her blue tutu. Who can forget the time we flipped the classroom on Miss Sukhu, and she completely flipped out? The joke was on us as we had to write our notes that Friday evening with books in hand. Miss Hutton kept us in shape whenever we forgot to bring our excuse for being absent, by making us do pushups. We also certainly enjoyed the visit to the Kiss factory and Chuck E. Cheese courtesy of Miss Ada Mohammed and Miss Prabudai Jaggernauth.

May we forever be grateful to our committed teachers who moulded us into decent young men, walking us through the many trials we experienced as high school teenagers and sticking with us, ensuring that we were all successful throughout our high school journey. To the Principal, Vice Principal, Heads of Department, Deans and Administrative Staff we say a heartfelt thank you. To Dr. Michael Dowlath, whose easy-going temperament made him especially approachable to the student body, and whose expert advice facilitated the development of good character, worthy of being called a Naparima student.

To the office and library staff, thank you for your unwavering support and assistance throughout the years. To the janitorial and cafeteria staff, we sincerely thank you for making our stay at Naps a very rewarding one. Special mention must be made of Mr. Alfred Pancham, who was not just another member of staff but a very loyal friend to all. To our hardworking security staff, we commend you for creating a safe and conducive environment, always going above and beyond the call of duty.

Our deepest gratitude goes out to our parents and guardians for being our greatest supporters. Their love and encouragement have motivated us to be exemplary young men. I personally want to take the opportunity to thank my mom and dad who have been my constant pillars of support and guidance in my life. Your endless sacrifices, unconditional love and dedication has enabled my success. There are no words to express my gratitude and I love you both dearly.

We must pay tribute to our classmate Adam Sukhbir who because of his great determination and courage, became the best that he could. We were all inspired by his resilience; Adam was a pinnacle of strength to all of us. Sadly Adam passed in October, 2021 and we will always remember him.

We, the class of 2020, are a powerhouse of innovation and creativity. We will push boundaries to make the world a better place. Always remember the values that Naparima College has instilled in us as we venture into the world, filled with endless and unforeseeable possibilities. Just keep believing in yourself. Be humble. Be kind to others. Be passionate in all your endeavours. But most of all, stay true to yourselves.

Before I end, I'd like to leave you with the ending lyrics of the song "The Next Chapter of Our Lives" by Shane Harper.

This is not goodbye,
It's time to write
The next chapter of our lives.

Can't erase yesterday
We'll remember it always
'Cause we started something that won't ever end.

Now let's write,
The next chapter of our lives.

Congratulations to the Class of 2020! We finally made it! Thank you