

## **Valedictorian Speech - Malique Auguste - 2022**

Good morning guest speaker, specially invited guests, staff, parents and of course, the graduating class of Form 5, 2020 to 2021. Today, my peers, I bid you heartfelt congratulations. We made it through CSEC and not to mention an entire pandemic. It's a tremendous achievement for all of us and our parents and teachers who supported us along the way.

When we entered this esteemed College in form 1, over 6 years ago, some of us were barely taller than 4 feet and had baby faces, but now many tower over their parents and others have beards and moustaches in dire need of a trim if I'm being honest. I myself barely have any whiskers. But if anything, those physical changes are nothing compared with the lessons we've learnt, the people we've met and the experiences we've shared during our time at Naparima College.

I recently had a conversation with a friend of mine and we were discussing what we liked about Naps. The central thing that we settled on was the community of brotherhood. Midway through standard three, I transferred over to St Paul's Boys Anglican school, it's the primary school opposite the grounds by Lewis Street. They welcomed me with open arms and pushed me a lot academically but I must admit that I would have preferred it if we got to spend more time in group activities getting to know each other better. That of course wasn't the fault of the school, it was nearing the time to prepare for SEA and I was just the transfer student who didn't feel as though he properly fit in.

On the first day of Naps, however, I guess we were all like that transfer student; shyly walking through the halls, not knowing where to go or who to speak to. Some of us were lucky enough to have already known some people, others not so much. But eventually, we all formed our friend groups and began to make memories that will likely last a lifetime. From our ritual of going to rituals on the last day of exams, chanting for half days and actually getting them, rain sweats on the court to the excitement of Naps vs Pres. I'm sure that no one from 1S will forget playing "infected" almost religiously up until someone got hit by a car. This is the only place I know where a game of tag was temporarily banned.

It wasn't all easy-going though. Naparima College held us to a high standard with all the homework, labs and exams, and of course who could forget the cramming – I mean the constant studious revision that we all engaged in, or at least told ourselves that we would at the start of every year. These shared experiences are what have made us into the men that we are today, the Naps men that we are today.

It's ironic then, that one of the most impactful experiences that we shared was one spent miles apart. I remember when I heard about the first case of Covid-19 in TnT. It was a Friday afternoon and I was at JA, an inter-school club where students get to run a business. We were told that we would be heading home and that JA was cancelled for the foreseeable future. Now I was upset because I had finally worked up the courage to go talk to this girl who normally sat all the way on the other side of the room. I know, I know, it's not that big of a distance but I promise

you it seemed so at the time. Eventually, however, I got over it and started to celebrate the early vacation. The only thing I was concerned about was that we might not be allowed back outside in time for the JA banquet, a celebration that's usually held at the end of the program, because I wanted to ask that girl to dance. But hey it was just going to be a few weeks away from school. How bad could a little flu be? Over 6 million global deaths and 2 years of restrictions later, it is clear that I underestimated this little flu.

During the early stages of the pandemic, I know that many of us didn't pick up a book until our parents forced us to or until the first day of zoom school, and can you blame us? We were suddenly thrown into a new world with greater responsibilities and greater distractions. How easy was it to mute a teacher and then scroll through Instagram or log in to class in one tab and watch YouTube in the next? Others struggled with a lack of devices, inconsistent WiFi and a feeling of loneliness that grew out of the lack of interaction.

Eventually, however, we adapted to this new situation and it became the norm. We learned to implement the vast amount of online resources in our studies and that we could rely on that very community that we had built in the previous years at Naparima College. Many had struggled to separate work and the other parts of their lives as the line between them became increasingly blurred, so we had to learn to draw that line in the sand ourselves.

The most important thing that I learned was to grab on to the opportunities that were thrown my way because you never know when a decade-defining pandemic could just pop out of nowhere and make those opportunities no longer an option. Participate in that competition, join that club, go to that party, ... and you know, talk to that girl a little bit sooner.

This pandemic has led to many changes for better and for worse, but important changes nonetheless. Changes that will forever shape who we are, how we think and how we interact with others for the rest of our lives. It will surely be a while before anyone is comfortable coughing in public again or sneezing loudly.

To the Administration, teaching staff, librarians, office staff and maintenance employees, I express to you the gratitude of all graduates here today, for your support during our time at Naparima. You all made an indelible impact on us, teaching us the values of professionalism, having a strong work ethic and a disciplined determined mindset. To our parents...without your support, encouragement, stern discipline and broad shoulders to carry us through this journey, where would we be? Our gratitude to you for standing by us through the "new normal" cannot be fully expressed.

My fellow graduates, I know it may be a cliché to be optimistic in a graduation speech and I remember in form 4 that Miss Ramdeen made it clear that clichés were essentially a sin when writing and giving speeches. However, today I'm certain that any challenges we face we'll be able to overcome. I'm sure to the Standard 5 you, SEA seemed like a great challenge but you handled it. I'm sure to the Form 5 you, CSEC seemed like a great challenge but you handled it. I'm sure CAPE, the job that you're working at, the degree that you're pursuing or whatever

you've been doing for the last year seems like a great challenge as well, but you're overcoming that too. Right now I can say without a doubt that whatever challenge you're dealing with or that's on the horizon, you'll be able to deal with that too...because that's what we do.

I won't lie to you, overcoming that challenge, getting over that hill, is likely to be difficult, but running from that challenge would be like running on a treadmill. You exert all that energy and in the end, you're right where you started except now you're thirsty and out of breath. So before you try to get away from that problem, know that you can't climb a hill while running indoors. Both activities require the same amount of energy, but only one of them has a nice view in the end. Thank you.