**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ANH NGUYEN**

**"Education, A Bridge for Unity in our society."**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, faculty, administration, distinguished guests, and of course to all of my fellow students and the graduating class of 2017 of Cosumnes River College, I want to thank you for allowing me the chance to speak in front of all of you at these graduation exercises. (**If you want to acknowledge anyone in particular that was involved in having you to speak, do that now**). I would like to express my deep gratitude to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for asking me to speak. I literally would not be here (**point to the spot where you're standing.... )** right on this spot if it were not for the vision and encouragement of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

The theme for this graduation class of 2016 is, "Education, a Bridge For Unity in our Society," and I have to tell you, the more I think about this title, the clearer it becomes to me that **THIS** theme is **MY** theme.... of course I realize and accept that we are all unified in our potential to relate to this... yes it belongs to all of us, but it really sums up my experience, my journey, and my path to Cosumnes and **beyond**. It was on my mission to gain an education in the United States that I discovered my purpose. I discovered what it means to understand. I discovered that education really does connect and unify us.

I am sure we would all agree that this is a great school, and the grounds and area are really beautiful... especially in the autumn. I have had the great privilege to enjoy this atmosphere for several years. In the fall I will move on to transfer to Sacramento State University, but my time here at Cosumnes will always be unique and precious to me.

Each day I spent enrolled in this school has been special. I wake up and feel happy and blessed to be able to study new lessons while meeting new friends and enjoying new experiences. I know that these are memories that will last a lifetime. I don't know how many of you may or may not realize, but in the country from where I came, Vietnam, to have the gift of being able to study in the United States is something about which we all dream. Some people that I know from my home town have already made the journey, and when it was my turn to follow the path, the opportunity for me to come here was presented and I eagerly took it. After all, this is something I had wished for for a long, long time. .... just one simple example of how education creates a bridge to unity...

Of course, life and plans don't always go as we dream, but if we are sincere in our goals, we find a way to overcome obstacles and stumbling blocks on our way to success.... and really... every step on this path has given me a chance to learn and grow... that in itself is the definition of success. When I got here, because of my lack of understanding and my poor command of the English language, I had to begin my studies with ESL courses.... English as a Second Language. Looking back, I may have had a hard time in the beginning but I learned how important it is to have a foundation in order to understand. I remember in the Spring of 2014, I registered to take Accounting 301. That's financial accounting with Professor Parilo.... remember when I dreamed of conquering the world... or at least my American college education? Not so fast!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I didn't do too well. .... truth is that I did really badly, especially on the first test in the class. While I felt sad about the results and desperate to study and succeed, the truth was I didn't understand the lecture, so of course I didn't do well on the test. I was frustrated... I wanted to learn but I knew this wasn't working. I decided to drop out of the class... which is unusual for me. I am not a quitter, but I knew I needed to find more pieces of my education puzzle within me in order for the lectures to make sense. Dropping out of accounting didn't mean I was giving up.... far from it... I knew I had to improve my English and that became my main focus.

I concentrated on ways in which I might practice and improve my English. In the morning when I woke up, I listened to videos on YouTube **(if you want to make a joke you can say**)... you know they have educational videos too!! (**And wait for the laugh**). I watched the news regularly and each night before I went to sleep, I read books... all kinds of books. I was determined to discover the mysteries of education that existed beyond my language barrier. I was focused on understanding and building a bridge... to unify me to the world around me.

In the Spring of 2015, I was ready to face the "beast." I was prepared to listen and learn. I couldn't wait to see how much more I was able to understand. .... so it was back to Accounting 301 with Professor Parilo...**again**...I was so happy that there was so much more that I understood. I was able to follow along as Professor Parilo conducted her lectures and guess what? I got an A on the first exam and on the second, I received a score of excellent.... I knew I was on my way... and that my education and determination were strong enough to build bridges.

I would like to acknowledge Professor Parilo. She's a really good teacher... my experience has been that she encourages me to challenge myself. She makes sure her students grow stronger, and whether she is aware of this or not, she inspires us to dream and to imagine what we might want to do in our careers. From being around the Professor and soaking up her interest in the course, And through her encouragement and enthusiasm in the profession, I realized that I, too, would love to become a CPA, a Certified Public Accountant, just like my Professor!

It was the bridge built by the hunger for education that brought me to United States. That same bridge reached out and supported me to finding my career path. And it is on that bridge to unity that I think of my country, where I came from, and just how blessed I am to have been able to discover my path to understanding and to my dreams. In Vietnam, so many children have no idea what potential exists for them... they can't dream because they probably don't know what to dream for. So many children don't have the opportunity to get higher education.

It is clear to me that the bridge that brought me closer to the world was education. My desire to learn allowed me to travel. It encouraged me to ask questions, and it insured that in order for me to build **MY** bridge, I had to reach out and grab the "bridges" of those around me... and as I join forces through knowledge gained with my classmates, teachers, and even the "talking heads" on YouTube, I know more and more each day just how strong the power of knowledge is. I think of all of the people and children back home in Vietnam and I wonder what I can do to encourage them to join this bridge of unity... and just as I worked so hard to conquer the issues that first stood in the way of my success in Professor Parilo's accounting class, I will find a way to share what I have learned.

I'm so fortunate to have found a happy and interesting life here at Cosumnes River College. I have made friends from many different cultures, religions, and geographic locations, but we have all discovered unity through education. Kofi Annan said, "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family."

I will continue to work and do my best to achieve my goals. I know it doesn't matter how long it takes... after all, is life about the destination or all that we see and learn along the way? No matter how far I find myself going; no matter how many twists and turns I find on my path, I will not stop and I will never forget where I came from. Lao Tzu said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." I am proud to know the importance of taking those steps in order to build bridges and connections to understanding and unity.

Thank you!