**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**YOLANDA ROSA ROSA**

Director Jeanette Espinel, distinguished members of Schiller International University Scholarship Committee, faculty, staff, family and friends, tonight is about completion, acknowledgement, and moving forward. I want you to know that I stand before you, grateful for the opportunities and challenges life presents. I appreciate, more than you can imagine, the privilege of sharing my thoughts with you, and in particular, I want to share this moment with my peers, the Schiller International University graduating class of 2019.

It would be impossible...unthinkable... maybe even a little absurd... to imagine sharing my commencement address, without thanking my father and mother, Alfredo Rosa Cruz and Yolanda Rosa Santiago... They mean the world to me... they are my parents... they are my role models... they are my heroes. They tirelessly demonstrated their determination to excel in life. They constantly persevered when facing adversity. Their devotion and presence provided support and encouragement to me and my siblings, and their commitment to us fulfilled our needs in a healthy and unified family environment. I have grown up, surrounded by the motivation to face and conquer whatever presents itself throughout life.

I am genuinely thankful to my husband, Alex, for being by my side for the past eleven years, for encouraging me to pursue my dreams, for providing unconditional love and dedication. Last but not least, I am very grateful to my two sons, Rodney and Xoel, who set the bar quite high with regard to pursuing goals and mastering studies. To each one of you, the milestone I’ve reached tonight is for all of us.

Life has a way of throwing us “curve balls,” and if we are smart and resourceful, we learn how to catch. Ever since I was a little a girl, it has felt like I’ve lived at an accelerated pace, always seeking to attain the ultimate goal in the least time possible. In high school, I wanted to shorten my path to university, and I did. Along the way, I found “bumps in the road” that took me off route. I married, I became a mother, and I worked as well.  Not having enough time to resume my studies, I attended a two year career college whose course work prepared me for Hospitality and Tourism. Through those early years, I served in Marketing departments and managed events for different hotels, having direct contact with clients from all around the world. It was a fantastic opportunity that I truly appreciated.... the experience has stayed with me all these years.

What was the best part of those early years? I found it fascinating that my job granted me the chance to meet and work with people from all over the world, and we shared one great thing... our **diversity**... diversity in the way we thought,... diversity in the visions and goals we imagined... diversity in the cultures within which we were raised. Learning that... getting to know a little bit of the world beyond my own community provided some of the greatest lessons life has offered, and it gave me the drive to pursue learning **MORE**. People with different backgrounds, different cultures, different understanding, inspire the challenge of getting acquainted with their unique requirements from a fresh perspective. The experience encouraged me to live and work in the Middle East for a while... in Kuwait and Bahrain. This diverse exposure served as motivation to open my mind, soften my heart, and expand my knowledge on a global level. With each experience, I craved more knowledge... and with each bit I learned, I attained more success in my career.

Of course, some things don’t change. I wanted to obtain the most knowledge in the least possible time. I wanted to discover practical, efficient approaches to having clearer vision while serving my international clients in planning and staging their events. I managed to complete my next course in a year and a half. Somehow, deep inside of me, I knew there was more- I wanted to achieve a higher degree **literally**. But time was, as always, a factor.

In 2014, my son Xoel, shared his desire to continue his studies. I offered to help in his search for alternative online learning from an accredited university, and I discovered Schiller. I enrolled in the International Relations and Diplomacy BA degree program, completed in 2018 and went right into my Masters Degree program... that determination.... I will never regret.

Many professors left a great impression during my studies. Professor Henry LaChapelle continuously reminded his students that there was no short cut on the path to success. His words echo in my ears, encouraging me to continue my race to greater understanding. Dr. Lyman Hussey, a man of precise words and colossal wisdom, has also influenced my academic studies with his extraordinary contribution. Last but not least, I cannot forget the excellent administration at Schiller that consistently went the extra mile with their valuable advice.

Schiller International University allowed me to pursue my studies by providing a context in which diversity is embraced. Everyone works together, contributing to achieve a common goal. Diversity is not an “elective.” It’s a necessary subject that, in today’s world, we, as a global society, need to adopt and treasure. Thank you, Schiller, for encouraging that acceptance.