**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**COSMO TERRIGNO**

Hello everyone and welcome to this year’s commencement exercises for Woodland Country Day School’s graduating class of 2021. To all of the family members, parents, friends, colleagues, co-workers, and distinguished guests, it’s really good to see and be with of you on this very special day. I think we can all appreciate that this gathering, this year, holds special meaning, and I know that my family and I feel a deeper sense of appreciation for what we have built here at Woodland, and for the courage, resilience, and determination all of us have employed to insure and support this mighty and focused band of graduates to get to this point... their “finish line” ...on the way to bigger and greater scholastic and personal achievements.

To all of you graduating today, each year, I declare how great the class is... and each year I mean it. For you, you stood on the shoulders of those students that have preceded you. As you carry on, you’ll realize that the younger schoolmates that are coming up through the ranks have your shoulders upon which to stand. While this graduating class may be comprised of just seven very capable students, your achievements and impact on this school are tremendous. You prevailed in what was obviously a very challenging atmosphere....clearly none of us had the tools or previous practice to know how to get the work done in a global pandemic, but each one of you brought light, curiosity, enthusiasm, and a strong sense of community to your commitment to school.... you kept the flame alive here at Woodland, and for that, you’ve given us very broad, strong shoulders upon which the future will balance and succeed. Congratulations!!

We are here today to acknowledge and honor this year’s graduates, however, it’s important to also recognize and celebrate the context within which we all function. That, of course, is this school and it’s environment and legacy that inspires us consistently. Woodland Country Day School is proud to be a community of students, faculty, and parents working together to create a nurturing and inspired environment... one that supports the intellectual, social, physical, and moral growth of its students. Our school is nondenominational and functions as a private-independent school. It’s situated in the woods of Southern New Jersey and features our main building, Ivy Manor, built in 1815. To anyone who knows us, they, and **you**, know that Ivy Manor is more than just a building. It’s a beacon that has served as an example of what a community can accomplish. This building has endured the tests and challenges of time for the past two hundred and six years. It literally shows us the importance of having a strong foundation.... of being resilient and being strong enough to survive the unexpected forces of time and nature. It shows us the importance of adaptability, and every day, we can choose to be inspired by the weathered yet proud masonry. There is a word that you’ve probably not heard. It’s “pentimento.” The dictionary definition teaches us that it means, “the presence or emergence of earlier images, forms, or brushstrokes that have been changed or painted over.” In this case, what it means is that each year that passes forms a layer of life that this building and school, has seen and hosted. It’s been standing as a symbol for Woodland Country Day for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years and before that, it served to provide strength and shelter for so many different people and events. Graduates, Ivy Manor and what it symbolizes, will now live on in you, and your experience here, at school, will join the other countless layers that have built the rich history and heritage that hopefully, will continue to inspire, strengthen, and support future generations. This school has always been dedicated to educational excellence in an environment that focuses on building self-esteem, confidence, and respect for others. Every aspect of having a strong foundation: academics, athletics, and aesthetics, are all forefront in our collective intention of providing the greatest building blocks for each of our students.

 As I mentioned, this Class of 2021 may be small in numbers, but **BOY**, are you diverse in character!! All of the other staff, faculty members, and I, are continually impressed by you grads!!! You’re dedicated, smart and wonderful leaders of this school and your futures are bright, for sure. What’s really great, and has been a constant source of inspiration, is how your interests and skills are remarkably diverse, yet you’ve never ceased to come together as a class—each one of you bringing your own gifts and talents to the table, and that collective sense of community and acceptance never fails to reap the benefits of the greater good. I also must say that you have always led by example and, as such, you’ve made your parents, faculty, and staff incredibly proud.

It’s no secret that this class is graduating during the year that saw the continuance of a global pandemic. If anything, what this past year has taught all of us is that the future is not guaranteed, and while we never know what awaits us around the corner, the most important thing we can do in life is to keep learning... to remain open to new ideas and to be receptive to “creative problem solving.” This past year has taught us of the importance of critical thinking- of doing research, of exploring options, and of discovering paths to success that we may not have thought about before. In that aspect, we have all received the education of a lifetime- literally. That it happened for you graduates, while you’re still so young and impressionable, is, in a way, a tremendous gift. These times give us the opportunity to value the basics in life, and you did just that. Although the year’s activities and events have been modified due to the pandemic, your spirits clearly prevailed. You’ve faced your fears and considerations like real troopers... with understanding and wisdom we normally would have expected to see in much older students. Through it all, you’ve upheld the school’s mission both online and in person.  Each of you continue to seek out ways to help others and to really find joy in your learning experience. The Roman philosopher Seneca said, “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” Graduates, you’ve taught us that no matter the circumstances, reality can be rich, nurturing, and inspiring. You’ve truly demonstrated what it means to be “senior” to whatever circumstances come our way. Thank you for that!!

As you move on to the next chapters of your lives and your education, I know you will keep your experience of Woodland Country Day School close to your hearts and minds. For the past eight years, or however long each one of you has been here, you’ve been instilled with the mission of this school. The message is a thoughtful one... one that was created for a purpose... to serve you well past the day you move on from here.

1- “Help us to stand for the hard right against the easy wrong”

2- “Teach us to work as hard and play as fair in your sight alone, as if all the world saw” 3- “Forgive us when we are unkind and help us to forgive those who are unkind to us”  4- “Send us chances to do some good every day and so to grow more in your grace and favor.”

I think we can all agree that Woodland is more than a just a school. We have created a family, one that continues to evolve and weather the storm, like Ivy Manor. I know in my lifetime, and in my educational career, never has our individual and collective resolve been so tested... literally. This year we came together in uncertainty to teach and encourage our students in their studies and personal development. We were able to do that out of the respect and appreciation we have for each other, and we were and are, deeply aware of the importance of enriching our students. Throughout the challenges we faced we have become closer and stronger in our friendships and relationships, and that is a priceless gift.

Graduates, the bottom line is, never stop learning. Take what you’ve learned here at Woodland and go forth. Continue to explore, challenge, and feed your minds and souls with openness, honesty, and a real passion for life. You will always be a part of the “pentimento” of Woodland, and for that, we are happy and proud. Thank you for being part of our family, and for teaching us!!! Congratulations!!