**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JAMES STRAIT**

Hello everyone, and welcome the this year’s commencement exercises for the senior class of Kubasaki High School!!! To the parents, families, and friends of our graduates, thank you for being here and for the continued encouragement and inspiration you provide for our students and especially this year’s senior class. To our teachers, administrators, and distinguished guests, clearly, we would not be here without your relentless dedication to building educational foundations and character driven future leaders. To our graduates…. What can I say??? **ALMOST DONE**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). You’re **almost** out of here… ready to move forward to the next steps on your paths to the rest of your lives. While we tend to look at graduation day as **completion**… an ending to a major chapter in your lives, it really is a **beginning**. With each page we turn and every door that closes behind us, we are presented with something new… exciting…. As yet undiscovered… and **EVERYTHING** in our paths invites the opportunity to **LEARN**.

I am so proud to say that even in the face of unimaginable …. And I mean **REALLY** unimaginable challenges, such as what we have collectively experienced for the past couple of years, you, our students, showed remarkable resilience as you demonstrated innovative ways to somehow, still coordinate and participate in memorable school-wide events. It makes me smile to think of the creativity involved as you planned for and attended outdoor Homecoming, Prom, and Pep Rallies. It was so great to witness your enthusiasm as you supported your upper classpeople by assisting in the previous senior class' drive-through graduation ceremony and parade. And what about the senior bowling social event??? If any of you didn’t know what the word “**keggler**” meant before that evening (**afternoon?**) trust me…. several of you should be proud to use that word now!!! (**Note… it means “bowler.”**). You collectively shone during Senior lock-in, and truly demonstrated you are **SENIOR** to unpredictable circumstances!! … and COVID friendly Kubi Fest gave us **ALL** a reason to celebrate!! It is an inspiration to witness our students provide a support system for each other while living here, in Japan. The reality of our base being locked down kept you, our students, from fully experiencing the Japanese culture to a great extent, but somehow, you managed to get the message…. The way in which you got together and helped with beautifying our campus using numerous Eagle Scout Projects was so refreshing in so many ways. The new initiative established with artwork… I’m referring to the dragon mural on the gym building, and gardening around the school campus, demonstrate that your experience, in spite of imposed limitations, absorbed and honored the inherent culture of this community and country. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it has shown us that there are broader ways to gather as a group, share ideas, and devise and participate in, new experiences outside of what we thought was possible. That is creativity that goes beyond an event. **THAT** kind of creativity opens doors to entire new worlds and shows us just how much we can achieve when we are resourceful. I don’t know if I’ve said this before, but I think it’s more applicable now, especially after what we’ve experienced. There is a quote that teaches us, “Nothing is impossible. The very word itself says, ‘**I’M POSSIBLE.**’” Those are wise words to live by!!

Graduates, as members of military families and as students here at Kubasaki High School, you’ve faced unique circumstances, and while those unique circumstances may sometimes limit a sense of security… a feeling of belonging, please know that each one of you holds a special place in this world, and what you’ve been through, whether it’s frequent moves, deployment of parents and family members, the uncertainty of what may happen in the future, I want you to know that there’s a plus side to all of this. You are more prepared to face a world filled with … **WHO KNOWS**??? With a strong educational foundation, well developed character, and an inherent dedication to honoring your personal integrity, you are on the right road to changing the world… and whether you like it or not, you **WILL**. Sometimes, we may not be aware of the effect we have on people and situations, but think of the impact others have had on you. We all exist, wherever we are, in relationship to others. As you go out and explore the future, think about the positive effect you want to have on others. There is a line in a poem by the British poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson that teaches us, I am part of all that I have met.” You know who, in your lives, has become a part of you….think about how you want to be a part of others’ lives…. how **YOU** can best use your own “**secret sauce…**” your common sense, your kindness, your sense of humor, your talents, your ability to listen **AND** speak up… to make your mark and change the world….. and I want to give you a little tip…. Existence **CONSTANTLY** changes… now it’s **YOUR TURN** to shape your lives, your communities. **YOUR** world, to make it a better place for all. **EVERYTHING** you do matters. Even when you don’t think it’s possible, your actions impact others. Be conscious, compassionate, and engaged in the world around you. Find your voice. Use it productively. Make a **difference**. Congratulations!!! Thank you!!