Greetings esteemed administrators, teachers, dearest parents and families. It is an immense honor and privilege to be addressing you today: Class of 2016. It is often said that graduation is the end of a chapter and the beginning of another. Indeed, your last four years are full of stories that are worthy of celebration, and that give you reason to be thankful for providing a foundation for greater and better things. So let’s begin …

When I became Board President in December 2015, I was handed a schedule of my duties. The one that caught my greatest attention was the 2016 graduations. I am not the best public speaker, as has been pointed out many times, but I figured that I had plenty of time to prepare and ponder what I would say to you. So here I am today; humble and thankful for being given the opportunity to be transformed by the many wonderful experiences I have had and perhaps to inspire you as your K-12 education comes to an end.

You are all too young to remember the original Polaroid cameras, and there may even be some newer “reborn” models, but I don’t know for sure. You see my generation and older grew up with these cameras. They were marketed as “instant cameras,” but in reality there was “wait” time - a ‘development’ time before the final image emerged. Sure some of us thought waving the proof around would speed up the process, but for sure it didn’t – that image developed within the specified time – when the time was right.The image became crystal clear at that point.

Why am I telling you about a camera you might ask.Well unlike current information technology where iphone, IPADs, Androids can make things happen instantly, I want you to think about your life, and the need to take time to transform and develop into the person who can makes great changes in this world. Yes,these last 13 years of education are the first steps in a journey that will constantly change and bring new conditions under which you will develop into a stronger and better person.

Personally, education and books were my ‘Polaroid” camera, because ofwhat it did for me. I will be lying to you by saying that my school years were the most pleasant memories that are eked in my mind. Contrary to that perception, my fellow students used to tirelessly judge and sometimes mock me because I wasn’t quite as ‘smart’ as them. So in an attempt to console my inner self, I blamed poverty that led to the worsening of things around me. In my moments of loneliness,I immersed myself in books andsomething hit me: I found myself enjoying reading those books. It was between the covers of those books I could go anywhere, I could be anybody, I could do anything. I began to read about people who accomplished great things, and as I read those stories, I began to see a connecting thread. I began to realize, and believe,that the person who has the most control of what happens to you in life is YOU. YOU make decisions. YOU decide how much energy goes into every decision. I came to understand that I had control of my own destiny. After comprehending that poverty in itself is only as temporary as a mirage, I refuted the thought of hating poverty. I knew I could change it and it was incredibly liberating for me. I figured out that I didn’t need the approval of others to transform my situationand life. I figured out that the outside noise only clouded my future hopes, so I let them go.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else, is the greatest accomplishment”.

But rest assured precious ones that we are going to make it and blossom thanks to the tools we’ve been equipped with by this articulate institution; blended with the most passionate teachers for their relentless job, guidance and all-round expertise.

It is my prayer and hope that the education you have received opens the door of prosperity Don’t stop questioning things, don’t stop examining things, stay curious, and remember to put your education, energy, and enthusiasm to good use to make this a better world for succeeding generations for a better and blessed America.