

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR DIEGO MARTIN
NORTH SECONDARY SCHOOL**

FEATURE ADDRESS

**THE HONOURABLE SHAMFA CUDJOE
MINISTER OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: Friday April 15, 2016

Venue: Lucien Road, Diego Martin

Time: 8.30am

- Mr. Clayton Patrick, Principal of the Diego Martin North Secondary School
 - Mr. Olson Oliver, School Supervisor III
 - Ms. Sherice Beddoe, Valedictorian
 - Parents round of applause
 - And most importantly, the Graduating Class of 2016 Round of applause
 - Teachers, Parents, Guardians and Friends of the Graduating Class
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You have made it!

You could have been somewhere else, doing something else but you are here. This story could have had a different ending, but thank God for his mercies you are here. You could have dropped out of school and joined a gang, but you are here.

You could have had a baby, and give up on your education but you are here. You could have chosen to get a job to help with your family's financial situation, but you stayed the course, you are here.

And the simple fact that you are here is cause for a celebration. Even before you sit your CXC's, I tell you it is cause for a celebration. There is purpose in your presence...that is cause for a celebration.

Again, I say you could have been elsewhere, but you chose to be here....ladies and gentlemen, that is cause for a celebration.....Give these champions a riveting round of applause.

I am excited for you today.

So excited to celebrate this milestone achievement with you today... to celebrate your diligence, perseverance, commitment and your sacrifice... the closing of a chapter, and the beginning of a new one.... a new chapter of hope, peace, productivity, and endless opportunity.

Today, you get to remember and to reflect....today you also get to reposition and to press reset. And that is the beauty of graduation... the beauty of new beginnings. So Diego Martin Secondary, please bear with me in expressing my excitement and sincerest congratulations.

It is indeed a privilege and a distinct pleasure to stand before you this morning as your feature speaker for Graduation 2016. I am pleased to be invited by I thank you for the opportunity...it is an honour indeed.

Now as you may all know, I hail from Tobago, so when Diego Martin North Secondary made this request of me to be the Feature Speaker at its Graduation Ceremony, I was caught off-guard. So earlier in the week I went on a little journey to try to catch my bearings.

So I told my friends about this assignment. Then I said “tell me what I need to know about Diego Martin North Secondary”

Finally, I found a friend from the Diego Martin area who told me “I do not know too much about that school, I went to the better school.” What do you mean, I said?

The person responded “Those students come from marginalised communities, and their parents are not so financially sound, stable or lack discipline. And that’s all that I could tell you, because I didn’t go there, I went to the better school”.

And I smiled...because that flower fell right in my garden...so close to home that at the time I couldn’t even respond...I just smiled....because when I passed common entrance in 1993, I passed for Scarborough Secondary, and there was so much disappointment and despair because I did not pass for the better school.

Further, I was born in Mason Hall, my mother’s birthplace. For the most part, a very decent and disciplined people who focused on hard work and education. My father is from Bethel Village, known for fearless fighters, ...before my grandfather passed, he instructed my mother...whatever you do, do not take up residence in Bethel...it is no place to raise your children...but a little after grandfather died, my parents moved the entire family of 7 to no other village but Bethel....Because they knew all too well, that it mattered not where you are from. What matters is the content of your character and how well you focus on getting to your desired destination.

None of my siblings did not attend the better schoolbut I am proud to say today that they are all living decent lives. Daddy died but we were fortunate because we all dared to dream. Our parents loved us, supported us and no matter how old we got, showered us with love.

It was about pursuing your dream, discipline and strength of character.

So here I am 23 years later..... I did not go to the better school but the hurdles I had to jump and the obstacles I had to overcome, caused me to be better schooled.

So in that vein I salute you, because you have beaten the odds.

What the naysayers don't understand is that these institutions and circumstances increase strength, embolden courage, amplify confidence.... strengthen character. All the necessary characteristics of a dream chaser. **Because dreaming alone is not enough....nobody gets anywhere by simply being a dreamer...success belongs to those who persevere, those who do not just dream, but those who chase those dreams relentlessly.**

Chase them like your life... your existence ... your survival depend on it... because they really do,

Those of us from these communities know all too well about dreaming.... We dream of a better life, a bigger house, a better job, a more stable home, the opportunity to go to college, to see another country to go out to dinner, to go on a family vacation...and the list goes on.... Do not tell us about dreaming, we know that all too well.

But whoever told you that dreaming enough, told you a lie,

You see dreaming is the easy part. Pursuing the dream is the challenge.

Because the dream itself is a journey. On the simplest level, it takes commitment, time, desire, and courage. Nothing great is ever easily realised. You have to challenge yourself; you have to get out of your comfort zone. Challenge your ability, and trample on the boundaries to which you have been confined.

Be the first one in your family to go to university. Make it all the way to a Master's Degree.

The first to establish your own business

The first to seek opportunities in a foreign country

Why not? Why not you? Why not now?

Your parents and fore-parents worked, sacrificed, cried, bled and died, not for you to walk in their footsteps but for you to have a better life. My mother always said, I am a checker, and I will walk barefoot and naked before you become one.

You owe it to yourself, you owe it to your family, you owe it to your community, and you owe it to your country. The opportunities you have now, your parents could not have fathomed...GATE, scholarships, business grants, exchange programmes, internet...you name it ...the world is on your side...rooting for your to get with the programme...the only obstacle between you and your dreams is you....

Anything you want....anything your heart desires....once you could think about it, it can be done....

So Dream big, because if you dream it, you could achieve it.

“Dream bold, if your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough.”

- **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**

You see the size of your dreams must always exceed your current capacity to achieve them. This is where faith in the infinite source steps in. We often find ourselves questioning our fitness and capacity to realise our dreams. In fear, we question each and everything....finding all the reasons why we cannot, rather than why we can.

Poor me syndrome, always the weak one, always the victim...

And as I think on this, Moses, of the Good Book, immediately comes to mind. He stuttered and God chose him to speak to Pharaoh. He felt inadequate and unable to achieve the greatness God had laid before him. God often chooses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel?" Exodus 3:11. "I am not eloquent, neither before or since you have spoken to me, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Simply put, please do not take me out of my comfort zone. I appreciate you thinking of me, but this might be a little bigger than I can handle.

Moses failed to see the dream because he was focused on the obstacles.

We are guilty of the same most times.

I told you earlier that there is purpose in your presence. God did not bring you this far to leave you. He did not give you air in your lungs to simply sit around. God gives you life, because he has work for you to do.

And if we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, then what are we afraid of?

Our biggest fear

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Do not be discouraged

So don't you be discouraged by the people who don't understand your dream or don't support your journey. The ones who say who does he think he is or when she got so stuck up? ”

You may wonder, why does your dream affect them? Why is it their business? That's because you have called them out. You have challenged their comfort zones. They fear your success because of the implications that it may have on their lives. They worry that they would lose their partner in crime or their pal in pity.

In some cases they become so locked into mediocrity that it is impossible for them to imagine your success. So they view your journey with skepticism....but don't you be distracted....dreaming takes focus, determination, courage and grit....keep pressing on...what others say about you, is simply not your business. And the sooner you get those losers out of your life...you'll get closer to realising your dreams.

Guard your head

Your mind is a special gift from God. It is one of the most important tools in your arsenal. While our minds can be the epicenter of creative and influential leadership, our minds are also battlegrounds that must be guarded. All moral failure begins in the mind. And it is in this light I say, guard your head.

I want to influence young people, so I pay attention to their music, and I found myself falling in love with this one hit... the beat is infectious...and I don't care who you are or where you come from When Dexter Daps drops Shabba mother pot, if you don't bob your head.

But if you listen to the lyrics....that song and so many others like it, contributes to everything that is wrong in our society.

There is no way that you could be feeding your mind with that kind of rubbish while you chase your dreams...it is impossible

So I urge you

Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words. Be careful of your words, for your words become your actions. Be careful of your actions, for your actions become your habits. Be careful of your habits, for your habits become your character. Be careful of your character, for your character becomes your destiny.

We battle an old sinful nature that often clouds our thinking. We live in a world that bombards us with false and counterfeit philosophies. And we have an enemy who is constantly on the prowl seeking to devour us.

Guard your head. Protect your dream.

Dreaming is easy; pursuing the dream is the challenge.

You want something, go get it. Be that beacon of hope, that small light in a dark room. **Get out there and choose You everyday...** no boyfriend or girlfriend. You have to be your own hero every single day.

Nobody said it would be easy, but you better believe it would be worth it.

I don't know what dreams you have, I don't care how hard your life has been, but as you work towards that dream, I want to remind you that it is possible....

Allow no one and nothing to stand in your way...you didn't come this far for nothing....there is purpose in your presence...chase that dream...stay hungry... stay on the grin. Look yourself in the mirror everyday and say I am going to get mine, no matter the hardship, I am going to get mine...no matter the pain, I am going to get mine...because it won't be easy...hard times are going to come, but that too shall pass...I won't stop until I get mine....victory has your name written all over it....I dare you to go out there and get what is yours!....at the end of the day, it all depends on you.....and it is not over until you win!!!!

April 15, 2016