

# Valedictorian Speech, by Abismael Diaz

Mr. Scarola, honored speaker, esteemed administration and faculty, family and friends, and most importantly...Class of 2008.

Good evening!

It is my pleasure, and a privilege, to stand before you now on this most spectacular day, a day we will all remember when we look back at our accomplishments, a day we will long to relive and revisit once more, a day we will cherish forever. For today is the day we graduate from high school. It is a day when we have overcome so many odds and challenges to achieve what many in our daily circles of life have probably not. It is a day that all of you have so rightly earned and worked so hard for. You should be proud of yourselves. In addition, know that your parents, siblings, and friends are proud of you too. Even if they are not present within the walls of this room for any given reason, know that they truly are, and that they will always admire you for your effort, determination, and perseverance. Congratulations to all of you.

I must say, I honestly never thought that I would be the school's valedictorian. I still remember coming to Grover Cleveland for the very first time. I had just left work early in a rumpled McDonald's uniform to be evaluated and placed in my fall classes. Truth is, getting an education was one of the last things on my mind. Our family had just moved back from the Dominican Republic, and our financial circumstances were horrendous. The only thing I was focusing on was working a full shift to help my mom meet the rent. For that reason, when I was placed in our school's Math/Science program, I didn't really give it a second thought, and foolishly, I thought this school was going to be easy.

It was actually hard—very hard. I had painfully discovered that I was behind. I began to see the toll of living in the Dominican Republic for two years, which should have been my eighth and ninth grades in

the United States. In essence, I lost two years of a standardized education, and as a consequence, my reading skills had diminished, my writing was horrible, I struggled with algebra, and I didn't know *any* trigonometry. I felt lost and overwhelmed. I tried to catch up, but without ever taking Math A, Math B was challenging, and my hours working at McDonalds would not provide me the time that I needed at home to do my homework and catch up.

My first report card was a real disaster. What's worse is that it seemed to sum up my future. As I looked at my report card, an inner voice in my head would yell, "You're nothing, but a young Hispanic male, that will *never* account for *anything!*"

As embarrassing as it was, I decided to start taking my textbooks to work. I would study ferociously as soon as my one-hour break started to the second it finished. At the end of my shift, I would rush home to study some more. Sometimes, on my way home, I would even call a classmate to ask him questions about the basics of algebra and geometry. I didn't ask any of my teachers for help out of fear that they would realize that the administration had made some a kind of mistake, and would demand for me to be taken out of their classes.

Luckily, that never happened. And luckily, my mom was able to land a job that allowed me to cut down my hours at McDonald's. With this extra time I could forge ahead. And because of my experiences at working a grill and a fryer, I realized far too well that if I wanted to live and secure a successful life, education was the right heading to pursue.

I have chosen to study like a nerd because I am tired. I'm *tired* of my deprived surroundings, I'm tired of the conditions my family and I live in, and I'm simply tired, of seeing so many lives, so much potential, so many dreams, go to waste.

I have chosen to succeed because of my mom and dad. It would be disrespectful of me to turn my head away from all the trials and tribulations they have suffered just to make my life better than theirs. It would be disrespectful to make nothing out of all they have given me. It would be disrespectful to not let them see their dreams come

true through my eyes, and it would be MOST disrespectful to ignore all the love they have given me, which has allowed me to grow into the man I am today.

Pa, le doy gracias por todo el carino e amor que Ud. Me ha dado. Me siento dichoso de ser su hijo, y quiero que usted sepa, que nunca olvidare todo lo que usted ha hecho por mi. Lo amo pa.

Mami, le doy gracias a usted tambien, por haber llenado mi vida de tanto carino e amor. Todavia recuerdo todas las veces que usted me compraba regalos para la navidad, aunque no podiamos. Usted solo queria darme lo que usted no tuvo. Usted solo quiso verme feliz, y por eso ma, me siento ORGULLOSO decir que usted es mi madre. No se preocupe. Un dia usted no tendra deuda, y un dia usted vivira en su propia casa. Se lo prometo. Te amo mami.

I also want to thank teachers, that despite my reluctance to ask for help, inserted themselves, making sure I got the assignment right, and gently prodded my head of the desk during first and second periods. I want to thank the college office which went out of its way to find summer enrichment programs to sharpen my academic prowess, and for helping me getting into MIT. And last, but not least, I thank my classmates and friends who willingly shared their knowledge when I didn't know what was going on in class, and who helped me stay in school when I was at my lowest point. My high school experience is only what it is today, because of you all, and for that, I thank each and every one of you for all your love and support. I will sincerely miss you all.

Congratulations to the class of 2008!!!!!!!