

Leave the World a Better Place

By ALICIA HOSEIN



Alicia Hosein

Ms Alicia Frances Hosein (Bachelor of Science, Psychology [Special], First Class Honours, Faculty of Social Sciences) gave the valediction at The University of the West Indies 4:00pm Graduation Ceremony of Friday, October 26, 2018. This is her speech.

It is a great honour to stand here, representing the Faculty of Social Sciences graduating class of 2018 with this valedictory address. I wanted to start off this speech with an inspirational quote from one of my favourite philosophers, a man of true wisdom – Drake: “Started from the bottom, now we’re here.”

There aren't more appropriate words for this momentous occasion, because we did start from the bottom. We entered Year 1, wide-eyed and fresh-faced (and thanks to The UWI sun, possibly two shades lighter than we are now). Entering The UWI reminded me of driving on my own for the first time. It was a novel and exciting experience, and a greater sense of independence.

We no longer had a strict dress code to abide by as in secondary school, we were free to create our own timetable and we could have actually chosen to attend lectures or not (I mean, if you had an 8am class, I think the choice was already made for you). We had to struggle to find our way around the campus and, as an aside, I still don't know where “ENG 3” is. We had to find new and creative ways of parking, because Lord help UWI parking.

For some of you, greater independence came from living on your own for the first time. You had the luxury of watching Netflix for any amount of hours without someone constantly reminding you of how much work you have to do. You did not have to report your every move to your parents or guardians, and you didn't have their negative opinion on how having KFC two times a day, five times a week isn't healthy for you.

Now as the years went on, as it is with driving, we adapted and grew accustomed to the university life. We learnt a myriad of lessons, some in the classroom, but some of the more important ones I'm sure you'd agree could not have been found in a textbook. We unearthed and developed new skills – time management, budgeting, attaining a higher tolerance for alcohol, power napping, the ability to go to the lecture only once to get exam hints and still (manage to) get an A.

And, as it is with any great journey, we created a multitude of memories with our classmates, friends and even lecturers and staff. Memories I, for one, will forever treasure.

At the risk of sounding like a cliché, as on any drive there were a few bumps on the road or, in Trinidad's case, huge potholes. From the robberies on campus to the stress of finals, we UWI students had a lot to endure. Moments of wanting to hand in the towel arose multiple times and sometimes attaining a degree just did not seem to be worth all the stress and frustration. Along with academic challenges, several of us encountered additional hardships – loss of family or friends, heartbreaks, health complications, heartbreaks, financial difficulties, heartbreaks (I think we all know what my struggle was). But, whatever our battles, we did not give up. We fought, we endured and, as the latter part of Drake's quote says, "Now we are here."

In Psychology, one of the major debates amongst theorists is the dichotomy of free will versus determinism. Determinists believe that the universe has life planned out for you; no matter what choices you make, your life will turn out the same; whereas persons who believe in free will believe that you have influence over your life outcomes. You have the ability to make choices and determine your path in life. Personally, I like to believe in free will. I believe that you have control over your life, and not only can you choose which path to take, you can create your own path.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the paths I urge you to take is that of making the world a better place. The late Dr. Eric Williams, Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, addressed the first graduating class of UWI in an independent Jamaica in 1963. He told the graduates, "This education qualifies you to work for the community." That is to say, don't utilise this degree selfishly. You were afforded this invaluable opportunity of attaining your degree in this prestigious institution. I beg of you, do not take it for granted and most importantly do not use it for self-serving purposes. Journalist Tom Brokaw neatly summed it up: "You may think of (this certification) as a ticket to the good life. Instead, think of it as your ticket to change the world."

There is a world out there starving for honest leaders who do the right thing all the time, innovators who create for the welfare of people and not only for the bottom line, persons who genuinely care about the environment and persons who dare to dream about making a positive impact on society. The world is starving for you. Now if we had a dollar for every

time a person told us that Social Sciences students are slackers, I think we'd be rich enough to justify our slack. There are going to be people who judge you based on your faculty, credentials, their limited knowledge of your capabilities and based on their small-minded thinking. They will doubt you and even attempt to make you doubt yourself. Luckily you have free will. You can either let that doubt define you, or let it motivate you.

I majored in Psychology and I got this all the time from my family, friends, even strangers: "Psychology? What are you going to do with that?"

I'd like to take this moment to share exactly what I am going to do with that. I am going to be an instrument of change. The stigma of mental health is plaguing our nation, so much so that persons are taking not only their own lives, but also lives of others. I intend to change that. I intend to utilise this degree to the benefit of not myself but of others; to be of service to others, because that is what the world needs.

Faculty of Social Sciences graduates of 2018, I put to you that you have the power to instigate change in the world. We can think of so many things wrong in this world that needs fixing, but who better to bring forth such change than those who yearn it? Our three-plus years of attending this university gifted us with tools and, when we are given tools, what do we do? We build. We create. Use your knowledge gained, be it academic or non-academic, to create a more beautiful world. Build for yourself, build for your family, build for society and build for the generations to come. As the saying goes, leave the world a better place than what you found it.

Your change does not need to be big for it to be impactful. Rosa Parks, by simply saying "No", ignited one of the most successful mass movements against racial segregation in history. While some of us may not gain independence for a country like Dr. Eric Williams or be the first female Prime Minister like Kamla Persad-Bisessar, each of us, by consistently doing our small bit, can spark change in society.

As I come to a close I urge you to not limit yourself. Do not let the words of others, your own self-doubts or the fear of you being too small to change this big world, limit you from leaving your mark on this earth. You owe it to yourself and for the betterment of society to

not let that fear cripple your potential, but rather let it serve as a motivational force in the realisation of your passion. I leave you with the words of mother Theresa, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." As we walk out of here, let each of us cast our own unique stone.