

Commencement Speech: My Story

I want you to know that my intention is not to bore you with one of those really long commencement speeches that everyone talks about later at dinner, recounting how agonizing was to sit there listening to some foreign kid ramble on for hours. Instead, I'm hoping that by telling you a little bit about how I ended up behind this podium, you will walk away reflecting on your own story and excited for the next chapter in your own life.

Standing here brings up a mix of emotions that are really hard to describe, from being happy, that I will not have to pile on more student loans to being sad for leaving a place that has been my home for the past four years, a place that has given me so many happy memories. It has been an amazing journey for me to get to this exact moment in my life, and I would like to take a few minutes to share some of it with you.

My name is Carlos Nucete. I was born in Merida, Venezuela and raised by my paternal grandparents. When I was only three years old my father decided to come to the U.S. in order to support me and my grandparents, as it was very difficult to provide the daily necessities for all of us. Just before my father left Venezuela, my mother called and told him "if you don't come and get Carlos I will leave him in an orphanage." You see, she thought her threat would keep him from leaving, but he was determined to find a way to create a better life for our family. Thanks to my amazing grandparents I did not end up living in an orphanage but instead I grew up in their very cozy and lovable home. I have to emphasize that it was a very modest and humble home and even though sometimes we didn't have food to eat and daily necessities were often scarce, love was never absent.

When I was 12 years old my grandfather died. We had been so close. He was the only father figure I had and his death changed my life completely. I started drinking alcohol at that age, and as a teenager I became very problematic. I started doing the wrong things and hanging out with the wrong people. My poor choices led me to having to leave my home in Merida because the only two places that I would have ended up were jail or dead. Six months after leaving Merida, my life was not better; it was much worse. I got to a point where I saw my future and it was just a blank page, there was nothing in it. At this moment I decided to take action and I called my father and told him that I wanted a better life.

My father was here in the U.S., working three jobs at the same time in order to at least sustain us, but it was not enough for a boy from the slums with no vision of a better future or the will to try and make one. The idea of attending college had never even entered my mind but when I called my father, he told me if I changed everything and turned my life around, he would find a way to bring me to the U.S. and give me a better life, and so I did. In 2009 at the age of 18 years old I set foot into U.S. soil with no notion of the English language, no family members besides my father, and no friends. As I was getting out of that airplane I promised myself I would become a completely different person from the trouble-making teenager I had been; I would become a success story. Seven years later I stand here with just a little notion of the English language, but with a great family called Marietta College.

This is the way that I see Marietta College, as a family; it has been a very warm and loveable home since the start of my college career, like the one my grandparents provided me when I was just three years old. There have been plenty of times when my Marietta College family has provided help and cared about me, but there's one specific time that will always be in my memory and in my heart, and it helps define what it means to be Pioneer.

My grandma died on Saturday September 28, 2013, just two days before my father was scheduled for a high-risk surgery. I was here in school and I went to talk with a staff member who I often call my mom, and talked to her about what was going on. She listened and asked if I was going home to be with my father after the surgery but I was not able too because I did not have the money to do it. Thankful for the ability to talk to her about what was going on in my life, I left her office and went back to my room. Later that afternoon, she called me and told me to go to the student affairs office to see the assistant to the vice president of student life. When I got there I introduced myself and we started talking about my situation and then suddenly she handed me an envelope with a \$600 check. She said, "Here, this is for you to go and see your father. It should cover your airfare and expenses." Is an understatement to say that I was perplexed by what happened. There simply are no words to explain how grateful I was to Marietta College for doing something like this, for providing me the funds to go home and be with my father during such a tough moment. This is just one of countless examples of how

great the staff members and this school are, here you aren't just another student, here you are part of the family, the Pioneer family.

I stated before that one of my goals when I came to the U.S. was to become successful, but in my mind at that age and because of my background, I envisioned success as being economically rich, having all the material luxuries that I wanted. But now after four years of experiences and opportunities here at Marietta, my idea of success has changed completely. There is a poem that I came across a couple of months ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson and I believe it perfectly defines what success means to me now. Let me take a moment to share it with you. The poem is titled *Success* and it reads, (quote)

What is success?

To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty;

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better; whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived;

This is to have succeeded."

So today, I already consider myself to be successful, and I think it would be safe for me to say that all of you here present are already successful people as well. I want to thank Marietta College for giving me the opportunity to be part of a great family; I want to thank the professors, the staff members, and the class of 2016 for sticking together. I want to thank Linda Roesch for not only being my FYE teacher, but for being my friend and campus mom. I want to thank Fred Voner who passed away recently, for being a great teacher and friend. I want to thank my best friends here at Marietta who pushed me and stood by me when times were

difficult. But I need to give a special and very personal thank you to my father, for sacrificing and giving up on his dreams to make mine a reality.

Each and every one of us have a story, a path that brought us here to this moment on this day, ready to embark on the next chapter. Shaped by our past and forged strong by our time and experiences here, we are the next great extension of the Long Blue Line, with a future full of success awaiting us.

Thank you all and god bless.