

DRAFT Written copy of Keynote Address Northern Marianas College
Commencement Exercises May 19, 2018 by Dr. Kit Porter Van Meter

Actual speech was based on this but varied. Allotted time = 10 minutes

In August 1982 I stood before the first graduating class of Northern Marianas College (then known as NMCC). 17 teachers received their AA Degrees and the President of the University of Guam awarded BA Degrees to eight (8) teachers (most of the course work done in the NMI). The band, Pacificana, sang the CNMI National Anthem and an original song written for the occasion. There were a total of seven (7) staff members at the college. They had been dedicated to achieving this first graduation: Jean E. Olopai, Abel R. Olopai, Susana T. Mafnas, Luis N. Limes, Jose C. Leon Guerrero and Luis S. Chong

Now, I have been invited to return and address you, the class of 2018 with around 276 graduates in the fields of Education, Business, Accounting, Criminal Justice, Nursing, Natural Resources Management and Liberal Arts. It is an honor to talk with you and see the growth of the college. Congratulations on your accomplishment.

Just four (4) history sentences. When the NMI became a Commonwealth in 1976 some people teaching had experience and training, but not degrees. The highest level allowed for the indigenous population during the Japanese Administration was 5th grade. By Sept 1981 the Certification Policy for Teachers required all teachers to have an AA Degree by 1983. Because of NMC/NMCC it was possible for them to achieve this without leaving their homeland and families.

The theme of your graduation is: *The larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder.* Today I wear my Harvard doctoral crimson gown because of being the first president of NMC/NMCC. This made me interesting to others thus giving me access to a university recognized world-wide as a top

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“Island of Knowledge.” I was able to blend the experiences and values of NMI life with the knowledge of others. To explore “the shoreline of wonder”

STORY # 1

When I was considering going to graduate school, a friend made an appointment for me at the university where she worked. Midway through the interview, the woman said: *You don't belong here, you belong at Harvard.*” She picked up her phone, asked if I could get there by three, and made an appointment for me. I did not see myself as a person who would apply to Harvard but I accepted her opinion and did.

However, it is not always of value to accept the view of others. On your new path as a college graduate you will have to know when to be confident in your own knowledge of who you are.

Story # 2

In 1967, after Peace Corps training on the island of Udot, I arrived on Rota, my home-to-be for two years. Walking with the women in the village, one of them said to me, “Ti position Americana hau” “You don't look like an American.” I thought, “Oh no, I am not who they want”. I responded “Sa Hafa.” “What do you think an American looks like?” She took me to her home—a small house raised from the ground. There in the corner of the room on the immaculately polished ironwood floor was a stack of Vogue magazines—a high fashion publication. I wasn't then and have never been a fashion model type so it was OK not to look like what was expected.

You will need to decide when to follow the opinion others have of you and when to not.

And you will need to let people help you find your path along the way—people who have already walked where you want to walk.

Story # 3

One day on Rota my husband and I decided to climb Wedding Cake Mt. , Leezu. The way up was difficult but we made it to the top. In the process, I had lost a zorrie walking over sharp lava stone, and ripped my clothes on thorns and briars. I disturbed a nest of bees—little ones with a sharp sting. And then it got dark. There was no soft ground to lie on and we were afraid to walk knowing an edge was near. The next morning we could not find our way down. We reached a cliff edge and it was too steep. We walked toward the center and came to another cliff edge forming a V shaped crevice. We had not told anyone where we were going. It is the one time in my life I thought I was going to die, but somehow we managed to go down the V and home.

A couple months later a family took us right up to the top following a path we had never seen. Later the old ladies took me with them looking for medicinal plants. They knew exactly where to go. You can see pictures of these trips on kpvcollection.com under Rota stories.

As college graduates, you will be deciding when you need help reaching your goals. At the right time, advice and examples can make obtaining goals possible.

Peace Corps was in the NMI for 12 years in the 60s and 70s, prior to Commonwealth status. The first goal was to do the job the host country had requested be done. The second was to prepare others to take over and replace you. The third is to give back when you are able.

Now that I am in my seventh decade I am attempting to give back. A quote from Guillermo del Toro, director of Oscar winner of best picture---THE SHAPE OF WATER (AARP Movies for Adults) resonates with me.

**“WE LIVE OUR ENTIRE LIVES FOR THE LAST THREE MINUTES...
STORIES HELP US HEAL OURSELVES AND OTHERS...
AS WE AGE WE HAVE A SINGLE DUTY TO TELL OUR STORIES BECAUSE WE GET
BOLDER...
TELL THE WAY WE SEE THE WORLD: THAT’S ALL WE CAN DO
WE DO IT FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME BECAUSE WE ALL FEEL THE NEED
TO DRAW A LINE IN THE SAND, BUT AS WE GET OLDER WE WANT TO ERASE
THOSE LINES.
THAT IS THE ONLY WAY WE ARE GOING TO GET TOGETHER...”**

Now I am a storyteller and as you have experiences you will connect with others and later become storytellers yourself.

End