Diversity & First Generation
6th Annual Celebration Letters
It’s been two years since I saw you, and I could only wish you were by my side as I graduate from Teachers College, Columbia University. I still remember the day I got my acceptance letter, and the excitement and stress that took over us immediately after. Looking back, it’s been quite a rollercoaster ride since then, and I couldn’t have surpassed all the challenges that came my way without your unending support. There have been numerous times I’ve caught myself sitting on the steps outside Low library, or in between stacks at Butler Library, and imagined how you’d feel as you walk through the hallways thinking about how far YOUR hard work and sacrifice over the years has brought us.

To my dear brother in Cambodia, who inspires me every single day - thank you for igniting the spirit of curiosity in me, and for the constant encouragement to explore, dream and discover. To the rest of my family thank you for the countless nights you’ve stayed up in a different time zone to hear me out, for all the struggles and sleepless nights you’ve endured to finance my education and thank you for being the wind beneath my wings.

Aizhum Tavana Nanni (1000 times thanks in Malayalam, an Indian language).

A big thank you to my professors who worked relentlessly to get us the education we deserved as we quickly transitioned online. To my classmates, especially the ones who’re the first in their families to graduate, and to my fellow international students, a big congratulations to be able to persevere through some of the toughest times the world has seen and for despite all that, making it to the finish line! Congratulations!

Sitara Maria
I dedicate this monumental and vital work to you—mi abuelita, Rafaela Estevez (Doña Fellita), and my great aunt, Tia Juanita. You were both models of empowered and independent women who raised me until the age of seven in the Dominican Republic before I was “taken” to New York City. Mami Fellita this doctorate is for you and the love of education that you instilled in me. Although you could not read or write, you were an amazing mathematician with an entrepreneurial spirit. You gathered food and clothing for others considered less fortunate—even though we were considered economically disadvantaged by American standards and labels. Mami Fellita y Tia Juanita—you were the two most important women in my life, who unfortunately can only guide me and celebrate with me from heaven. Your spiritual guidance and blessings from God above have made this possible.

I am grateful to Mami—Francisca Vargas, who risked it all to come to the US undocumented at the time and later a citizen. Leaving four of us behind, you forged ahead with resilience and pure determination to bring us to Harlem, NY for a better future. In 1977 we arrived at Amsterdam and 126th Street, near Teachers College, where I will receive my doctorate today. Because of you, I was able to walk through the campus—since my elementary schools, P.S. 36 & 125, where I became the principal 30 years later were just a few blocks away—thinking how unattainable this dream once was. Mil gracias guerreras!

Rafaela Espinal
Dedico esta obra monumental y vital a mi abuelita, Rafaela Estévez (Doña Fellita) y mi tía abuela, Tía Juanita. Ambas fueron modelos de mujeres empoderadas e independientes que me criaron hasta los siete años de edad en la República Dominicana antes de que me “llevaran” a la ciudad de Nueva York. Mami Fellita este doctorado es para ti y el amor por la educación que me inculcaste. Aunque no sabías leer ni escribir, eras increíble en las matemáticas y poseías un espíritu emprendedor. Aunque los estándares y etiquetas estadounidenses nos consideraban económicamente desfavorecidos como imigrantes, recuerdo que cuando viajábamos recolectabas comida y ropa para otros considerados menos afortunados para llevarles en nuestro país. Mami Fellita y Tia Juanita, ustedes fueron las dos mujeres más importantes de mi vida, que lamentablemente solo pueden guiarme y celebrar conmigo desde el cielo. Su guía espiritual y sus bendiciones del Dios de arriba lo han hecho posible.

Estoy muy agradecida a mi Madre, Francisca Vargas, quien arriesgó todo para venir a los Estados Unidos indocumentada en aquel momento hasta hacerse ciudadana después. Dejando a cuatro de nosotros atrás, siguió adelante con resistencia y pura determinación para llevarnos a Harlem, NY, para un futuro mejor. En 1977 llegamos a Amsterdam y la calle 126, cerca de Teachers College, donde recibiré mi doctorado. Gracias a ti Mami, pude caminar por el campus, porque mis escuelas primarias, P.S. 36 y 125, donde me convertí en la directora de P.S. 125 30 años después, estaban a solo unas cuadras de distancia, cuando yo pensaba que no alcanzaba que alguna vez fuera este sueño.

Mil gracias guerreras!

Rafaela Espinal
Hello and As-Salamu Alaykum (Translation: Peace Be Upon You),

While there is an unfamiliar sadness with the virtual world that bars me from reading this letter to my family in-person, there is also resounding hope. Even in the most troubling times, my family is a part of this important day in my life - the way it has been, for the last 26 years.

This letter goes to my Abu, who has driven me all over Pakistan in the search of the best academic institutions which we couldn’t even afford. Who taught me that happiness is not ‘acquired’, but is ‘found’ in the state of being. It is being content with what you have, while yearning to strive for more.

This letter goes to my mama, who has celebrated each win of mine, while constantly reminding me to stay humble. Who taught me that while it’s important to be rational in times of crisis, it is far more crucial to have a bigger heart.

This letter goes to my siblings, cousins and extended family, who have constantly reassured me that no matter where I go and what I do, I will always be at home as long as I have them.

This letter goes to my friends back home and in New York, who persevered for me when I would fail, who saw hope and potential in me where I could not, and who still continue to be there for me.

I thank you for being an inseparable part of my life and a constant source of positive energy that I would be lost without.

Yours truly,

Fahad Awan
This letter is dedicated to my dearest parents and grandparents that helped me get to where I am: “Abu” Walter, “Aby” Cuchi, Marissa y Américo.

Gracias por estar a mi lado en cada paso de mi vida. Gracias por pasar su sabiduría y por los numerosos consejos. Gracias por apoyarme a través de todas mis aventuras. Gracias por apoyar mi decisión de estudiar al extranjero a pesar de tenerlos lejos en Puerto Rico. Y gracias por siempre darle prioridad a mi educación y sembrar mi ambición por más, a pesar de todos nuestros obstáculos. Jamás hubiese imaginado estar graduandome de una universidad como Columbia University y les agradezco todo porque no lo hubiese podido lograr sin ustedes. Este logro no es solo mío, sino por y para ustedes también. Llegar a este punto no fue fácil, ¡pero lo logré! Y a pesar de tantos años difíciles su apoyo incondicional hizo toda la diferencia. Siempre serán mi inspiración y mis personas favoritas. Los adoro con todo mi corazón.

ISABELLA BEATRIZ RIVERA RUIZ
I will never forget the day I got my acceptance letter to Teachers College. I became the first person in my family to not only hold a Bachelor’s degree, but now to do a Master’s degree. I knew exactly who to call first. My grandparents. They never had the opportunity to pursue further education, they had to start working at a young age in order to have a roof over their heads and food on the table. My grandfather worked long hours and still today in his mid 70’s works full time. I know he does this to put me through school. All that was ever asked of me was to get an education and make a life for myself that I would be proud of. I bet they never thought they would be watching their granddaughter graduate from Teachers College, Columbia University with 2 Master’s degrees. My grandparents are the most selfless people anyone could ever meet. They never once complained about a tuition fee, and they always told me to not worry about it and to focus on my studies. I can guarantee you they still don’t know how much that meant to me and how that allowed me to work as hard as I did and to accomplish this goal. They aren’t the kind of people to congratulate themselves. These degrees that I am earning today, have my name on them, but they are because of the hard work and dedication of my grandparents. Congratulations Gramma and Grampa, we did it! I love you!

DREW DUFFY
Before I left for New York, I knelt next to my dad and started sobbing. He was laying in his bed, attached by his belly to his kidney dialysis machine. This would be my first time living on my own, without my family. Through the tears, I said, “What if I don’t fit in and I fail?” He patted my back and said, “baby, you were meant to do this. I have a feeling you are going to do well there.” Very soon, TC and New York City began to feel like home. On my way to the airport after winter break, my dad told me he was proud of me for doing well and staying true to myself. For some reason, it felt like the last thing my dad would say to me in person, and it was. During my second semester at TC, my dad passed away from a heart attack. My dad wrote me letters for my high school and undergraduate graduation days. He does not get to see me graduate today, and he does not get to write me a letter telling me how proud he is of me. So, I decided to write a letter to him, telling him how I could not have been the first in my family to earn a bachelors or master’s degree without his unwavering belief that I could do anything. Thank you to my amazing mom and siblings for your strength and support. I did it! And to quote Bon Jovi, “like Frankie says, I did it my way”.

KAYSEY WANN
ようやくこの日を迎えることができました！初めての一人暮らし、コロナがかったりと激動な留学生活だったけど、いつもそばで支えてくれるみんなのおかげで卒業することができたよ。本当に感謝の気持ちでいっぱいです！ここで培った経験、知識、自信を次に繋げて、また走り続けていきたいと思います。とにかく楽しくて充実した日々だったよ、本当にありがとう！

美欧より

DEAR ZAHIT-SAN & KEIKO-SAN,

Dear Zahit-san and Keiko-san,
I can’t imagine how my life in NYC would be without you. Thank you for always being with me, caring for me, and giving me love. I’m so honored and blessed to have you as my NYC parents, and I want to express my gratitude for your care. Words cannot describe how important you are to me. I am who I am today because of your effort, guidance, and continuous support. I couldn’t have done it without you. I’m so glad to have you both witnessing my graduation. I really hope that you will always be as happy as I feel today! You are my role models, and I want to pass this kindness on to other people as well.

本当にありがとうございました！大好きです。

Best, Mio

MIO TERAMOTO
TO MY AMAZING PARENTS,

Because you both preserve and keep going even when life got tough,
Because you both make sacrifices that me and my siblings will never fully understand,
Because you both make sure to stay connected to God,
Because you both are representations of what miracles look like,
Because you both pour love into everything you do and into everyone you meet,
Because you both look towards the future without fear because you know who holds it,
Because you both are good listeners and give the best advice,
Because you both are just who you are,
I am able to take risks and dream big knowing that you both have my back no matter what!
Thank you for everything and I love you always!

KAMILLE WAY,
MAY 2021
Today, I am filled with joy because there was a puzzle many years ago that has finally come together. My parents homeschooled me as a child and even when I left home for school eventually, they constantly reminded me of the importance of lifelong learning.

As the first child in the family to complete graduate school, I would like to recognize my mother’s sacrifice to sideline her dreams for law school, my father’s motivation by ending his soccer career to move to America and the constant support from my loved ones. This journey has been a constant learning moment and it is sad that not everyone who started with me saw this day but the legacy and the love shown from day one has made me who I am today.

I pray for blessings and mercy for my family and loved ones and look forward to more progress in my academic journey.

Like my brothers always say “our blessings shall be eternal In Shaa Allah.”
먼저 사랑하는 우리 아들 제이슨, 우리 딸 세라에게
코로나때문에 밖에 잘 나가지도 못하고, 학교도 잘 못 갔는데
엄마까지 논문준비에, 티칭에, 잡 서치 까지 한다고 정말 몇달동안 나 만큼이나 고생한 우
리 아이들, 같은 집에 살아도 엄마가 너무 보고 싶다고 맨날 같이 눕고 싶다고 한 우리 꼬
맹이들...
나중에는 “엄마 미팅 잘 해~ 공부 잘하고 와~” 하고 격려 해주던 5살, 3살 천사 아기들...
문 딱 걸어잠그고 공부하고 미팅하고 인터뷰 보면서도 항상 최책감에, 미안한 마음에 신경
이 쓰이다가도 아....꿀리 끝내야지, 잘해야지, 성공해야지 하면서 나를 더욱더 힘나게 해주
는 나의 아기들...
엄마여서 힘든것도 많았지만, 어쩌면 엄마이기 때문에 할 수 있었던 것도 많았던 것 같다.
좀 더 멋진 엄마가 될 수 있도록 하게 해줘서 고맙다 제이슨, 세라야
그리고 사랑하는 우리 남편, 여보의 사랑, 정성, 보살핌이 없었다면 진짜 이 길을 끝까지
못 갔을지도 몰라. 내가 될 해도 다 괜찮다고 말해주는 유일한 사람, 내가 어떤 선택을 해
도 믿고 지지해 주는 사람, 나를 온전한 나로서 바라보고 사랑할 수 있게 도와준 사람, I
feel safe in you, I feel strong with you. 우리 집에서 가장 고생한 우리 남편, 감사합니
da. 평생 이 감사한 마음 가지고 남은 삶 재밌게 살아보아요!! 🥰🥰
그리고 마지막으로 멀리 한국에 계신 엄마, 아빠, 어머니 우리 가족 모두 너무 감사드립니다.
항상 응원해주시고 격려해주셔서 여기까지 온 수 있었습니다.
모두 사랑합니다.

MINHYE SON
Thank you for your support from the beginning of my Master’s journey to the end. From the long nights to the reminders about APA formatting. Even when we were in the hospital before the birth of our daughter you made sure I stayed focus and made sure I had my fair share of babysitting through my Fall 2020 classes. I love you.

To my Parents (Joseph & Valerie) and Brothers (Joval, Richard et. al) who always reminded me that even with my pursuit of this degree to “don’t look too good, nor talk too wise;”, my mentor Dr. Travis Bristol for setting the path so I can see it possible to move forward, Betty Duverger, Dr. Denise Patrick, Ruth Desronvil and the entirety of my village:

Thank you all for your constant support throughout my entire educational journey from Kindergarten to my Masters…I will need it for the PhD.

“And you never can tell just how close you are, it may be near when it seems so far; So, stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit—it’s when things seem worst that you must not quit.”

I am eternally grateful and blessed to have each and every one to celebrate with.

-JOSEPH T. WILSON II
Since I was little, you’ve always said, “We don’t worry about you”. But I know that there have been many sleepless nights while I’ve been at Teachers College, where all you could do was worry. 11,000km away in Seoul, you watched New York City suffer from Covid-19 and rise up against racial injustice through the evening news. But I also know that “We don’t worry about you” means “We believe in you”. So even when you feared for my safety as an Asian and a foreigner in this country, you respected my decision to stay in New York City. And by staying, I’ve learned that my potential is limitless. I now have a master’s degree, I marched for Black Lives Matter, rallied to stop Asian hate, and write online for Asian American advocacy. For 30 years, you’ve given me endless love, trust, and support, and now I’m sharing that with others to stand up for what I believe in. Moving to New York City has been one of the most valuable and transformative experiences of my life. So thank you. Thank you for trusting me, believing in me, and always supporting me. I would not be who I am today without your love.

Love,
Jung Jin
DEAR UNCLE HENRY,

I would wager you could not have imagined the cascading effects your decision to leave Bolivia in 1959, as a young man of 23 years old, would have on the members of your family. This is particularly and obviously true for those of us who had not yet been born.

Afterall, your sister and my mother, Lluviza, remained behind in Bolivia and it would be another year before she followed you to New York City. Finding that you had established yourself in Queens as a factory worker and gas station attendant, earning $10 per week, it would be another 15 years before I was born.

But there is a straight line, Uncle Henry, from that day in 1959 when you arrived in the States, orphaned, impoverished, and lonely, to this, when I graduate from Teachers College, Columbia University, a Doctor of Education.

I would not have attained this distinction, or felt the call to serve others, were it not for your exemplary courage and selflessness, your devotion to family, and your understanding that the opportunity for education, which you had been denied, is a precious gift.

Thank you for that leap of faith, for your support of my mother and her family as we grew and prospered, and for your constant care. My children, and one day their children, will continue to be the direct beneficiaries of that single and compounding decision to make great change in your own life.

Con cariño y abrazos fuertes,
Cindy

CYNTHIA WILTSHIRE
I want to let you know how grateful I am to be able to call you my parents. From your humbleness, to your infinite love, both of you shower my siblings and I with care and support without contingencies attached. We are so lucky to have you as moral compasses in our lives; guiding us as we carve out new paths for ourselves. I am most appreciative of you knowing that you are both immigrants and despite being disadvantaged, and facing a backdrop of genocide, persecution, poverty and displacement, you managed to raise three successful children in a new country with nothing. For all the struggles that come with being a first-generation American, I can say that it is so ultimately worth it. You taught me the value of hard work and that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, an ethical line. You instilled in me a hustle to be the hardest worker in the room because that is what you had to be to make it. You taught me the value of faith, family and our longstanding cultural traditions, which only beautify and diversify this country. You raised me to be humble, respectful, tolerant, good-hearted, hardworking and earnest. All of that is because of you both. Thank you for being the best parents to my siblings and I. Mom, Dad— we truly owe you everything.

Lovingly Yours,
Christina
First generation graduates: We are more than a growing and diverse group of students whose parents did not attend college. We have been influenced not only by this unique classification, but by our college experiences - yet we are influencers. We have endured, overcome imposter syndrome, and have completed our goal to be the first in our households and families to graduate and have paved the way for others. We are role models.

Since I didn’t arrive at this stage independently, I want to first, I thank God for the blessing of having been accepted to Teachers College - an institution that attracted the best faculty, staff and students who truly cared about my journey, and also my success. Secondly, I thank my sister, professors, leaders, mentors, and friends for listening, encouraging, and supporting me every step of the way.

I especially want to thank my mom for her commitment and support throughout my study and my life. Mom, you never went to college, yet you are the best at Oral History and helping me figure out our family genealogy - even though you’ve questioned “¿qué es exactamente lo que estudias en la universidad?” (“What exactly do you study at the university?”). I congratulate you mom, for helping me achieve this goal. Congratulations First-Gen Graduates for your endurance, overcoming obstacles and achieving this phenomenal goal!

In the words of former first Lady Michelle Obama “Never forget there are so many people who believe in you - who are cheering you on every step of the way!”

Reference
DEAR MOM AND DAD,

I can only imagine what it must be like to raise five children. Even so, I can say that despite ups and downs, you seem to have done a great job. And for that I am truly thankful. Here I am, your first daughter to graduate internationally, and from Columbia no less! And me being here has a lot to do with your efforts to provide me, my brothers and sisters with good quality education and varied opportunities. Thank you for agreeing with my annoying requests to take English lessons when I was young, for enduring the challenges of having me participate on that educational project that helped me to get to know myself – even though that meant revealing our differences –, for letting me draw my own path, even though that was not necessarily the one you envisioned for me. And thanks for believing in me when I didn’t – I remember you saying “we’re gonna make it happen, you’re going”, when I was selected to TC and I was not sure if I should go because even with the scholarship it was still more expensive then I could afford.

I’ve made it. And I have you to thank for this, for all the support throughout the years.

Thanks, mom. Thanks, dad.

With love,

Má

MARIANA CASELLATO
Gracias por todo el apoyo que en dado hasta el momento. Sin el apoyo de ustedes no estaría donde estoy ahora. Gracias por darme la motivación de ser más de lo que me pudiera imaginar de mí mismo y de mi futuro. Ahora pude demostrar que si se puede, aunque muchos pensaban que no. Mi maestría es dedicado a ustedes. ¡Lo logramos! ¡Los amo!

MAMA Y PAPA,

Gracias por todo el apoyo que en dado hasta el momento. Sin el apoyo de ustedes no estaría donde estoy ahora. Gracias por darme la motivación de ser más de lo que me pudiera imaginar de mí mismo y de mi futuro. Ahora pude demostrar que si se puede, aunque muchos pensaban que no. Mi maestría es dedicado a ustedes. ¡Lo logramos! ¡Los amo!

Now to my Friends, support system, and community:

Very few people truly thought I could be where I am today- a Chicano graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University. It took words of encouragement and examples from you all who have supported me to where I am today. Thank you for understanding all my feelings of frustrations which are now followed by the feeling we will never forget. We did it y’all!

ARMANDO LIZARRAGA
TO MY PARENTS,

感谢父母对我一直以来的支持，无论我遇见了什么样的困难，你们都是我最坚强的后盾。同时，也感谢你们在我学业上面无条件的支持，无论我选择什么样的专业，你们都不会抱怨，你们总是把决定权给予我自己。能够让我选择自己所喜欢的，感兴趣的专业的。最后，再一次感谢你们，感谢你们默默的付出！希望我从此以后能够成为你们的骄傲！

HENG ZHANG
Esta carta es para decirles estoy muy agradecido con ustedes por apoyarme en mis estudios y se que no a sido fácil para ustedes cuando tuve que dejar a la familia e ir a Texas porque en nuestro estado ninguna de las universidades que yo quería ir no me aceptaba porque era indocumentado. Pero gracias a dios - como ustedes siempre dicen - obtuve una beca completa para recibir mi licenciatura de Texas A&M. Y ahora estoy a punto de completar mi maestría de una las instituciones mas prestigiosas de el mundo – Columbia University. Pero nada de lo que yo e podido lograr en los últimos 7 años hubieran sido posible sin el apoyo completo de ustedes y aunque mi licenciatura y maestría lean mi nombre los apellidos Fragoso y Varela me lo dieron ustedes y por eso las dos licenciaturas son de ustedes y se las dedico a ustedes. Me trajeron a ese país para vivir la vida que ustedes no pudieron tener y no creo poderles repagar por ese sacrificio nunca, pero espero que esta maestría le enseñe que su sacrificio no fue por nada.

Con mucho amor, gracias.

JOSE FRAGOSO VARELA
QUERIDA FAMILIA,

Mis padres me educaron con amor y protección.
Gracias a mis padres y al sacrificio de ellos ahora soy una doctora.
Este título se lo dedico a ellos con agradecimiento.
Sin el apoyo Ruth y Danny no hubiese podido llegar hasta aquí.
¡Por ustedes y para ustedes!

Gracias por hacer todo más fácil. Los quiero mucho.

JULIA GUZMAN
It seems like just yesterday that I flew from Changchun to New York to pursue my PhD degree at Columbia University. Now I am graduating as the first generation of PhD at Columbia, and of the United States!!! Thank you so much for the daily video calls, for your constant support, your endless love, and your countless sacrifices that have opened many doors for me to grow and succeed. You all have fostered confidence, passion, independence, courage, perseverance and passion in me to work hard, live through hardships and pursue my dreams with no boundaries. I would not be where I am today without you! I feel so honored and lucky to have you all!!

Love Always,
Yue Ma

YUE MA
Teachers College has a “long-standing Convocation tradition that students of color and first gen students write letters to their families and loved ones thanking them for their support over the years.” So, that’s us. Here’s my letter thanking you.

If Mark were writing this letter he’d end it now, like this: Thank you.

We’re different, Mark and I. I’m the one who got the Ph.D from Columbia (and I’m the one who won a car). I’m the one who went to college, even when SAT tests scores didn’t think I could. I’m the one who had to figure figure-out college. And, I’m the one who never doubted your support for one second. Never.

You were with me on this entire journey, since moving into Claflin Hall besides Nickerson Field at Boston University in 1993. You’ve been through this Ph.D process with me, urging me on, babysitting. And I know you’re here with me now.

I know that as parents and teachers, you rock. I am a very lucky guy and I am incredibly appreciative of all the good that was graced with your work, sacrifice, and love.

Thank you.

Love,

RICH NOVACK
DEAR MOMMY, DADDY, AND COLLIN:

I never dreamed that someday I would be receiving a PhD from an Ivy League school! Thanks to you Mommy – my backbone, my rock – I always believed that education was important and knew that higher education was going to be a part of my life. I know that for you, a young girl growing up in a single parent home in New York public housing, and daddy, a boy growing up poor with six brothers and sisters in Oklahoma, you never imagined that your children would achieve this much.

I attribute my success to you because you have always supported my dreams, academic and otherwise, and made me feel that I could do or be anything, if I put effort into it. Even as my plans for my future changed many times, from wanting to be an actress, to wanting to be a doctor, to wanting to be a teacher, to now wanting to work in higher education, you have been by my side cheering me on and supporting me, and for that, I feel extremely lucky, and I am forever grateful.

Collin, you have always been my sounding board, lifting me up and cheering me on when I got down on myself. As an older sibling, I have always felt it was my responsibility to be a good example for you, which is why I’m so proud of all that you have and will accomplish. Thank you for being you – my “partner in crime”.

I love you all so much.

RASHIDA ROBINSON
Mis querido padre y madre,

Me siento muy bendecida de tenerlos como mis padres y quiero expresar mi gratitud por su cariño y apoyo todos los años. Gracias por darme una gran pasión por el aprendizaje y por hacer todo lo posible para encaminarme en buen camino. Me han dado el mejor regalo de todos, una educación. Siempre estaré agradecida por los sacrificios que han hecho por nosotras. Soy quien soy hoy gracias a su esfuerzo, guía y apoyo. ¡Gracias por creer siempre en mí! Sin ustedes dos no hubiera podido hacerlo. Ustedes son los mejores padres del mundo y les debo mi éxito. Hoy lo celebro a ustedes porque es un orgullo ser su hija. Los quiero mucho.

Su querida hija,
Yarimar Gonzalez

YARIMAR GONZALEZ
YOU BELIEVED IN ME,

Something that I need that makes me feel strong?
I don’t know actually.
At least you made me understood my faith
And that’s the reason for another day.

Something that you said that probably I didn’t know?
It’s to go after my goals
But there are so many voices against
And a life that may betray me again.

But you believed in me
In every step of my life.
At least I understood my faith
And that’s the reason for another day.

You believed in me
If you notice, let me know
There are so many voices against
But that’s the reason why I am here
‘Cause you made me chase my dreams.

There are so many voices
There are so many choices
There is life behind
But I don’t know which one I should choose.
It is illogical, irrational
That I’m here waiting for times to come
Instead of making them happen.

But you believed in me.
In every step of my life
At least I understood my faith
And that’s the reason for another day.

You believed in me
If you notice, let me know
There are so many voices against
But that’s the reason why I’m standing out
Cause I want to make you proud.

LARRY RAMOS
I went to school thinking I might come out on the other side with a clearer picture of who I could become. And to no surprise, I still don’t have all the answers I was hoping to find.

But I do know that wherever I go, I want to help. I want to improve the lives of young people. I want to show students that the best parts of themselves are attainable with the right support and guidance. I learned that from you. I know that’s possible because you did that for me. And you still do.

I say all the time that my favorite part of being an educator is that I get to be a fan. I get to show up for students. I get to see them experience successes, support them in the moments when they struggle, and I get to work alongside them as they continue to learn and grow. That’s what makes this work worthwhile. It’s why being an educator brings me so much joy. And it wouldn’t be possible without each one of you and the sacrifices you’ve made for me.

Thank you for being my biggest fans. I love y’all so much, and I am thankful for you every day.

Love,
Tristan

TRISTAN KISHONIS
Cuando entre a la Universidad de Columbia, entre con mucha inseguridad. No sabía cómo iva a manejar pero aquí estoy. Quiero sacar el tiempo para expresar mi agradecimiento a muchos que me reespaldaron para lograr este momento. Gracias a Dios, a mi padre que me cuida desde el cielo, a mi mama y a mis hermanos por reempujarme en la dirección que necesitaba llegar. Gracias por los buenos consejos y las distracciones que necesitaba en los momentos más difíciles. Yo los adoro. Quiero darle gracias a el resto de mi familia por creer en mi y por animarme que me siga enfocando en mis estudios. Mari gracias por inspirarme y abrirmee el camino para que yo misma creer en mi potencial. Sin ti, nunca hubiera yo pensado que podría cumplir con lo más imposible. There’s too many family and friends to thank individually. Just know that if I’m sharing this milestone with you, it’s because you’ve contributed to this achievement one way or another. And for that, I am extremely thankful.

TO JAYDEN AND GIANNA,

I hope that Titi has made you proud and that you follow in making great changes in our family. School isn’t easy but it’s a sacrifice that pushes you to levels you wouldn’t think you can reach. I know that I’m the first to graduate in this family but hopefully you’ll make sure that I won’t be the last. I love you guys!

ESTEFANIA ESQUILIN
I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father. To my mother, Myriam García, who encouraged me not to put off until tomorrow what I can do today. Mom, thank you for your endless love, support, and faith in me. To my father, Ebersan García (1947-2012), who instilled in me that education would open the door of opportunity. Dad, because of your sacrifices, I am able to be here today. It is both an honor and a blessing to have entered this world as your daughter.

Le dedico esta disertación a mis padres. A mi madre, Myriam García, quien me animó y me enseño a no dejar para mañana lo que puedo hacer hoy. Mami, gracias por su amor, apoyo, e infinita fe. A mi padre, Ebersan García (1947-2012), quien me inculcó el valor de la educación. Papi, gracias a sus sacrificios he podido llegar a ser lo que soy hoy. Que honor y bendición el haber llegado a este mundo siendo su hija.

BRENDA GARCIA
To my mom and dad, Grace and Chuck, I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank you and tell you how much I love you. You have given me so much support as I’ve made my way in the world. I can’t imagine what it was like for you to leave Hong Kong and come to Canada in the 1970s and how different your world became. I am so grateful that you chose Canada to be your home - my access to education and training in Canada opened doors for me in a way that would never have been possible here in the United States. I am thankful for your open-mindedness, liberalism, and instilling those values to me. As I get older, I appreciate you more and more for everything you have shown, taught, and done for me. Now you can say your kid is a doctor!

MAUREEN YUEN