

Maligayang hapon sa inyong lahat!

My name is Kelvin Hanzlie Ibia, and it is an honor to be here at today's commencement. I am pleased to warmly welcome all graduates, visitors, and faculty to Kaua'i Community College. The graduates who are seated here today have been impacted by each and every one of you. We're all gathered together today to honor the efforts, commitments, and resilience that every single student has demonstrated in their journey of earning their desired degrees. Our theme in this year's commencement is withstanding difficulties and being like an 'a'ali'i bush.

Life, as I grew up back in the Philippines, was hard because schools were not consistent. They were poorly organized, teachers were not required to have full degrees, and students suffered from corporal punishment. But the thing that hurt me the most is my third grade teacher saying "Bobo ka, wala kang mararating sa buhay!," which translates to "You're dumb. You will never get anywhere in life." Imagine your role model crushing your dreams into many pieces. I felt discouraged; I lost my confidence, and since "teachers were always right", I just accepted it.

At the age of 11, my mother Sherlie and I moved to the United States to have a better future. I thought life was getting better, but there were many challenges like language barriers, cultural differences, and adjusting to new social interactions. Due to my inability to communicate initially, I was bullied, and I've been told that I eat dogs. I've been told to go back to my country, or even worse like having my chair pulled out from under me. This made me think that maybe I was really nothing. Maybe my teacher was right that I was just dumb. I wanted to drop out of school and just go back to the Philippines.

But then seeing my mother, Sherlie, and father, Bonifacio, come home from work tired, exhausted, and still pushing just to raise their two kids. I realize that there are millions of reasons why I need to be successful. Instead of letting the negativity get to me, I put my time

and effort into learning English rather than socializing. At that time, I was also learning Spanish and Thai. This resulted in me graduating high school as valedictorian with a 4.0 GPA and being the first to graduate in my family.

When I attended college, I was accepted in the Kipaipai program which helped me reduce my stress through financial and educational problems as well as gave me a job as a mentor. If you don't know, Kiapaipai and Waialeale are first year experience programs where they help their students in their first year of college. I joined Student Government as a Vice President to serve as the voice of students and University of Hawaii Student Caucus to represent Kaua'i Community College. I was also a shift manager at McDonalds and Taco Bell. Life was getting better! Now I am graduating with my Associate of Liberal Arts, while being on the Dean's List and transferring to UH Manoa to pursue my bachelor's and master's in Second Language Studies with a double major in Philippine Language and Culture. I will probably pursue my Ph.D. in Second Language Studies too, hoping to be a professor in a post secondary school to encourage multilingual students to continue their education and not give up. I understand the courses and challenges that multilingual students have to go through because I've been there.

Despite all the negativity and challenges that came into my life, I faced them and didn't turn back. If people say it's impossible, remember it's only impossible for them but not for you. Just keep going, do good, be good, and listen to yourself. This is just the beginning leading you to something even better. Never settle for less; take the good with the bad. Also, push forward, be grounded, and be firm. You all deserve the best in the world. Maraming salamat po.