

2023 Valedictorian, Savannah Chikwe

First of all, I would like to express how honoured I am to be standing here on behalf of a cohort of remarkable individuals.

13 years. 156 months. 678 weeks...all coming down to 41 days until the final chapter in this book of ours comes to a close. From holding our parents' hands as we embarked on our first day of prep, to soon embarking on our own life journeys in the big wide world. Who knew that these 13 years would fly by this fast? Throughout the years we have watched year 12 cohorts come and go, and now we, class of 2023, are at the top of that summit, taking all of it in and living that reality. All of the memories, the laughs, the ups, and the downs. Taking it all in and embracing every moment. So, when the sands of time eventually run out in that hourglass, we will have no regrets.

I have had the privilege of being a student at Plenty Valley Christian College since year 2. It was the summer of 2013 when I entered the school premise, gripping onto my parents' hands for dear life. It was a lot to digest as a 7-year-old, but after my first day as a year 2 student, I remember having a feeling of happiness that ran deeper than the surface. Over the years I made acquaintances, and those acquaintances turned into friends, and those friends turned into family. Somewhere between then and now, I learned the intricacies of my being; journeying through the chapters of childhood and teenage-hood and finding myself in between. Somewhere between then and now, I learned to understand the feeling of being blessed with incredible peers who push me to become a better version of myself each and every day. Somewhere between then and now, I learned to understand the powerful impact that teachers have in our lives, not only as students, but as human beings. And somewhere between then and now, I learned to accept that the year 2023 would be coming knocking on our door faster than we could ever imagine. Our final chapter in this roller coaster of a ride, and boy has it been an epic one.

Now, time to take a trip down memory lane, shall we? We all have memories stored in our memory bank. All of the capture the flag games in primary school, all of the camps (#whathappensatcampstaysatcamp), and all of the incredible productions throughout the years. From Gobby killing it as the Litter Muncher in the 2013 Junior Primary School Production, to Tom giving us the performance of the year in the 2017 production Honk Junior, to our very own Mariam Dammo touching our High School Musical-loving hearts with her flawless performance as the one and only Gabriella Montez. We have come so far, and have made some magical memories along the way. Memories that will last a lifetime.

As we reminisce on all these moments of our school journey through the lens of our current selves, we come to realise that we have grown so much. Seeing each and every one of you incredible human beings grow and mature into such remarkable young adults over the years truly warms my heart. 5 days a week, Monday through Friday. When that alarm clock rings, marking the start of a new day, and we get dressed into our uniform ready to face the day as a student, we should look in the mirror and commend ourselves for the milestones we have achieved. This year has not been easy, and in the future, there will be moments where we feel like surrendering to our giants, but during those moments, I encourage you all to remember that you are all champions and that you are capable of achieving anything you want in life. Even if circumstances don't go as planned, be rest assured that just because something is delayed, doesn't mean it is denied. If you take a snapshot of the ups and downs from this year, there is one thing that remains certain: we are still standing strong. All of those stressful moments that you thought you would never overcome, look where you are now. If the version of you from the start of the year could see the version of your current self, witnessing all of the challenges you have defeated, they would be beyond proud. As the likes of Mark Twain and my dad would say, "it's not about the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the

fight in the dog". No matter how difficult like can get, always remember that we are the architects of our own reality.

There are a few special people who I would like to thank for making tonight possible and for being our pillars who have helped us reach this pivotal moment in our lives. The 6-letter word that shapes who we are as individuals: family. It is because of these people that we are who we are. Our legendary parents: not only investing in our education financially, but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. All of those moments when we have asked our parents for help with our homework. All of those moments when our parents have taken time out of their day to ask us how we are truly doing. And all of those moments when our mum, our dad, or those special family members in our lives reassure us that we are enough, and that we are doing the best that we possibly can.

Nella and Julius Chikwe, my two pillars, my rocks, and my absolute world. Words cannot express how grateful I am to both of you for these past 13 years of support and love. Mum, you my best friend and the most unstoppable woman I know. A girl only dreams to have a mother as epic as you. Through the tumultuous storms, and through the sunshines and rainbows, you have been my fortress. Thank you for being by my side through it all. Dad, you are the funniest person I know, and have a personality that is unparalleled. I am blessed to have such an empowering role model in my life. I like to think that everyone's life is like a story, and you, dad, are the hero in mine. You have both shown me the true essence of taking life by the horns and always making the most of it. I hope that I have made you proud throughout these 13 years, and will continue to do so in the future. Jordiii! My little man. Thank you for cheering me up during moments when I have felt down, and for being the greatest support this year, especially with the chores. Seeing you mature into the confident young man that you makes me so proud, Jordi. I am honoured to be your sister. And to my little cutie patootie, Zara, who is the best dog anyone could ask for. I love you and can't wait to give you a cuddle when I get home.

I would now like to thank our powerful trio, Mr Siatskas, Mrs Lay, and Mr Ogden. Our beloved homegroups teachers. Mr Ogden, you have been such a shining light this year, and have been the epitome of what it means to be truly optimistic. Every time I see you walking past, your smile is always beaming bright. Thank you for being a constant reminder that gratitude can go a long way. Mrs Lay (or shall I say 'Mrs Slay')! You are an absolute gem. Thank you for always taking the time out of your day to check in on all of us; not because you have to, but because you selflessly want to. Your golden heart touches so many lives, more than you could possibly know, and it has most certainly touched mine. Mr Siatskas: the man, the myth, the legend! You have exceeded all expectations as our Year 12 coordinator, but also as our biology teacher for many of us here. We will never forget your altruistic nature: buying birthday cakes for all of the students in your homegroup and biology class, handing out chocolates after every sac, and taking your iconic camera everywhere you go. We can truly see God's selflessness shine through you with everything that you do, and it is such an inspiration to see. These three people have played instrumental roles in our lives and have provided us with the utmost support, and on behalf of all of us, I hope we have made you proud.

To all year 12 teachers, thank you for helping us reach our approaching finish line. You have equipped us with knowledge, wisdom and discipline that will enable us to reach for the stars in our upcoming life chapters.

Mr Kearney: the best senior school coordinator out there. Thank you for teaching us that we shouldn't be afraid of stepping out of our comfort zone. I will never forget the TILT leadership program you lead last year, as it was one of the first few moments where I truly let my guard down and embraced the refreshing feeling of change. You have such a hunger for making an impactful difference in our school community, and your support for our cohort throughout the years is appreciated beyond measure.

To our incredible captains: David Tregale, Alanah McGinty, Lionel Bailey, and Bethany Fedele. Tonight's blissfulness couldn't have been achieved without you. We have all witnessed the amount of effort you guys have put into not only this night, but this year as a whole. Thank you for blessing this school with your creativity and genius minds. You are the greatest captains we could have ever asked for, and have truly made us proud.

I will now like to thank the person who has lead this school, wholeheartedly, and has emboldened us all to embrace the tenets of striving for excellence, build community, learn courageously, actively steward, and nurture godly character. Our Principal, Mr John Metcalfe. Your devotion, dedication, determination, and diligence towards ensuring that this school is a safe haven for many does not go unrecognised. Thank you for assuring each one of us that we are uniquely made in the image of God, and that all of our talents and gifts are what make us who we are. Despite the abundance of work that you do behind the scenes, we appreciate you for still managing to be a part of this journey of ours right from the beginning through to the end.

To the greatest friends I could have ever asked for: Tiare, Alanah, Isaac, Marcus, Daniel and Jerry. You have changed my life forever. Thank you for showing me what true friendship is, and for making this journey so memorable. FYI, you're stuck with me for life. Now, I have had the privilege of growing up with one special girl, who not only is my cousin, but my other half. Bethany Monique Fedele, you brighten my world more than you could ever know. I wouldn't be where I am today without you in my life. You are my person, and our unbreakable bond is one that I will cherish forever.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank God. There have been moments throughout this year where I have felt like giving up; throwing the towel in. Life can get like that, and as we embark on our different pathways next year, life will attempt to knock us down. But there is someone who is greater than all of our battles, and that is God. Isaiah 41:10 reads "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand". Whenever we feel anxious or uncertain, anchoring our faith in God is all we need.

13 years have turned into 1 final week until we get to hear that bell ring for the last time at 3:20pm. As our final days of school swiftly approach, I encourage you all to make the absolute most of it. Take it all in, because before you know it, we will begin our next chapter of conquering the world outside of these four walls. You guys are champions, and the world is so blessed to have each one of you in it. Thank you for making these past 10 years so magical for me. Soon we will be walking across that stage in our black robes and then it'll hit us...we did it...we graduated. And as we soon venture out into what seems like uncharted waters and face the double-edged sword of uncertainty, just remember that we have made it through these 13 years, so nothing can stop us now.

Thank you.