Grandfathers, grandmothers, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, grandchildren.

Thank for inviting me to be here for the 18th Annual Staaló Awards Ceremony. Do you realize that the awards were first given out in 1977? For those of you graduating this year, it was probably, the year you were born. As for the others, who will receive awards this evening, the 1977 ceremony will be history to you.

It is wonderful to see so many young people in one place. Just being together here this evening, you young people with your parents, grandparents and other relatives and friends is an expression of unity. Unity is the theme of the ceremony this evening. I can't say it in your language (SQ'EQ'IP) but in my language which is Cree, the word for unity is wechathoowin. That's much easier to say, isn't it? Perhaps, your school will have to switch to Cree.

Wechathoowin, unity means pulling together. Pulling together as a family, as a class, as a school and as a community is what is needed for success. I recently read that only 30% of Aboriginal students in Canada will graduate from high school. So if you are graduating this year, you are part of that 30%. What has happened to the other 70%? You probably know a number of students among that 70% because at one point, they were with you in class. Where are they now? Were they victims of a lack of unity?

To succeed, we must pull together, work together. Together is a key word. If all of you young people here today were to practise unity, you will help each other get through school. If someone is having a problem in math and you are good at it, you should help that person. If someone is having a personal problem, you should be a friend who will listen and give encouragement to the person. Too often in today's world, we compete with each other, we get selfish and greedy and if things are going well for us we do not think of the one who is not as fortunate. As a group of students here today in grades 8 to 12, in Staaló territory, you can do a lot to change that statistic of only 30% completing high school. You can make it your personal challenge to help each other so that as the years go by, you and your classmates can stand together not only as you graduate but as you go on in life.

Those of you finishing high school, will be moving on to higher education. Years ago when I was growing up (in your grandparents day), grade 12 was often the end of one's education. We could get pretty good jobs with grade 12. In fact, following 6 weeks of summer school, I became a teacher. Today to be a teacher, you must go to university for 5 years. Today, grade 12 is not the end of your education but the beginning. Isn't that great news? While we are on the subject of grandparents, and the fact that grade 12 was pretty good in our day, there were other things that were not as good as you have it today.

Today, you don't have to chop wood, carry water, take out the honey bucket; scrub wood floors, why you don't even have to move your butt off the chesterfield to change channels on your TV. That's a big plus for you, believe me!!! That leaves you a whole lot more time to LARN things. In terms of technology, the hardest thing we had to learn was how to use a telephone. Today, with your computers, you cruise the information highway to learn
whatever you want about any subject you want, in any part of the world. Times have really changed and you have to keep up with those changes. So plan to stay to be in college or university for a few years.

Unity, wechathtoozin, will be important to your success in whatever vocation you decide to pursue. When you look for an institution to attend, find out which ones have support services, people with whom you can identify, where elders are available to share their wisdom and knowledge, where there are programs that are relevant to the way our people think and view the world, that have a place where students can gather. It sounds like I'm recruiting for UBC. That is the kind of place that we have been attempting to create at UBC. In fact, today, May 25, which is a memorable day for you is also a memorable day for me. It is 2 years today, since the First Nations Longhouse was officially opened at UBC. The $5 million Longhouse is a home away from home for Aboriginal students. It makes unity possible for the students.

So wherever you head after graduation, make sure that whoever is with you from the Staa'lo Nation or another Nation hangs in there with you throughout your years of post secondary education. Don't be like the crabs in a pot who pull each other down as they reach the top. Do the opposite, pull each other up.

In conclusion, I would like you to gaze with me into the future to the Year 2000. That isn't far into the future, its only 5 years away. What do you see yourself doing? How old are you? You will be five years older than you are now. So do your math quickly, how old will you be? 18, 20,23? Where will you be? Who will you be with?

Probably the best way to get a glimpse of the year 2000 is take a look at yourself now, in 1995. You are in grade 8 or 9 or ten or eleven or you will be graduating. How is your life right now? Are you satisfied, excited, happy, or are you somewhat frustrated and confused? Who/What has made you who you are today?

You are likely thinking, my parents, my grandparents, other relatives, friends, enemies, the school, the church, the community, the government. As you think about this question carefully, I believe you will find that the answer is YOU. You are the BOSS of yourself. It is possible to have a great family, home, other good surroundings and yet become a problem to yourself, your family and society. Why? It is because, you are the BOSS. It is also possible to have been raised in a family with many problems yet become a contributing citizen of your community, your country. Why? Because you are the BOSS. What I'm trying to say is that we hold in our hands all kinds of excuses, blame and sometimes even hate if things aren't going right for us. If you have these in your hand, you have no room for wechathtoozin---UNITY.

To all of you here this evening, I say thank you for letting a Cree into your midst, congratulations to the award recipients, and let us remember to keep UNITY our motto for the future.

Akoosani ni tootamuk