

Where do I even begin? You know, I think I speak for almost everyone here when I say it feels beyond surreal to be present in this gym, is that right students? Especially after the onslaught of endless demoralization I'm sure we all fought this past year.

My own battle with the pandemic involved sleep. My sophomore year, I held my chest high, with an attitude considerably higher. I almost pranced from class to class, garnering comments about my constant cheerfulness, all thanks to 8.5 hours of sleep. My friends would say things like, "Jakob..."

And I'd say, "Yeah, what is it?"

"What is wrong with you... This is IMSA, you should not be this happy all the time!"

This past year though, that cheerfulness turned into desolation. Every night, I slept only 4-5 hours because the lack of in-person friendships had broken me. I'm sure for many of us, this is all too familiar. My chest deflated, my attitude sank through the earth, and the motivation I once cherished, took pride in... it was lost.

Though, my battle with sleep was not even comparable to the other entire wars I witnessed. Never before had I seen my strongest friends and family struggle with bipolar disorder, eating disorders, drug abuse, self harm, and even thoughts of suicide. All of us fought a different battle. Some of us even fought wars.

Yes, this past year was dreadful. In fact, to be politically correct, "it sucked bro". But guess what... students, where are we right now? Yes, we're at IMSA! And do you know what that means? It means the worst is finally over! Do you all know that tunnel that's always talked about, the one with the light at the end of it? That light was once 20 miles away, but now it's just beyond our reach. Yes we have COVID restrictions, but we've finally reunited as the one and only IMSA family.

I understand this analogy isn't new, but the comparison is exceedingly true. The RC's are like the parents of the IMSA family, and for one resounding reason. They're always upset with us students. But just like our actual parents, it stems from care that resides deep in their hearts. It upsets them whenever our actions now may diminish our future potential. And for that, RC's, we thank you.

Teachers. You all are like the grandparents! Some of you may recoil at that thought, but it stems from the wisdom needed so the generations of tomorrow can change the world. The wisdom required in the fields of STEM and so much more. For that, teachers, we thank you.

Sophomores. In other words, the babies. Sophomores, you all may be new to the IMSA family, but we're all thrilled for the energy you will bring. It is always the sophomores that surprise our family the most every year, and act as the glue that holds us together. So sophomores, I ask you to bring forth that energy, and to keep holding us together.

Juniors. In other words, the awkward middle children. Juniors, we're elated to see the faces from our zoom calls greet us with open arms. This year will inevitably give more work than the last, but comes with your first IMSA events on campus. You will have to balance your extracurricular involvement, and make sacrifices for homework, clubs, sleep, and much more. So Juniors, I ask that you have fun, but also not to lose sight of your purpose here.

Last but not least, class of '22, are you ready? Last but not least we have... THE SENIORS! Seniors, we're the eldest children. Our time here is almost complete but we still have a great unspoken obligation. We must restore the student experience. We must be role models for our younger siblings. We are, quite literally, the redefining class of this school and we mustn't underestimate that responsibility. So Seniors, I ask that we work together and pass on the legacy of IMSA's culture for years to come.

As many of you could already tell, the cheerfulness the past year stole from me, I've now stolen back. For everyone here, for the IMSA family, I ask that we all take back what's rightfully ours, from the sleep lost during late nights spent worrying, to the pride we hold in our hearts as we advance the human condition. Let's move to a year filled with mends and restorations. To a year flowing with joyfulness and gratitude. To a year defined by friendships, and hope. Thank you!