We have gathered here today October 26th 2017 to celebrate the life of the most the most selfless, inspiring and charismatic human I have been blessed to spend the last 32 years with: the Honorable Rudolph David Gaskin, affectionately called ‘Rudes’. Rudolph David Gaskin was born on Januray 1st 1950 to Edward and Kathleen Gaskin, both deceased. He would often share his date of birth curiously looking at the listener’s expression before making the cheeky comment, “Yes, (nods his head) I start the year.”

From his childhood in Barataria where he was born, he knew he had an exceptional purpose in life. However, he grew up in Curepe where he took on the role of protector, adviser and motivator to his siblings and later this role expanded to his many nieces, nephews and other impressionable youth who crossed his path. The many stories of his motivating force to many are a dime a dozen. However, as any boy, he showed his mischievous side. His eldest sister, Heather, will often tell the story of returning home from school from Tunapuna E.C. after which he would wander off with his friends to look for fruits. Of course, walking from Tunapuna to Curepe after his escapades, they would get home late. They were both greeted with the rod of correction with Heather crying while he was getting his share.

On Saturdays, he would be asked to go to the market to buy beef and provision to make soup for the Saturday lunch. He left on his bicycle but most times ended up going to play football with his friends. Returning home, about 4:00pm, again the rod of correction was waiting for him but Rudy would try to negotiate his way out of getting lix and when that failed he would run under the bed. Rudy loved his family dearly. As he started to do well financially, instead of seeking his own home, he convinced his parents to let him breakdown the house in which they lived to build a modern structure. Not only were his parents now quite comfortable but so too were his siblings who all lived there.

As he became a man, he always wanted the best for the younger generation of the family who also tell the story of running to grab the nearest book or novel upon hearing Uncle Rudolph’s voice. Behind his back they called him the ‘Dean of Discipline’, whispering amongst themselves, “The dean is coming”, as they heard his voice. The ones who were unable to express what the contents of the book was about, would often be scolded on the importance of education. Rudy would often say to them, “No-one can take away your education.”

He followed his own advice, constantly upscaling himself from his high school education at Hillview College to his later years moving on to attain his CLU (Chattered Life Underwriting). In fact, it was during his Hillview years he met his beautiful wife Allandrina, who he fondly called ‘Dreens’. A relationship which germinated since I was 13 and he was 16 years of age. I attended Lashkmi Girls Hindu College and on afternoons waited at the school’s entrance for my driver. He would be riding his bicycle from school down to Curepe and soon I caught his attention. One day he mustered the courage to ride across the road to meet me, how he loved my long plaits which always formed part of his conversation. He was never daunted by the fact that I never wanted to speak to him. As in those days, a girl in her school uniform talking to a boy was taboo. Coincidentally, one day after we both left high school, we met at a wedding of one of my cousins in Curepe. He made no hesitation in asking me to dance with him.

At that time, Rudy worked at Government Kennisth on Upper Frederick Street. Somehow, he found out that I was attending the Government Teachers Training College on St. Vincent Street. Of course, he came there looking for me. It was in conversation, he learnt that I lived at 12 Arapita Avenue, Woodbrook. He soon found himself there only to find that another young man was already visiting. Mr Self Assured informed me that the guy was only wasting his time since my initials would never change, my maiden name being Gibbins. What a determined man! A relationship soon blossomed between us as his determination to capture his elusive price paid off. On August 18th 1985, we got married in Long Island New York.

As a young man Rudy began working, his first job was at the Town Hall. He soon left there and went to work at Coconut Grower’s Association and then at Caribbean Packaging Industry. He never stayed too long in any one job since he was always striving for excellence. He went on to work at Government Kennisth where he eventually moved to be the lab technician at Mucurapo Senior Comprehensive School. In those days, Mucurapo was a force to be reckoned with in the game of football. He assisted in coaching one of our shining stars, Russell Latapy, who was then a student at Mucurapo. Never one to remain stagnant, he decided while working at Mucurapo Senior Comprehensive to get into the insurance industry. He first worked as a part time agent with Algico.

In 1976, he informed his mother he was leaving the government service to go into insurance full time. His mother was upset and wanted to know how he could leave a secure job with the government to go to sell insurance. She would ask, “What if no one bought from you?”. He worked with Algico until 1982. Being determined and self assured, he knew that there was more life had to offer in the insurance industry. In March 1983, he joined the illustrious company of Guardian Life, now known as Guardian Group. In 1986, he became Agent of the Year and eventually moved on with the company to become a unit manager. Rudy took pride in servicing all his agents: giving financial advice and guiding several of them in acquiring their own homes. Wherever support was needed, he was there for them.

He touched the lives of many in a most profound way. An example of such was reading on the Newspaper, the need of a mother to assist her daughter who had recently pass for her SEA exam for St. Augustine Girls’ High School. He immediately told me he was going to call the number because he wanted to help this young girl. He immediately got involved: he purchased her items for school, covered transportation costs and provided support throughout her secondary schooling and even to now. Today, Kerneisha Skeete is now a fourth year medical student at UWI Cave Hill Barbados. She always showed her gratitude to him and on Friday last she came in to spend the weekend so that she can spend time with him knowing he was not doing well. Gratitude is so very important in life. A selfless man who not only wanted the best for himself, but for everyone he encountered. Rudy has been successful in qualifying for thirteen (13) of the company’s overseas sales conventions. At the company’s head office his name and picture is there with the other outstanding Life Guardians. These conventions took us to the most exotic places in the world: going on Mediterranean Cruises, having dinner at the foothills of the pyramids in Egypt, having dinner while sailing on the River Nile, walking the great walls of China, sailing in the Gondolas in Venice, to name a few. Yes, Rudy Gaskin worked hard while enjoying the finest things life had to offer. He would say to his co-workers, “I qualify first for my wife and then for myself to go on conventions.”

Rudy was a fond lover of sports. The game of football was one of his passions. At his time spent at Hillview College, he became the captain of their football team. He attended the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canada where our own Hasley Crawford won gold for our country in the 100M race. In 1984, we both attended the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, California and in 2006, Rudy gave up going on convention, which was an Alaskan Cruise. We instead went to support our boys who had for the first time qualified for the football World Cup, we attended thirteen (13) matches, spending one (1) month in Germany. Often he travelled to Barbados to attend either a football or cricket match. He met his now brother-in-law, Michael Holder, in whose life he also played a significant role motivating and molding him and Carol Holder, his sister, in the successful business partnership they now own and run.

He also took up the game of golf. It is while practicing one evening at the Golf Course in Trincity that he felt a sharp pain in his left hip. Life can surely catch you on the blindside, as he often repeated. Thinking it was just a muscular pain, we visited more than one physiotherapist. We were soon advised to seek further medical help and soon discovered there was a tumor on the left hip which was to be removed. In 2009, he had his first surgery at St. Clair Medical. In keeping with his character, he never let his medical issues get the better of him. He would jokingly say he is now bionic having undergone hip replacement. In 2012, the problem reoccurred as another mass was seen. Rudy and I journeyed to Salt Lake, Utah where he had his second hip replacement. Coming out the anaesthetic he repeatedly called the doctors name saying, “Dr Randall I want you on my team, we have to kick the ball hard”, such was his love for football.

Again, we returned home where he resumed a relatively comfortable life and went back to work with Guardian Group. However, he was now walking with the assistance of a cane which he proudly strutted around with. How he took his illness in good stride! We continued to enjoy the things we loved doing. Rudy enjoyed dancing. He would often be seen dancing a sailor type dance using his cane, much to the enjoyment of those around.

In 2015, during the height of campaigning for the year’s general election, Rudy and Felix Borde were assigned by the then candidate for Tunapuna, Esmond Forde, to be his accountants. Rudy worked tirelessly to ensure that Esmond Forde won his seat. Our dining room became a sea of red where 15,000 t-shirts were kept and eventually distributed on afternoons during the walk about in the constituency. The weekend before the general election, Rudy felt a sharp excruciating pain running down from his left hip. Upon returning home, he spent quite a while in the vehicle before coming inside. When he did, he headed straight for his bed to lie down. That’s when I found out about the pain since I was not with them that afternoon. The next Monday was election day and in spite of his pain, he went to exercise his civic duty. The next week, we visited Dr Ian Pierre at St Clair Medical and upon doing an x-ray we saw that the prosthesis had broken and there was also a very large mass which had grown on the left hip. Shortly after, we found out that that left mass had compromised the integrity of the prosthesis, hence the reason why it broke. We were soon on our way to the University of Miami Hospital where he had two surgeries which were done by their re-known orthopedic surgeon, Dr Sheila Conway. One was done on the 4th of November and the other on the 11th of November. Her intention was to do both on the 4th of November but after losing ten (10) pints of blood and the removal of the mass, which she told me weight almost ten (10) pounds, she decided not to put him through anymore trauma and put off repairing the prosthesis in a week’s time provided he was ready to do so. He stayed in ICU for seven (7) days and on the 11th he was returned to theatre to repair the prosthesis. We stayed at the hospital for six (6) weeks, my bed being right next to his in his room. It is there he had to learn to walk again, this time using a walker.

On the third day after his second surgery, the kitchen mistakenly brought chicken as part of his meal. He asked to speak to the person in charge, since he had placed on record that he does not eat meat. A lady, by the name of Angie, came to resolve the problem. Talking with her, we found out that she was from Tobago and she asked where we were from. Of course we were happy to say Trinidad. She decided that to compensate for the error made, not only would Rudy be provided with his three (3) vegetarian meals but that I too would now be given the same instead of having to purchase my own meals. We continued to see God’s intervention in our lives as we continued to hold on to his promise that he would never leave us nor forsake us. At the end of the six (6) weeks, we were relocated to Broward Health Hospital in Fort Lauderdale for physiotherapy where we spent three (3) weeks, after which, he became an outpatient. Would you believe the same mistake with the kitchen bringing chicken to him reoccurred there? Again, the person in charge of the kitchen made up for it by ensuring that not only Rudy got his three (3) vegetarian meals but I was also included. Indeed, it had to be God! In all, we ended up spending five (5) and a-half months in Florida. During the five and a half months spent in Florida I want to give special thanks to Phil Saunders and Ben Darbeau who constantly visited us during our duration at both hospitals, always ensuring that we had extra to eat and drink. I also want to thank my sister, Jimmy May, and family for allowing us to stay at their home.

We returned home in April 2016. Rudy continued to be optimistic and spoke about returning to work at the Vernon Fingal’s branch. Anyone asking him how he was doing, his immediate response was always, “I’m doing great!”. He was never one to complain. He soon started doing chemotherapy at Medical Associates and afterwards radiation at Brian Lara Cancer Center. After treatment, he was advised by Dr Ravi Capildeo to do another set of chemo, however, Rudy decided against it. We were then sent to the palliative care clinic in Caura where he was now being seen by Dr Karen Cox. He was determined, as he said to Dr Cox, to beat his ailment. He eloquently and assertively said this to her. She looked at him in awe and asked if he would be willing to speak to the patients who were staying at the hospital to give them that source of upliftment, faith and courage. Throughout the ten (10) years of him battling cancer, he touched many souls and changed many lives.

As faith would have it, in September he was no longer able to visit the clinic for his appointments. A doctor by the name of Astra Chan was now assigned to do home visits. His condition rapidly deteriorated. On Saturday last he called me around 7:30pm and told me he was leaving me and that he loved me dearly and wanted me to take care of myself. He told my sister, Jimmy May, and his friend, Cheryl Perrez, I want you all to take care of Dreens for me. It was at that point I asked him if he wanted me to call his entire family, which I did. Rudy was so very lucid throughout the night as each one arrived at his bedside, he had kind words and counsel to share. What a bittersweet moment it was for all of us. Esmond Forde and Franklyn Tuitt stayed with us until after 2 am Sunday morning. Franklyn prayed with him and at one point early that morning he called out to Franklyn and said, “Franklyn, I want you to help me with the transport”. Franklyn immediately understood what was happening, Franklyn told him call on Jesus, he would help you with the transport. Rudy passed away at 5:15am on Sunday 26th October. Dr Janet Charles, a dear friend of his, who faithfully came every Saturday evening to spend the night with us, was at his bedside.

Rudy was full of love, full of life. He lived a phenomenal life with little to no regrets. He would want us all to remember him that way. Not as a vulnerable man at the mercy of the C-word but a stallwart of strength, courage, gratitude and faith, a strong believer in the supreme being. One of his favorite verses from the bible was, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not onto thine own understanding, in all thine ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your part.” Rudolph David Gaskin, we thank you for all the lessons you thought us and for being that blessed soul who taught: life is what you make of it. That blessed soul who showed us: in pain and suffering there can be love and light. That blessed soul that showed us: we can push all boundaries of life, we can fight all battles until our maker is ready for us. Making peace with God, Rudy showed us that the wrath of death has no dominion over us, that blessed soul that would forever be blessed and had the God-given privilege of preparing his transition to go to the other side in peace and in love. Not everyone would get such a privilege. Rudy, I love you and I thank you for all you have done for me and your entire family. May your blessed soul forever rest in eternal peace.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr Janet Charles, his sisters; Heather Fletcher and Odessa Meyers, his brother-in-law; Michael Holder, his nephew; Shawn Meyers and our friend; Veronica Lewis who all assisted in taking turns to spend one night in the week with us to give support.