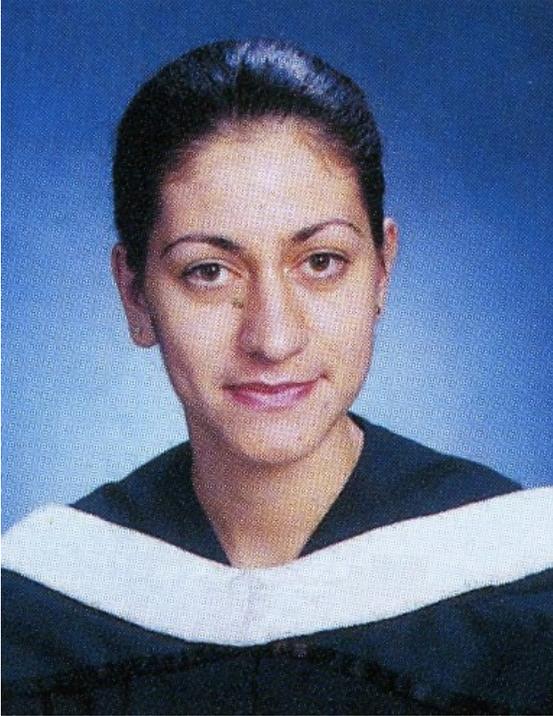


Boriana Petkova - Class of 2003



Dobro Utro! Chlenove na upravitelnia savet, Gospodin Macchiarola, Pochetni gosti i prepodavateli,

I couldn't resist! You've just experienced Bulgarian. Now let me try some English!

Members of the Board of Trustees, President Macchiarola, Honored Guests, Members of the Faculty and Administration, Fellow Graduates, Family and Friends,

For four years I managed to deceive people at St. Francis that I know English and now they've given me the ultimate test- they put me in front of more than 2000 people and asked me to say something wise in 5 minutes. (*phuuu*) Let me try that!

It has often been said that we are a product of our surroundings. Our interaction with everyone we meet supposedly leaves a permanent mark in our unconscious by creating a miniature data bank in our mind. We draw on these little memory banks everyday and they build our character. I feel very lucky, for in the past four years at St. Francis College I've been surrounded by you.

Our backgrounds together represent some 80 different countries. In this respect St. Francis College reflects the city of New York in the fullest sense. I came to the United States to experience American culture. And I did. I have learned the meaning of the 13 stripes and the 50 stars on the US flag, I've memorized the 27 amendments of the Constitution and I still attempt to hit the high notes of the Star Spangled Banner. But through my four years at St. Francis College I have learned much more from YOU. I have learned how to make a delightful pelau from the Trinidadians; I discovered the passion of salsa from the Latin Americans. I've seen how they "*shake that thing*" in Jamaica. I learned how to cook latkes for Hanukah and how to make a shish kebob like they do in Iran. I heard Albanian and Croatian folk songs and even a Norwegian and Palestinian rap together! And finally from my Brooklyn friends I learned how to "*party as if it's my birthday*" (And yesterday it was my birthday!)

This is what makes St. Francis not simply a College but a Community. It is not every school that provides education with a friendly hand. The first thing I noticed at St. Francis was a long sign in the admissions office, that reads: Zdrastvuite, *Wilkomen*, Bien Venido, *Welcome!* From admissions, through academic enhancement and all the way to

the office of alumni relations, the faculty and administration at St. Francis have welcomed our diversity and have given us the one-on-one encouragement and guidance, the financial support and nurturing environment to fulfill our potential. In this community we have been given the opportunity to reach beyond academic success to find tolerance and respect for each other. From a group of strangers on day one, four years later we are a community. Without realizing, through our everyday interactions we have been filling the little memory banks in our mind with knowledge invaluable for our personal lives. Now is the time to pass this knowledge on to the rest of the world!



As we leave today to embark on the great journey of adventure, called ‘real-life’ we will probably face many difficulties. But is a fact of life that all things are difficult before they become easy. I am convinced that a big part of our life is not what happens to us, but what we make of what happens to us. Our best bet is probably to learn how to laugh at our problems. A positive attitude may not solve all our problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort. As Benjamin Franklin said, *“the Constitution only gives the people the right to pursue happiness, you have to catch it yourself.”* There is so much sadness in the world that we are all under obligation to contribute as much joy as lies within our powers.

In Bulgaria we don’t have valedictorians, so when I learned I was going to be one, my first job was to look the word up in the dictionary. I did and I learned that *“a valedictorian is a student giving a farewell at commencement”* (which means a beginning). I was a bit confused as to why would someone say ‘good-bye’ at the beginning of something, but here it goes:

At this beginning I urge you to cherish your little memory banks filled with the richness of the St. Francis Community. My parting words on behalf of our class, with deepest appreciation, are simply:

- Blagodaria (thank you in Bulgarian)
- Todah Rabah (thank you in Hebrew)
- Shókran (thank you in Arabic)

-Muchas Gracias!

-Thank you very much!