Alyse Santisi was a freshman when the volleyball program's turnaround began.

Q: During your four years at FIU, what was your fondest memory?
A: It was when we finally won a tournament in April.

Q: Where do you see yourself after graduation?
A: I'm going to start my masters at FIU in exercise science and I'm going to be a graduate assistant for the volleyball team.

Q: What is the most important thing you've learned at FIU?
A: One good thing is good recruitment. Coach did a good job of promoting a program and finding ways to make it more appealing to you.

Q: What is the reason for the volleyball program's turnaround?
A: The team and then running a big tournament in April. It's going to be the Play For a Cure Tournament. We did it last year; we're going to do it for another person with a terminal illness or something of that nature.

Q: What is the most important thing someone has taught you?
A: I've learned at FIU?
Sharing the spotlight

Father and daughter graduate on same day

CHARLIE GRAU
Editor in Chief

When Daniel Cazalis and his daughter Begoñe came to the United States from Cuba, it was not an easy task for them. Daniel, a professor who teaches math, computer science and statistics at FIU, delivered pizzas for Dominos and Begoñe, got a job scooping ice cream at Haagen Daz, even though she was too young at the time to work.

"My dad was working a lot. He did everything from building roofs to deliveries, everything to help provide for us," Begoñe said.

Both father and daughter will be among the thousands of FIU students graduating on Dec. 17 and 18 at the Pharmed Arena.

I was assuming that I would graduate before her. But she was really fast and really on time and I was dragging for many years," Daniel said.

Daniel will be receiving his doctorate in computer sciences. This will be his second doctorate, his first was in applied mathematics from University of Rio de Janeiro.

Begoñe will be receiving her bachelor’s degree in journalism with a minor in French and philosophy.

“T’ll graduate after this exam,” I proudly announced in class last week, while the 15 or so students who anxiously waited for her book were cheering and clapping and I smiled.

Wait. It didn’t really happen like that. I never made any announcement. I did think about it, though. Who doesn’t?

The truth is, my last exam was less of a heroic act and more of a mental torture.

I walked into the classroom and dipped into my exam studying, not because I hadn’t studied but because I had barely slept or eaten during the previous week.

I walked down my last aisle and thought that maybe, just maybe, I should intentionally fail the test, stay in college another semester and delay the "big change." But he didn’t.

After giving this idea a shameful second thought before dropping it, reaching my old purple bookbag and stepping again to consider whether I should correct my professor when she said, “Have a nice winter break,” by answering, “I’m graduating. It’s more of an eternal school break if you don’t count this thing.”

After deciding it didn’t matter whether I corrected her or not, stepping out and deciding that this winter was too lazy for a December afternoon, I finally reached that notori-ous moment: now what?

Should I laugh or cry? Tell the world or be content alone? My mind was blank.

Pure emptiness.

I remembered the first exam I took there. It was for microeconomics. During the previous class, the guy who sat next to me — let’s call him Tom — asked to borrow my book to study for the same test. The bookstore had run out, he explained, and added that he would make some photocopies and meet me two hours later outside the library.

I was too naive to say no or to ask for his phone number, and too shy to go with him. So I let him walk away with my book. Two hours later at the library, Tom was no show.

I waited a couple of hours in case he had taken longer, in case there was a long line at the copy center, in case he had run into some trouble, but would still make it back.

But he didn’t.

I was 17 and living all by myself.

In just one afternoon I went from feeling invincible to feeling like an idiot. I was going to fail my exam and probably the class. I was never going to make it past that semester and in a few more months would be moving back home. I couldn’t sleep the night before the test.

Miraculously, the few pages of notes I had helped me pass the test. After class, Tom smiled and said he had waited “forever” for me. Yeah, yeah, I said, took my book and never spoke to him again.

Even though it’s too soon to digest the changes approaching, I am sure about something: the girl walking through the graduation stage this week won’t be the innocent girl who anxiously waited for her book outside the library six years ago.

That girl came here feeling she could devour the world, believing she knew it all, yet it only took an encounter with Tom to realize how much there was still to learn.

Although it took more downs than I wished, I can’t describe how much I grew here and only hope there was a Tom in each of your lives to teach the things no one else can teach us, the things we learn when we are most vulnerable.

Like for some of you, my future is a little foggy but I’m not scared, I’ve learned to take each challenge as it comes. Perhaps the saddest part of leaving FIU is leaving my innocence here, but I know that if I ever walk around, I’ll be able to find that girl in the face of other freshmen.

As for Tom, I wonder whether he’s reading this.

Family, teammates major reason for Santisi’s success

SANTISI, page 1

A. What I’ve learned through high school up to finally graduating college is that I can do a lot more than I think I can do, but it takes a lot of hard work.

I’ve learned that through being a student-athlete and having to deal with time management and having to deal with the need to be successful under pressure and when you’re tired. I think playing a college sport makes you such an all around better person to be successful in real life.

Q. How has your family influenced you in your college experience?

A. My family has been huge, huge, huge in my success as both a player and a student. I always wanted to do what my older sister did. She played volleyball for one year so she got me into playing volleyball.

Then my twin sister and I played together. She’s the reason why I was successful when I was young because we would practice everyday outside just constantly touching balls and getting reps.

While other girls were hanging out with their friends, me and my sister were playing volleyball.

The support from my mom and my dad is so awesome. Basically what my older sister told me is to do what I love and have fun.

Do the best I can. This school has taught me that the best that I can is all that you can do. So always try to do the best you can.

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