A degree 57 years in the making

SUPER SENIOR: Barbara Leon, 57, reads an art book to her 3-year-old granddaughter, Ceci. Leon has five grandchildren and is graduating with a Humanities degree.

Don’t be a cynic, our journey is just beginning

A graduation, I’ll be sitting next to you as we move from college students to college graduates. During our college journey, each one of us has learned lessons we’ll never forget.

At graduation, we’ll feel accomplished. We’ve all spent nights writing the last pages of essays or cramping a few last concepts seconds before a test. procrastination is the biggest stress inducer in college and doing work on time is probably something we never internalized.

At graduation, we’ll feel proud of ourselves for our accomplishments. But hours later, as we walk out of graduation together, step-by-step into the real world, we’ll find that what’s waiting for us at the other end looks bleak.

Hundreds of thousands of students will graduate this semester and next, hundreds of thousands of students graduate last semester but, unfortunately, the job market can’t produce enough jobs to plump all our pockets. Even worse, the state of the economy has forced employers to reduce the number of positions they already have.

It’s under these gray clouds that we’ve spent our last frantic months as college students and under which I’ve learned the most important lessons of all.

Never be a cynic, Yes, the economy is in the dumps, Yes, I’ve gotten my share of rejections. But pendulums swing both ways: The economy will bounce back and employers will eventually start hiring again.

Learn to be ready. You might say, “We went to college to be ready.” Learning doesn’t end when you take off the blue cap and gown.

Know your industry, know who to network with, who has been experienced — even if it means taking internships and staying at home a little longer.

Learn to create your own opportunities because opportunities never knock. In this economy, we all have to learn to be proactive with our lives.

Learn to be brave. If there aren’t any job openings in your area, find a job in another city, another state, another country.

Some, like me, will need that after graduation, there’s vast horizon in front of them.

Luckier graduates have their path set. They’ll be heading to graduate school or to a job in January.

Whatever your circumstance, I’m sure there’s plenty of support about, but leave the worrying to your parents.

You never want to be caught in a situation where you’re unprepared — say, in a foreign country where you don’t know the language at two in the morning — but it’s important to remember that the journey, however rocky, however long, however cold is important.

Work hard, have goals, have faith, but most importantly, remember that life is a journey. We’ve just ended one chapter but there’s another one that must be explored, enjoyed and lived — if it is, you’ll always have a story to share in the end.

A degree 57 years in the making

SERGIO BONILLA
Asst. News Director

She graduated from Clifton High School as a 16-year-old with hopes of obtaining an undergraduate degree from Patterson State College – currently William Patterson College – in New Jersey. Yet it is now, as a 57-year-old mother of three and grandmother of soon-to-be-six, that Barbara Leon will be graduating with a Humanities degree.

“I am no longer saying to myself, ‘No, I can’t,’” Leon said, “I’m learning so much at this point of my life.”

Leon has devoted more than 30 years to helping her husband, Orlando Leon, manage his obstetrics and gynecology office and raise their three children: Orlando, Annie and Robert. Even if it is decades later, Leon wanted to prove she could finish what she started in 1968.

“A college education has given me more confidence,” Leon said. “You’d think at 57 you would already have confidence, I’ve opened up to ideas as to what I could do with this degree.”

Despite graduating with a 3.98 GPA as one of Phi Beta Kappa, Leon was initially not sure how she would perform in university level courses.

“I was afraid that I wouldn’t be able to keep up intellectually with the students,” Leon said. “I quickly learned that was B.S. and that I could keep up and still learn.”

Additionally, Leon was concerned of how she would adapt interacting socially with younger peers. Leslie Deonier, 28, is graduating alongside her friend Dec. 15, and she said age difference never hindered her friendship with Leon.

“I don’t see her as old,” Deonier said. “She’s hands down one of my best friends.”

Since Leon’s return to FIU, Deonier has been encouraged to not only make friends, but to learn from them.

“She’s my only baby sister,” Puig said of Leon, who watches over her two children: Ceci and Danny. “I could ask her about anything, even how to be a better mom.”

In addition to helping Puig take care of her children, Leon helped her daughter-in-law, Orlando’s wife, obtain her own degree. Leon baby-sat the couple’s three children while their mother took classes.

“She helped Orlando’s wife finish school, even though she hadn’t,” Puig said.

Neglecting her education to help her family was a recurring theme during Leon’s time away from school. With her degree almost at hand, Leon is trying to figure out what to do following graduation.

“Therein lies my conundrum,” she said. “Am I the good grandma? Am I the good mom that helps out? Am I the rock that’s always been for so many people?”

Lasema Ikadiri will graduate with Leon as well, and she pictures her friend in an art gallery in the future.

“I see her in a museum setting,” Ikadiri said. “I see her using some of the knowledge we’ve learned from school.”

Leon is saddened from that now on Humanities is no longer offered as a major, only as a minor. Still, she stresses the high quality courses and professors the Humanities program has to offer.

“The professors are phenomenal,” she said. “They’re so inspirational. You sit in there in awe of them. I recognize them for all majors.

Humanities classes give you such a wonderful basis for life.”

Her former professors, such as Barbara Watts, Daniel R. Guernsey, Marian Demos and Bruce Harvey have all told Leon she should continue her studies into graduate school.

She said she respects her professors deeply and is considering graduate school as an option.

Her daughter has two options for her mother after graduation.

“Sincerely, I would want her to help me. Unselfishly, I think some of her professors have talked to her about grad school,” Puig said.

When Leon seeks President Modesto A. Madonna’s hand at the Fall 2008 Commencement Ceremony, she will do it with out dwelling on time lost.

“I’m so sorry that I didn’t get started until now,” she said. “I should’ve started long before I did. But I can’t beat myself over that.”

Leon has not made a definite choice regarding her life after college, but she is sure about one thing: “I think I should do whatever I want to do to finish. I’m 57, and I think it’s my turn.”
Fall 2008 Commencement Candidates

-Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Supervision
Guillermo Manuel Garcia-Talain
Larry J. Moss

-Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration
Peter Barbus
Gregory John Frenco
Mary Sheldon
Robert James Hartman
Valerie A. Smidthephyll

-Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
Ren Y. Myers

-Bachelor of Arts in Information Technology
James C. Ball
Luis Antonio Crespo
Rajo Kirpalani
Susanna Villanueva

-Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering
Anat Aviram
George P. Greens
Javier Gonzalez
Maria Concepcion Gutierrez
Sergio Luis Martinez
Viviana Money
Rosa Ramirez
Sebastian R. Moberg
Adrian Romero
Barbara M. Traif
Estefan Arteaga White

-Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering
Efrain Jose Abrut
Jonathan Alejandro Aparin
Angela M. Barro
David Battan
Howard B. Batt
Franz J. Bokett
George Abdul Cho
Robert A. Chacon
Roberto Chavez
Shawn J. Conn
Daniel C. Duardo
Herbert Fernandez
Luis Florent
Miguel Gabriel
Gauthier Milano
Jose Gil
John Gill
Esteban Gil
Hector Gonzalez
Olman Guzman Guillen
Carlos L. Guerra
Javier Herrera
Milena Klarica
Marc Kupferschmid
Oto Ivan
Chien-Po Martha
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Pedro Mora
Pedro Altamirano
Christopher Perez
Rafael Ramirez
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-Antoinette Sampson

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Rodrigo Andres Barbosa
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Campano-Zamudio-Gomez-Acebo
Christian Cordova
Eliseo Avila
Delfin Olivero
Edward J. Ramhurtan
William A. Safar
Juan Tiu Silva
Karen Y. Velasqueh
Chen Wang
Karene Watts

-Doctor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
Vivek Kamur
Andi Kumar Reddy Nimmala
Sankar P. Jayath
John J. Semper
Manju Zope

-Doctor of Science in Materials Science and Engineering
Rang Bandapalli
Xuexing Chen
Sang-Hoon Chung
Kanpat Sanam
Sukumar Reddy Nimmala
Nesha Pramanik

-Doctor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
Danielle Sodhi Auldisci
An Ч. Kamal
William Felipe Betancourt
Suresh Chandra
Jennifer Anna-Simeon Giraud
Narciso Josue Gomez
Rodrique Arzah
Tom A. Prahina
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Jean-Marie Antoine St. Hilaire
Damien Striker
Alex E. Theresa
Teresa M. Thompson
Danica C. Zapiac

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Jean-Marie Antoine St. Hilaire
Darren Straker
Alex E. Theresias
Tonia M. Thompson
Danicza C. Zupcic

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Natacha Borrajo
Vivian Mileydi Cantor
Irma Colon Diaz
Christina E. Deehl
Katherine Louise Estrada
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Keisha Marie Miller Forrest
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Ruth Angela Mycklewhyte Rodgers
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-Master of Health Services Administration

Mary A. Formosa
Jill Carron Goldblatt
Vanya G. Lefebvre

-Master of Social Work

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Melissa Martha Ballestero
Marissa Belton
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Ima Ragel Frias
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