

**VICTORIA VLACHOS '22 – VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH –
JUNE 5, 2022**

CARNESECCE ARENA, ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Good morning Mr. Karsten, Dr. Penikas, Administration, faculty, family, friends and classmates.

Classmates, I want you all to picture yourselves on the first day of freshman year. Anticipation churns in your stomach. The unfamiliarity of the foreign building you walk into is daunting. You're surrounded by countless new faces you can't possibly get to know. You go to the wrong class a few times, returning to the correct one, your face flushed with humiliation. Maybe you were timid that year. Maybe you didn't make many friends, or the friends you did make weren't the ones that stuck.

As a freshman I spent much of my time worrying— about the past, the future, everything combined. Yet now I recognize that the most meaningful memories of high school came from the small moments I often overlooked— the trips to our lockers before lunch, the inconspicuous glance from a friend in the middle of class, the endless track meets. Or the smile from a friend, the concerned look of a teacher, the chocolate chip cafeteria cookies we rushed down to lunch to devour. These moments seemed trivial, sometimes lasting seconds. But they taught me the value of simplicity.

our education. School at Molloy has not been solely learning math, English, science, social studies. Surely our education in these topics was exemplary. But the *simple* moments in our education— these are the ones that will remain ingrained in our hearts. Such as when Mr. Kelly told us to “unfurl our sails” in every edmodo post on Friday afternoons. Or when the first thing we saw when walking into Mr. Sheehan’s class was the quote “reserving judgements is a matter of infinite hope” painted on the lightswitch by Ms. Edward when she was a student. Simplicity is every act of compassion, every email, every extra help given by a teacher. It's when we stood up on our chairs in AP Lit screaming “Carpe diem,” or when my Calc class filled the chalkboard with memories and inside jokes that will forever belong to us.

Many of us have shared retreats or freshman camp at Esopus. Esopus perfectly and purely embodies simplicity. The earthy smell of the gym, cheesy bread, round robin, Flag, walking to the river and skipping rocks with your best friends. Whether it’s freshman camp, retreats, or the senior encounter, many of us have a connection to this place that provides an indescribable feeling of comfort.

Sadly, two years ago, everything stopped. But we persevered. Simplicity is what kept us going during the months of isolation in our sophomore year. These times were difficult— for students, teachers, parents...for *everyone*. We all felt loss and woundedness in many ways. In a time where there was not much to hold onto, we relied on the simple things to bring us joy. During lunch, we Facetimed our friends and ate with them as we normally would; on zoom extra help we talked to teachers about movies we'd watched or brownies we'd baked.

Now we are journeying to what's next. Crossing the bridge into our future. In a way we are all immigrants searching for a new beginning. But as we move out into the world I hope we can keep the simple moments from high school in our hearts. Classmates, look to your left, to your right, in front of you, behind you. Do not forget these faces. Remember those who were kind to you, the teachers who helped you, and even the people who you lost touch with over the years.

I would like to take a moment to thank those who helped *me* get here. Thank you to my parents for your hard work and the meaningful values you instilled in me. You will always be my ultimate inspiration. Thank you to my teachers for your life wisdom

and your unfaltering efforts to instill in us the confidence and knowledge to make us feel safe and respected. Thank you to my friends for being there for me through everything.

The writer Tim O'Brien said, "stories save us." Our fondest memories will all turn into stories that we will remember in many years. These stories save us because they remind us of everything we once were. It is these stories that keep us alive, that keep us constantly learning and growing.

As we travel onward, our lives will be enriched with more and more stories we have yet to create. There will be new people, new experiences, new lessons added to our stories. Our lives will inevitably change, and all that will be left are the memories of the moments that we once lived. So, classmates, I urge you to hold onto the simple memories from Molloy. Hold on to the laughs in the locker room. Hold on to that bittersweet feeling of counting down the seconds of your last class at Molloy. *Hold on to who you are right now.*

Classmates, good luck with all your future endeavors! And never forget to cherish the simple moments in your lives.

Thank you.