

YONKERS RISING

Bayan Baker, 2015 SLC Graduate Living The American Dream in Yonkers

As a child war refugee of the former Yugoslavian 1990 ethnic war, Bayan has become a strong believer in the motto, “work hard in order to succeed.” Her desire to achieve greatness in this world is powered by both the difficulties of her past and the present, memories of war, and the struggles that she and her family have encountered on their journey towards “the American Dream.” Like many who came before her, Bayan learned of the many opportunities that await us, and all too quickly, grasped at any chance to better herself.



She is not the eldest daughter of doctors, and her parents did not graduate from college in the States, (although her mom did continue her studies and received her degree in English Literature some years after moving to this country) and she is not a child of great means. Time and time again, Bayan and her family found themselves working tediously against colleagues, classmates, and those who surround them, in order to accomplish their dreams. They have faced many difficulties in life, some common to everyone, and others not so much, but they never let any obstacles thwart them from making themselves into something, and they ensured that they would see out the reasons that encouraged them to escape the war in Europe and seek out a better country to live, work, and learn.

After graduating in the top 10 of her class from Yonkers Middle/High School with a full International Baccalaureate degree, Bayan went to Sarah Lawrence College

on an almost full-ride through both the Sarah Lawrence College Presidential Dean's Scholarship, the Yonkers Town Scholarship, and then in her last two years, The Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Scholarship. Although her dreams were never to attend the most expensive college in the entire country, (2015 statistics show that Sarah Lawrence College is now ranked as 4th expensive) Bayan and her family could not pass up on the opportunity to attend a prestigious college that offered such scholarships, is aesthetically beautiful, is ranked number one in the nation for its professors, has a unique teaching curriculum, and important to her parents, was close to home.

Determined to continue to work towards her dreams of becoming a doctor, preferably a pediatrician or a pediatric oncologist, Bayan entered Sarah Lawrence as a freshman in 2011, and began to take the pre-requisite classes necessary for medical school. In her first year, she was taught General Chemistry by her Don (equivalent to an academic advisor with whom you meet once a week for the entirety of your four years at SLC) and professor, Colin Abernethy. After the year-long course, Bayan applied for, and was accepted to a 10 week summer program to work as a research assistant in the Inorganic Chemistry laboratory at Sarah Lawrence College. That summer, she and a colleague, discovered a new structural form of bis(thf)magnesium chloride with an infinite linear-chain structure, which they are currently working on preparing for publication. This research was then presented at various conferences throughout the U.S. and even internationally in Quebec, Canada in May of 2013.

In her second year of college, Bayan began to fall in love with biology, and after taking general biology with her future P.I. and professor, Drew Cressman, she found herself developing a passion for molecular and cellular biology. During the summer of 2013, Bayan once again was given the opportunity to work in the laboratory as a research assistant, although this time, it was in the Cressman laboratory, where she was given her own independent project to work on. Her task was to design a biological model system in human hepatocyte HepG2 cells to be studied on campus. Bayan states that while it is important to be humble in research, and understand that only one out of thirty attempts of an experiment will work, it was a rewarding experience seeing a project all the way through, and positive results were produced. Bayan went on to continue her work during her junior and senior year, balancing a full and rigorous course load of only science classes, two on-campus jobs, and two off-campus jobs, one of which was at Rising Media Group, in addition to her research which she attempted to maintain approximately 10 hours a week.

“Without a doubt, junior year was the most stressful year for me,” Bayan says. “I was supposed to graduate a year earlier from college – because I had so many credits from my high school I.B. degree. But after realizing how much I had on my plate, I realized that there was just no way I could take more classes than I was allowed to. So I stayed at SLC for another year, and this was by far, the best decision I could have ever made.”

In September 2013, at the start of her third year, Bayan had the opportunity to join the team of dedicated volunteers at Saint Anthony's Free Medical Clinic in the Bronx, New York. “I'm lucky I'm a morning person,” Bayan jokes, “as we were expected to be there around 8 a.m. every Saturday morning.” The free clinic provides a variety of free medical services to those who are uninsured or underinsured, and sees both adult and children patients. “The free clinic has given me first-hand experience that

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shows me that I've chosen the right career. I've seen what doctors can do for people, and I want to be able to make the same positive impact in someone else's life. If there is anything that this experience has taught me, it is that there is not enough generosity in the world. The appreciation from our patients is so invaluable that it has become a life goal of mine to instill the same type of charity and happiness in a part of the world that so desperately needs the care."

In addition to volunteering at the clinic and continuing with her research, Bayan was also Co-President of the Brainwashed club, Secretary/Treasurer (and then Vice-President her senior year) of the SLC American Chemical Society student chapter, and Co-Organizer of the Semi-Annual Sarah Lawrence College Science and Mathematics Poster Symposium held at the end of each semester. She was also a T.A. for general biology and babysitter of Professor Cressman's two children, whom she loves dearly and still watches from time to time. In January 2014, Bayan was awarded The American Chemical Society Leadership Institute Award, and was flown to Dallas, Texas to attend a leadership conference for four days. There, she networked with fellow scientists and professionals and learned the necessary skills to being a successful leader.

That summer, having completed her junior year, Bayan continued her research in liver regeneration, this time, leading the entire lab team as lab technician, and worked closely as liaison between Dr. Cressman and the research team, ensuring that everyone works successfully and diligently. Her research and hard work carried into her senior year, and she began to take on more academically challenging roles, such as being on Professor and Dean search committees, speaking at events held for the Board of Trustees, speaking to students on Admitted Students Day, and partaking in community activities as a representative of Sarah Lawrence College.

Bayan explains that her senior year was the year she learned the most about herself. "I was always a 'go, go, go!' type of student. People would always tell me that I would eventually burn out. It was senior year that taught me how to slow down. I had blinked, and three years of college was gone, and I barely remembered anything but how much I worked and how

much I studied." While she may have made the mental decision to slow down, Bayan continued to work at Rising Media Group, as a babysitter, as a researcher, and as organizer for the SLC Semi-Annual Poster Symposium, which alone can accumulate up to 100 hours of dedication within two months, as the entire event is student-run, and therefore requires much of her time.

She completed her senior year at Sarah Lawrence College in May 2015, having graduated both a successful student with a high GPA and entirely debt-free having worked tediously throughout college. "While I did work a lot as a student in college, I did not do this alone. I had parents who did their best to help me each step of the way, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. I owe them a lot, and I know they're proud of me and that's what matters." This summer Bayan plans to apply to medical schools, and then look for work as a research lab technician in the meantime while she waits to hear back from colleges. She will continue to work at Rising Media Group and will continue to volunteer at the Saint Anthony's Free Medical Clinics on Saturday mornings

Bayan is a great example for students and individuals who are determined to work hard to see their dreams achieved. When asked what motivates her, Bayan says that she was never taught to expect things to simply happen for her. She came to this country with her family with nothing, and as a young child, she was granted the opportunity to be taught how to build herself up from nothing. "English wasn't even my first or second language," she jokes, "and it took five years of ESL classes to master it. But I did it! It's all about how willing you are to put in the work."

She offers the following advice for students who want to be successful in their futures. "Clear your mind of 'can't'. It will be a long, tiring, and perhaps difficult journey, but plan well, be organized and remember and remind yourself what it is that you are fighting for. Make sure that you are passionate about your choices and know that you have chosen something you will look forward to each and every morning of the rest of your life. A when you look back at your past, you will know that all of your successes are a product of your diligence, efforts, and the commitment that you put in, and that, if anything, is worth the battle."