



1941
2016
Celebrating
75 years

March 2017

Good evening everyone, my name is Niamh Durcan, and I am from the class of 2012. I just want to start off by taking this opportunity to thank you for inviting me to speak tonight at this 75th Anniversary Dinner. It is a huge honour to have been asked to speak amongst and in front of such accomplished and admirable women. Unlike the other two presenters tonight, I am still a student, so I haven't *yet* figured out how to make my millions or take over the world... but I'll come back to you when I do.

I'll start off by introducing myself; I'm 23, I did my Leaving Cert in Loreto in 2012, and from there I went on to study Business and Law in UCD. I graduated from B&L in 2016 with a 1st class honours and went straight into the Marketing Practice Masters in Smurfit, where I'm currently studying. People often ask me what job I want to get after I finish, and I must admit, I have *great* plans for the future, I'm just not going to tell you about them until I figure them out for myself first.

I started in Loreto in 2006. I came in from St Brigid's in Cabinteely, not too far down the road, and I still remember the anticipation and indeed nervousness I felt starting on day one. I was so excited to make new friends and to get a taste of life in secondary school... I was a little *less* excited about the colour of the uniform and the size of my schoolbag filled with books.

When I think back on my time in Loreto Foxrock, there are certain memories that will always stand out in my mind; I remember the thrill of taking part in the musicals with Blackrock College in 2nd year and CBC in 4th year. I remember receiving a call from Ms Mannion asking me if I would like to be Head Girl when we were to return as sixth years; I said yes right after I had picked myself up off the floor. I remember the immense pride I had felt when I got to make my first speech in front of the school at our opening school mass, our 6th year talent show where we got to make fun of our wonderful teachers and showcase all of our wonderful talents and I remember our graduation where we laughed and cried, reminiscing on the past and hoping for the future.

The common thread that runs through all of these memories is the friendship, community and sense of belonging that embellishes each and every one. Loreto was a place that taught us how to respect one another. It was a place that showed us how to look after one another, and later on down the line, in a turn of events that none of us could ever have foreseen, it would become a place that we would return to, to mourn the untimely loss of our two beautiful classmates.

June 16th, 2015 is a day that everyone in this room, and everyone in this country, will never forget. I remember sitting at my desk during my Summer internship in KPMG, staring at my phone in disbelief as the devastating news broke that our friends had been caught up in a tragic accident in San Francisco.



1941
2016
Celebrating
75 years

Within hours, I had been contacted by the school, by Ms Daly and Ms Prendiville, and was told to spread the word that the school was to open the following evening for a vigil mass. We arrived in our droves at the school,

but we had no words to say to each other. We sat in candlelight and in silence in the concert hall, and we mourned the tragic loss of Eimear Walshe and Olivia Burke. We prayed for the recovery of Aoife Beary and for all the others out in Berkeley at the time. Nobody knew what to say to each other, but the strange comfort that I experienced sitting in silence in that hall is something that I will never be able to explain, or indeed ever forget. Grief was what united us that evening, but so too did the comfort of being back together in the place where we had grown up, in the place that had offered us so many happy memories as a year group.

After the funerals took place we went back up to Loreto. We stood in a circle, joined hands and released white balloons into the sky, with the hope that they might reach the two angels we now had looking down on us from above.

I will feel forever indebted to the school for opening its doors to us on that night, and in the evenings that followed that tragic event. As a group of young adults, for many of us it was our first time dealing with such a tragic loss, and bereavement and grief were newfound emotions that we had little or no experience dealing with. I wouldn't realise it until later, but much of my grieving process would take place in our concert hall, in our canteen, and in the company of my friends. Together, we would sit as a year group, together we would laugh and together we would cry as we reminisced on numerous stories about the two girls. We would sit in silence, in disbelief, and in sadness but we would sit in solidarity in Loreto Foxrock.

I remember a couple of months later; I was about to get out of my car for hockey training one evening, when I received a call from Joanne Brock. Joanne told me that herself and Michelle Burke were planning a 'Strictly Come Dancing' fundraiser to raise money for Aoife Beary, who was a survivor of the Berkeley tragedy. In school, I had always been involved in the choir and orchestra, but dancing was never my forte so I told Joanne I would reach out to the 'better dancers' in my year group to see if any of them would be interested in taking part. By the second phone call, we had signed up 3 accomplished dancers. The problem was, Joanne was still looking for a fourth dancer. At this stage I had exhausted my options and Joanne had convinced me the person didn't have to be a good dancer at all; they could have no experience and two left feet, they just needed to be up for the challenge. I guess that was my cue; after the third phone-call, I was signed up. Truth be told, I could never have turned down the opportunity to raise money and awareness for such a worthy cause that was so close to my own heart.

So, my 'Strictly For Aoife' journey began, and what a journey it was. Myself and fellow classmates, my old teachers, and parents from the school started practising in Loreto for six weeks before the ultimate showdown was to take place in the O'Reilly Hall in UCD. At every session, there was blood, blisters, sweat and tears accompanied by complimentary bottles of ice cold water, hot cups of tea and tubs of sugary sweets that were wheeled into the hall halfway through each session. We danced our socks off for those six weeks but the motivation to do so was overwhelming: we knew that if we could raise enough money we



1941
2016
*Celebrating
75 years*

could send Aoife to Cambridgeshire to the Oliver Zangwill Rehabilitation Centre, where she would receive treatment that could ultimately change her life.

Behind the scenes, Joanne, Michelle and the rest of the Parents Association worked tirelessly to secure donations, to secure sponsors, and to generate awareness and push ticket sales for the event. On the night of the event, we had the privilege of performing in front of 1000 people in the O Reilly Hall. Every single person

in that hall was there for one reason- and that was to help Aoife, who was positively glowing from her seat in the front row. The sense of community, of friendship and of hope was magnificently palpable on the night. All together, we raised over €80,000, and Aoife was afforded the opportunity to travel to the UK, just like we had wished. While there, Aoife completed an intensive 16 week rehabilitation programme which she says provided her with strategies and guidance to deal with the challenges that came from sustaining a brain injury. Aoife was in surgery last week but really hopes that she will return to college to complete her GamSat exams during the next academic year and I have no doubt that she will get herself that white coat soon.

What was achieved by Loreto College Foxrock and the local community with the 'Strictly for Aoife' event was mind blowing; we made it on to national radio stations, broadsheet newspapers, tv and beyond. It really goes to show the incredible achievements that can be made when people work together and support each other for a common cause. The awareness generated, and the money raised was testament to the incredible vision that was set out by Joanne and Michelle.

For me and for so many others, Loreto College Foxrock was the fulcrum of my formative years as a teenager. I feel so lucky to be part of this special community and I think that we should all be extremely proud to be able to say that we are Loreto girls. You can never underestimate the power that we as women have in today's world, and I think that Loreto has taught us that we need to take responsibility for ourselves by appreciating the education and support we have been given and by pushing ourselves to reach our full potential.

I am so proud to be here tonight representing the class of 2012 five years on. I am so proud of the friends I made in Foxrock, and of the people they have become. I am so proud to say that I am, and always will be, a Foxrock girl.