

I clearly remember when Ms. Murphy asked me to take over as Year Head for 6th year. It was August 2019, and we were in her office. I wish I could say I jumped at the chance without hesitation. But I didn't. I was filled with fear and anxiety, already sweating - not at the prospect of leading you through your final year, but at the thought giving this graduation speech. I was disproportionately and irrationally overcome at the thought of standing up in front of all you 6th years, your families and the staff of school. If you were to tell me then that I wouldn't actually be standing up to speak to you, that we would all be doing something called a zoom, and that all the 6th years have been out of the the school building nearly 10 weeks, I would have thought you'd gone mad. But here we are.

So much has changed in the last few months. You went from working in a classroom to working online. You went from planning a standard graduation to a virtual one. A new normal came into our lives. Things that we would have thought crazy 3 months ago are now commonplace. The world changed. And you changed with it.

While we pray for those families most affected by recent events, there is no subject you could have studied that will be more valuable to you than this experience. You are not the same young women who left Loreto College on March 12th, scrambling around the place filling suitcases with books. Despite not being in the standard educational setting of the classroom, you have learned so much. There were lessons in fear and dealing with the unknown, lessons dealing with stress and anxiety. Lessons in learning how strong you really are. You have learned how to be independent in your learning, how to overcome extraordinary circumstances. Lessons of hope, courage and resilience. All of this you will take with you to third level and beyond. Remember these skills, they will guide you and help you.

In the future when you are in a job interview and you are asked to demonstrate a time when you had to adapt to a situation under huge pressure, you can simply reply - I was a leaving cert student in the year 2020.

It has been a pleasure to teach many of you for the last six years and it has been a privilege to have been your year head for the last year. While I didn't actually teach any of you in class this year, you as a group have taught me more than I could have anticipated. I have learned that patience is a virtue I had often overlooked and that the resilience of young people is far too often under appreciated

You have shown enormous strength of character. It has often been said during these extraordinary times that we are all in the same boat. From speaking to you and your families over the last few weeks is it clear that we are not all in the same boat. Some of you are the daughters of healthcare workers, serving at the front line. Some of you have underlying medical conditions and have been worried and afraid. Some of you have had step into the role of caregiver for your younger siblings while your parents go to work. Some of you are essential workers yourselves, working in shops, putting yourself at risk so you can help provide at home. All of you have been affected, All of you have family members that you miss and long to see. We are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm and you have weathered this storm with enormous strength, bravery and courage.

I know that when we were planning this online celebration, that some of you just wanted a normal graduation, and recent events has changed the celebration that you have earned and deserved. In the future you might think differently. It has given you a special legacy and one of the greatest gifts of all: A great story. The graduating class of 2020 will never been forgotten. It might not feel like it, me sitting in my attic, each one of you at home in your living rooms and kitchens. But you are making history.

My memories of graduating school are fuzzy, granted it was 20 years ago, but I'm sure you would have looked forward to this day, with nerves and trepidation. Imagining yourselves up on the stage in the Concert Hall, looking stunning, with your teachers, families and wider school community proudly looking on. What we have is a different type of occasion. But think of the story you will tell in the

and years ahead. To your children and grandchildren. You will always remember this day. Back in 2020, you will say, we made history.

Over the last few months I have so often thought of the seasons. Winter was slowly leaving us when we were all last together in person. Spring quickly made an appearance, bursting forth with new life and new growth. It was as if Mother Nature knew we needed the positivity of sunshine and birdsong surrounding us. Now Summer is nearly here and time marches on, and with it, our school community is losing a group of young women that I am so proud to have worked with.

I am so very grateful to the many supportive parents, guardians and grandparents I have met over the past six years who helped you get to this point here today. This is a very proud day for you too. As it is for all of your teachers, Ms Murphy, Mr Whelan and Ms Byrne who have been a huge support to us all over the years. Thank you all. I am also very glad to have worked with a wonderful group of prefects. Girls who have shown great leadership and have been a great support to me, your teachers and fellow students.

Ladies, you are a group of inherently kind, thoughtful and passionate girls. Your laughter and sense of humour has raised all of our spirits on many occasions over the years. I looked forward to our online assemblies more than you will ever know, and was left with a sense of loss each time they finished. Your kindness and goodness has shone brightly at numerous moments during your time in school.

I have had the great privilege in getting to know you over the past year in a greater capacity and helped you through the many unexpected high and lows of this year. But I also got to discover your hopes and aspirations for your future. Before me sit not only Loreto students but our future business women, teachers, medical professionals, childcare workers, creative artists, solicitors, and much, much more. I am very excited for you and the next step you are about to embark on. I know that this step can be daunting for some of you

but please remember you are a Loreto girl at heart and you will take Mary Ward's core values of – Truth, Joy, Sincerity, Justice and Freedom with you wherever your future path may lead.

Class of 2020, we wish you every success in your future. In all aspects of your life. You are the architects of our future. This your time, build us a better world.