

Graduation Speech - Head Girl - Jessica Egbulam - May 2019

'One day, all of us will get separated from each other. We will miss our conversations of everything and nothing, the dreams that we had. Days will pass by, months, years, until this contact becomes rare... One day our children will see our pictures and ask 'Who are these people?' And we will smile with invisible tears because a heart is touched with a strong word and you will say: 'IT WAS THEM THAT I HAD THE BEST DAYS OF MY LIFE WITH.' – Anonymous

Staff, family, friends, on behalf of the class of 2019, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to our graduation ceremony. I am deeply saddened yet extremely proud to say that after six years, we've finally reached the end of this chapter in our lives. We arrived here as tiny first years, carrying bags usually bigger than ourselves. We can agree that we were all a little scared, lost and unsure about our future. Six years later and much more grown up, we're still a little scared, lost and unsure about our future but supposedly, now we're adults. So how did we get here?

To begin with, first year was a really big change. Some of us left home for the first time and had to get used to sharing a dorm with four or five complete strangers. Others were shocked by the rigid schedule, having to wear a uniform and the crowds of people everywhere. All of us made friends, started extracurriculars and found our way around the school as Villiers slowly became home. The year continued in a flurry of sports' blitzes, subject choices and the dreaded exams. Before we knew it, first year was over. It was summer. We had survived.

Then, second year began and like every other year we've seen since, we quickly became 'too cool for school.' No longer were we the youngest here and our cocky attitudes ensured that everyone knew it. We had some of our first overnight trips with Villiers. Whether we spent a night in Dublin for hockey or travelled further to Scotland or Almeria, lifelong memories were created. Personally, I don't think I'll ever hear 'The Lidl Song' or 'Fergalicious' without being brought back to that never-ending bus ride from Dublin.

Following this, third year brought the long awaited Junior Cert. We were overstressed, overworked and overly fortunate that in our naivety, we thought those exams were hard. But we got through it and whether it was measuring ourselves with pens or playing countless games of paranoia, we all found ways of relaxing during those difficult two weeks.

Next came TY. Where do I start? We were dancers, actors, models, bankers, designers, entrepreneurs, mountaineers. The list is endless. Of course, there were also countless trips. What happens when you take a group of 16 year olds and add snow-covered mountains? Naturally, you get a talent show with some pretty iconic performances. Or maybe hiking was more your style and you felt the deep satisfaction of completing the Camino. For me MUN was pretty memorable. I'll never forget wandering around Prague for hours in the middle of the night because our Leaving Cert geography teacher had misread the map. Finally, I must mention the TY hikes. I have to admit, few things bond a group of people more than walking for hours in the wind, rain, sleet or snow across the middle of nowhere. Obviously, there wasn't a single complaint as we were trekked up hills, soaked to the skin. Although the barbeque in May made it worthwhile.

And of course we can't talk about TY without mentioning Mr. Atkinson. He was an integral part of the year for all of us. We saw his patience every Friday morning at briefing as he waited, sometimes for a pretty long time, for a hundred odd teenagers to stop talking. However, his adventurous spirit really shined through when he was leading us on hikes, laughing as we trudged through Achill or shocked at our inability to put up tents in camp craft. I'll never forget hiking up mountains, and through bogs whilst carrying tents on our backs for hours, only to have Mr. Atkinson drive up to the campsite and counter our exhaustion with a massive grin and a pot of meatballs. We all got something meaningful from that year largely due to him and for this I know that we will always be grateful.

I have to admit, fifth year was hard. After this especially tough start, it was difficult to heed the teachers' advice and 'hit the ground running' but we managed. Our time became consumed by afternoon study, prep and Saturday study. Somehow we also had to squeeze in sports, relaxation and a bit of 'footy on the pitch'. It took us awhile but we eventually got the balance right. There are some parts of fifth year like these memories which will be missed, but on the other hand if I never hear the phrases 'I'd say so' or 'mood' again, it will be too soon.

Now, I don't really need to remind you of this year because we've just gone through it. I'm sure we still remember the trauma of finding a debs date and the 'ease' of planning a sixth year holiday. However, the last few months can be summed up by the term nostalgia. This is completely understandable because we are coming to a lot of lasts. There was our last trip as a year group way back in September when we went to Higher Options and tried to figure out what to do with the rest of our lives. A few weeks ago, we saw our last Villiers hockey final in Comp. We've come a long way from 13 year olds with ties around our heads to the people wearing boiler suits, leading face-painting and chants with some of us even playing in the match. Friday was our last assembly and not only have we discovered that the first good morning will never be loud enough, but also that this is the day the Lord has made and that we should rejoice and be glad in it.

So those are the last six years in a nutshell but what did I actually learn? I guess that mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell and that unfortunately osmosis has nothing to do with absorbing information in our sleep. I've accepted that I'll never know everything such as when it's actually Marshall's birthday and what Mr. Griffin's smile looks like. But the most important things can't be found in a text book. What's going to stay with me for the rest of my life is the ability to laugh at myself and admit when I'm wrong, the constant reminder that it costs nothing to be nice and the knowledge that even the strongest friendships can be made or broken by a chicken nugget.

Now, I've reached the point in the speech where I throw in a few inspirational phrases. The world is your oyster. Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life. The best things take time. Yes, I know they're clichés but they must be overused for a reason so surely there is some truth in them. For example, let's look at things which take time; Gearóid's eyebrows came back, John Cashel was removed from the roll and Morgan even grew. As much as I'd like to give you advice for the future, I'm in the same boat as all of you. I don't know where I'll be this time next year or even what I'm having for dinner tomorrow! One thing I am certain of is that regardless how June goes, our lives are going to be what we make of them so let's make them interesting enough that people won't click past our Snapchat stories.

Nevertheless, we wouldn't be here today without the love, support and sacrifices of many, many people. Our teachers have dealt with everything we've thrown at them since we were 12 years old. The night staff practically raised a few of us 5 days a weeks. Without the kitchen staff, we would have starved and the maintenance team kept our school clean. Our coaches gave us a break from the stress of studying and the hidden work of the administrative staff is immeasurable. Ms. Quinn has always been there to encourage our endeavours and take our photos for Twitter while Ms. Storey ensured that we were the best version of ourselves by pulling up our ties. I also must mention the friends we made, because of whom, school life was that bit easier. Last, but far from least, our families and above all, our parents who have made numerous sacrifices for us to be here today. To all these people, on behalf of our graduating class, I'd like to say a massive, heartfelt thank you.

Fortunately for you, this speech is coming to an end akin to our time here at Villiers. As I already mentioned, we've had a lot of lasts but soon we'll be looking at even more firsts and that's something to get excited about. My fellow sixth years, it's been 5 years, 8 months, 25 days and 3 hours, and I know it sounds incredibly cheesy, but I wouldn't change a single second. Congratulations guys, we did it!