

Reflection on my school days at Presentation Secondary School Waterford

Delivered by Sr Margaret Mary Healy, Ann Brennan and Nicola Cooney during the Official Opening of the school, March 22nd 2013.

Sr Margaret Mary Healy When I was invited to reflect on my days as a pupil, the little Irish phrase comes to mind:

*“Aoibhinn beatha an scoláire,
Bhíos ag déanamh léinn.”*

In September 1938, Presentation Secondary School Waterford welcomed its first pupils. The first pupils to take the Leaving Certificate sat the examination in 1945. My connection with Presentation doesn't quite go back that far!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Getting to school Having completed the Primary Certificate Examination at Presentation Primary School Waterford, I moved on to second-level education at St. Philomena's Secondary School as Coláiste na Maighdine was known then. It was a move from a very large primary school to a very small secondary school – both in terms of space and pupil numbers. Most of the pupils walked to school. But some cycled in from Kilmacow, Mullinavat and Mooncoin. Others travelled by train from Co. Wexford. Others came from Tramore, Ballygunner, Passage, Butlerstown and Ballyduff. I remember being amazed at a pupil who travelled in from the country each day on her own motorbike.

Ann Brennan - Getting to school 1980 –first year – I left for school, kitted out in my hideous nature trekker shoes and blue duffel coat, the one that was bought about two sizes too big for me so as to last the whole six years. I headed up the steps through the front field in Roanmore and up through the mass paths (both of which are now gone). I was early for school, because I enjoyed the bits before and after much more than the bit in the middle.

Nicola Cooney - Getting to school Each morning I hop into the car and head down Keane's road to school. I am dropped off at the old school gate and make the journey to the new school entrance, passing the tennis courts, where our old school building once was. When I walk through the doors, the smell of toast wafting from the lunch room always makes me feel much better early in the morning. I travel up the *up* stairs and begin my daily fight

with the combination lock on my locker. I get my books then close that dreaded combination lock again. I get ready for the first three classes of the day.

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - School Building The school was in part of the Convent building. At the time we didn't realise the historic nature of our school building which was designed by Pugin.

Imagine you are entering the Waterford Health Care Centre. As you move towards Reception you will notice two large pillars. They mark the first row of what was the First Year classroom space. Stretched between the two large pillars nearest the door leading to Reception was a very long bench which could accommodate 7 – 8 twelve year olds. There was no such thing as individual desks or individual tables and chairs for First Years. There were four such long benches. The classroom was very large and had a very high ceiling. There was plenty of space for the First Years.

Beyond this First Year classroom were two much smaller classrooms for Second Years and Third Years. There was one more classroom which was known as the Academy – this was the smallest room and was designated for Fifth and Sixth Years combined. Some years there were no Sixth Year pupils. Other years there were no Fifth Year pupils. There was no Transition Year, no Fourth Year. There was one other classroom in a different building – a corrugated building – this was where we learned Domestic Science and Needlework. We had presses outside the Academy where we stored our hockey sticks – these presses were so large you could walk into them! They doubled up as cloakrooms too. There was no such thing as individual lockers!

In the 19th and early 20th century before the schools were divided into primary and secondary sections, these classrooms had originally housed primary school pupils. Junior pupils often stood around their teacher in a semicircle to recite their lessons - nails driven into the wooden floor indicated the position.

I remember in 1961 when St. Philomena was demoted and we wondered whether the name of the school should or would be changed! It was eventually re-named Coláiste na Maighdine.

Ann Brennan - School Building When I started here there were two parts to the school. We had the old and the new school. The old being the top school on Slievekeale and the new being our recently demolished old school, if that's clear. Now the new school was obviously a place to be treated nicely and with respect, so where else would you put the first years only in the old school. In the good old days the students had the classrooms and we waited angelically for our teachers to arrive (ahem). We'd listen for clip cloppy heels or heavy stomps or the almost silent swish of the nuns, anticipating who was going to catch us in the act. Our first year here was great craic we were like queens of the castle up there

Nicola Cooney - School building When I started in First Year we were in the recently demolished old school building, but of course that couldn't hold all of us, so we also had three rows of prefabs. The prefabs replaced the classrooms that were in the top school. It never really occurred to me, or most students, to keep a jacket handy for those trips across the car park to the prefabs in the rain, but it gave us reason to get some fresh air every few classes. Now for the first time in living memory, we are all under the same roof. We have gone from having no science labs to having three, having no computers to having two computer labs and from having no stairs to having three different flights. I'm sure that Sr. Margaret Mary could never have imagined a corrugated building turning into this fabulous new school!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - Pupil Numbers It was not usual for all pupils to transfer from Sixth Class to secondary school. Some pupils remained on in Seventh Class in primary school or went straight to work. There was a small fee for secondary school, 2 pounds, payable once a year.

When I commenced as a First Year, I was one of 28 First Years and there were 63 pupils in total in the school that year. By Third Year the 28 had been reduced to 14. By Sixth Year the original 28 pupils had been reduced to 2 – myself and Maureen Power. Both of us joined the Presentation Sisters. So of the original 28, 14 sat the Intermediate Certificate (now known as the Junior Certificate) and two sat the Leaving Certificate. No, we didn't have a class of two – we were combined with the Fifth Years and both groups followed the Sixth

Year programme. I was the only pupil from my Sixth Class group to continue on to complete Leaving Certificate at Presentation Secondary School.

Ann Brennan - Pupil Numbers While there were only 63 students here when Sr Margaret Mary started, there were 600 + students here when I started. I was C and there were 4 C groups I was in cC4, and to this day I consider myself a C. When I chat with friends about old friends and acquaintances it's always "oh you remember her she was a "D" a year ahead of us". TY was offered for the first time when I was in fifth year, at the time it was offered as an alternative to Leaving Cert.

Nicola Cooney - Pupil Numbers Currently there are over 400 hundred students in the school. Like Ms. Brennan, I am also a C. When we started in first year we were considered to be a big enough year with around 80 students. We are all still here and about to sit our junior cert. Next year there will be 4 first year classes, the F's. At the moment it's easy to tell who's in which year because we are in order – the A's are the first years, the B's are the second years and so on – but next year it's going to get confusing!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - School Day and Roll Call School began at 9.00 a.m. and finished at 4.00 p.m. Lunch break was from 12.50 p.m. – 1.40 p.m. The Home Economics Room doubled up as a Lunch Room. Apart from the pupils who travelled from the country, all the other pupils went home for dinner/lunch. There was no time to delay along the route – except maybe a quick visit to the little shop in Cannon Street for a toffee apple or another treat. We had a half-day on Thursday for games but we came to school on Saturday mornings. There was no bell to indicate change of class – teachers just moved on to their next class and pupils generally stayed where they were. The Roll was called each day.

Ann Brennan - School Day and Roll Call In the eighties the teachers kept track of us using the roll book, there was no attendance officer then, only the fear of Mocky Dower tracking you down, and for most of us that was enough to keep us in school.

First year is always the hardest one trying to get used to the longer day. Starting at 9 and not finishing till 4, but there was the advantage of 40 minute classes, that no matter how bad your day was going in 40 minutes you might be heading to art or home ec, so it was just a matter of keeping your head down and it would soon be over.

In my day lunchtime was dinnertime, I'm not sure I'd even heard of lunch. Dinnertime was 12.50 to 2.00 o'clock and I went home every day for my dinner to my Mammy. My Mammy was a remarkable woman who served up hot dinners at various times throughout the day. My dad was in first at 12.30 from Waterford crystal, me next at 12.50 followed by 2 of my brothers at 1.00 from Mount Sion, 2 more brothers at 1.30 from Waterford crystal and my sister at half past 5 from the Hypermarket. There were no microwaves in those days she was just constantly cooking.

Nicola Cooney - School day and roll call In first and second year, 3 times a day I saw Rose our attendance officer run around the school collecting absentee forms. If an opportunity arose, we were ***more*** than happy to offer our services to collect the roll. We now have E-Portal. *It's a computerized roll call system.* The teachers together with Rose and Paula now have everything at the touch of a button because first thing every morning, the computers go on, with teachers constantly being reminded **TO HIT SUBMIT!**

We have school from Monday to Friday from 9 to 4. We have nine 40 minute classes every day. Like Sr. Margaret Mary, we also have school on Saturday but we call it **SATURDAY DETENTION!**

Lunch time is from 1 to 2 and it is the time of the day that we have the most freedom. Once we get to second year we can go out for lunch if we like. We can have hot meals without going home because we can buy food from the caterers in our canteen, Mary Grimes and although we have moved school, we can still buy our blahs from Tommy in the tuck shop!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Uniform Our uniform was a black knee-length pinafore with crest and red sash, white shirt, red tie, black cardigan or jumper with crest, black shoes, knee-length socks. A black blazer was optional.

Ann Brennan – Uniform Ahh the Pres uniform, always the best uniform in the town, black skirt and black jumper and at the time ANY black skirt and jumper, which left a lot of room for interpretation, and I was up for the challenge. So in the early 80's fancying myself as a bit of style icon, I had a skirt of my own design made. A skin-tight ankle length skirt with no split in it, so I walked to school like Morticia Addams, which was no mean feat coming up the mass paths.

Nicola Cooney – Uniform Personally Ms .Brennan, I'd love to dress like Morticia Adams but can you imagine Ms .Gallen and Ms .Ryan`s reactions? We still wear a black skirt and jumper, but we now also have the option of wearing trousers. Sr. Fidelis, our former principal helped the students when she was approached with the idea of adding trousers to the uniform. A committee was set up and a fashion show held, showcasing the proposed addition to our uniform. The trousers were a necessity as students ran every 40 minutes between the top and bottom schools. The teachers and parents voted, and there was a positive outcome- a lot of us now take the option of wearing trousers.

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - P.E. Uniform For hockey matches we wore a white tee-shirt and a divided skirt, hockey boots and knee socks. We also wore a red band to tie back hair.

Ann Brennan - P.E. Uniform I wasn't so lucky with the P.E. uniform, emerging from the toilets, wearing the dreaded culottes, a fabulous shorts with modesty flaps front and rear combination I reluctantly took part in my weekly workout. Our gear did improve a bit as we went on, to the ultra-modern pleated red skirt with knicker shorts, which I must admit clashed ever so slightly with my purple legs in the cold

Nicola Cooney - P.E. Uniform Our PE uniform consists of black tracksuit ends, a red polo shirt and cream soled runners – *no exceptions!*

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Curriculum Subjects on the curriculum at that time included Irish, English, Mathematics (Algebra, Arithmetic, Geometry), History, Geography, French, Commerce, Book-keeping, Art, Christian Doctrine, Singing. There was an annual written Christian Doctrine examination. Typing and Shorthand were offered, at no cost,

outside of the school day to those who wished to study these. Computers hadn't been invented so we learned our typing on really old manual Royal typewriters. We learned touch typing and I found this a most valuable skill which easily transferred to the computer keyboard later on. Tippex hadn't been invented so great care had to be taken to ensure accuracy. There was no Delete key! The photocopier hadn't been invented so we learned how to make copies using carbon paper inserted between two sheets of paper. Shorthand came in very useful too and still is.

Science was not taught – there was no Science laboratory. There was no Art Room – our Art equipment was limited to a box of paint and a jam jar of water. To change the water, we took a walk outside down to the outdoor sink outside the cellar door of the Convent.

There was no subject choice.

Ann Brennan – Curriculum I remember the introduction of computer classes but they could only offer these classes to a handful of girls, I decided computers weren't for me, I couldn't really see them catching on. In first year we had a new subject called SESP, which was a combination of History and Geography and to be honest with you I still have trouble differentiating between the two. All of our subjects were academic and were taught on the blackboard using lovely dusty white chalk, with the exception of TYPING (omg) Ms Kelly tried her best, but some of us were beyond help, and if the speed I typed this speech at is anything to go by, I must have been her worst student.

Nicola Cooney – Curriculum There are more subjects available to us now than there were in Sr. Margaret Mary's time here. We have a choice of languages to learn - German or French and we also have the opportunity to study subjects like Science, Art, Music and Home Economics. In transition year, we don't just do your average everyday subjects. We do Food Science, Film Production, Hair and Beauty and Cookery, among other things. This year Mr. Scanlon set up a new school choir - The Glee Club and piano and guitar lessons are available during lunch time and after school to anybody interested.

In our new school, there isn't a chalk board in sight and I'm sure it's to the teachers **great disappointment** that they no longer leave school everyday covered in chalk dust. Teachers

now use either markers on the whiteboard or slides that they project onto the board using their computers instead. They are able to complement what we are learning by showing us pictures and videos from the internet.

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Sports Hockey was the sport of the time and Presentation girls were very successful in the various leagues. The senior pupils encouraged the junior players and we all felt part of a team. We competed against the local schools such as Newtown, Ursuline, Bishop Foy, and Ferrybank. We cycled over to Newtown and Grantstown, played our match and cycled home afterwards. We trained on the grass field – the cows often wandered through while the practice was in progress. We had no changing rooms, no showers and of course, no Sportshall. Several pupils went on to play as members of Waterford Ladies Hockey Team. Later on, netball was introduced and was played in the top playground. I recall the question being raised as to whether we should play Camogie but the answer was that hockey was safer because you were not permitted to raise the hockey stick above shoulder level.

Ann Brennan - Sports Judging by my physique you've probably guessed P.E. was not my favourite subject, but I tried my best(ish). Fundraising had begun in earnest for the building of this gym and I brought in my 50p a week contribution in a little brown envelope. Pat Flanagan was our PE teacher (tough job) and weather permitting we played football in the field or basketball on the outside courts, but more often than not we had PE in the G.P.area (our old lunch room).

Nicola Cooney – Sports The Pres girls are still successful at sports, not Hockey and Netball anymore but Basketball and Camogie. This week we have become All-Ireland champions in U16 Basketball, Munster champions in Camogie and South East champions in First and Second year Basketball. There are great facilities in our school for sport. When we were in the old school, this gym building was considered to be the bee's knee's, however, when we moved school, it was overshadowed slightly, so now, our gym has been refurbished, as you can see.

We get to try our hands at a bit of everything in PE, from basketball to badminton here in the sports hall. We particularly love the days of good weather when we have the opportunity to go outdoors, no longer to use the hockey pitch, but, to use the new tennis and basketball

courts. Upstairs on the balcony we have brand new gym equipment all we need now is a personal trainer!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - Books There was no such thing as Free Books or a Book Rental Scheme. We bought our books in Bevans on the Quay. Books were covered in brown paper or wallpaper and were passed on from one child to another or from cousin to cousin, neighbour to neighbour. There was generally just one book per subject – this book lasted for two or three years before being passed on or shared.

Ann Brennan - Books Like Sister Margaret Mary we too inherited books from siblings or neighbours, and being old neighbours who knows I possibly inherited one or two of your books. There was one advantage to having your own books, it allowed you to take down vital notes in the margins, things like “Ann woz ere march 84” , “Wham rules” Or “ Mrs Ann Brennan” just as well that last one worked for me.

Nicola Cooney – Books Nowadays hardly anybody buys their school books in shops and those who don’t inherit them from others use the book rental scheme in our school. The scheme was set up by Sr. Josephine in 1996 with the help of a group of parents. This scheme allows us to rent most of our books for a fraction of their cost. The rental system is now very similar to our school library’s system as all of our books are barcoded. While we have books today, who knows, it could be I-pads next year, and wouldn’t Rose love that!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Teachers When I joined First Year there was only one lay teacher on the staff, Ms Frances O’Donnell who later became the Vice-Principal. All the other teachers were Presentation Sisters.

Ann Brennan – Teachers In the eighties we had a selection of teaching staff here, nuns and lay teachers, including men. We didn’t have year heads, but we did have class tutors. Eileen Gildea was the lucky one who had my class. One of my favourite school stories involves Mrs Gildea all the way back in first year Irish class. Myself and 3 of my partners in crime hid under the coats on the coat stand. Mrs Gildea came in and started the lesson; it was the story of Neidin the donkey (riveting stuff). Every time Mrs Gildea said “Neidin” the four of us went eeeaaaww! It took her a little while to locate where the disruption was coming

from, but we made it a little bit easier for her by falling out on to the floor in hysterics. To be fair she did take it in good fun.

Nicola Cooney – Teachers We also have tutors for each class in our year *and* we have a year head. Mr. McCarthy is my year head and he *somehow* keeps us in check, *constantly*.

The Staff in our school are now all lay people, both male and female and although there are no longer presentation sisters as members of the teaching staff their ethos still lives on in our school.

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - Tours School tours were not part of our school year. There was little interaction with local schools – apart from sports, games and debates.

Ann Brennan - Tours The school tour Easter 1985, still the most talked about event in all of my school days, and probably in my whole life, maybe just edged out by my children, maybe! I'll try to keep this short but when I get talking about Paris 1985 it's hard to stop. We left from the top school on Sunday morning kissing Mammies and Daddies goodbye and heading off on what can only be called the best school trip EVER! 80 students and 11 teachers armed with a jam packed itinerary and a song book to keep us entertained on the bus. The teachers endured a 21 hour sailing to France while the students danced in the disco and flirted with the boys from Mount Sion. (We couldn't believe our luck Mount Sion on the same tour, oh happy day).

We spent 5 fabulous nights in Paris we visited Chateaus, the Eiffel tower, the palace of Versailles we did a little shopping we went on the metro we ate disgusting food, I'm afraid as a 16 year old I wasn't quite ready for French cuisine. All too soon it was time to head home and even the thought of twenty one hours on a boat with the boys from Mount Sion couldn't lift our spirits. I had had the time of my life. I often look back on the photographs which include one of the bus, the bus driver and one of a sandwich (go figure) with just a hint of smugness that I was part of the coolest tour the Pres ever went on (fact)

Nicola Cooney - Tours School tours today differ greatly from Ms Brennan's time. There are different tours designated to certain subjects taken almost every year by students. The Sixth Year History students visit places of significance to what they study in their senior cycle. In recent times they have visited places such as Poland and Berlin. The Transition

Year tour is now a fitting end to a great year, Ms Bolger and Ms, O`Sullivan take the girls to Belfast where they visit the Titanic exhibition and Stormont, they do some shopping and maybe go ice skating.... I`m looking forward to it already!

We third year students visited Dail Éireann this year in Dublin on a C.S.P.E. trip, I have to say that it`s a far cry from Ms Brennan`s day!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy – Music On Thursdays, Mr Stanley Bowyer, father of Brendan Bowyer, came to teach choral singing. We had a three-part choir. We were prepared for the Department of Education Choral Examinations. We also performed in the Municipal Theatre. Ms Mai Vereker taught Elocution and pupils were prepared for Lamda examinations. Piano lessons were available after school hours for a small fee. Pupils were prepared for the Leinster School of Music examinations.

Ann Brennan - Musical The musical has always been a highlight for the students to take part in. In the eighties you had to audition for a part in the show. So in 1983 I`m not quite sure how, but I got the part of a sailor in the schools production of H.M.S. Pinafore, we rehearsed in the tin shed, and the show went on in March in the primary school hall. To this day I still remember the excitement of going on stage wearing half a ton of makeup and my hair quiffed up with gel, Mrs O`Keeffe had brought in the gel and believe it or not this was the first time I`d ever seen or used gel (a love affair was born). For me the musical is still the highlight of the school year, only now I`m used where my lack of musical talent doesn`t scare the daylights out of the audience, they keep me backstage.

Nicola Cooney - Musical The musical is now held here in the gym, with this hall being transformed into a theatre for the occasion. This year`s musical, “Thoroughly Modern Millie” was a huge success and we are going to hear music from it later on.

As a third year I am really looking forward to the Transition Year musical and we already had our dance audition with Pat Grant – he said we were brilliant dancers!

Sr Margaret Mary Healy - Reflection The example of a young girl, a pupil at a Presentation school in Cork, led to the arrival in 1798 of the first Presentation Sisters and the setting up of the first girls` school in Waterford. From Jenkins Lane to Hennessy`s Road to

the Convent on Slievekeale Road to Cannon Street the school has now arrived at this fine building. There have been many changes in the intervening years as the school responded in creative and relevant ways to the needs of the time. The vision of Nano Nagle and the core values of those early pioneers live on today in the tradition of academic excellence, the happy atmosphere and the good relationship between pupils and staff at Coláiste na Maighdine.

As we thank God for the many blessings, for the moments we have shared, and as we look to tomorrow, my prayer today is that the Lord will continue to bless and guide all who teach and learn here.

Go raith míle maith agaibh.

Ann Brennan - Reflection Now I know I wasn't the best student or even a close second, but the values instilled in me during my time here have obviously benefited me over the years. I have been incredibly lucky to have been given the opportunity to come back to work in "the press", although it's probably just as well I didn't deliver this speech at my interview.

Nicola Cooney – Reflection Since first year there has been a lot of change for us and now we have finally settled in the *new* school, no longer a dream but a reality. I look forward to the next three years here and to my future, but I already know that I will look back on my time here as fondly as Ms Brennan and Sr Margaret Mary.