

Catherine McAuley Alumnae Award Winner 2019

Brigid Glanville

Acceptance Speech

Like most other recipients of this award, I was slightly perplexed as to why the Alumnae Association would bestow this achievement on me. I am honoured and flattered, but humble in accepting this award.

I left school in 1994, with my family having a long history at OLMC Parramatta. My mother, aunt, sisters and cousins all went to OLMC, so from the first day it was a familiar place.

Everyone has memories from their school days. While some have bad memories, I feel fortunate that mine are mostly positive. School for me was a safe place, one where I was encouraged to do my best and it was possible to achieve anything. I was extremely talkative and had robust opinions. While there were countless times I was told 'to stop talking', 'stop yelling across the playground' or 'let others answer the question first', I still walked out of those large wrought iron school gates with a sense that these strong characteristics would be useful in my career.

There have been periods in my life I have felt embarrassed at how talkative I am and would consider myself too overbearing. However, as I navigated my way through a career in journalism and politics, I realise now they are useful skills to have. What has helped me most is I have learned to listen more. I realise that being honest, thinking critically and having strong communication skills are extremely valuable in any workplace.

At the end of Year 12, it came as no surprise to my friends and family that I wanted to be a journalist. I studied Communications at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst. I have had an incredible career as a journalist and presenter for the ABC. I started as a rural reporter in a cadet program and worked both in Australia and internationally. I spent time in Washington DC for a brief stint as a reporter, just 12 months after the September 11 attacks and worked in the former New Zealand bureau as a foreign correspondent. In more recent years, I covered NSW Politics which opened a whole new world of presenting live television.

Journalism is a career where social justice and principles are constantly being dealt with. Stories of injustice, reporting on the minority, and exposing corruption and unfairness are the ones that I loved covering. I believe that a strong sense of social justice instilled in me at OLMC as a 'Mercy Girl' is something that will never leave me. It is an intrinsic part of my make-up.

Over the last few years, I started looking at what else I could do beyond journalism. It is a shrinking industry and I wanted a change. After covering politics in NSW for 8 years, I left the ABC and I now work for the NSW Education and Early Childhood Minister, Sarah Mitchell. As Deputy Chief of Staff, I oversee the major policy, strategic and media decisions made about education in NSW. I have school aged children, so have a strong interest in this area and it was something I felt I could do that might make a difference. I was fortunate to have a great education, but I want all children to have one. It is a big job and politics brings its own challenges, but it's fascinating and never boring.

In fact, one of the biggest challenges our schools and students have faced is the current COVID-19 crisis. The technology that is available means students can learn from home, however, the work to get this off the ground has been massive. I have never shied away from a challenge and have enjoyed every minute.

It would be remiss of me to ignore the period of my life where I wasn't happy about the challenge I was facing. After the birth of my second daughter Clementine in 2014, I was diagnosed with postnatal depression. While it took lots of counselling, I survived and gained a new perspective of mental illness.

One in 5 women suffer from perinatal depression and anxiety. I decided to use my profile and speak up about this illness. It is a treatable illness and I just couldn't stand watching so many people suffer, knowing that if they had a broken leg, they would get treatment. Depression is no different.

I am now an ambassador with The Gidget Foundation. A charity that provides counselling services to families suffering from pre and postnatal depression and anxiety. From time to time, women contact me telling me that after reading my story about postnatal depression, they found the courage to ask for help and are now in a much healthier and happier place.

I often think of quotes from Catherine McAuley that I remember learning at school – 'We must strive to do ordinary things extraordinarily well.' A motto we all can strive to live by and one that will help make a difference to those less fortunate than us.