

JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

William Godfrey, Coláiste Iognáid, Galway

Moving schools is always a challenge.

Changing countries (England to Ireland) adds another layer of difficulty, especially when you don't know what to expect, and are doing it without your immediate family, leaving parents and four younger siblings behind.

Thankfully, my older sister had moved to Ireland two years prior and enjoyed it so much she had remained, leading me to follow in her footsteps.

This was the situation I found myself in at the end of August 2017. After the long summer, exams all finished, time spent with family and friends alike, I joined my new school. Coláiste Iognáid in Galway city, or known locally just as "The Jes".

The transition was strange in so many ways, such as going from a five lesson day, each one hour, to a nine lesson day, each forty minutes.

Other social differences quickly became evident.

Contrasting everyday terms, such as mitching, or in England skiving.

"Grinds", a word that annoyed me greatly, which would just have been tutoring - and the joy brought about as people tried to explain what a "Culchie" was too. Amusingly, everyone settling on that fact that Dubliners consider everyone else Culchies.

One aspect that made both my sister and I stand out was our foreign articulation of certain words.

Many moments in ordinary conversations would be interrupted by amusement from atypical pronunciation of common words. For my sister, a prominent difficulty in England had been with her accent, always sophisticated and mature from a very young age. This led to fellow students there slagging - another term recently introduced to me - her, for the "posh" nature of her speech.

Over here, however, all that was flipped on its side, with great appreciation from others, really helping her mind to settle, with the one aspect of character that had set her apart negatively, bringing about positive recognition.

Then, one evening after my drama lesson, a normal week followed by a normal day, I came home to find my sister was dead. A striking abnormality in what would otherwise have just been life as I'd always known it. Much was revealed in the upcoming days.

Realisations about the past. Attempts to comprehend the present. And shocking truths for the future.

I was now the eldest.

No longer following anyone else, but paving the way for the four youngsters treading along behind me.

Pain is often very difficult to express. You are told it's not weakness to go to others for support when you are overwhelmed by emotion, although that's not always the problem.

What's difficult can often be feeling something.

Anything.

One of the most powerful and significant manifestations of everything that happened was the overwhelming outreach from those around us. My immediate family, bar my mother, hadn't experienced the Irish process for the deceased.

A drawn-out wake, the endless hours spent shaking hands, but most of all the heart warming involvement of all those around us.

People from all walks of life, sharing stories, leading to the identification of many contrasting components of her life, no-one with anywhere close to a full understanding of what my sister had fully consisted of.

Even those very close to her would be surprised by her acquaintance with improbable individuals, bringing tales that taught us new aspects of her character. A deep network of friends and connections had been created in the school around her.

I am not particularly decisive.

Therefore the decision to move was particularly hard to make, leaving much behind.

I will never be able to say whether it was the right decision.

But the consoling truth is, and forever will be, as a result of my decision, time was spent with her, before she finished her journey with us.