Speech by Miss Alex Besanko upon being recognised as a female Old Ignatian who made a significant contribution to College Life, presented to the College at Rectors Assembly.

Good morning Father Rector, Headmaster, Special Guest Angela Hart, staff and students.

I have been asked to speak to you all today about my inclusion in the recent library display that has been put together so ably to celebrate some of the women who have been a part of St Ignatius College. I would like to acknowledge that this display is not a comprehensive picture of all the women who have done great things in their lives, merely a snapshot of some who made significant contribution to the community during their time at the College.

Today, I would like to talk to you about my experiences and what they have meant to my life and to my journey. I have many fond memories of my time here, and perhaps some of these are similar to your own.

I remember Mr Coffey constantly telling me to pull my socks up and button up my top button so much so that he got to the point where all he had to do was to turn his head, outstretch his hands and deliver a piercing gaze that reflected exactly what he thought of my rather dishevelled appearance. I remember Mr Haskell giving a rather impassioned speech about the value of reading and how it is foundation of all consciousness, all life and all existence. After which I went out and hired 9 books from the library. I remember Mr Abela bringing in a then ‘1 month old baby Victoria’ to Year 4 ‘show and tell’. To Year 8 science with Mr Donofrio, and remember one lesson where we counted the times he suddenly grew taller, walking up and down the step behind the teachers desk in the science lab. These are all memories of the living people that make this place special and
unique. As Ignatians, we are constantly encouraged to see God in all things, and I think it is through the people here, that this is most apparent. It reminds me our time here is so much more than just being at school. It can be our legacy and is indeed what you make it. I will always remember some advice I received in year 8 PD, when Ms Doyle so eloquently challenged us all to be proud of our gifts and talents, and think of them as a display of God’s work in us, and not to feel arrogant or boastful for doing so. I am referring to true humility, which is not about putting ourselves down, but more celebrating what we are and what we can be to the world. I think to love oneself as you would others and God, is very important. In an increasingly techno-driven world, trying to avoiding the trolls and negative tweets, we are constantly bombarded with messages of buying this, eating this, doing this and somehow these will make us happy and fulfilled. It can be very difficult to truly appreciate the human that you are. Let me tell you though, having legs like Jennifer Hawkins or a wardrobe like Princess Kate will not make you happy for long. This was probably the most important thing that I learnt at my time here – true value is not measured in things. Value is in our actions, how we treat others and what impact we have on the world.

I was very surprised when I was informed that I had been choose a one of the ‘women of the wall’ I see myself as just as average person, as ordinary, but hopefully one who can do extraordinary things with and for God. To be courageous, conscious, compassionate and kind. We are very lucky here, in that there are many excellent examples of women and men on staff who live out this mantra every day. I implore you all to stop and reflect on these people who show strength and grace in challenging situations, and consider how their example might be followed in your lives. It is no coincidence that this display was unveiled at the end of May, being the special month of Mary. I believe she is the epitome of a strong and successful woman. She did not attain great wealth or power, working her way up the corporate ladder, but did something much deeper and more fulfilling with her life. She showed faith and courage in perhaps one of the most confronting and fearsome situations, when visited by the angel proclaiming God’s will for her to give birth to his son. Her strength of character has been remembered for thousands of years. Her sacrifice and her faith made
her both powerful and content. For all of Kim Kardashian’s fame, I doubt the people of the future will have any idea who she is, no matter how interestingly dysfunctional her family are now. Other examples of women with character exist in the Old Testament when we read the story of Naomi and Ruth. Consider this for a moment; Naomi had a husband and two sons who were both married. After Naomi’s husband died, her sons kept her safe and were good company. But all too soon they too both succumbed to illness and died. Naomi was facing the challenging prospect of being entirely alone in the world for the rest of her life. She decided to travel to her hometown to live out her days – a rather precarious trip to Bethlehem. But enter Ruth (the widow of one of Naomi’s sons). She decided to go with Naomi, to accompany her so that she would not be alone. Ruth gave up everything, seemingly on a whim. I find Ruth’s words very powerful; “Don't ask me to leave. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your friends will be my friends and your God will be my God.” Could you imagine doing this now? Giving up your whole life, people and possessions, just to follow an old woman blindly into a desert? We might ask ourselves- why did she do this? Arguably, it was because she had total faith in God and in herself. Because she believed it was what she was asked to do, to use her gifts for others. This is the sort of quiet courage we should all aspire to. Not for success, praise, status or ‘likes’, but for discernment, strength and faith.

Mrs Thurston always talked about speeches having a clear, final point. A takeaway message if you will. Mine to you is this; the best thing you can do, is to be yourself and to celebrate the gifts that you have. To surround yourself with things that bring out the best version of you and not to be afraid of doing extraordinary things. Don’t focus on the result, don’t focus on the ‘wall’ step back and look at the bigger picture of your life and the journeys you will make. Because what other people think of you, is really none of your business, and you are much too blessed and too special to not share yourself with the world.

So as you walk away today, if you only remember one thing, let it be this.

How will you leave your footprint on the world?