

My name is Lauren McQuaide and I am a *very* proud graduate of the class of 2004 at St. Ursula School. For those of you whom I have not yet met, my wonderful parents are Bill and Carolyn McQuaide, and my siblings are Sean, Adam, Samuel and Caitlyn, three of whom have attended St. Ursula School as well, with my youngest sibling Caitlyn **somehow** already in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the school. I am currently a Junior at Carnegie Mellon University, majoring in Astrophysics with a minor in Business Administration. Many of you will ask “What in the world are you going to do with that major?” ...but I’m still asking myself that every day, so I will not have an answer for you tonight. I’ll probably earn my MBA after graduating and go into Business.

In addition to school, I work for the University as a Resident Assistant for a dormitory on campus, as an Assistant to the Housefellows for the First-Year house advisors developing social and professional development programs for freshmen students, and as an event planner for our Conference and Events Services department, coordinating conferences on campus for clients. While I’d love to say I took on all of this on my own, I know that without the work ethic that St. Ursula had instilled in me as a child, as well as the support from my parents to always perform to the highest standard, I would not be where I am today. I set high goals for myself each morning to work my hardest and to get the most out of my life and my education, and I’ve learned from St. Ursula the importance of never giving up.

Yet, I never truly realized the effect St. Ursula had on my life until I moved out of the suburbs and into the city. For one semester last year I worked for a company in East Liberty called Wireless Neighborhoods, tutoring teens through a government-funded program in this area of the city that my parents were *much* less than pleased to find out I was taking a bus to four times a week. While I

know that they are happy that I am no longer commuting to such a dangerous area, in retrospect I could not have been happier with what I experienced there-- I learned two very important lessons while I was with the company: the first is the immense importance of a positive upbringing for children. I saw first-hand the effects that the after-school program had on the kids by the end of the semester, even just by creating a stable and secure atmosphere for them that many had never had before, both physically and academically. While the exterior focus for the program was on standardized test tutoring, everyone that worked there knew what the true goal of the program was --to create an atmosphere for the students where they felt safe, to foster the significance of education and hard work, and to challenge students to create goals for themselves. My second revelation is that these are exactly the types of goals that St. Ursula had always had for me. I was fortunate enough to have the upbringing at St. Ursula where every person around me had strong morals and a belief in God, where everyone believed in me to succeed at the highest level, and where the focus on education and hard work was unparalleled. I may have even taken this for granted until I saw for myself what can happen when children at such an impressionable age are not continuously surrounded by this type of support. Today, my parents will be happy to report that I still mentor underprivileged children through a program called Pittsburgh Junior Academy of Science, but the children are transported weekly to the Carnegie Mellon campus instead.

With three siblings going through the school as well as at least ten cousins, the school had always been a second home to me. The strong values of family and faith that St. Ursula had introduced to me will lead me in the right direction for the rest of my life. I know that whatever is thrown at me, I will always have my faith and my family to guide me to make the right decisions. To lead a life with Christ is the most important lesson your children will learn at this school, and it is a lifestyle they will lead well beyond graduation from 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Academically, the faculty at St. Ursula always found ways to challenge me every day. When I would finish my school work early, Mrs. Heyl always had an extra worksheet or project ready for me to start. But it is not just the impressive formal education that was important for my success-- it was also the excitement and curiosity to learn that St. Ursula brought to every classroom. As I realized through my mentoring program where I mentor 7<sup>th</sup> graders in quite challenging science projects, getting children excited about learning when all they want to do these days is text and gossip, is **not** an easy task. It is easy to feed them information, but extremely difficult to get them excited about science and probing to learn more; yet, the faculty at St. Ursula was successful in this on a consistent basis. They fueled my desire to ask questions, to completely understand a subject, and to create goals for myself to obtain the highest education possible. I can attribute my hard work and conscientiousness to the values St. Ursula instilled in me at such a young age.

With the small class size at St. Ursula, a close-knit bond was formed between my 16 graduating classmates and I. Over winter break about ten of us went out to dinner together, and even though some of us had lost touch over the years, as soon as we sat down it was like we were back in eighth grade again. From fundraising efforts to build houses in Chimbote to avoiding at *all* costs singing in Mr. Romanelli's music class, for eight years we created memories that we will never forget. I learned from St. Ursula what true friendships are and what they mean to me, and I learned after graduating how important it is to choose the right friends in life. Friends that will inspire you to make the right decisions, not influence you to make the wrong ones. Friends who encourage you to succeed in life, who are happy for you when you do, and support you when you fall short. It is this discretion I learned at St. Ursula on both a religious and moral level to surround myself with only the people who are a positive influence on my life.

Another aspect of my life that has prospered due to my roots at St. Ursula is the importance of being a well-rounded individual. With the extra-curricular activities available such as basketball, cross-country, Battle of the Books, and Science Olympiad, St. Ursula has always placed influence on following your curiosity and taking advantage of all opportunities, and I think that even to this day being well-rounded has been one of my greatest strengths as a person. In fourth grade I didn't really *want* to join band and give up one recess period a week, but with my parents' persistence I picked up clarinet and later, alto saxophone. I figured at the time I would just do what they said, but soon learned how much I loved music and how much of a break it was from my busy thoughts I always had in my head. After eighth grade, one of my best friends in my class and I realized we would rarely be seeing each other once we went off to different high schools—so we decided to join as drummers in a bagpipe band her little brother John was in, mainly just so we could see each other every Thursday night. However, I soon fell in love with the music, and for the last seven years I have been competing as a snare drummer with the Balmoral Highlanders Bagpipe Band, based in Pittsburgh. While it may seem like a random and weird hobby, it is my weekly escape from the stress of work and studies, and for at least two hours it is the only thing going through my head for once. I know this is just one aspect of my life that I would be missing out on had St. Ursula not given me the opportunity and encouragement to try new things and enhance my curiosity in life.

I frequently look back on my upbringing at St. Ursula and still cannot thank my parents enough for their decision to enroll me. This decision you made 15 years ago has truly shaped me into the person that I am today, both spiritually and academically. Mom and Dad, because of the way that you have raised me, I am proud of my religion and the morals I hold, the decisions I make every day, and the independent life that I now lead.

Sister Joanita, I thank you for all of the support that you have given me over the years, for constantly challenging me beyond what was expected, and for guiding me in a lifestyle with Christ. Father Dorsey and Father Ernie, thank you for leading us every week in prayer at mass and being the leaders in my faith since I was a child.

While all of the teachers at St. Ursula are an amazing inspiration in the level of education and religious guidance they provide, there was one teacher in particular that has truly had a lasting impression on my life. I need to give a tremendous thank you to Mrs. Heyl-- for the encouragement you gave me daily to succeed, for the educational challenges you created for me when I would finish my school work early, for the after-school Science Olympiad program that inspired me to study science, and even to this day being the voice in the back of my head that tells me to never give up. I think of you on a weekly basis as I'm mentoring, hoping that I can be the voice of encouragement for children that you always were to me at St. Ursula.

And finally, I would like to thank every one of you tonight for your support of this amazing school. The impression this school will have on your children is priceless, and will give them the strong foundation of faith and morals they will need when they are out in the world alone. The ability to make the right decisions, to place education as their highest goal, to choose the right friends, and to lead a life with Christ are just a few of the important life lessons your children will learn at this school. So I ask you tonight to realize that you have unselfishly made one of the **best** decisions you could have for your children, and when they are twenty-one years old and standing up here giving this speech, they will be extremely grateful for the gift that you gave to them.