

Colleen Manuszak, Alumna

I have been blessed with a very unique and beautiful journey throughout my years at Providence. It all begins with my Mom and Dad. My parents like so many others saw the value in a great education, especially one that was based in our faith. I grew up in the surrounding suburbs, so I knew from a very young age that Providence was where I would be attending high school and I was always so proud. I would enter my freshman year of high school in 2004 however; my experiences with faculty and staff from Providence began in the years prior.

Like many future Celtics I attended several athletic summer camps. Volleyball was my sport of choice and I can remember being at camp and thinking how cool it was to be playing with the high school players and to be being coached by the high school coaches. It was so exciting and nerve wracking at the same time because I always wanted to make a good impression as I hoped that one day I would join the Providence Volleyball Program. I can remember hearing Coach Rachel say during a drill at one summer camp "Good Job, Colleen," and thinking to myself "Oh my gosh, she knows my name!" You bet I was beaming with pride and told my parents as soon as I got home that the Assistant Varsity coach knew my name. It was something so simple but very powerful to someone like me who was young and impressionable.

In junior high, I also had the privilege of playing club volleyball for two seasons under Ms. Mary Colbert which was yet another wonderful introduction to someone who was a great representative of the Providence mission and values.

My 8th grade year I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a shadow day. I can still remember the first passing period I ever experienced and how it was so different from my

catholic grade school. I was used to lining up quietly behind our teacher and walking down the hall in two lines-separated by girls and boys but here there were no lines and there were so many more students than I was used to! The halls felt alive with so much energy and I can remember people shouting down the halls greeting each other and even high fiving teachers. It was such a fun and welcoming environment. One of the first classes I sat in on was Mr. Al Wycislo's history class. While Al was lecturing, I started taking notes like the rest of the students. The boy sitting next to me leaned over and asked "Why are you taking notes?" I remembered being embarrassed by this. I think I was so nervous and wasn't sure how a "shadow" student should act and thought to myself that I, too, should be taking notes on this great lecture. I don't know why I was so nervous because just like Al, every teacher, faculty, staff member and student I encountered welcomed me, asked me questions to get to know me better and made me feel right at home. My shadow day experience only made me that much more excited to attend Providence the following fall.

2004 my freshman year of high school officially began. Having known Ms. Colbert previously and having volleyball practices a couple weeks before school started meant there were several familiar faces walking the halls on my first day of classes- which gave me great comfort. Now, I can share with you a gazillion memories that I would create over the next four years as a student, but we don't have time for quite that many -so I am going to share with you a few moments and instances in time and how they made me feel.

I remember back when we had homerooms my freshman year and Coach Ternik was my teacher. We always had a lot of fun as we would go to our homeroom most of the fall semester in preparation for Harvest Drive. Harvest Drive created a fun and competitive way to fundraise

for our school. I will be the first to admit that fundraising for anything is not my cup of tea. With that being said, to this day I am so in awe of the faculty, staff and Providence families that so bravely and valiantly fought to keep the doors of our school open so many years ago. It makes me reflect and ask...if we were in that position now, could I stand my ground and fight for this place I love so much. For they knew they were fighting an uphill battle yet they were so resilient. How extraordinary! I hope and pray the answer to that question would be "YES!" Yes, I would do anything in my power to help keep this school open. It is not the building I would be fighting for, it would be for all of you, and for all the good you bring into the lives of your students, co-workers and the greater community. For it is not the bricks and mortar that make this institution so special, it is the people in it. I know from a student's perspective how true that is.

I can remember Ms. Gura pulling me aside one English class and telling me how well she thought I was doing. Little did she know I felt as if I always struggled in reading and writing, yet that small act of encouragement would give me great confidence in my abilities in the years to come. I always found so many of my teachers using innovative and interactive ways to teach- for example Dr. Burke tossing out "fichas" to students who would answer questions correctly or Mrs. O'Keefe or Señor having celebrations with food and decorations for days like "Day of the Dead." I quite vividly remember defeating JCA in volleyball my senior year while playing under Coach Airola and Rachel, and at that time, Shannon was a coach for the program as well. That was a great memory. What would make it even better is so many of my teachers like Coach Cogs and TP would always ask me how our season was going. I remember at the end of my sophomore year in MR's English class, he gave each student this beautiful card with a picture of

Jesus on it and on the back it stated how thankful he was for each individual student...to this day I have that picture. The benefit of going to a Catholic high school is that every class began with a prayer. As students, we could discuss our faith openly and in a safe place. I was raised in a home where faith was at the center of the household. So going to Providence only helped to further deepen my faith and my relationship with God. From classes, to Masses, to retreat days and Kairos - as students we were inundated with how much we are loved by God.

I always knew my parents made sacrifices to send my sister Nora and I to Providence. And now that I am an adult, I more fully appreciate that act of love. I'm so thankful to them. Parent's, like mine, of Providence students are not the only ones who make great sacrifices to be a part of the Celtic Family. I can safely say that all of you sacrifice so much of yourselves for the betterment of this school and all the individuals who are a part of this community. Perhaps it is your time or maybe your finances... whatever it may be, I thank you for all you do, for your dedication and commitment. I truly got the behind the scenes look into all of your hard work when in May of 2008, I graduated, and in June I started working as an administrative assistant in the Pastoral Office. Having had such a quick turnaround time from being a student to being a staff member brought with it some awkwardness. I remember feeling very strange walking through the staff lounge or seeing my name on one of the mailboxes. I also had the hardest time transitioning from calling you Mr. or Mrs. to calling you by your first name. In fact, with some staff I still struggle with this to this day, and I think at this point it is safe to say you will probably perpetually be called Mr. or Mrs. by me. What also made working at Providence so fun for me, was that I was there as my sister was going through high school, as well as all of my cousins from the Connelly and Urchell Families. Several of my cousins played sports, while

many others were part of the Fine Arts program. It was at this time that I developed a great appreciation for all our Fine Arts programs, and the students and staff that are a part of them.

I truly had so much fun learning about you and getting to know you as friends over the next eight years as I worked in the office. I experienced so much growth in my time with all of you professionally and spiritually. You taught me so much. You always treated me as one of the crew. I loved when you would stop in the Pastoral Office to discuss something or just say, "Hi." I miss the faculty and staff luncheons, especially the holiday ones when we played games...it was always so competitive. I miss the Masses and catching up with you in the halls. You all taught me so much in my years on staff. I was extraordinarily proud to be a part of the Pastoral Team with, Fr. Merk, Mrs. Annie Persicketti, Señor and June - so much so that when I stop in for a visit I still catch myself asking, "What are we working on today?" Working in the office has expanded my music selection, as now contemporary Christian rock is a pre-set station in my car. I have also attended several Christian concerts which were so much fun- one of them being with the Pastoral crew, Amy Potempa, Jackie Poulos and Melissa Sallade. The love of my faith that developed over the years at Providence even inspired me to sign up for an online dating website called Christian Mingle- which is how I met my husband Ryan. So now, I highly recommend online dating for everyone.

There have been so many children of staff that have come through the doors over the years since I have been a part of the Providence Family: Barrett, Cichoracki, Coglianesi, Cavallone, Gura, Colbert, Williams, Zlogar, Begeske, Withers, Ellingson, Harris, Harper, Grigoletti, Gregory, Giordano, Ditzler, DiPego, Devine, Dau, Copenhaver, Carroll, Brassil, Austrums, Arthurs, Ternik, Persicketti, Palmasani, O'Keefe, Murray, Monterosso, Madej,

Lindgren, Ball, Costello, Dillon, Rodighero, Westbrook, Smith, Senffner, Stoub, Tellez, Xydakis....and I am sure there have been so many more staff and child combos in the time I have not been at Providence as well as many other relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. We are literally Family here. We all spend so much time at work that it tends to become our home away from home, and our co-workers become family. Now, no place is perfect, just like no family is perfect. As a great English teacher named Ms. Kathy Rabbers would always say, "Times change, people don't." There will always be that family member that drives you a little crazy or perhaps you have a hard time seeing eye to eye, but I hope and pray that at the end of the day you can still love one another as Jesus loves you and be a united front as you work together for the common good of this place we love.

The last year that I was at Providence my Mom was hired on- to help with the nursing paperwork in the Dean's Office and sub in the Kitchen. She still works full-time in the Kitchen. There was a common misconception for many who thought for the longest time that I was Persicketti daughter, and as honored as I was to be associated with such a wonderful family, for those of you who might not know my real and beautiful mother is Anne Connelly-Mitros. It was a lot of fun seeing her around school and witnessing her experience all the wonderful people and things I have had the privilege of experiencing over the years. With her working here, my relationships at the school have grown even deeper, as now I have the added bonus of receiving hugs from all the lunch ladies every time I stop by to see my mom.

A few years ago my parents were asked to speak at a summer home Mass for incoming freshman parents here in this chapel. My mom assigned my Dad to be the presenter, and that was an easy "yes" for my Dad. They were both so proud that their daughters were alumni of

Providence and would jump at the chance to rave about this school. I want you to know that what you do here and how you treat everyone and the impact you have on all the students and their families is so powerful and profound that as my Dad stepped up to give his reflection he broke down into tears, so much so, that he could barely get through his presentation. Now this is a man, that up until that point in my life, I had never seen cry. That's how much he was moved and how grateful he was to God for this place and for you.

Unfortunately, the greatest loss my family has ever experienced was the loss of my Dad just a few short months ago. As we were planning his services, the funeral home asked my mom where she would like donations to go in lieu of flowers. Without hesitation, she said, "Kevin would love to give back to Providence." Losing my dad has been the furthest I have ever felt from heaven, from God, yet at the same time the closest. What a dichotomy! I was continually looking for a sign that my Dad was okay, that he was in God's loving arms, and that he was still ever present in my life. I can remember family members and friends saying: I heard your Dad's song, I saw cardinal, and I knew he was there, I had dream, and he came to me, but for me there was silence for quite some time. Then one night I was home alone and trying to find a movie on Netflix. I remembered my Mom and Dad saying "The Two Popes" was a really nice movie. Little did I know that by the end of that movie I would get my sign that I had been so desperately praying for. In the movie Pope Benedict, like myself, was struggling. He believed in God so deeply, prayed to God but only heard silence in return and felt so disheartened. That was until he developed a relationship and friendship with Jorge who would later become Pope Francis. It was through Jorge that he experienced God's love and felt His presence in his life. It

was then that I knew my Dad was ever present in my life, that God was present in my life. I experience his love still through all of you. I felt in that moment my Dad was at Peace.

As I reflected back on the weeks after my Dad passed I recognized that we received so much love and comfort from this community. Some of you attended my Dad's services, while others sent beautiful cards and flowers, to just giving us hugs in the hallway or shooting us text messages to check in. From a logistical standpoint, I will be forever grateful to Fr. Merk, MaryBeth Carroll and Lynn Murray who quickly sprung into action to make sure my mom had insurance for herself. As a daughter there was no greater gift I could have received then seeing that my mom was being cared for by a community I loved. It has brought my entire family so much comfort.

My family has not been the only ones to experience a great loss over the years, I am sure everyone here has lost someone they deeply loved. In my time at Providence I was there for the passing of Joey Diaz, Alex Dombrowski, Rasa Poskocimas, Tom Barrett, Charlie Dunne, Marie Osborne, Pam Kettwig, and Al Wycislo. I do not bring this up to make you feel sad but rather to express how incredibly special our community is. It was the faith you taught me and the love you showed me that continues to carry me through this beautiful life, and that has helped me to navigate the trying times.

You prepare young people every day for the rest of their lives, I was one of those young people. Your support and kindness towards your co-workers is so important- I had the privilege of being one of those co-workers. Everything I experienced as a student, a co-worker and alumnus has molded me into the woman I am today. And, for that, I thank you. Please relish in

the time you have here together; it is a gift and blessing. The years I spent at Providence will forever hold a special place in my heart. May God bless and keep you always.