

IND: A Baltimore Landmark
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On May 5th, it was announced that the Institute of Notre Dame (IND), the oldest all-girl's Catholic school in Baltimore, would permanently close its doors this summer.

IND was founded by the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1847. For the past 173 years, it has stood firm in its original location in East Baltimore.

The Baltimore Sun states, "IND's first class graduated in July 1864, as cannon fire from the Civil War could be heard in the distance, according to the school's history. During the Civil War, the sisters helped slaves reach freedom as part of the Underground Railroad. They tended to students and each other during the pandemic of 1918. During the Baltimore riots in 1968, the school was left untouched except that the words 'soul sisters' had been scrawled across the building, according to a 1997 story in the Baltimore Sun. Even in the 1970s, when other preparatory schools moved out of the city and into the suburbs, IND remained."

IND is known for educating a diverse group of girls and sending 100% of them to college. I am a proud graduate of IND's class of 2011. I am now a college graduate and in December, will become the first in my immediate family to earn a master's degree.

I don't know anyone else who had a high school experience quite like mine. I don't know anyone else who loves their high school as much as IND girls love IND. In fact, people look at me like I'm crazy when I talk about how much my high school impacted my life. IND is more than just a school, it's a sisterhood.

I always get the question, "What was it like going to an all-girls school? I bet there were a lot of cat fights!" Sure, there were fights just like any co-ed school, but at IND, we were free to be ourselves. We didn't feel any pressure to dress up or impress anyone. As a matter of fact, some of my classmates looked like they literally rolled right out of their beds and came to school in the morning. We were a family. We encouraged and uplift each other. We inspired each other to do our very best both in and out of the classroom. My sisters and I formed bonds that have turned into lifelong friendships.

The Institute of Notre Dame did so much more than just provide me with an education. It helped shape me into the woman I am today. IND instilled so many of the qualities that I pride myself on including leadership, independence, and love for the community.

If there's one thing to note about IND, it's tradition. IND girls are HUGE on tradition, beginning the day you walk through the doors and up the Slate stairs in a crisp new uniform.

Freshmen "little sisters" are greeted by their junior "big sisters" and celebrated with "Freshmen Welcome." The big sisters decorate each locker with baby shower decorations and bring lunch for their little sisters to welcome them to the IND family.

Sophomore year, you receive your class pin and earn an invitation to the Ring/Pin dance.

Junior year you receive your class ring—the same ring that thousands of women before you have worn. You also get to wear the coveted IND blazer, distinguishing the upperclassmen from the younger classes.

As you can imagine, dances are a big deal at an all girl's school. There's MORP (prom spelled backwards) for freshmen and sophomores, winter formal, father-daughter dance, junior/senior prom, and the final white dance.

Things get really wild during spirit week leading up to the IND/Mercy basketball game. The classes compete against each other in locker room decorating contests, skits/dances, and themed dress up days throughout the week. On Friday, the school reunites to cheer the varsity basketball team on in the IND/Mercy game—the largest women's sporting event in the state of Maryland. I even got to play in the game one year.

In the fall, the junior and senior classes compete in the annual powderpuff flag football game while their little sister classes cheer them on.

Senior year is packed with all of these events and more: Singing the 12 Days of Christmas, picking a graduation gown, the 100 Days celebration, College Decision Day, and Senior Farewell. It all culminates with the Baccalaureate mass and graduation at the Cathedral of Mary our Queen. Each girl wears an identical white dress and carries a bouquet of red roses. It's absolutely breathtaking.

The final event is the White Dance where the entire class comes together and decorates their white dresses for one last celebration.

In high school, my planner was FULL every single day of the week— before school, after school, and even during summer break. I completed almost 500 community service hours... And not because I had to, but because I WANTED to.

I held a position as a school ambassador, where I represented IND at middle school recruiting events and Open Houses. (Almost exactly what I do now as a career for The University of Tampa!)

I was involved in the student government. I took pictures and was a contributing writer to the school newspaper and yearbook. I also played basketball for three years.

I served as the President of the Peer Ministry club where I helped to coordinate community outreach events and plan yearly class retreats, the senior overnight retreat, and Peer Ministry retreats in the mountains with no cell service. I was a part of the Campus Ministry club and participated in school masses as an Altar Server.

I helped to lead Project K.I.N.D., an after school mentoring program. In the summers, I served as a counselor for TamarIND, a camp for elementary/middle school girls in the community.

My senior year, we even coordinated a performance in the school talent show where our entire class dressed up as nuns and performed a song from Sister Act.

There was NEVER a dull moment at IND. And not only were the students involved, but the parents were too! IND's Mother's and Father's Clubs were there for any and everything.

As a college admissions counselor, I look back and realize just how prepared I was for college. Not just through the application process (the counseling department was fabulous), but in every way possible.

Throughout my years at IND, I had many, many teachers who inspired me and impacted my life. Especially our dear late Sister Hildie, who always provided me with a laugh and a hug when I needed it and a warm place to sit when my sister was late picking me up from school.

My friend and mentor, Ms. Vanessa "Wills" Williams, who means more to me, my high school career, and my life than I could put into words.

Mrs. Hemphill and Mr. Hiles, who sparked my interest in English and Journalism. Four years later, I received my bachelor's degree in Journalism.

And Mr. Alicea and Ms. Seeley who always kept me on my toes. People always compliment me on my appearance— it's because of them. Ms. Seeley was the best-dressed woman I knew. Whenever my uniform was out of place, they were on it! This obviously continued into my adult life.

I can't thank them enough for taking a little lanky 13-year-old and giving her a sense of purpose and a deeper faith. They molded me into a leader and encouraged me to crash through the glass ceiling. Thirteen years later, and I'm still determined to change the world.

I'm so proud to call myself an alumna of the Institute of Notre Dame, along with powerhouses such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Former Senator Barbara Mikulski. Just last week, I was telling a friend how I wanted to move back to Baltimore when I have children so that my daughters could attend IND and become a part of the tradition. As much as I love living in Florida, I wanted them to have that experience too. It's heartbreaking that this will never happen, but I've got enough memories to last a lifetime. I'm so glad I lugged my giant Nikon camera around to every event.

The doors to 901 N. Aisquith Street may be closing, but IND will FOREVER be in our hearts. Our home.

Hail Notre Dame. Love Notre Dame. Always, we can count on thee, the spirit of IND.