

- Leaving Cert. English (Higher) 2010: Paper 1 Text 1

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This interview is an extract from a long article entitled 'Conversations with the President — Mary O'Grady Takes a Trip Down Memory Lane'

Mary O'Grady has been our most popular politician for four decades and, in an exclusive interview, she reveals the influences in her youth that contributed to her success today...

*Were you interested in politics from a young age?*

Well, in our house, you didn't have a choice! My father was first elected to Dail Eireann on my second birthday so politics was a constant in my house. As a child and teenager, we were completely immersed in the campaign trail. I remember 'pounding the pavements' with my father and thinking he must be a very important man because everybody knew his name! My childhood home was invariably busy. People called for my dad constantly and I remember thinking as a child that I would love to be as popular as him! Obviously, at that time I didn't realise that constant callers and the phone waking you up in the middle of the night could also be stressful!

As I got older, I realised what it was all for and I began to look at the policies and the parties. Elections caused great excitement in our house and I particularly loved the buzz of the counts. There was such a tense air of expectation. As the boxes were opened each party would huddle together tallying the votes. There was such excitement and such camaraderie that I knew I wanted to be actively involved in the process when I got older.

*Did your parents encourage you to follow a political path?*

Absolutely not! My mother has had to sacrifice a lot of her own life as a result of politics. We never had a normal family routine or sat down for traditional dinners because my father was always running to some meeting or overseeing his clinics. Family life took second priority when an election was imminent. My mother graciously accepted this for her own life but she was concerned about the effect it would have on my own life.

She discussed the sacrifices I would have to make but, as my father says, 'It's in the blood' and it was all I ever really wanted to do. We often discussed the idea of being able to change a system from within and he encouraged me to consider how one should use one's life as a way to enhance the lives of many. I think it would be fair to say that he was my inspiration!

*Did anybody else in your childhood influence you?*

I was lucky. I went to two brilliant schools with exceptional teachers. We were encouraged to think for ourselves. There was a great emphasis on articulating your ideas freely and clearly and I truly believe this laid the foundations for all of the debating I would engage in in later life.

I remember the elections for class representative and school council. We had to make a speech in front of our year. It was very intimidating at first but when you looked at your peers nodding in agreement with you, you were spurred on.

We had a very progressive principal who embraced the spirit of the student council and actually

## Interview – Sample Answer

listened to our views so I had a very positive first experience of democracy! My representations actually culminated in things changing in the school so I saw the 'power of the people' and the advantages of a democratic system at an early stage of my life!