‘TAP Lady’ by Kattriona O’Sullivan

This is a short synopsis of my life since TAP – got into psychology degree in TCD, fell in love, had a baby in 2nd year, worked really really hard, graduated in 2008, got a scholarship for a PhD, had another baby, got married, got happy, graduated my Phd, got a job, left a job, got a job, left a job, got a job I like!

In the middle of all this I became a grown up; I said goodbye to my eldest son who moved to the UK to play professional football and I said goodbye to both my parents who died from different addiction related illnesses.

I am now what you would call a fully formed individual (apparently), I have had opportunities that were previously unavailable to me. I have reached the outer circle of the education classification wheel. But what does this actually mean?? In the grand scheme of my life it means I can now afford to pay my bills, I can buy a house, I can work where I like- in lots of ways I am equal. It also means that I feel guilty about watching the x-factor, celebrity love island and other (non intellectual) programmes. It also means that when I enter my work environment I am probably the only person who understands how amazing cocoa brown tan is and the dating histories of the kardashians.

It means that I now see more – I see the way people from my community are disadvantaged. I see how I am an anomaly. I am the outlier. My achievements mean I no longer belong with my working class peers. Yet my lack of privilege, and the route I had to take to get here, mean I often do not feel like I belong with my middle class peers.

This isn’t all bad; there are so many of us now who are coming through the same routes as me we are actually starting our own class. The TAP class! There are doctors, lawyers, politicians, lecturers, social workers and so many more of us doing-the-do, being successful people. In some ways we are still the group that doesn’t fit; but we are also the group that knows how to fight!

There is more to me than my TAP story. This morning I woke up to my 2 little boys, now 8 and 11, asking me for toast and tea. I sent a text to my eldest son who is playing a match tonight to tell him good luck and to tell him that I love him. I kissed my husband and my dog goodbye (not at the same time) and I went to my job. I work in TAP now. Which is strange and great and hard and great. I am on the board of a charity, which supports lone parents, and I try my best to give back in any way I can.

In many ways I am not the person I was before TAP. I am a better version of me. But being a better version of me doesn’t mean I am better than anyone else. I am just different. I still love shit TV – especially the Kardashians, I still swear a lot and I still have no clue how to make mulled wine. If there is one change that makes me proud is now my children sit around the dinner table saying things like ‘mam when I go to college…’ … they dream bigger dreams than I did. They live in a different sense of entitlement, they don’t think that they are entitled to the dole…they know the world is their oyster. This makes all of the uneasiness worth it. Knowing that my sons will not be first generation college goers makes me proud.