

OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR IOGNÁID Ó MUIRCHEARTAIGH, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, President, National University of Ireland, Galway, on 29 June 2007, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on WILLIAM WALSH

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

“Sequoia is a genus in the cypress family, containing the single living species *Sequoia Sempervirens*. Common names include Coast Redwood and California Redwood. It is an evergreen, long-lived, tree living for up to 2,000 years, and is commonly considered the tallest tree in the world, reaching up to 380 feet in height and 23 feet in diameter at the base”.



In many ways the man we honour here today – William D. Walsh – resembles the sturdy sequoia tree from which he named the company, Sequoia Associates which he founded and on the board of which he currently sits. While it is normal to indulge in some element of exaggeration when presenting a citation of this kind, we must admit that Bill may not be 380 feet tall, certainly he is not 23 feet in diameter, and is perhaps unlikely to live for up to 2000 years, Bill Walsh – also a California resident – is a man of great standing, a leader among the Irish American community; a committed and thoughtful philanthropist, and, like the *Sequoia Sempervirens*, a man who I hope will be around for many, many years to come.

Exactly 70 years ago this month, Bill Walsh first visited Ireland with his father and his brother Donald, who is also here today. Since that time, Bill has had a passionate interest in this country and in all things Irish.

Bill Walsh is a man who can be described in the classical philosophical sense as a man of “goodness”. Aristotle in his ethical writings suggested that the purpose of every human action is to achieve something which is good. Bill Walsh’s actions over his lifetime exemplify this point.

After graduating with a Bachelor’s Degree from Fordham University and a Juris Doctor degree in 1955 from Harvard Law School. (which he attended on an \$800 dollar scholarship), Bill began his career in the field of **law enforcement – the classic battle of good versus evil**. As Assistant US Attorney of the Southern district of New York from 1955 to ’58, Bill ran narcotics investigations in the garment industry and on the waterfront, eventually winning the indictment of one of the most powerful of American crime bosses, Vito Genovese. As Counsel to the New York

State Commission of Investigation he targeted illegal gambling as a revenue source for organized crime, ultimately writing a book on the subject.

Although his career in law was marked by many distinguished achievements, there is a view in his family that one of his finest hours was when, dressed only in a tee shirt and swimming trunks, at three o'clock in the morning, in a small courthouse, he argued successfully to have his brother and some friends (and possibly even himself) acquitted of a charge of being let's say "exuberant and over-active". But the less said about that particular episode the better.

Another little known aspect of his legal career was that, in order to boost his - at that time - meagre income, he was an occasional participant in a TV program entitled "You are the Jury", a sort of precursor of Judge Judy. Who knows, had his career gone in a different direction, we might now all be watching "Judge Bill"!

Later as his career developed, his interests moved from justice and law enforcement to the commercial world of business. In this he remained a good guy too! Since he founded it in 1988, Bill Walsh has been a partner in the venture capital firm of Sequoia Associates, based in Menlo Park California. In the 20 years of its operation, the firm has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to acquire and restore financial health to over 20 ailing enterprises. As a general partner of Sequoia Associates, Walsh pays many visits to Sequoia portfolio companies in the United States and Canada, to advise the management team on business dilemmas and decisions. He currently chairs or sits on the board of ten companies. Before joining Sequoia, Bill was President and CEO of Arcata Corporation and before that was a consultant with McKinsey and Company.

He has set a standard for **philanthropic generosity** - giving of his time, his talent and his treasure to causes he believes in. Among the organisations which have benefited from his energies are: The American Ireland Fund; his alma mater, Harvard Law School; Fordham University; The Neurosurgical Research Institute and the Hoover Institution. Not only is he a committed and generous donor, but he gives significant time and thought to the issues which exercise these organisations. He has been a National Board Director of The American Ireland Fund since 1997 after being awarded the Distinguished Leadership Award and he has been an insightful and dynamic member of the AIF's Development Committee, looking to secure the future of the American Ireland Fund for generations to come. He has co-chaired the Dean's Academy Board at Harvard Law School; has been a valued trustee of Fordham University in New York; chaired the Board of the Neurosurgical Research Institute and sat on the Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution.

In 1997, Fordham University opened the William D. Walsh Family Library, at its Rose Hill Campus in the Bronx. In its 2004 edition of *The Best 351 Colleges*, the Princeton Review ranked Fordham's William D. Walsh Family Library fifth in the country, ahead of Yale, Harvard, and Columbia. Among the most technologically advanced facilities

in the nation, the quality of this outstanding library rests to a considerable degree on the \$10.5 million dollar benefaction which the Walsh Family made to Fordham.

As ambassador to Bolivia for the Knights of Malta, he learned of a priest who needed help for the street-children there. Bill responded by funding the Street Children's Hospital of La Paz, a truly amazing initiative in one of South America's poorest countries, setting up a series of mobile hospitals which bring the healthcare to the children, rather than the children to the centres

In Ireland the issue of Integrated Education is one close to his heart – he believes that integrated education is a key issue in copperfastening a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Bill Walsh is very much a family man, and we are pleased to welcome here today some members of his family – his wife Jane, his daughters Tara and Deborah, his brother Donald, and his friends Truman and Marian Bidwell. Given that his grandfather came from County Mayo, those of us here in Galway would see Bill's success as a classic example of overcoming the disadvantage of place of birth. For the record, this statement is a joke!

This University was in operation when Bill's grandfather left these shores, but no doubt coming to University was not an option for the young man at that time. How things have changed, with the percentage progression to university now higher for County Mayo than for any other county in Ireland, and most of them come here to NUI Galway.

Bill Walsh has been described as a lion of a man. Since his first visit to Ireland with his father in 1937 he has had a passionate love for and interest in all things Irish. He is a very humane man, has a great sense of fun and festivity, and yet is utterly committed to and gets great satisfaction from his philanthropic activities, whether these be in support of great institutions of learning, at one end of the scale, or assisting the Belvedere Youth Club in Dublin or the Street Children of Bolivia at the other. And yet, while the scale of Bill's philanthropy is amazing, it is more the manner than the scale of the giving which is remarkable, because Bill gives of himself as much as of his wealth when he commits to a cause.

It is indeed a privilege for us today to welcome back to his own place here in the West of Ireland, one of our own, lawyer, businessman, philanthropist, leader amongst men, Bill Walsh, so that we can confer on him the highest honour that the University can bestow.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.