BREAK the MOULD

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by Wren & Rook

Text copyright © Sinéad Burke, 2020
Illustration copyright © Natalie Byrne, 2020
Illustration and design copyright © Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 2020
All rights reserved.

The right of Sinéad Burke as the author respectively of this Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988.

ISBN: 9781526363336

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C104740

Wren & Rook
An imprint of
Hachette Children's Group
Part of Hodder & Stoughton
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

A Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk
www.hachettechildrens.co.uk

Publishing Director: Debbie Foy
Commissioning Editor: Laura Horsley
Editor: Phoebe Jascourt
Art Director: Laura Hambleton
Senior Designer: Sophie Gordon
Designed by Thy Bui

Printed in the United Kingdom

Burberry ® is a registered trade mark of Burberry Limited. Ferragamo ® is a registered trade mark of Salvatore Ferragamo S.p.A. Givenchy ® is a registered trade mark of Givenchy. Gucci ® is a registered trade mark of Guccio Gucci S.p.A. Louis Vuitton ® is a registered trade mark of Louis Vuitton Malletier. Prada ® is a registered trade mark of Prada S.A. Vogue ® is a registered trade mark of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.

The website addresses (URLs) included in this book were valid at the time of going to press. However, it is possible that contents or addresses may have changed since the publication of this book. No responsibility for any such changes can be accepted by either the author or the publisher.

SINÉAD BURKE
ILLUSTRATED BY NATALIE BYRNE

BREAK the MOULD

wren & rook

CONTENTS

① TO DREAM ____ 2

② TO BE YOU ____ 20

③ TO BE DIFFERENT ____ 44

④ TO BE CURIOUS,
TO BE KIND ____ 70

⑤ TO FIND YOUR WORDS ____ 92

⑥ TO HAVE A VOICE ____ 118

⑦ TO LIVE IN A WORLD
NOT BUILT FOR YOU ____ 142

⑧ TO BE SEEN ____ 160

⑨ TO CHANGE THE
WORLD ____ 182

⑩ TO TAKE YOUR PLACE ____ 206

For my Mam, Dad, Natasha,
Niamh, Chris and Chloe.

Without you, none of this would
be possible. I love you.







I

TO

DREAM

'BREAK THE MOULD'

Have you ever thought to yourself, I would love to stand out. To do things differently. To make a difference. To change the world. To break the mould. But you figured - no, that's impossible.

In many ways, that was my story. Or, it could have been.

When I was younger, I wanted to be a teacher, I wanted to work in fashion and I wanted to change the world. But I'm a little person. I have dwarfism, which is a physical disability that means my arms and legs are a little bit shorter than most people. Growing up, there weren't very many teachers, or writers, or fashion designers, or activists who were disabled like me.

Not seeing someone who looked like me in the places I longed to be, meant that I used to think that my dreams were impossible. But from my earliest days, my parents encouraged me to believe that I could do anything that I dreamed of. They told me that I might have to find a different way

to achieve my dream, but it wasn't impossible. Just because it hadn't been done before, it didn't mean that I couldn't be the first.

I went on to become the first little person to be on the cover of *Vogue*, a monthly fashion and lifestyle magazine. I was the first little person to attend the Met Gala – a very fancy fundraising ball where lots of celebrities get dressed up in amazing costumes. I created the first little person doll and the first little person mannequin, because when I was growing up, there were never any toys or shop mannequins that looked like me. I introduced the word for little person into the Irish dictionary and into Irish Sign Language and I am the first little person to ever advise the President of Ireland. I'm part of a group of people, called the Council of State, who he calls on whenever there is a big decision to be made.

I was able to fulfil my dreams. Now I want to help you fulfil yours.



PERMISSION TO DREAM

The act of making a dream a reality does not happen overnight. It takes time, effort and perseverance, but YOU can make it happen. You can discover and create your own dreams and I want to show you how. Let's rewind and step back in time to my very first day of school …

I was SO nervous. I wanted to make friends and I wanted to fit in. I looked different from the other girls in my class. I was concerned that they might not know how to talk to me, or what to say. I was worried that their nervousness might have meant that they wouldn't talk to me at all. I decided to introduce myself, to put everyone at ease. So I told them a story about me.

It was just a few lines. I practised it at home in front of the mirror and felt a mix of fear and excitement. I walked into the classroom and everyone looked at me. They all wore the same clothes: a bright blue jumper, shirt, bowtie and pinafore. I wore them too and in our uniform, I looked like the other girls, just smaller.

The teacher told the class that I was their new classmate and asked me to say hello. It was my moment. Standing in front of them, I waved and smiled. I took a deep breath and said,

'Hi, my name is SINÉAD.
I am four years old. I have
ACHONDROPLASIA. That's spelled
a-c-h-o-n-d-r-o-p-l-a-s-i-a.
It means that I'm a LITTLE PERSON
and I can do most things
just like you.'

It was not only my first day of school, it was also my fourth birthday.

The teacher had a look on her face that said she wasn't expecting a speech. It was the kind of look where an adult is trying their best not to smile, but they can't control it and a grin stretches across their face.

The class shouted,

'WELCOME SINÉAD'

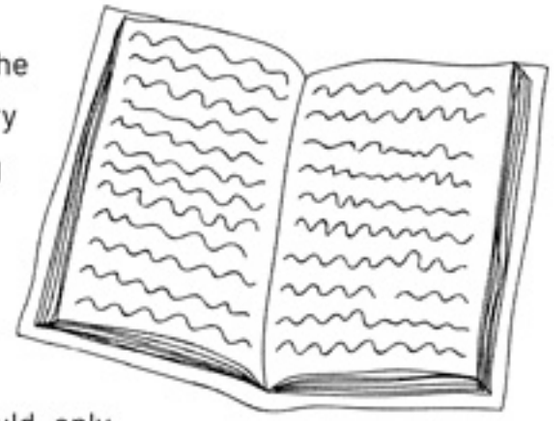
and over-emphasised every syllable in my name. With so many voices, it sounded like Shin-aye-yed. It didn't matter, I was part of the class, I would spend eight years in a classroom with these girls and, already, I felt accepted. I was one of them.

They had made small changes to help me feel comfortable. At the back of the classroom, we hung up our coats, hats and scarves on bright, colourful hooks. Mine was at the end of the row and much lower than the rest. The ability to hang my coat up, on my own, might seem trivial or unimportant, but it allowed me to be a student in the same way as everyone else.

In my classroom, there were thirty spaces for children to sit and every table and chair looked the same - wooden with red metal bars for the legs. My seat was at the front of the room, my table and chair were identical to everyone else's, but smaller. The legs had been shortened, and they were just the right height for me to be able to sit down, without using a footstool and without having to ask anyone for help.



I loved school. In the classroom it seemed anything was possible. There was a playhouse nestled in the corner and inside, there were costumes and lots of accessories. I remember spending hours dressing up, sometimes as a doctor wearing a white coat over my uniform, with a stethoscope around my neck. Other times wearing a chef's hat and jacket, and every now and then, wearing a hard hat and a high-vis jacket like a construction worker. I loved to play, dream and imagine all the possibilities of who I could be and what I could do when I left school.



Then I would zig-zag from the playhouse to the classroom library where I would run my fingers along the spines of the books. I loved turning the pages and escaping to a different world. Learning about princes and princesses, countries and cultures that I could only dream of experiencing. It was bliss.

That first day, I didn't want school to end. When the bell rang for us to go home, I left the classroom dragging my feet and my schoolbag, desperate to spend a few more minutes there.

I had made up my mind. Bursting out the school doors, I told my parents that I wanted to go to school for ever. When I was old enough, I wanted to be a teacher. They didn't hesitate, not for a moment. Smiling brightly, they both looked at me and said, 'Great!'.

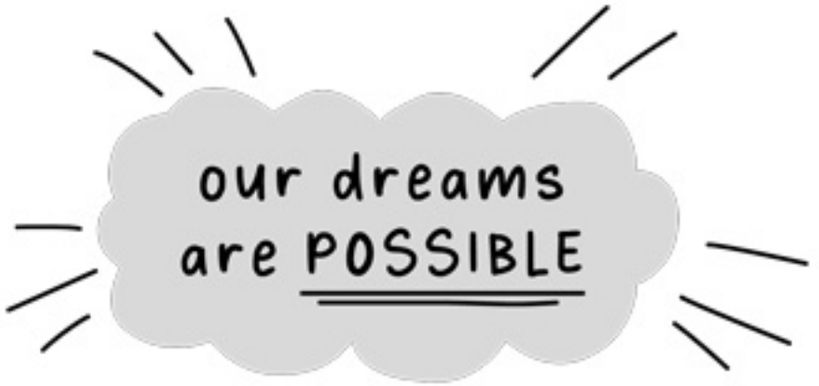
I often wonder how my mam and dad felt at that moment. They had worked with the school to create the coat hook and my table and chair at a smaller height. Already it was obvious that the classroom wasn't designed for a little person as a student, so could a little person be a teacher? It would be difficult to reach things, to see all of the children, and as none of my teachers looked like me, maybe that meant it was impossible. Maybe I couldn't be a teacher. My mam and dad were calm, but I wonder if they were thinking about this and asking themselves these questions?

You see, we live in a world where there are often **ASSUMPTIONS** about what a person CAN or CANNOT do or be, because they are **DIFFERENT**.

When there are no role models, or people who look like you, already achieving your dreams, it's easy to think it's impossible, but that doesn't mean it's true.

When I told my parents that I wanted to be a teacher, they didn't accept those biases, which is an assumption of what or how something should be. My mam and dad gave me permission to dream.

My life might be very different without that moment because sometimes, all you need is someone to believe in you. That someone could be a parent, a grandparent, a brother, a sister, a cousin, a friend or it could be you, believing in yourself. We all need someone to tell us that



and to remind us how brilliant and unique we each are.

THIS BOOK

Now I'm passing on that message.

I want to ENCOURAGE you to BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, to have PRIDE in who you are and to find comfort in your own skin, to be CURIOUS about the world around you, to DISCOVER your voice, and to DREAM as big as you can.

I want you to be confident in fighting for what you believe in, to be ambitious about changing the world so it is fairer for everyone. I want you to encourage others to use their voice too!

There are moments when these dreams might feel impossible. You might feel like giving up. You might feel like your dreams should belong to someone else. But, I'm here to remind you to have faith in yourself – because I've been in your shoes. I was a kid who felt different, I looked different to my friends and family, and at times, I was the kid who just wanted to fit in. But fitting in means hiding a part of yourself. It's choosing to not let the world see and experience all of who you are. I used to feel like hiding, but not any more. I've learned to be proud of who I am, to not be afraid of what others might think and to dream enormously big. And you can too.

I'd like to tell you something that I have learned:

THE IMPOSSIBLE *IS* POSSIBLE.

THE LIST OF DREAMS

From a young age, I kept a list of my dreams and ambitions. Throughout this book, you'll read some of my stories and the moments where so many of my dreams have come true. You'll learn about some of the people who have inspired me, and in each chapter, I'll introduce you to someone amazing, someone who you might not be taught about in school.

So, what's on your list? Because you might be different or feel different to the other people in your class or your family, but this book is here to help you find the power in being different, to discover the things you love about yourself, to grow your confidence, to follow your dreams, to break the mould and to find your place in the world.

Grab a pen and a piece of paper and start writing your list of dreams and ambitions. Remember, this is YOUR list, so write everything and anything on it that you want to achieve - even if it seems impossible. Especially, if it seems impossible!

HERE'S MY LIST:



NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Decorate your list and keep it somewhere safe, a place where you can refer to it often.

No one else has to see it if you don't want them to, or you could share it with your family or friends - and encourage them to write a list too.

It is up to YOU.
This is all about YOU.
It is the start of YOUR
BRILLIANT journey!