

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile Series

by Margaret McGlohon '81C

### Kathleen Kelley '00C

**Associate Professor of Dance & Technology  
Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ**

#### **Artist. Caregiver. Dancer.**

Kathleen Kelley '00 is living the advice she's giving to today's Saint Mary's girls: "Create a community where you are, support the journey of others, and take care of others. If you can do this, you'll be successful." And, if you do, you'll be just like a Kathleen, who is living her dreams as a teacher and performer of dance at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

#### *Learning through Love*

Kathleen's family moved to Raleigh when she was five years old. She has two older half-siblings and four adopted siblings, all of whom have special needs. In this supportive environment, Kathleen developed a keen sense of what love and commitment meant, and how being in a supportive environment helped one's independence and growth.



"It was my mom who began the process of considering Saint Mary's for my last two years of high school," she explains. "So, we visited, and I applied as a day student."

As dancer at the NC School of the Arts, Kathleen loved to dance, but yearned for a more rigorous academic institution. She fell in love with Saint Mary's on her first visit.

"After enrolling, most of my time was spent in the dance studio as a member of Orchesis," she recalls. "Those days were long, but in my senior year I was awarded the Smedes Scholarship, which allowed me the opportunity to become a boarding student."

#### *Lifelong Learner, Lifelong Dancer*

After Saint Mary's, Kathleen attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G) where she earned a dual degree with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. It during college that Kathleen decided she wanted to pursue dance as a career.

"So, I headed to New York City after college to fulfill my dreams," she says. "There, I performed with many artists and choreographers, like Deagnit Shemy and Mei Yin Ng. I also began creating choreography of my own for Labor Force Dances, a company I co-founded with a friend. Our dances centered on showcasing the power of women who come together within a community."

In 2010, Kathleen enrolled in graduate school at the University of Illinois. There, she earned a Master of Fine Arts in Dance with a Graduate Minor in Gender Studies. During that time, she also taught undergraduate classes in both dance and technology and designed and taught online courses.

"I started to become very curious about the ways that media and dance intersected," she explains. "At the end of my MFA, the stars aligned as a perfect job became available at Montclair State University. After graduating, I accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Dance and Technology at Montclair and moved back to the New York City metro area."

Kathleen recently completed her sixth year with the school, where as a professor, she integrates technology – such as projections, film, and audio – into students' daily dancing lives. As a faculty member, she teaches modern/contemporary dance, Digital Technology and Dance, creates new dances with students, and collaborates with the Film Department on a course called "Dance Film."

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"I'm passionate about how dance intersects with the daily experiences of our lives," says Kathleen. "Our society, as a whole, spends a lot of time on technology, and on our devices, figuring out how to use technology to connect with each other and enhance our work. It's fascinating and important."

She also says all her students are pre-professional dancers who haven't necessarily thought about how to integrate media into their dancing lives. "Through technology you can project images behind a dancer or pick up movement or see movement in other forms. You can use technology to change the experience or perspective of the audience."

Being an active artist is also very important to Kathleen, and she pushes herself both personally and professionally. "When I'm not teaching, I'm busy with my own company, Proteo Media and Performance. Proteo is a collective that both creates new art work and supports other artists in the creation of their work. My motto is 'the more you give, the more you support others, the more your own work will grow' and it serves me in these endeavors and in my professional career."

### *Lifting Others and Giving Back*

Kathleen also says it's the strong and supportive network of colleagues which lifts her up in her community and helps her discover and implement ways to empower others and to give back to them and the community.

"That's my guiding principle. In everything I do, I try to think about ways that can empower and support our creative community. When I am creating dances, I am always thinking about the people who are in the room (the dancers, the audiences) and how we can come together to imagine and experience something new together."

In fact, Kathleen and her Saint Mary's classmates remain in touch today and have enjoyed a "group chat" for nearly 20 years. Classmate Sarah Rose Nordgren '00 remains Kathleen's best friend and artistic collaborator to this day and is just one of the Saint Mary's girls she enjoys visiting regularly.

"Sarah Rose and I are finishing our third collaborative effort, a film called 'Vibracorpus.' It is a video that incorporates dance and text (our two art forms). As we were working on it, we sent lots of notes back and forth about the ways that emotional lives can exist in the digital realm and be very different in real life. We are planning to finish the video this summer and submit it to poetry and film festivals."

Sarah Rose, who also danced at Saint Mary's, took the path of writing as her passion and career, when Kathleen headed towards dance. But, Kathleen very much enjoys writing and reading in what little spare time she has these days.

"As we all grow and look back, I want today's Saint Mary's girls to understand the huge value that is Saint Mary's. Now, as I look back, I see a strong and supportive community; one made up of mostly women," she says. And, she notes, "These women are the ones who lifted me up, supported me, and were tremendous role models. That's not the case in many schools or workplaces, and it's important and something I'm very thankful for having in my life."

Kathleen lives in New York City. She hopes to return for her 20<sup>th</sup> reunion next April and is excited that Orchestis' Spring Dance performance is the same weekend. She also truly embodies the spirit of Saint Mary's women who are resilient, intelligent, resourceful, passionate, and nurturing, and who are educated to make a difference in their communities and the world. And, we are grateful.

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