

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

### Jeannine Eason Brown '94HS '96C

**1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Sky Class Teacher**

**Carolina Friends School, Durham, N.C.**

Born in Durham and raised in Burlington, N.C., Jeannine Eason Brown '94HS '96C has come full circle. Once a student at Saint Mary's, today she's a teacher at Carolina Friends School, an independent school in Durham, N.C. Jeannine credits Saint Mary's with teaching her to love learning and the gift of wanting to pay that love forward with her own students.

#### Discovering a Love for Learning

A native of North Carolina, Jeannine Eason's family moved to Ohio when she was just four-years-old. "My dad, Ernest, was a doctor and he did his residency there," she explains. "But, when I was about to enter second grade, he and my mother, Margie, decided to come home to North Carolina and settle in Burlington."

There, she and her brother enrolled in the public school system. "By the time I was in high school, I wasn't doing as well as I could have been doing and I wasn't very happy."

Jeannine's parents began looking for something different to help inspire their daughter. "A woman who lived in Burlington and knew my parents told them about Saint Mary's in Raleigh," she explains. "That's when my parents came to me and said I needed something different."

A typical teen, Jeannine wasn't thrilled at the idea of being sent away to school and away from her friends. "I reacted as most girls my age would and told them I didn't need the school and didn't want to go."

Yet, as parents often do, they helped her come around to the idea. "I begrudgingly went and was prepared to hate it," she explains. "Very quickly, I began to fall in love with the place and with learning."

She enrolled for her junior year of high school and ended up staying through her first two years of college. "I was a boarding student and I had always been a dancer, so one of the first things I got involved with was Orchesis," she says and smiles. "It was the very first thing I jumped into and it helped me make friends and allowed me to express myself."

She soon got involved in other social clubs and activities including the Undatettes and SHARE. "I was also a member of The Circle, was an Acolyte for Chapel, and during my college years I was a member of the Cold Cuts and became the first Marshal of color."

But, it was Saint Mary's faculty and staff who were passionate about education that really impacted Jeannine. "They were actually interested in me as an individual and as a student," she explains. "The faculty and staff encouraged me, helped me grow, and told me they KNEW I could do it. That inspired me to do more, to learn, to grow, to try and to realize I was capable when I did. Once that happened, there was no stopping me."

Soon, she was asked to be an admissions ambassador and began giving tours to prospective students and their families. "At my high school graduation, I received the Marian Drane Graham Award," she says. "It was as pivotal moment in my education knowing how far I'd come and wanting to stay on for college and try even more."

#### Beyond Saint Mary's Gates

As a student, Jeannine had always been in dance. "So, that's what I thought I wanted to be professionally," she explains. "After graduating with my two year degree in 1996 from Saint Mary's, I told my parents I wanted to go to New York City and become a dancer."

Her parents suggested she consider a "back-up" and go to school to get a degree in dance education. "That was a smart move on their part," she says and laughs. "I thought, 'Well, I'll humor them,' and thought I'd stay on track to become a professional dancer there. But, soon I discovered I loved taking education courses and really liked the idea of learning about how different students learn differently."

Soon, Jeannine discovered a passion for wanting to help students learn. "These experiences caused me to reflect on my time at Saint Mary's and connected me to my own student experience; where I



learned to love learning and discovered I was smart and capable. I wasn't inadequate, like the way I was made to feel in public school. They just didn't meet my learning needs. And, I wanted to give that to my own students."

Jeannine came back to North Carolina and attended UNC-Greensboro, receiving bachelor of arts in Dance Education. "I taught in public high school for a while, then went back to get my Elementary Education Certification from North Carolina Central university. There, I took courses like, how to teach reading, teach math, etc."

She also realized how much she liked being a teacher and providing to her own students the kind of experience her faculty at Saint Mary's had given her. "I wanted to show each student in my classroom that learning is fun and empowering. I wanted students to discover their potential, just as I had done at Saint Mary's."

Jeannine also spent some time at home as a stay-at-home mom for the three children she shares with her educator/photographer husband. "I was blessed with a stepson who is now 15, a daughter who is 14, and our youngest son who is 11. The youngest goes to an independent school, like I did."

Most recently, she learned she will be a presenter at the National Association of Independent Schools People of Color Conference (NAIS POCC) in December. "My workshop is called *Beyond Buses and Boycotts; Revamping Black History Month and Your Entire School Calendar* and I'm so excited to be chosen."

In reflection of her success and happiness, Jeannine says, "I don't know where I would be without Saint Mary's. The lessons I learned, the experiences there stay with me to this day. It was where I was taught how to learn, where I learned to LOVE learning and became a school nerd!"

As an alumna, Jeannine stays connected to friends she made, attends events, and gives back to Saint Mary's Annual Fund to help provide more support for annual scholarships. She also will soon serve on our education panel for Saint Mary's Career Night for students and looks forward to serving as a mentor for Saint Mary's students of color.

Her advice for today's Saint Mary's girls? "When I receive newsletters and magazines, emails or updates, I see how much Saint Mary's has grown since I was a student and how much more opportunity there is to learn and grow and be challenged. I want today's girls to take everything they are learning and apply it to their lives, using those lessons to do great things for themselves, in their communities, and around the world – wherever their lives take them."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Jeannine Eason Brown '94HS '96C graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising their families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change in their communities. Jeannine's story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women have to be resilient, resourceful, intelligent, passionate, and nurturing, and we are grateful for the impact she's having on her very own students and community today.

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