

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

### Dr. Peron Graeber '10

#### Veterinarian

#### Veterinary + Clinical Care, Las Vegas, NC

Native Mississippian Dr. Peron Graeber '10 discovered a passion for animals and followed her heart to become a veterinarian. As a Saint Mary's graduate, she fell in love with the school and moved 780 miles from her home and family to share an experience that helped prepare her for her career and for lifelong learning.

#### Finding Saint Mary's

Peron Graeber grew up in the small town of Marks, Mississippi. "It's about one square mile with no stoplights. My brother William and I basically grew up on the family 'compound,'" she says and laughs. "My neighbors were my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and great aunt and uncles!"

Peron's parents, Bill and Dede Graeber, raised Peron there until she relocated to Raleigh to enroll at Saint Mary's. "My dad, brother, and uncle all went to the McCallie School as boys. So, when it was time for me to go to high school, my dad asked the McCallie School's Development Director for ideas on where I could find a similar education."

Curtis Baggett had come to know the family over many years, first as a teacher and later as the school's development director. "He shared with my dad a few ideas, but said if he had a daughter, he'd send her to Saint Mary's, so we added it to our list to check out."

Bill, Dede, and Peron toured several schools, and although they knew they wanted Peron to select Saint Mary's, they let her know that it was her decision. The family arrived during a day when the school happened to be closed, and there were no tour guides on campus. "The security guard escorted us around!" Peron recalls. "I wanted to go away to school. I was ready and wanted to be like William and go off to school. So, after touring a few different institutions, I fell in love with Saint Mary's."

She says there was no comparison. "The students were so happy here, and everyone was so welcoming including that security guard! It was a beautiful campus, so I chose Saint Mary's and moved across the country to attend as a boarding student."

Peron remembers a lot of great times. "I roomed all four years with Mary Stuart Smart '10, and she, Rachel Finney O'Brien '10, Susan Heyman '10, and I became lifelong friends," she explains. "We would do everything together, from laying out in the sun on the tennis courts during the weekends to playing on the soccer fields. Susan even convinced me to join the lacrosse team and play for two years, even though growing up in Mississippi I'd never seen or played it! I loved it."

As a student, Peron was challenged academically, but remained active on campus in Echo, Beacon, as a Marshal, and as a senior cheerleader. "We cheered at pep rallies on campus, and it was so fun."

#### An Epiphany

After graduating in 2010 from Saint Mary's, Peron enrolled in the pre-med program at Clemson University. "For a long time, I thought I wanted to be a doctor, but when I began studying for the MCATs, something happened," she recalls. "I decided to take a break from studying and watch a movie, so I turned on *Water for Elephants*. One of the main characters was a veterinarian, and I identified with him so much. That was when I realized I couldn't imagine NOT working with animals."

Peron switched programs from pre-med to pre-veterinary medicine and graduated with a degree in Biological Sciences. In reflecting back on her childhood, she says, "My love of animals started because of my mom. When I was a kid, I was terrified of dogs. Mom was an animal lover and basically said, 'No daughter of mine will be scared of dogs.' So, she went out and bought a dog and I fell in love. I also grew to love all animals and even had a lot of turtles growing up."

After leaving Clemson, Peron relocated to North Carolina to work for a year as a veterinary assistant. "I wanted to gain some experience and make certain this was what I really wanted to do."

When she began applying to veterinary colleges, she eventually elected to enroll in Ross University's Veterinary School on the island of St. Kitts. There, she finished her pre-clinical work over two and a

*Continued...*



half years and treated cats, dogs, and all kinds of exotics like lizards and birds. "The program focused on tropical veterinary medicine, conservation of endangered species, preservation of ecosystems, zoonotic diseases and how they affect livestock," Peron explains.

While there, she adopted two dogs. "I found Henry the "coconut" Retriever – that's what islanders call Golden Retrievers – and Christopher the cat. When I left for the U.S., it was another adventure, and I brought them back with me."

### Life After Vet School

For Peron's clinical rotation and final year, she enrolled at Texas A&M University. "I spent that year rotating through specialties like cardiology, anesthesia, emergency medicine, and other areas," she explains. "I'd known for a while I was interested in emergency medicine, but during my rotation in the ER, I decided that was where I wanted to specialize."

Once she'd completed the clinical rotation and found her specialty, she was offered a position in Fairfax, Virginia at the Pender Animal hospital. "There, I was hired as an emergency veterinarian and I stayed until the late summer of this year," she explains. "It was a great learning experience and I was able to further grow my skills as a veterinarian."

Then, she took a leap of faith and relocated to Las Vegas, NV for love and for work.

"I was offered a position in emergency medicine at the Veterinary + Clinical Care animal hospital to work hand-in-hand with critical care specialists for small animals, like cats and dogs – not exotics. I love it because I get to work with many different veterinary and critical care specialists, so it has been a truly in-depth and eye-opening experience so far."

She's also in Nevada with fellow Ross Veterinary graduate, Keith Allen, who happens to be her long-time boyfriend. "I never thought I'd be living in Las Vegas, but it's beautiful and moving here was a win-win," she says and laughs. "There are lots of beautiful hiking and camping areas, as well as great food and music."

As a young alumna, Peron has stayed engaged with her alma mater and made consistent gifts to Saint Mary's Annual Fund, in addition to helping manage a restricted fund for Saint Mary's with her dad that the family established. She is also counting the days to her ten year reunion next April 24-25, 2020 and encourages graduates from the Class of 2020 to take time off and save-the-date.

Peron's ability to listen to her heart and to have the courage to take risks helped her develop an even stronger self-confidence.

"When I think about today's Saint Mary's students, my wish for them is to just get out there and people or job shadow as much as they can and expose themselves to multiple career opportunities, interests and potential pathways," she says. "I think it's also helpful to talk to and meet as many people as you can; ask their advice and for their opinions and learn from it. Your plans can change at any time, but it will all work out in the end if you listen to yourself. And, make sure to enjoy the journey as you see where life takes you."

Young alumnae like Dr. Peron Graeber '10 graduate with the skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and integrity for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are positive role models in their communities. We are delighted to share Peron's story, which demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women have, to be resourceful, intelligent, passionate, resilient, and to take risks and enjoy life wherever it takes them.

# # #

© 2019