

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

### Amanda McLaurin '99HS

**Artist and Workshop Teacher**

**Camano Island, WA**

Raleigh native Amanda McLaurin '99HS discovered a passion for exploring the world, its people, their traditional textiles and crafting. Rather than remain in the hometown she loved, Amanda chose to have new experiences and found joy in the work she does in each location. Today, she's an entrepreneur living on the West Coast with her husband, Joel, their dog Blanche (a pug-mix) and enjoys the beautiful views from their home on Camano Island in the Puget Sound.

#### Comfort in Change

Amanda McLaurin was born into a well-known Raleigh family and was part of the third generation of McLaurins who in 1947 founded McLaurin Parking and Transportation. If you live in the Triangle or visited, then chances are you've parked in at least one of their garages.

But, doing the easy thing and working for her family wasn't for Amanda. "I was born in Raleigh, the middle child between my older and younger brother, and we moved to a family farm in Cary, and then later to Apex," she shares. "We attended Apex Public Schools, but when I was in ninth grade, I realized I needed something difference – a change."

Good friend and fellow-alumna, Sarah Yarborough Lytvinenko '99, with whom Amanda had attended elementary school, told her about Saint Mary's. "I asked my parents about going and they liked the idea. So, I applied, got in, and made the switch."

Amanda came to Saint Mary's in her sophomore year, the same year the junior college closed and Saint Mary's had become a four-year boarding/day school. It had been quite a time of transition for the small girls' school, but Amanda took a chance because of its reputation.

"The freshman class was small and tight-knit and only had about a dozen girls in the class," she explains. "I had been a swimmer and joined the swim team once I enrolled."

Amanda loved the atmosphere and recalls fond memories of faculty and staff, like Randall Lathan reading "Voices from the Bible." She also developed friendships with classmates like Anne Kochersberger Locklair '99 and Laura Wilson Ingkatanuwat '99. "Anne's mom was a Chaplain at Saint Mary's and she grew up on campus," Amanda remembers. "It was so fun to reconnect with others from our class at our twentieth reunion last spring. I can't believe how time has flown!"

After Saint Mary's, Amanda enrolled at Appalachian State, then decided it wasn't for her and transferred to UNC-Asheville. "Realizing I need something different and having the confidence to listen to myself, I decided to take two years off and head back to Raleigh after that."

Back home, she went to work. "It was good for me. I learned to be an adult; to pay my rent, have a budget, and manage my time."

After working for a while, she again sought change and made a big move out of state to Atlanta, Georgia. "I went to an arts trade school, The Portfolio Center, now called the Miami Ad School," she explains. "I majored in photography that focused on advertising and fulfilled some of my creative needs."

Throughout her high school, college, and working career, Amanda had also always worked at least part-time waiting tables to support herself. "I stayed in hospitality when I left Atlanta after four years," she says. "When I got back to Raleigh, I went to work for South, a restaurant that later re-branded itself Coquette in North Hills."

Thanks to a friendship developed with a colleague she worked with at South, she took a position with The Pit in the downtown warehouse district. "I was the private events and catering manager," she explains. "And, it was right after the 'Throwdown with Bobby Flay' special that happened, and we had lines out the door continuously."

Amanda worked on community events for The Pit, including large July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations on the closed-



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down Fayetteville Street and for the Cuegrass Barbecue Festival held each year. "It was a great learning experience," Amanda says. "There was just something about creating experiences for people that was exciting. But I realized after a few years, I wanted another experience."

### Global Learning Shared

Growing up, Amanda's mom, Sally, was a preschool teacher and her father, Bill, worked for the family business. "I didn't know people could just change careers whenever they wanted," she explains. "I thought people just knew what they wanted to do. They went to school, got a job, got married, and had kids. That never felt right for me."

Being comfortable with change has its upsides. "There's adventure, the sense of exploration," she says. "I fell in love with the Pacific Northwest after visiting friends in Seattle, so I moved there next."

It wasn't an easy or quick decision. "I loved my hometown, Raleigh," she explains. "I even felt a little guilty wanting to leave, to have a new experience. But it felt right to me."

After relocating, she went to work catering events for a time, and then was offered a position managing catering and events for the Cornish College of the Arts. "That was the time in my life when I reconnected with Joel, who would become my husband," she recalls. "We had mutual friends in Seattle because Joel, though born and raised in Seattle, had gone to Cary High School and we'd actually had met at a friend's wedding. It was through that friend that Joel and I met again."

Joel had come home to the Seattle area for a vacation after he had been living and working in Indonesia an ESL teacher. "It became an extended vacation," she explains and laughs. "He stayed to see how our relationship developed and when the offer to go back to Indonesia came, he asked me to go with him and I did."

The couple spent two years in Semarang, Indonesia, on the island of Java, which has six million people living within the surrounding area. "It was very hot – Atlanta hot – all the time and very 'South Pacific'," she says. "Joel worked for an international school teaching fifth grade and taught an S.A.T. class for students looking to study in the U.S. I also ended up teaching there."

Being creative, teaching for Amanda was very academic and she didn't enjoy it as much as she thought she should. "I loved the kids, though, and the experience gave me a great foundation for learning about lesson planning and developing curriculum," she says. "I taught for two years, and whenever Joel and I had time on the weekends or during time off, we'd travel around the country."

Joel's love of history and Amanda's interest in fabrics, crafts, and traditional methods of sewing and artisan work propelled the couple to visit local towns and cities. "One city was still ruled by a Sultan and there were traditional weavers who made the fabric for his guards and officials' uniforms," she says. "We would ride around on a scooter listening for the shuttle moving through a loom, then we'd stop, knock on the door and ask to see their work. Here we were, two very pale, very foreign Americans showing up randomly at these weaving studios. I think people let us in because we were the kookiest thing they had ever seen!"

Amanda purchased fabrics, posted experiences on Instagram, and learned a great deal about traditional methods of crafting and sewing. "The people were so welcoming to us," she recalls. "I knew then that I didn't want to go back into events and thought what next?"

When Amanda and Joel returned to the U.S., they settled back in the Seattle area, about 90 minutes north, on Camano Island on the Puget Sound.

"It was so quiet after living in a place so filled with people and noise," she says. "But, when we returned, I knew I wanted to do something with what I'd learned in both my teaching experience and from the people who had shared their crafts with me."

Amanda began teaching after school programs to elementary and middle school students interested in sewing and weaving. She also opened [www.amandamclaurin.com](http://www.amandamclaurin.com) and began teaching workshops for adults in macramé, mending, and embroidery and started hosting corporate retreats. Most recently, she worked with REI to provide a private class for their staff.

"At this point, most people are aware of the farm-to-table movement and have started asking questions like, 'Who grew my food?' and 'Was that person compensated fairly?' Now, that same ideology is coming into fashion with the #WhoMadeMyClothes movement," she says.

Amanda likes the idea of creating an experience and hopes people will re-evaluate their purchases once they see and feel how much work is involved in creating clothing.

"I hope people will leave my mending workshops wanting to keep their garments longer. The idea is to get folks to steer away from fast fashion, and instead buy less items of higher quality, well-constructed garments and keep them longer through creative mending."

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Amanda teaches in the Seattle area, as well as at Craft Habit in Raleigh when she visits family.

Saint Mary's alumnae like her 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. Amanda's story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's of women to be resourceful, intelligent, passionate, and resilient in taking chances and experiencing life – and we are grateful to share her story.

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