

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Margaret McGlohon '81C

Elizabeth Gardner '87C

*Meteorologist, WRAL
Raleigh, N.C.*

From Saint Mary's Girl to Meteorologist

Elizabeth Gardner grew up in Raleigh, N.C., and attended Saint Mary's for her first two years of college. As a student, she lived in Cruikshank and Holt Dormitories. She enjoyed membership in the Cold Cuts, the N.C. Student Legislature group (the political team from Saint Mary's who traveled to other area campuses), was a phonathon caller for the development and alumnae office, and fondly remembers her time in class with Dr. Steve Esthimer.

Drawn early on into the sciences, Elizabeth recalls her first day in chemistry class with Ms. Alice Zawadzki Greiner. "Dr. Janice Coffey was the head of the science department at Saint Mary's, and Ms. Greiner taught chemistry and physics. On the very first day, she tested our observational skills by asking us what was in 'the beaker'."

After Saint Mary's, Elizabeth transferred to the University of Colorado in Boulder where she received her Bachelor of Science in Journalism. Her first internships were at a local TV station in Denver and at WGHP in High Point where she eventually became the Weekend Reporter.

"I didn't really like reporting 'bad news,'" she explains. "Instead, I became inspired by a friend who was the weather anchor at WGHP, so I decided to go back to school."

That's when she enrolled at Mississippi State University and completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Geosciences.

"My first weather job was in Wilmington," she says and smiles. "But, before I found myself returning home to Raleigh and working at WRAL, I had a stint as a weather anchor in Spokane, Washington."

When asked what her day is like as the morning meteorologist for Raleigh's WRAL station, Elizabeth's first response is a grin and a little chuckle. "Well, I arrive at the station by 3:30 a.m., and it's a good thing I don't live far!" she laughs. "What makes my morning is being greeted by my colleague, Harry, who is the happiest person I know. He escorts me every day from the parking lot into the building."

Elizabeth says that the first thing she begins to do is to prep for her initial live report. "I study the computer models, and as a meteorologist, I do my own forecasting. I also create all the graphics that I show on TV!"



Continued...

Elizabeth says, "The array of computer weather models aren't perfect, so it's up to me to translate or interpret the readings and then provide the most accurate report I can. You do have to have a sense of humor, do the best you can with the knowledge you are given, and be confident in your reporting."

Elizabeth is on the air 27 times between 4:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. "I cover a 20-county span and throughout the morning, I continue to study all the models and update my reports."

She's also responsible for social media and forecasts for WRAL's radio station, Mix 101.5. "I also have five colleagues in the weather center at WRAL, and I've been with the station for 21 years. For 14 of those, I've been the meteorologist for the morning and noon newscasts."

Mom-Mode & Inclement Weather Days

After Elizabeth finishes work at 1:30 p.m., she tries to get in a work-out each day when she gets home. She's then in "mom-mode" she says.

"I love being home when my children get home from school," she explains. "Together, we work on homework, head to soccer or piano practice, and then have dinner. Then, I try to get to sleep by 8:30 p.m. and hopefully get six hours of sleep before I do it all again."

But, what if it's an inclement weather day? "At the station, we take 12-hour shifts, rotating for as long as the threat of dangerous weather is imminent," she says. "Two or three of us are always on, so that we can help people stay safe."

Elizabeth received a Regional Emmy for best weathercast in 2001, 2015 and 2016. She is a Certified Broadcast Meteorologist by the American Meteorological Society and holds the National Weather Association Seal of Approval.

When Elizabeth is not reporting the local and regional weather at WRAL, she enjoys time with her husband, Tripp, and their two children. Avid outdoorsmen, the family enjoys whitewater kayaking (Elizabeth is an instructor), hiking, mountain biking and snowboarding. Elizabeth is also the president of a non-profit working to bring a whitewater park to the Neuse River near Falls Dam.

"In my spare time, I coach the Science Olympiad at Moore Square Middle School and I'm the team manager for both of my kid's soccer teams."

Giving Back to Saint Mary's

As an alumna, Elizabeth has been active as a guest speaker for students, attends local events, and supports Saint Mary's Annual Fund, in addition to providing interested alumnae tours of WRAL's weather center.

"It was so fun when we recently gave Harriet Conger Glover '52HS '54C a tour of the weather center. Afterwards, we interviewed her for WRAL because Harriett's paternal grandfather was a volunteer weather observer in Edenton for the Weather Bureau throughout his life, recording weather (temperature, winds, barometric pressure, etc.) every day, 365 days a year. It was a fun interview, and I love connecting with alumnae in this way."

She also gives some good advice to today's Saint Mary's girls.

Continued...

"Take time to really build upon the community you're making at Saint Mary's. You have so much more in common than you think you do, and I hope all of today's girls take advantage of everything Saint Mary's has to offer. At 900 Hillsborough Street, you can shine and build your strengths in a supportive environment, surrounded by caring adults."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Elizabeth Gardner '87C 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. Elizabeth's story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women have in their communities to make an impact, and we are glad Elizabeth's career has her in Raleigh.

We also thank her for providing our community with the best weather forecast possible so that we can be prepared for our day!

#

© 2019