

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Lauren E. Gerber

Tiffanie Agee '02

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Saint Mary's Many Blessings

Tiffanie Agee'02 is a native of Alabama and as a child spent a lot of time with her cousins, most of whom were boys. "I was definitely a tomboy and dirt and spiders were my thing!" she says and laughs. "In fact, even before Saint Mary's, I contemplated becoming an entomologist. I loved science and insects. Saint Mary's gave me the confidence to actually focus on science in college."

Growing up, Tiffanie attended a private Episcopalian middle school, and in 8th grade the school had a high school admissions fair. "Saint Mary's was there, and they had the coolest giveaways. I was obsessed with the lip gloss on a string in these cool colors the admissions reps were giving away," she recalls. "That day, I only submitted my name to schools with the coolest stuff. I was 13, and the cool stuff was the draw."

After the event, Tiffanie says that very few schools continued to outreach to her, and Saint Mary's was one of them. "They kept sending great packets that looked cool and had neat things. I had a corner in my room set up for things like that and kept my Saint Mary's things there."

For ninth grade, Tiffanie's parents decided to send her to public school. "Pretty soon we all realized it wasn't the right fit for me, after my middle school experience. My parents asked me about the schools I was receiving items and mailers from, so we made a plan."

The family visited The Madeira School in Virginia first. "It was okay, but not the right place for me. I felt pretty alone there, but then I came to Saint Mary's for an overnight visitation," she explains. "I loved it. I also met several future classmates who would become my close friends, Hallie Sessoms Kennedy '02, Becky Bengel '02 and Alex Marshall-Brown '03, and several faculty and staff, including Gretchen Fracher Hardage '65C and Hope Tyndall Hancock '74HS '76C who were part of the Admissions Department, as I was being recruited."

Tiffanie and her parents then decided she'd enroll for tenth grade. "At first I just worked to become acclimated, because it was a big transition," she says. "But, by my second year as a junior, I got involved in a little bit of everything."

She joined the French Club, and then became its president, was a member of the Model U.N., got involved with Vestry, and then became Senior Warden. "I also played volleyball and was on the swim team, but my main sport was golf, which my grandfather helped teach me."

A natural-born leader and thinker, Tiffanie decided to run for Student Government Association (SGA)



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president her senior year after talking with former Head of School Theo Coonrod. "Theo told me the SGA president was in attendance at many official school events and represented the entire student body, which was an honor and a big job, and felt like a part of the administration," she recalls. "It also provided a scholarship, which was a blessing."

While running for SGA president, Tiffanie printed out song lyrics on posters and posted them across the campus. "Theo gave me lots of room and space to do that, and I was elected!"

When school opened in the fall of 2001 and as part of her duties as SGA president, she and others on the executive committee planned to introduce themselves to the student body during assembly. That morning, September 11, 2001, everything changed, and she recalls the day with great clarity.

"At the time, people didn't communicate the way they do now. None of the girls had cell phones, there was no cable on the TVs in the dorms," Tiffanie explains. "I was getting ready for the day like I normally do, when I heard someone outside yell to get to a TV. I'd also been playing the radio, some R&B song, and it was interrupted with a news report of a plane colliding with a building in New York City. At first, we students didn't understand why that was a big deal for national news. But we all went over to Holt lounge, which had the only TV with cable, and sat there eating cereal and watching what was happening. That's when the second plane hit."

Tiffanie also remembers some of the girls were very worried about their families and kept trying to get in touch with their moms and dads. "Two students had parents who lived right in NYC, so I waited with those girls until they were able to connect and found out they were okay. Then, everyone went to their respective dorms."

Soon after, she says the students gathered in Pittman for Assembly. "We wanted to gather. No one knew what to do, so we just started with the school song, went on with announcements, and learned pretty quickly classes were canceled. In some ways, it was intense, in other ways chaotic and weird. But, I am so proud of us as high schoolers and how we handled it; how Theo handled it."

Tiffanie recalls Mrs. Coonrod as very supportive of her students. "She was also really supportive when I applied and got into Texas A&M for college. She said to me, 'At least one of my girls got to Texas!' and we laughed."

After arriving at Texas A&M, Tiffanie began her undergraduate work in the sciences but found the lab work a bit boring. "I discovered that I wanted to be around people. I was a good writer, good reader, and was a people person, too. So, I prayed a lot about it."

Thinking about her options and interests, Tiffanie realized she could study the social sciences instead, to blend science and statistics with reading and writing. "It was social science instead of natural science," she says.

For her senior project, Tiffanie studied the Texas public high school system's curricula and how it changed from the era of segregation to the years after desegregation in Texas. The project took her a year and a half. In 2009, she received her bachelor's degree in Sociology and a minor in History.

"Then, I started to think, what next?" she says. "I realized getting a Ph.D. was the likely next step, but it felt maybe a little too academic. I wanted a more active career."

That's when Google® helped her. "I started Googling the terms 'problem solving,' 'reading,' 'writing,' and 'people.' That's when law popped up as an option."

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Tiffanie says a legal career wasn't anything she'd even thought of before. "Now, it's my thing!" she says. "I began studying for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and was accepted to the Loyola University School of Law in Chicago."

After a year, she transferred to the University of Alabama School of Law in her home state. One of her internships was in New Orleans and focused on prison work. "It had a major impact on me."

In 2013, Tiffanie received her *Juris Doctorate* and then began to contemplate what to do with her career. That's when another Saint Mary's blessing happened. "I value my connections to the faculty and staff with whom I've built relationships, and I'd maintained those connections and was still close to faculty who taught me and also with Theo Coonrod. Theo even opened her home in Texas for me so that I could stay with her for nearly three months after college. If you don't have those kinds of relationships with your faculty and classmates, you're missing out."

Then in 2015, she sat for the Bar Exam in Alabama.

"As an attorney, I began working on criminal appeals for people after they were convicted, but who sincerely believe something was procedurally wrong with their trial proceedings. I read all the transcripts, then file an appeal based on my understanding of the law and the procedure that was violated. It can be very intense."

Soon, Tiffanie realized she wanted to choose *who* she served. "Other firms wouldn't let me specialize more broadly. I wanted to serve my community, those I know, and be more accessible to those in need. I figured what I needed to do was establish my own 'boutique' law firm that could also handle criminal defense, direct appeals, personal injury, commercial and business law, and estate planning."

In August 2016, she obtained an LL.M. in Business Transactions and in November 2016, Tiffanie opened her own law firm, Agee Law, LLC. She also became a law professor at Miles Law School where she teaches a class on "Legal Writing & Research" and a class on "Agency & Partnership."

"I also teach in the *Prelaw Undergraduate Scholarship (PLUS) LSAT Program* at my alma mater, the University Alabama, during the summer to help students p."

As a person who believes in making a positive impact in her community, Tiffanie has had the privilege to speak on panels and symposiums that center on race, the practice of law, the prison industrial complex, education, and an array of social issues rooted in her statistical knowledge of the social sciences.

"I've been given a lot of opportunity over the years, so I firmly believe in giving back in my community," she says. "One of the greatest opportunities and one of the most critical decisions I made in my life was going to Saint Mary's, because that decision, that opportunity put me on the path to where I am today."

Tiffanie understands that boarding school to the average American family may not seem a very 'normal' thing to do. "But, the amazing environment at Saint Mary's was and is so full of opportunity, that you want and need to be the best you can be to honor that opportunity. Being away from home allows a 'college-like' experience during a critical point in a young girl's development, and I was truly able to discover who I am. Yes, there was more freedom, but it was provided within a safe place monitored by other adults. And, there were definitely consequences. I paid attention to that. But, that safe environment gave me a foundation and safe space to learn, to try, and to grow. Of course, my mama didn't send me to North Carolina to mess up. Had I done that, she'd have been up there so fast to handle my business, and I had too much lose, so I invested myself just as Saint Mary's invested in me."

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She also adds, "There was a sense of performance in that mediocrity wasn't a thing. Everyone was smart. Everyone had a chance to be in leadership at all levels, and I didn't even pay attention to the fact that there were no boys. It wasn't until college that I realized what a privilege that was."

She also recalls that the young women she went to school with may have been competing, but they also lifted each other up. "We all had a voice, and I never felt like I couldn't do something. I value that and the fact that I could build lifelong relationships with classmates and with faculty and staff."

She also has some advice for today's students. "If something is on your mind to try, you should do it (within the bounds of the law)," she says. "I still do that now to keep from talking myself out of what *could* be."

Tiffanie also says today's students need to stop overthinking or talking themselves out of trying new and big things because: "You never know what your blessing will be if you don't try. And who knows where that outcome will lead you."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Tiffanie Agee'02 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. Tiffanie's story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary's women have to do big things their entire lives, and we're thrilled to share her story.

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