

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Lauren E. Gerber

Weldon Jackson Byrtus '92C

Registrar

Saint Mary's School

Raleigh, N.C.

At Home at Saint Mary's

Raleigh native Weldon Jackson Byrtus '92C was born in the old Rex Hospital on Wade Avenue. She says the furthest she ever lived outside of the area was Chapel Hill when she "went away" for the last two years of college.

She grew up as a middle child alongside two brothers, attending St. Michael's Episcopal Church's pre-school, Joyner Elementary, Daniels Middle, and Broughton High School. When it came time to attend college, she had no plans to enroll at Saint Mary's, even though her mother Mary Parham Jackson '63C was an alumna and former Alumnae Council member, and her grandmother Eliza Lewis Parham '34C, aunt Liza Parham Avery '65C, great-great grandmother and multiple cousins all attended Saint Mary's. She's also related to *the* Eliza Battle Pittman for whom Pittman Auditorium is named.

"I was a senior in high school and my mother said to just go and look, and that there would be no commitment. 'Fine,' I thought and so, I went," she explains. "I also thought there's no way I would like this girl's school. And, then I fell in love with the place the very first visit."

Weldon laughs when she recalls, "My mother never even said, 'I told you so'."

While in college, Weldon was a member of MAPS, WATTS, The Circle, and served as a Marshal. She lived in Holt Hall as a freshman and then in Penick Hall as a sophomore.

"I loved being here," she says. "We hung out together, laughed, studied on dorm, and did everything including wearing our PJs to class. At Saint Mary's, I could be myself. It was so laid back but also supportive. And, we all got along! Here, I met my best friends for life, women whose weddings and baby showers I attended." Weldon and her friends still keep up with each other to this day.

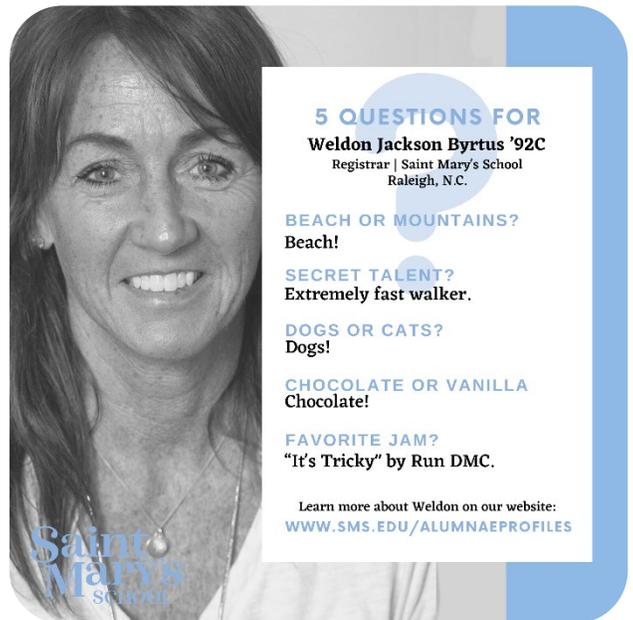
Life After Saint Mary's

Weldon did what many Saint Mary's girls did, she enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "I majored in Economics at first, but then changed to a major in Industrial Relations because it included classes in economics, sociology, and psychology, all areas that interested me."

At Chapel Hill, Weldon was also active in the Chi Omega Sorority and met a lot of Saint Mary's girls there and around campus. After graduating with her bachelor's degree, Weldon came home to Raleigh.

"I moved back into the family home, just as my older brother was moving out," she recalls and laughs.

Her first job after college was with Wachovia Bank where she stayed for a couple of years. "It was



Continued...

about that time that I ran into Gretchen Hardage '65C at Crabtree Valley Mall. She worked in the admission office at Saint Mary's and told me the junior college program was closing, which I hadn't heard," Weldon recalls. "We caught up, and then six months later, I was getting my hair cut in a salon and the stylist says, there's a phone call for me. It was Gretchen and she said, 'Clauston (Jenkins) wants to interview you in an hour.' I was sitting there with a wet head, no resume, and told her I was in the middle of getting a haircut. But I pulled it together and went to see him right then."

Weldon drove over to the campus to meet with President Jenkins who told her he wanted her to fill the role of Director of Financial Aid and asked if she would be interested. "I was very interested and told him so. He hired me on the spot," she says.

Living and Working on Campus

The day she was interviewed and hired, she was also taken across campus and introduced around to faculty and staff, many of whom remembered her well.

"I worked five years in that position," Weldon recalls. "It was a little strange being back on campus as a professional. Some faculty I saw said things like, 'Didn't you just graduate?' even though it had been five years. It was odd in that I was an adult, but my memories of my time here were rooted in my college life. I had to learn to call the adults by their first names – instead of 'President Jenkins' (as I called him while I was a student), I had to say 'Clauston.' Or, instead of Dr. Grissom, I had to say 'Margaret,' who had been one of my English teachers at Saint Mary's. And, faculty would also ask me to work on projects with them. It was a transition for sure. Later, I became the Registrar for Saint Mary's."

As Registrar, Weldon oversees the school's master schedule for classes and works with departmental chairs and with the Dean of Teaching and Learning in setting classes. She also processes registration requests, maintains class lists and reports, as well as enforces the rules for entering or leaving classes. She also keeps a permanent record of grades, scores, and transfer records for incoming students.

"Our faculty chairs are really proactive and collaborative with those teaching the curricula. Our Dean of Teaching and Learning, Leslie Owen, is great at opening up opportunities for everyone, and it's fun to get to see the different side of education in this way. It's something I take great pride in – knowing our girls' curriculum is so strong and our faculty so engaged and thoughtful in cross-collaboration."

When asked what keeps her here at Saint Mary's for all these years, she answers simply, "The people."

And, of course she loves her job, the students, and colleagues alike. "I'm an advisor and interact with my own students in a different way. I love going to Chapel and Assembly, and in this role, I get to see the inside of what happens in a school. Working in admission and financial aid, and now as Registrar, I see first-hand the importance of what we're doing by educating girls. It's a win-win for me."

A Desire to Give Back

Looking back over her years at Saint Mary's, from student to professional years, Weldon feels deeply a sense of community and being a part of the fabric of Saint Mary's, and she is grateful for that.

"After graduating from Broughton, if I'd gone onto UNC immediately, I probably would have fallen through the cracks. But Saint Mary's was an easy transition. I received a great education from great people. Elsewhere, I could have easily been lost in the shuffle."

At Saint Mary's, she learned better study habits and felt ready for the next step. Her independence grew, and she was grateful for her women's college experience and for now being a part of the all-girls' school experience.

"Girls considering Saint Mary's should definitely give single-sex education a shot because of the many

Continued...

benefits. We inspire girls to step outside of their comfort zone, engage their minds, amplify their voices, and discover who they are and who they want to become," she explains. "Consider the small environment – here everyone knows you, they know your name. It's a personal education, and our faculty utilize teaching and learning strategies that capitalize on the strengths of girls."

It's that very reason that Weldon also invests in her alma mater, not just as an alumna, but as a staff member. She gives back in many ways, beyond her professional duties. As a loyal annual donor to the Saint Mary's Annual Fund, Weldon helps us bridge the gap between the true cost of operating a 24/7 boarding/day school and tuition and auxiliary revenue, which doesn't meet all our needs. She also attends local and regional alumnae events and her reunions.

"For me, being at Saint Mary's, I am motivated to stay because I don't want to let our students or my colleagues down. They invested in me, had a genuine interest in me as a student and now as a colleague. I want to invest in our next generation, and I stay here, doing the best I can to ensure that investment continues to benefit our girls."

In just two years, Weldon will celebrate her 30th reunion with the rest of her classmates from the college class of 1992, and she's excited to know that so many will soon be back to see what Saint Mary's is like today. "So much has changed, but so much has remained the same."

Today, Weldon and her husband, Jimmy, and their daughter, Liza, reside in Raleigh.

"My daughter already wants to come to Saint Mary's," says Weldon and laughs. "She attends some of our summer camps and loves them. Most days, I'm a travel soccer mom after school, and as a family, we love the beach. We head back to Nags Head where I grew up going every summer. We stayed with my grandmother Eliza Lewis Parham '34C, who was also a Saint Mary's May Queen! I spent lots of summers there with cousins, aunts, and uncles. It was like an annual reunion."

Those of us here at 900 Hillsborough Street also see Weldon in the stands cheering for the Saints athletic teams and in the audience during many music performances and theatre productions. Like all of Saint Mary's alumnae-staff members, she is "true blue."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Weldon Jackson Byrtus '92C graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change. Weldon's story demonstrates the abilities Saint Mary's women have to do big things out in the world, and here at 900 Hillsborough Street. We're glad to share her story.

#

© 2019