

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Lauren E. Gerber

Mary Brown Taylor '08

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At Home at Saint Mary's

Mary Brown Taylor '08 was born in Atlanta, Ga., and when she was eight months old, relocated with her parents, William and Lee Archibald Taylor '78C, and older sister Austin, to Charlotte, N.C. As a child, she and Austin attended Charlotte Country Day School. For middle school, Mary Brown transferred to Trinity Episcopal, which at the time had newly opened and hers was the first 5th grade class to enroll.

"Both schools were a very good fit for me," Mary Brown explains. "The classes were small and personal. Trinity Episcopal was brand new, and it was a good academic fit. I wore a uniform and loved it because everyone had to. There was no competition for the best or coolest outfit. It was comfortable and we focused on school."

Throughout their childhood, Mary Brown and her sister had a strong sense of family and stability. Their parents remained in the same home and in the same neighborhood for 28 years. The girls also grew up hearing about Saint Mary's from their mother, Lee, who was an alumna, and from the lifelong friends Lee had made there.

Mary Brown says that during her 8th grade year at Trinity Episcopal, she and her parents knew it was time to begin looking at options for high school.

"My parents were the driving force, and I trusted their judgment; I've always trusted them," she explains. "We looked around at schools in Charlotte, but we all knew I would do better in a small environment. So, we visited several boarding schools, concluding that Saint Mary's might be the better place for me."

But it wasn't as easy as it sounds.

"Moving away at just 14 years old to attend a boarding school is a big deal," says Mary Brown. "It's a little scary and sad, and when they dropped me off, Mom and I were sobbing. I was like, 'Really? You're leaving?!'"

Mary Brown knew one of her suitemates who was the daughter of one of her mother's friends. "The Residential Life Team knew what they were doing, because the girls on my hall became – and remain – my very best friends."

Mary Brown also recalls that Saint Mary's was a very different place at the time. "There was no texting. Cell phones were only used to call your parents. There was no Instagram, no Facebook, or Snapchat. So, we really got to know one another. Plus, our rooms were so much different! The girls in the



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residence halls really dress up their rooms today. Back then, it was pretty basic. We didn't bring in headboards or a lot of homey touches. We brought our bedding and our clothes. That was about it."

Mary Brown has great memories of getting to know the girls in her dorm and says their "Hall Mom" was the best. "Katie Bradbury Wellman was truly a role model."

There were two girls from Washington, N.C., who knew Katie from growing up. She's still a staff member today, although now she's in the Admission Office. It is fun for both Katie and Mary Brown to work together.

"I made lifelong friends with Sidney Dawson Dozier '08, Nancy Stewart McLendon '08, Julia Nutt '08, Claire Murray '08, and Crutcher Nash Battin '08, just to name a few."

Mary Brown says that it wasn't just her Hall Mom Katie who made Saint Mary's like a second home. It was also other faculty and staff in the Saint Mary's community.

"Academics weren't my strong suit," she admits. "I struggled, but here at Saint Mary's, faculty and staff are so invested in each student that they will help you. Faculty offered to meet me before and after school; they found me tutors. I remember when I was in 10th grade, my advisor, Dean Holland, was very supportive and told me, 'We are here for you and you will get through.' That support, in lieu of my parents, meant everything and I wouldn't be where I am today without Saint Mary's."

During her senior year, Mary Brown lived in Smedes Hall; it was the first-year girls moved back in after the complete renovation of the historic building. "I had the room on the second floor over the front entrance, next to Emily Smith '01, who was my new Hall Mom."

She also remembers life as a typical teenager.

"We were good girls, but we were known to test boundaries now and then," she says and laughs. "It was a safe environment to do that, and we were a close-knit group – both boarders and day students. We lived together, learned together, and grew up together. We were so young; those formative years gave us everything we needed to go beyond the gates and out into the world. I truly would not have the kinds of relationships I have today, or the friends I have, without Saint Mary's, and I certainly wouldn't be the person I am, had I not chosen Saint Mary's."

Life After Saint Mary's

Mary Brown and her friends graduated in May 2008. Saint Mary's staff member and college counselor Scott Orvis suggested she enroll at Presbyterian College, believing the small academic environment would again enable me to thrive.

While at college, she kept in touch with her Saint Mary's friends. "We were living different lives at our schools, but we all came back to each other after college. In fact, I'm Godmother to Sidney's children."

It was in the summer after college that Mary Brown returned to Charlotte and worked with a jewelry designer for a few months while deciding what her next step would be.

"I wanted to move back to Raleigh, so Claire and I decided to move back together. I worked in pre-schools at both The Jordan Center and St. Michael's Episcopal Church."

Mary Brown had always loved children and babysat lots of kids as a teenager. She also began working as a nanny for a Raleigh family. "I've stayed with that family for nine years now," she explains.

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After three years, Mary Brown decided she wanted to try something else and went to work for Peter Millar as a customer care specialist.

"I worked on their e-commerce team handling customer service for their website customers. But I still wanted something different. I just wasn't sure what."

It was during this time that Mary Brown reached out to her former advisor, Dean Holland.

"I said to her, 'You know me so well. I am not really challenged by what I'm doing, but I don't know what I want to do.' And, she then began to throw out ideas and told me about a position at Saint Mary's."

Within a day or two, Mary Brown received two text messages from her former Hall Moms, Katie and Emily, who separately told her that a position at Saint Mary's had opened and she should apply.

"So, I did, and I started as a staff member in October 2018, taking on the role of Assistant Director of Auxiliary Services and Summer Programs," she says. "Working with Kirsten Monroe, we oversee venue rentals (like the Chapel), summer programs, Shop1842 (the bookstore), and mail services."

Living and Working on Campus

Mary Brown says being back at Saint Mary's has been a great experience so far.

"It's kind of like I didn't leave! It's cool to be back as a young professional. I feel like I relate well to the girls who are ages 14-18 and can mentor them. I also think they benefit immensely from having young adults in their lives closer to them in age. We can relate well, connect, and the girls are comfortable reaching out or talking with me because I'm not giving them a grade," she says and laughs.

The mentoring and role modeling is particularly important in the summer programs. "When I was a student, I loved hanging out in Emily Smith's apartment. She was young and so was Katie Wellman. As students, it was easy to relate and to get to know them. I really like that I'm now that person to so many Saint Mary's girls."

She also says she loves to exercise. "Health and wellness is very important to me; I'm very into yoga, Pilates, and running. I love the outdoors and eating healthy."

In her role at Saint Mary's, she plans all year for the summer programs.

"It's really neat to get to meet so many children and grandchildren of our alumnae," she says. "We also get to know many neighborhood children and others within the Raleigh community. It's also great to have current students and recent Saint Mary's graduates as our camp counselors."

Mary Brown hopes to help grow the summer programs and looks to add more health/wellness activities and programs for students, faculty, and staff. For now, one recent addition is already seeing growth.

"We ran our first Miss Nancy's Etiquette Camp last summer, and it was so popular we had to create a waiting list. This year, we've already scheduled two sessions, and both are filling up very fast!"

It's obvious to anyone who listens that Mary Brown loves her new role at Saint Mary's. Her background as a pre-school teacher and nanny, as well as her customer service experience brought a unique packet of skills that align just right.

She agrees. "I love being busy, taking initiative, and I love doing this for my alma mater."

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A Desire to Give Back

As an alumna and a staff member, Mary Brown demonstrates her love of Saint Mary's in myriad ways. From her personality and professionalism at work to the relationships she creates, grows and builds, Mary Brown brings joy to all those around her. She also shows her commitment by being a loyal donor to Saint Mary's Annual Fund through her yearly gifts. As an alumna, Mary Brown also attends regional events and her reunions. As a staff member, she is engaged in the life of the school through her work.

Most recently, Mary Brown joined the *Saint Mary's Forever* Volunteer Campaign Committee to help ensure the realization of Saint Mary's campus Master Plan and the sustainability of Saint Mary's mission and vision for future generations. The committee is comprised of alumnae, parents, board members, and friends from all regions of the U.S. and carries the important responsibility of advocating and fundraising for Saint Mary's with alumnae and donors to support the *Saint Mary's Forever* Campaign. In some ways, one might say she's following in her father William's footsteps, who was Board Chair and a Trustee for Saint Mary's for many years.

Saint Mary's alumnae like Mary Brown Taylor '08 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. Mary Brown's story demonstrates the abilities Saint Mary's women have to do big things out in the world, and right back here at 900 Hillsborough Street. We're glad to share her story.

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