

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Shannon Williams

Katherine Kemp Robbins '00HS

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At Home at Saint Mary's

Katherine Kemp Robbins '00HS grew up the only girl in a household full of boys. The family lived in Henderson, N.C., and in 9th grade Katherine and her parents began looking at private schools for her.

Saint Mary's was one stop on their list of schools to visit, and Katherine already had a family connection to Saint Mary's – her great, great, great-grandmother Fannie Kingsland Daniel also attended.

"I just really loved Saint Mary's," Katherine recalls. "I had the best overnight experience, and knew I wanted to attend. I could tell it was a very special place."

Katherine says that as a student, "I appreciated that Saint Mary's was in a vibrant city, unlike many boarding schools."

Her first year at Saint Mary's was 1997, the first year it became an all-girls' high school without the junior college. She loved the independence she experienced at 900 Hillsborough Street at the age of 15, and she shared that rules her senior year were much stricter than her sophomore year.

"My favorite class was Virginia Boyd's creative writing class," she says. "I also loved playing field hockey on the first team. We did not score at all that first season!" Another favorite campus activity she recalls participating in was setting up luminaries with other members of the Granddaughters Club for Lighting O' the Grove.

She lived in Cruickshank for three years, moving from floor to floor and fondly remembers watching movies in the dorm on the TV with the other girls in the common room. "There were no TVs in our dorm rooms back then. My mother would send weekly episodes of *Felicity* on VHS and the hall would watch together each week after study hall."

Reflecting back, Katherine says, "Saint Mary's knits you together in a very special way. To this day, I remain in touch with many of my classmates."

Katherine also sees the influence Saint Mary's had on her in her adult life.

"Saint Mary's taught me to stay positive in circumstances that might not be the greatest," she remembers. "On the day of our senior prom, it was cold and rainy outside. We seniors went out to dinner and came back to a beautiful and magical misty evening. That taught me to be optimistic regardless of the situation."



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After graduation, Katherine attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). "I intended to study interior design and architecture," she explains. "But I soon realized the studio art classes were not for me. So, I switched my major to art history instead."

Later, Katherine transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) and graduated with a degree in Art History and English with honors in Creative Writing. (Thanks, Virginia Boyd!) After graduation, she relocated to New York City and began working in publishing.

While there, a friend suggested Katherine consider becoming a librarian. "After careful thought, I decided to return to UNC-Chapel Hill to earn my master's degree in Library Science. I absolutely loved the program and being surrounded by friendly, like-minded students."

Living and Working on Campus

After completing her degree, Katherine worked at the Environmental Protection Agency's library. She then moved into school librarianship, working in both public and independent schools. She married her husband Matthew in 2011, and they now have two young children. When a part-time opportunity opened in July 2019 at Saint Mary's Sarah Graham Kenan Library, she jumped at the chance to re-join the Saint Mary's community as its Cataloging and Circulation Librarian.

Katherine is a passionate supporter of same sex education, especially in this 100th anniversary year of women gaining the right to vote. She believes young women deserve a place to grow and become without the influence and distraction of boys.

"Girls need a place to blossom," she says. "At Saint Mary's, they get to be leaders. They get to do big things because they ARE the school. Girls-only education gives students courage to speak up and speak out, making them better citizens of the world."

Katherine also believes that single sex education is very relevant and important today. "There is such impact from social media – girls today are processing a significant amount of information. Saint Mary's provides a safe place to process and is a haven of growth, protection, love, and nurturing."

She adds, "Having such a place and experience changes your entire world."

Her advice for today's students and young graduates?

"Be kind. Be strong. Be faithful. And, know that wherever you go, you can always come back to Saint Mary's! It is wonderful to be back on campus."

As a sophomore high school student in 1997 she was on campus experiencing the school's transformation into a high school. In 2019 she is very proud of what Saint Mary's has become and loves being part of it again after so many years.

Saint Mary's alumnae like Katherine Kemp Robbins '00HS 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. Katherine's story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary's women have to do big things no matter what age or stage in their life, and we're glad to share her story.

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