

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

by Lauren Gerber

### Diane A. Tyndall '08

**Campus Staff Minister at International Friends  
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA  
UNC-Chapel Hill / Chapel Hill, N.C.**

Diane Tyndall '08 grew up with her sister, Lily Tyndall Snow '07, in Chapel Hill raised by lifelong educators. Her mother, Kathy, has been involved in education for forty years, while her dad, Don, has worked at UNC-CH's Adams School of Dentistry for forty years and is Professor and Director of Radiology in the Department of Diagnostic Sciences. A UNC-grad herself, Diane served on Saint Mary's Young Alumnae Council and Board of Visitors, representing the voices and interests of young alumnae like herself.

#### Deciding on Saint Mary's

"It was natural for me to choose Saint Mary's," Diane says. "My sister loved her experience and shared that with me. I also met her close Saint Mary's friends that first year."

Of course, the transition was also made easier thanks to the volleyball team. As a middle school student, Diane played volleyball. Her childhood friend and former teammate, Raleigh Froeber, went to the first day of Saint Mary's team tryouts in the summer of 2004. (Raleigh left Saint Mary's mid-way through her high school years to relocate with her family to Hawaii.)

"She told me all about the first tryout day and how fun it was," Diane recalls. "So, I showed up on day two and made the team. There, I met a girl who would become one of my lifetime best friends: Christina Nasuti Phillips '08. She and the girls on the volleyball team created a welcoming community of friends."

"I played volleyball all four years, served on the school newspaper, sang as a member of the Chorale, was selected for Beacon, and cheered as a 'Mu.' It was a privilege to receive The Wellesley College Book Award and the Ann and Margaret Highsmith Medal. In my senior year, it was an honor to be selected as a member of the Judicial Board," Diane explains.

"Serving on the judicial board helped shape me in many ways. Some of the most impactful included growing in the understanding of the complexity of justice; learning to listen well to all sides of a situation; developing courage and integrity when dealing with matters of civic responsibility; and creating ethical structures through the Honor Code for the flourishing of the community. It was a challenging role, but a wonderful opportunity to serve the Saint Mary's community in this way. I was thankful to be a part of so many clubs and activities thanks in a large part to Saint Mary's smaller school environment."

As a student, Diane also enjoyed Chapel and attending her sister's theatre productions. "I loved being able to see stories come alive through the hard work and strong talent of my sister and her theatre friends. I also liked performing with the Chorale in various places, including the Governor's Mansion and State Capitol."

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**5 QUESTIONS FOR**  
**Diane A. Tyndall '08**  
Campus Staff Minister, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA | UNC-Chapel Hill, NC

**BEACH OR MOUNTAINS?**  
Mountains, especially Blowing Rock, NC.

**SECRET TALENT?**  
Expert fried green tomato "chef."

**DOGS OR CATS?**  
Golden Retrievers!

**CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA?**  
Chocolate, definitely.

**FAVORITE JAM?**  
A mix of the 60s and 70s folk music by artists like Peter, Paul, and Mary; John Denver; or today's Kate Rusby.

Learn more about Diane on our website: [WWW.SMS.EDU/ALUMNAEPROFILES](http://WWW.SMS.EDU/ALUMNAEPROFILES)

Diane also recalls performing at the Raleigh Memorial Auditorium. "That performance was such a complex production. We sang alongside the Orchesis members while Saint Mary's music students played. Everything was choreographed and beautifully timed, and that memory of interwoven arts has stayed with me," she says.

Studio Art was also very important to Diane as a Saint Mary's student.

"That interest helped shape my thoughts about future careers after college," she explains. "I spent a great deal of time in Bratton Hall taking art classes under the tutelage of Teresa Assenzo; I have fond memories of those classes, one being when we studied Wayne Thiebaud."

The American painter is widely known for his works depicting commonplace items like cakes, pies, ice cream cones, and lipsticks with plain backgrounds and heavy shadowing. Diane says, "Ms. Assenzo took the class to a local cupcake shop where we purchased cupcakes and took photos of them in order to paint them later. As you might expect, we got to eat our still life objects! It was a fun way to bring art to life and very memorable."



*Diane's cupcake painting from her Studio Art class.*

Other special memories for Diane revolve around faculty like Lisa Graberek, Laura Stark, Steve Esthimer, Teresa Assenzo, Randall Lathan, and Bob Belknap.

"Mr. Lathan would read literature to us," she explains. "My parents read to my sister and me our entire childhood, and into adolescence. But there was something about a faculty member taking the time to engage with his students in that way – bringing stories to life – that sparked something in me. I hadn't been a big reader myself, but I did love listening to stories. Mr. Lathan made reading come alive for me in a way that inspired me to read on my own. Now, I read all the time! I discovered the power of stories to enrich lives and transform communities."

Developing good friendships was also a significant part of Diane's time at Saint Mary's. "When I look back on the importance of Saint Mary's in my life, I think about my friends and the faculty, and how these relationships helped shape us."

Recently, Diane was contacted by two prospective families whose girls were applying to Saint Mary's. "I told the mothers that one of the best things Saint Mary's gave me was confidence – as a student, a person, and as a woman," she says. "I had confidence in the small classrooms at my elementary and middle school because I had been with the same students from first grade to eighth grade. When I first arrived at Saint Mary's, I was reluctant to speak up in class. But, because of my professors, classmates, and an environment that challenged me to share my voice and articulate my questions – my confidence grew. Building this confidence served me well in the competitive co-ed environment at UNC-Chapel Hill where I received bachelor of arts degrees in History and Studio Art."

### **Best Laid Plans...**

Saint Mary's continued to develop Diane's love of art, and she also knew she cared about people. She had become a person "who loved stories and believed people could be healed through them." Diane planned to major in Studio Art at UNC-Chapel Hill to prepare her for Art Therapy programs after college, but that's when a crisis hit. The stresses of her first year at university combined with her young cousin's death after a 10-year battle with cancer sent Diane searching for answers to the deep questions that came from these experiences. That's when she reached out to her church for biblical counseling.

"Those four visits helped reframe my view of life, death, and God," she says. "I came to realize that God

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is intimately personal – truly Emmanuel, ‘God with us.’ I have a relationship with Jesus, He is not only my Creator and Savior, but Friend, and it totally changed my faith. It became more vibrant and personal. That’s when I realized I wanted to help people who are searching to find their own story within the larger narrative of God’s story.”

After graduating from UNC-CH, she enrolled at Southeastern Baptist Seminary for a Master of Divinity in Biblical Counseling. During her studies, Diane began volunteering as a conversation partner for International Friends through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA at UNC-Chapel Hill. She met and developed a close friendship with a woman from China, who loved world literature.

“My friend and I enjoy mythology and literature from around the world, and we even began reading the Bible together,” Diane shares. “She and I discussed the beauty and power of stories and how they reflect the individuals, communities, and cultural values from which they come. My friend’s parting gift to me was *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of the four classic novels of Chinese literature. Dr. Belknap’s World Literature class my freshman year at Saint Mary’s had a role in giving me a deeper appreciation for world literature which enables me to discuss these ideas and stories with my international friends.”

After graduating with her Master of Divinity, Diane began working for InterVarsity and International Friends because of her love for its vision. She especially appreciates how InterVarsity is affiliated with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) through indigenous movements in over 170 countries.

“In 2019, I was honored to represent InterVarsity/USA in South Africa at World Assembly, the quadrennial conference of IFES. I believe we have a lot to learn from the Global Church. The Western Church is used to exporting theology, but there is so much to learn from our global Christian brothers and sisters, especially from the Majority World Church.”

### **The Value of Interaction**

Today, Diane is a campus staff minister and, along with other colleagues, hosts a dinner every other week for international students. “At these dinners, international students are encouraged to share their culture in various ways, and we break up into small groups to discuss follow-up questions engaging students with the speaker’s presentation. It provides the opportunity to meet, create friendships, and hear the stories and experiences of those from around the world. I believe people are made for relationship and formed by their friendships. I see great value in creating opportunities for real life social interaction and understanding across cultures.”

Diane taught an Art History and Worldview course for international students to encourage cross-cultural sharing and to discuss cultural values revealed in global art. She also serves her community as a member of the Advisory Board for Carolina Public Humanities (CPH), which is part of UNC-Chapel Hill.

“Serving in this way parallels the heart behind my InterVarsity work – enriching people’s lives through learning and providing spaces for people to hear from one another. CPH’s mission is ‘to draw upon the humanities to nurture a deeper understanding of history and culture, enrich the life of the mind, and contribute to the development of a more humane world’.”

As an alumna, Diane has been actively involved over the past three years: first, as a member of the Young Alumnae Board, and now she plans to join as a member of the Alumnae Council and Board of Visitors. “I’ve become more involved because of how meaningful it is to cultivate relationships in community, like Saint Mary’s. In fact, a father of a prospective Saint Mary’s student was on a school

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tour and met Teresa Assenzo in the art studio. He is also a campus minister at UNC, and when Ms. Assenzo heard that, she recalled my name, told him that I had been her art student and was currently serving as a campus minister at UNC! He knows me personally and said it was such a small world; that relationship – *from him to me, from me to Ms. Assenzo* – had an impact. For me, these relationships foster meaningful community, and that's something Saint Mary's creates and encourages, too."

Being a part of the Saint Mary's community encouraged Diane to think more deeply about women's education. "I didn't grow up thinking about its importance, but as I reflect on history – so much has changed for women in the last 100 years. I know Saint Mary's cares deeply about transforming girls to become the best version of themselves. The school nurtures their individual passions and encourages them to try, allowing them to fail and succeed, which can only happen within a safe space. And, I believe young women need this – to be in a community like Saint Mary's that cares about them, challenges them, and encourages them to become women who cultivate their gifts and talents."

Her advice for today's girls? When asked by her students, she often says there is very little she'd change about her journey through school. However, she concedes that one aspect she would change is her perspective about life events.

"As a younger woman, I'd often worry and think about worst case scenarios rather than being mindful that failures, mistakes, and difficult situations are simply steppingstones leading to growth. I would also say that practicing and developing a spirit of gratitude significantly alters how you interpret and enjoy life."

In addition to her work on the Young Alumnae Council and Board of Visitors, Diane is actively engaged in regional alumnae events and in working with her classmates who also graduated in 2008. As a longtime donor to Saint Mary's Annual Fund, Diane understands the importance of giving to the place that gave her so much.

"It's participation that matters, and I think giving an annual gift is a tangible way to express gratitude for Saint Mary's. This will allow future generations of Saint Mary's girls to experience enhanced technology and programming while they continue learning and growing with wonderful faculty and classmates on a beautiful campus."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Diane Tyndall '08 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. Diane'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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