

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

by Christiane Newell

### Betty Ray McCain '50C

*Retired Secretary*

Dept. of Cultural Resources  
State of North Carolina

### Always a Saint Mary's Girl

Betty Ray McCain '50C grew up with a great respect for, and a family tradition in, attending Saint Mary's. "I knew I would be a Saint Mary's girl," Betty Ray says. "That was where everybody in my family went."

In the 1800s, her grandmother, Eloise Faison Perrett, and all six of Eloise's older sisters attended Saint Mary's. In fact, Eloise was named after her oldest sister's Saint Mary's roommate, and when Betty Ray became a mother, she decided to call her daughter Eloise in honor of her grandmother (and her great-grandmother Mary).

Betty Ray recalls many fond memories of her time at Saint Mary's, especially the friendships she formed there.

"My roommate, Olivia Lynch Hardin '50C, was a great seamstress," Betty Ray explains. "We had a room at the end of West Rock, and there were three closets in a row. We just put lamps over the middle closet, so we had a light and a secret closet!"

Olivia became Godmother to Betty Ray's daughter, and she was in Betty Ray's wedding. Like many Saint Mary's alumnae, lifelong friendships were created at Saint Mary's.

Betty Ray recalls many other happy days at Saint Mary's. "I remember sitting on the wall and waving at President Harry Truman when he went by," Betty Ray says. "I just thought that was wonderful."

As a student, Betty Ray was very involved in campus life.

"Beth Harriss Sprunt '50C started me on my journey," Betty Ray explains. "She nominated me for class president out of the blue. So, I decided to straighten up and do the best I could."

Betty Ray was elected president of her junior class, vice president of her senior class, and president of Granddaughter's Club during her senior year. She also served on the Stagecoach yearbook staff, Honor Council, and the Altar Guild.

"I took part in everything," Betty Ray says and smiles. "I loved the music program because

they let us perform, and we had a wonderful piano teacher, Mary Ruth Haig. I sang in the Glee Club and the choir. Saint Mary's was wonderful to me and I loved every bit of it."

### Life After Saint Mary's

Betty Ray's dedication to Saint Mary's did not end at her graduation. She has continued to serve as her



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class secretary since 1950 and remains a dedicated supporter of Saint Mary's Annual Fund. She also makes sure to attend Saint Mary's events like Reunion Weekend and local alumnae gatherings in Wilson, N.C.

After Saint Mary's, Betty Ray enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in music. She also attended Teachers College at Columbia University, graduating with a Master of Arts degree in music. To this day, her love for music remains, and she continues to play piano and sings alto every week in the choir at her church.

It's not hard to see Betty Ray's impact in the areas she's touched and been involved with, all resulting in marked improvements. Of all the things she's done, Betty Ray is proudest of her time working with Governor Jim Hunt as Secretary of Cultural Resource from 1993 to 2001.

"It was an exciting time, the best eight years I've ever had," Betty Ray recalls. "The North Carolina Museum of History opened, and Blackbeard's ship, the 'Queen Anne's Revenge' was found! I had so many opportunities there. North Carolina is a treasure trove."

As secretary, she also worked to build Meymandi Hall at Duke Energy Performing Arts Center and expanding the North Carolina Museum of Art. She also served as Jim Hunt's campaign manager and lobbied for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in North Carolina. Betty Ray was also the first woman to chair the North Carolina Democratic Party and remains active in politics. Most recently, she was named Chair of the Wilson County Democratic Party.

Over the years, Betty Ray has received many honors and awards, including five honorary doctorate degrees (from UNC-Wilmington, Wake Forest University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Greensboro and Barton College), the North Carolina Award for Public Service (2009), North Caroliniana Society Award (2006), and the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, two times. She also is a recipient of Saint Mary's Mazie Froelich Society Distinguished Alumna Award (2005), The John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities (The North Carolina Humanities Council's highest honor), the UNC General Alumni Association Distinguished Service Medal, the Design Guild Award from the NCSU College of Design, and the Distinguished Citizen of the Year Award from the Wilson Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Betty Ray is a 2010 inductee into the North Carolina Women's Hall of Fame and is also a member of the Faison and the Duplin County Halls of Fame.

To this day, she also remains passionate about history and historic preservation. She compiled an oral history from a list of veterans in Wilson County of the "greatest generation" into a seven-book collection.

"There are so many people here who are interesting," Betty Ray says. "And, no one had ever asked them before to tell their stories."

Betty Ray describes herself as "leisure impaired" and says she's not slowing down any time soon. "I'm currently involved with several historic preservation projects, one being the home of William Richardson Davie, one of the founders of UNC Chapel Hill," she explains.

She also works with the North Carolina Whirligig Festival in Wilson, Wilson Rose Garden/ Rose Garden Deadhead Society, and she's involved with the Rose Garden board.

To current Saint Mary's students and young alumnae, Betty Ray advises, "Never burn bridges, because you might have to re-cross them."

Betty Ray adds that Saint Mary's is one of the best school's she's seen.

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"It was by far the hardest of the three schools I've attended. The students have wonderful teachers and people who lead them, but they are in charge of themselves."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Betty Ray McCain '50C 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. Betty Ray's story demonstrates the ability of Saint Mary's women to do big things no matter the age or stage of their lives, and we're glad to share her story.

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