

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

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The Impact of Saint Mary's

An 11th generation North Carolinian and youngest of four children, Liza Fleury-Rabinowitz '03 grew up in Southern Pines. Daughter of an established psychiatrist and longtime public high school English teacher, she and her sister, Jane Fleury '99HS, both attended Saint Mary's for only their final two years of high school.

"Our Dad is a well-known psychiatrist in the area and our Mom was a high school English teacher, born and raised in Southern Pines. It was always important that we actively participate in our community," Liza says.

Jane attended Saint Mary's for her last two years of high school, graduating in 1999 after the junior college closed and the school was transitioning to a high school-only program. She was active in Orchesis, and Liza remembers attending one of her performances in Pittman with her family when she was younger.

"The piece I remember clearly was a group, with Jane included, dancing into the Auditorium to Janis Joplin or some other psychedelic music, on the windowsills, and throughout the audience. It was amazing. Then the very next piece was a beautiful modern dance to an orchestral score. It was absolutely inspiring to see the breadth of study and openness to creativity!" she recalls.

Liza says that she fell in love with the idea of coming to Saint Mary's because she had opportunities to stay on campus with Jane while she was there.

"My sister spilled the tea!" she says and laughs. "She shared her experience with me. I would spend the night with her in Cruickshank, talk and hang with Jane's friends, hear all about classes and secret societies and clubs, tour the campus and eat all the free bagels and cream cheese from the first floor refrigerator."

Liza became open to the idea of attending Saint Mary's, and during her junior year of high school she got the chance to do just that.

"My father was never super subtle, and was stoked to give me the opportunity to attend Saint Mary's," she explains and laughs again. "After I started my junior year of high school, I was in class one day when over the intercom, the principal called our classroom and said my dad was in the front office and I needed to come down. I went, and my dad said to me, "'Guess who's going to Saint Mary's!' I was stunned and excited but had no idea how much it would change my life! I will always be grateful to him for sending me to Saint Mary's that week. Orientation had already begun on campus, but I moved right into Cruickshank and was welcomed with open arms."

Liza says that she began to quickly develop close relationships with other girls and really felt at home.



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"It was the BEST education I could have hoped for," she explains. "I credit a lot of my success to Saint Mary's because I was taught how to approach my point of view thoughtfully, independently and confidently. I lived alongside peers and our mentors – those faculty and staff who lived on campus with us. I was also fully engaged on campus through a balance of after class activities and the rigor of the academic program."

As Liza recalls her time at 900 Hillsborough Street, she was able to reflect on the impact being at Saint Mary's had on her and other girls.

"Thinking about it in hindsight, our generation was one of the first to experience peers dealing with what we now know as the opioid epidemic. I always say how thankful I am that this epidemic somehow skipped over me, but when I think about it, these habits would have likely been cultivated during the time I was away at school."

Liza says she and the other students were challenged academically. They stayed busy and were able to participate in so many things: athletics, the arts, clubs and orgs, and more.

"Some of my peers back home may not have been as active, busy, or engaged. Or just may not have been given an opportunity to get out of destructive cycles," she recalls. "Some did fall into addiction. I can count on both hands, friends and acquaintances who have since passed from issues relating to opioid use. While I have had my own share of missteps and poor choices, Saint Mary's was an environment in which I could win and celebrate or fail and grow with reinforcement of attention, activity and accountability, which I'm sure, kept me on a path to success."

As a student, Liza blossomed. She was a member of the Chorale, Drama Club, served as president of Echo, was an active drama student and participated in every play she could. "I was in musicals like *Godspell* and the dramatic comedy, *Rubies*. All were shown in Pittman, and it was such an amazing opportunity to be able to perform in such a historic space like that at such a young age."

Even with all that on her plate, Liza was also able to participate on the softball and swim teams and was active in other various clubs and groups on campus.

"To me, Saint Mary's gave us opportunities to be independent and to raise hell about things we were passionate about. We planned meetings, entrepreneurial ventures and even protests on our own, and we resurrected traditions like Sigma Mu. We set up hilarious competitions, talent shows, pranks, and secret societies like years of Saints before us had."

She also says it was special spending time with on-campus faculty and staff, especially with Mary Virginia Swain '77HS. "MVS would teach us all about Saint Mary's traditions, history and long told ghost stories from campus. She was truly the keeper of the oral history of Saint's girls and I hope she will someday write a book that I can buy about just that! Her love for all things Saint Mary's was contagious and unifying, and we are still very close to this day."

She also recalls the care and dedication of faculty. "One year, after pulling an all-nighter studying, I was going to oversleep. That's when the Dean walked into my dorm or called me to wake me up so I wouldn't miss class. I can't remember exactly, but that care and attention is unique to say the least."

Liza also remembers playing with the residential faculty family, Dr. Bob Belknap and Nadia Metina-Belknap's oldest daughter when she was just a baby and that Mrs. Belknap was definitely their unofficial 'Dorm Mom.'

"I remember Mrs. Belknap coming to my room, checking in on me, my classes, how I was doing and really listening to me. She treated us as though we were her own and kept a tight ship!"

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The summer preceding her senior year, Liza was nominated by Saint Mary's to attend the North Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities to study theatre. It was then that her ideas for college study really began to develop.

"I fell in love with musical theatre and considered attending a school like Boston University to study but found that I was more suited to the weather in Charleston, and they had a great arts program!"

That experience helped her decide to apply at the College of Charleston (CofC). There she would study Communications and began to find interest in Media Studies, while also studying Theater.

Life After Saint Mary's

Liza says she took the "long track" at CofC. "I was in school for a couple years then left to work and live in Asheville and returned to finish my degree a couple years later. I enjoyed the College. There were small classes like I had at SMS and great opportunities for mentorship, awesome theater and of course, the five beaches within 20 minutes didn't hurt a thing!"

At the time, her dream was to become a 'backpack journalist' and in those years, "We were just at the very beginning of people being able to shoot their own videos, create voice overs, film b-roll, drop it in and then sell stories to news channels, agencies and the like. I also was able to study abroad in Trujillo, Spain, and travel all over the country for my Spanish concentration and absolutely loved that experience. So, to be able to work for myself and travel was enticing."

After returning to Charleston, she met Marc Rabinowitz who would later become her husband. They left Charleston together for San Francisco after Liza applied for a position at iHeartMedia.

"I was working at the local radio station, 105.5 The Bridge, while finishing college in Charleston. I started in production and promotions as a work study opportunity with CofC and was always out promoting local live music or helping the sales team write copy for on air promotions. Then, I was able to get an on-air gig on Saturdays in the six to 10 a.m. slot, called 'Listenin' With Liza.' It was a good chance to find my voice, and to hear myself on the air was incredible. I enjoyed it but found that if I could write and voice the commercials, why not sell the spots? And, that's how my career in ad sales began."

Liza made the switch to sales while working for the radio station and later at a boutique PR agency that was well known in the area. One of their vendors at the agency was iHeartMedia. After a time, she landed an interview with iHeartMedia and Liza flew to San Francisco.

"I had to interview with five different managers in a borrowed Missoni suit, but I got the job, flew home, and Marc and I packed up our house and our dog and moved across the country!"

She also says they were very lucky that Marc's employer, a Charleston based company, agreed to Marc working remotely. "He worked in medical equipment sales and refurbishment and proposed to his employer the idea of a West Coast branch. They agreed. We both had jobs, and so off we went!"

Liza recalls that it wasn't all easy. "When we moved, it was – *and still is* – difficult to find places to live. There is not a lot of inventory, and it is very expensive. We were very lucky to have been able to crash at a buddy's while we looked for our own place and worked."

Liza says her job was a wild transition. "It was extremely corporate, very competitive, and very fast paced, but I got to learn a ton about broadcast sales and production, meet a lot of celebrity musicians, go to private concerts, events and work with some of my favorite brands and companies as clients."

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Liza worked for iHeart for over six years. "Then, I was laid off."

In December 2018, just after she and Marc had married in Wrightsville Beach, and right before Christmas, iHeartMedia made decisions that changed the structure of the organization, she explained.

"It was very hard, but it allowed me to take a step back from the crazy long workdays, tight deadlines and sales driven environment."

She soon began looking for work more closely oriented to her marketing passions, which led her to a new position with Megan Media.

"That transition was smooth!" she recalls. "I had been working with digital promotions and celebrity endorsements, so now, instead of working with a lot of different media products, I could focus on just one, influencer marketing, and develop skills in a new arena, social media."

A New Passion

Over the years, Liza became more deeply engaged in her Bay Area community through volunteerism. That eventually led her to what has become a passion project: [GirlVentures](#). The only nonprofit of its kind, the organization "inspires girls, as young as age 11, to lead through outdoor adventure, inner discovery, and collective action. It combines outdoor adventure with social emotional learning for adolescent girls at a critical time in their lives" and their programs "nurture girls' self-esteem, resilience, and leadership skills, catalyzing their development as empathetic, confident conservationists and allies."

She found GirlVentures through a former camp friend. "When I was about 12, I went to Ferrum College Summer Enrichment Camp. It was there that I met a girl who would become my pen pal after camp, but eventually we lost touch."

She had found two boxes of old photos as she and Marc began packing for the move to San Francisco. "We took all the photos out of the frames – there were nearly 50 of them – and created a scrapbook. That's when I saw the photo of that friend and me at camp, with her name on the back."

Liza decided to look up her old friend and found her through Facebook. "The amazing thing was that, 20 years later, not only was she receptive to reconnecting, she was living in San Francisco and was working at GirlVentures as the director of development."

Liza attended a fundraising event and the rest is history. Today, she is an Ambassador Chair for the organization, acting as emcee for fundraising events ("I was never super shy!"), helping engage others with the organization, and making philanthropic gifts.

"Eighty percent of our girls receive some sort of financial support to attend the program," Liza says. "When I figured out what they were all about, I was super interested."

Before she was a student at SMS, Liza attended several summers at Camp Glen Arden in the NC mountains, which ignited her passion for outdoor adventure. Looking up at a sky full of stars in a sleeping bag by the fire with friends was an experience she cherished but didn't continue into her life after Glen Arden.

Knowing she was helping to give girls from all backgrounds that same experience inspired her to become more deeply involved. Liza began volunteering early on and attending monthly meetings where young professionals like her got together to discuss fundraising to support the nonprofit.

"There are two main fundraisers each year, and the more I saw, the more it became a win-win for me.

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There was amazing work being done through a wonderful mission I identified with, and there was a great network of people involved.”

Liza says GirlVentures focus is in some ways very similar to Saint Mary’s own mission to educate girls. Their goal is to raise more dollars so that more girls can be funded and enrolled in the outdoor education program.

“We recently had a very dynamic director of development who expanded our funding goals to increase the number of funded girls by ten times. Part of that is being able to outfit each girl with all the same food, equipment, gear, and clothes so everyone starts the program on as level a playing field as possible.”

She’s also proud because of how inclusive the organization is.

“We fund all girls, including gender expansive youth (cis girls, trans girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, gender queer youth and any girl-identified youth). With regard to leadership opportunities, the girls who have come up through the program also have the chance to come back as counselors, mentor with the Board Members and Ambassadors and lead their own groups their senior year.”

In addition to GirlVentures and Saint Mary’s, Marc and Liza also support environmental and civil rights activism. As an alumna, Liza stays connected to her alma mater through ties to former classmates and friends, attending alumnae gatherings and reunions, as well as supporting today’s students through gifts made to Saint Mary’s Annual Fund.

Liza’s advice for today’s girls is to cherish their time at Saint Mary’s, of course! “And to always keep the conversation going. Speak up, question authority, and take Saint Mary’s with you out into the world to help other people feel accepted, heard and seen as we each have been in our time here on campus. Not everyone is so lucky!”

And, we’re all excited for Liza to share that sisterhood with the young girls she’s working so hard for.

Saint Mary’s alumnae like Liza Fleury Rabinowitz ’03 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. Liza’s story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary’s women have to do big things their entire lives, and we’re thrilled to share her story.

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