

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Margaret McGlohon '81C

Alex Marshall-Brown '03

Actor/Performance Artist
Los Angeles, Ca.

Finding a Home at Saint Mary's

Growing up with a father in the State Department, Alex Marshall-Brown '03 became accustomed to frequently moving to and from different countries. By the time she landed at Saint Mary's School in the fall of 1999 at age 13, she had lived in several hemispheres. Those countries included Jamaica, Venezuela, Barbados, Guyana, Lesotho – *the landlocked country within South Africa* – places in South America and also in the U.S. in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

When she graduated at seventeen from Saint Mary's as a four-year boarding student, Raleigh was the city she had lived in the longest – and boy, are we glad!

At the time she began to think about high school, Alex called South Africa home. "My aunt already lived in Raleigh and suggested I check out Saint Mary's for high school. I applied, was accepted, and the rest is 'herstory'."

Alex relocated to Raleigh to live with her aunt and was able to attend Saint Mary's summer programs prior to ninth grade. She would be the first to tell you that over the course of her four years as boarder, she kept extremely busy.

"I was so busy, I didn't have a lot of time to socialize," she recalls. "I lived in Penick for two years before moving into Cruikshank for my junior and senior year. I played a sport each season, lettering varsity in basketball (as a guard), cross country (not my favorite sport) and track, as a sprinter. I also swam (infrequently), played soccer (as a sweeper), and attempted tennis."

She also gravitated simultaneously toward Saint Mary's arts program. "I found a way to participate in a theatre production each semester," she says and laughs.

Alex also took advantage of the visual arts program, which culminated in her taking Advanced Placement (AP) art during her junior and senior years. "I remember sitting in class watching the news as the towers fell in New York," she says quietly.

Not only was she active in arts and athletics, Alex also served in a myriad of leadership roles, including time as a Prefect in Cruikshank Dorm, was a member of the executive Student Government Association and Vice Chairman of the Judicial Board. In many ways, Saint Mary's was now home.

Life After Saint Mary's

Alex stayed close to home after graduating high school and attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. During her freshman year, she auditioned and was one of 12 candidates selected into the Bachelor of Fine Arts acting program.



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Continuing her Saint Mary's tradition, Alex performed in a theatre production every semester during college. "I worked hard, stayed the course, and later earned my BFA degree and a minor in Business and Finance."

During the summers of her collegiate junior and senior year, Alex performed in the cast of *Blue Jacket*, an epic 'cowboys and indigenous peoples' outdoor drama spectacle, nestled in the heart of Xenia, Ohio. "Looking back, I can attribute the roots of my martial arts, stage combat, and stunt training to this quirky, unparalleled experience I had," she explains.

After college, Alex made her way to New York City to really earn the calluses of her acting career.

"I'd graduated right on time for the 2008 housing crisis," Alex says. "I admit I worked extremely hard for several grueling years in the 'Big Apple.' The service industry is brutal, but I can brawl with the best of them!"

Alex served as a formal dining waitress, as hostess to the band and a bottle service cocktail waitress at BB King's Blues Club, while also gaining her Equity Card and hitting the pavement for Equity Principal Audition (EPA) open calls. Ever the hustler, Alex also took acting classes and worked on building her brand image. In 2010, Alex received accolades in notable periodicals such as *The Village Voice*, the *New York Times*, and *Backstage* for her role as "Topsy" in the Metropolitan Playhouse production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

"Through it all, I heard the call of the West," she says.

In order to be closer to her father's family and with stars in her eyes, Alex made her way to Hollywood, California, where she's been thriving for 12 years. As gritty as ever, Alex hit the ground running.

"I began performing for kid's birthday parties as the lovable *Happily Ever Laughter* faerie, Phoenix. Later, I landed a job as the financial manager of *The Africa Channel* and for the first time, I felt the security of a steady salary and health insurance."

Ever considering her upward mobility, she also successfully negotiated for a flexible work schedule so she could continue to pursue her passions. At the conclusion of her four years at *The Africa Channel*, Alex suffered a knee injury and chose to leverage her recovery time as an opportunity for self-assessment and reinvention.

"I launched a successful family photography business where I focused on documentary family photography, specializing in children," she explains. "I also ventured deeper into training for the stunt business."

Alex's television breakout role was as "Pepper" on the hit Fox comedy, *New Girl* performing opposite of Damon Wayans, Jr. It was on this show that Alex met her first real-life stunt man.

"Thanks to his directive, I was propelled into several new opportunities."

Her first onscreen stunt role was in Quentin Tarantino's movie, "The Hateful Eight."

Today, Alex touts a long list of onstage and onscreen appearances. Among them are appearances in lead roles, guest starring roles, recurring guest starring roles, supporting roles, and performing in several stunt double roles, including for television: "Halloween House (Seven Moons)", "New Girl", "The Mindy Project", "This is Us", "Modern Family", "Scandal", "West World", "Beast Mode", "Paradise Lost", "DayBreakers", and "Sneaky Pete" to name a few. For film, she was in roles for "The Oath", "Destroyer", "The Hateful Eight", "No Trace", "Brix & The Bitch, Bolden!", "Dolemite is My Name", "Bad Hair", "Against All Enemies", "Destroyer", and "Pitch Perfect 3" to name a few.

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She's also had roles on the web for "The Bright Sessions", Quentin Tarantino's "Suicide Squad", "Big Ideas", "Web Educational", "The Verse", "Magic Matty" and as the final contestant on "Project Greenlight." Theatre productions include "The Tragedy: A Comedy", "What of the Night?", "Uncle Tom's Cabin", "For Colored Girls..." and "The Man Who Ate Michael Rockefeller". Other fun projects Alex has been a part of include work in the Motion Capture industry for "Call of Duty", "Mouse Guard", "The Chimerical Era", "Crucible", and "Remember, Remember".

Alex's accolades also include a Best Actress in a Short award for "Brix and the Bitch" (Idyllwild International Film Festival), Best Female Actor (The Connect Film Festival), iTunes Best of 2016, and an Ovation Award Nominee.

"Throughout my career, I've allowed my curiosity to inform the expansion of my skill set," she explains.

Ever fascinated by the raging mystique of fire, she also made her way into the Flow Arts Community learning to manipulate props around her body as a gratifying, creative and meditative practice. Her props of choice include poi and rope dart, both of which she practices with flames. (Don't try this at home, kids!)

Most recently, Alex became the first black woman to embody a named "Star Wars" character as general Leia Organa's top Resistance spy, Vi Moradi; Starling. Delilah S. Dawson first wrote of this character in the novel "Phasma."

"I debuted the character in the one and only live stunt show at the inaugural ceremony of Disney's Star Wars Galaxy's Edge."

You may also have seen Alex as a hologram of Vi in the commercial inviting you to come visit the parks!

"I talked with Alex during the fifth or sixth week of the COVID-19 (Corona) Virus stay at home order," says Alumnae Director Margaret McGlohon '81C. "True to form, Alex is taking this time to self-assess and determine more future possibilities. Her life is rooted in the arts and she fully intends to hit the ground running once Hollywood reopens. She remains optimistic about what's next!"

Alex is using this time to reconnect with people of significance in her life, both friends and family – a priority for her! "There are friends from Saint Mary's who are still a part of my life today," she says and smiles. "Those friendships are among the most cherished relationships in my life."

Alex attended her 10-year reunion at Saint Mary's in 2013 and remembers fondly several teachers who challenged her, grounded her, and gave her opportunities to grow including: "Mr. Mason on the stage in Pittman; English faculty members Randall Lathan and Vickie Posey; and Director of Athletics, Coach David Gatoux."

Alex also says, "Saint Mary's was a refuge for me where I could safely expand my interests and independence, and test my capacity for grit and growth."

When asked what she might tell our Saint Mary's students today, she responded: "Be present. Anytime the world around you feels chaotic and out of your control, stop. Name the colors in the space around you. Feel the breeze on your skin. Get yourself back in your body in the present moment so you have a clearer mind to plan clearly for the future. Then, know that whatever you plan for will change exactly when you least expect it. It is when your plans change that you have the greatest opportunity for growth. Don't run from it. Just be present."

No doubt Alex Marshall-Brown '03, wise young alumna that she is, will continue thriving in her eclectic

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exploration of the arts, as she continues adapting to change with optimism. At every stage she grows into the best woman that she can be, and Pandemic be damned. #StayHomeTogether.

Saint Mary's alumnae like Marshall-Brown '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. Alex's story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary's women have to do big things with their lives, and we're thrilled to share her story.

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