

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

by Julie E. Ricciardi

**Elizabeth Patteson Dixon '80HS**

**Elizabeth Rasberry Pitts '79C**

*Owners/Partners*

*Portrait Associates, Raleigh, N.C.*

### Uniquely Saint Mary's

Friendship. We hear the word over and over again when visiting with Saint Mary's alumnae. Best friends are made here. Walking through the Grove, biology class, Chapel, the tennis courts, on the Pittman stage; the list goes on.

Early relationships built while in high school and college create a foundation and provide feelings of safety and of being grounded, as well as build comfort and trust. It's that unique "certain something" so many Saint Mary's girls talk about and recall from their formative years spent at 900 Hillsborough Street.

For these two Elizabeths, though three years apart, their friendship found its seeds during their respective times at Saint Mary's. It happened in what now may seem a lifetime ago.

Elizabeth Rasberry Pitts '79C attributes her decision to come to Saint Mary's to her mother, Mary-Bryan Cummings Rasberry '49C who herself held fond memories of Saint Mary's and encouraged Elizabeth to attend.

"It was a bit of a legacy thing. I think when I was a high school senior, it was almost assumed and the next thing I knew, I was on campus. No application or anything. At least that's how I remember it!" she says and laughs. "It was a natural progression from high school to Saint Mary's, and onto Chapel Hill - even if it was following in my mother's footsteps, Saint Mary's was the perfect place for me."

Once Elizabeth, quickly nicknamed "Raz", was on campus there was a feeling of familiarity and it felt as though she had known many of her Saint Mary's classmates from childhood.

For Elizabeth Patteson Dixon '80HS, who became known as "Patteson", it was a little bit different. Though her mother, Margaret Edmundson Patteson, had attended for a year in the 1950s, Dixon's dream was to attend UNC-Chapel Hill all four years. She knew a few girls at Saint Mary's but had never considered attending. That changed during her seventh-grade year while at Parrott Academy.

"My dad came to me and asked if I would like to consider going off to boarding school," Dixon explains. "While it was hard to leave home, I realized that going to Saint Mary's would afford me more opportunities than staying in Kinston. Being able to take college courses while still in high school was a great benefit...plus I made incredible friends and learned lifelong lessons."

For information regarding re-prints of this article, please contact Saint Mary's School's Alumnae and Development Office at [development@sms.edu](mailto:development@sms.edu).



**5 QUESTIONS FOR**  
**Elizabeth Patteson Dixon '80HS**  
Owner/Partner  
Portrait Associates

**BEACH OR MOUNTAINS?**  
Beach!

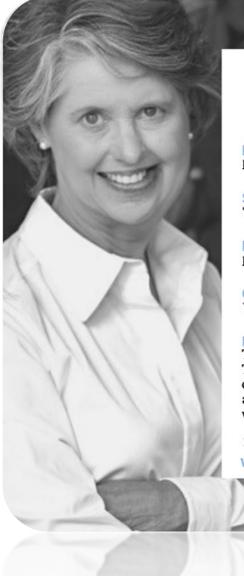
**SECRET TALENT?**  
Finding the BEST cookies in town!

**DOGS OR CATS?**  
DOGS!!!

**CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA**  
Chocolate FOR SURE!

**FAVORITE 60S JAM?**  
"Joy to the World" by Three Dog Night

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



**5 QUESTIONS FOR**  
**Elizabeth Rasberry Pitts '79C**  
Owner/Partner  
Portrait Associates

**BEACH OR MOUNTAINS?**  
No surprise - Beach!!! My happy place!!

**SECRET TALENT?**  
The pogo stick!

**DOGS OR CATS?**  
Dogs!!

**CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA**  
Vanilla with toppings!!!

**FAVORITE 60S JAM?**  
Those girl bands from the 70's, Diana, Tina, Dionne, Aretha, Janice...that we cranked up on dorm still get me dancing and singing, even though I don't do either very well!

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

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The women's friendship circles were expanding, and they shared friends in common. As they reflect, not only were they on a similar path, while on that path, they were probably at many of the same places at the same time! Little did they know that years later that their own friendship would be cemented in ways they could never imagine.

"We were both very active while at Saint Mary's. I was focused on my duties as Chair of the Judicial Board," Pitts says, while Dixon recalls that she was running for Underclass Vice President. They each have fond memories of their experience as "Saint Netters" under legendary Coach Mary Lou Jones.

Whether on the tennis court, in Chapel, on dorm, participating in student government or campus clubs, like Beacon and Circle, both women believe Saint Mary's offered them a transformative experience and prepared them well for their future endeavors.

Sitting with such lively Saint Mary's graduates, listening as they reminisce and recall connections after so many years (while also currently being the dearest of friends and business partners) reminds us all that the bands of Saint Mary's can transcend time and place.

"There are so many things we had in common and that overlapped," says Pitts. "After all these years we still try to find those moments to confirm that we've known each other for almost a lifetime. Our parents were friends, then there was summer camp, Atlantic Beach, summer jobs in Nantucket, even our oldest children who were born a day apart, and for the past 25 years we have pursued the same career with the same company!"

After Saint Mary's, Dixon went onto UNC-CH to pursue a degree in Art History, which led to a 20+ year career in the portrait industry. Pitts also attended UNC-CH but pursued a degree in Industrial Relations with a concentration in marketing. That led her first to an advertising gig in New York City before she began her own, nearly 30-year career in the portrait industry.

The Elizabeths' parallel paths were about to converge.

## **A Career Combined**

After years of working for Portraits South – formerly one of the nation's oldest and most respected companies – this dynamic duo joined forces in 2017 to start their own company, Portrait Associates. Portrait Associates has national presence, representing over 40 professional portrait artists available for commission.

Fueled by their collective 50+ years of experience and relationships in the portrait industry, Pitts and Dixon feel fortunate to be able to employ their knowledge and individual strengths to build a company of their own.

"We really value the importance of relationships, and there is no question we bring much of the work ethic instilled in us at Saint Mary's. Together, we brought in a sense of Christian values and integrity, which is one of the most valuable lessons we both cherish from our days of attending Chapel."

We chose the name Portrait Associates to emphasize the importance of associating and partnering. Promoting classic portraiture is all about relationships. Dixon and Pitts certainly have theirs, and then there are the relationships they develop with artists and clients.

"We are kind of like the hub of a wheel. We become the critical partner to everyone involved, the spoke to our sales associates, to our artists and to our clients, past and present."

When faced with the opportunity to venture into the business as owners, they admit they had some apprehension.

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"We saw the opportunity. This was our career, and neither of us was ready to retire. We knew we could take this idea on, but we didn't want to do it alone."

After sitting down and affirming their mutual trust in one another, and after obtaining the support and confidence from their families, the work began in earnest. In areas where they lacked prior experience, they were "willing to dig deep, put in some hard work and reach out to other professionals with expertise to make up that deficit" the women say.

Life lessons from their days at Saint Mary's carried them all along the way, enabling them to shift and learn other facets of their emerging work. The result? An intentional, methodical and thoughtful plan (and people) that would provide the support and work-life balance they needed for the transition to a new and fresh start.

"We wanted our children to know that it is *never* too late to become an entrepreneur, and it usually never happens when you think it will! When we looked at getting older, we knew the importance of keeping our minds active and maintaining a community engagement."

Both women say how blessed they are to have such a wonderful partnership. "It has been an incredible adventure particularly because we are doing something we love."



### **Why Stay Connected to Saint Mary's?**

For Elizabeth Pitts, her connection to Saint Mary's began after a 15-year gap. She had attended her reunions, but it wasn't until she was asked to join the Alumnae Council that she realized the value of *why*.

"Just seeing the girls living a dream that I could identify with was enough," Pitts explains. "Of course, the technology and campus had changed, but the camaraderie and the looking out for each other was still very much the same."

Subsequently her daughter, Betsy Bryan Pitts Mandl '09 is a grateful graduate of Saint Mary's. Elizabeth also served seven years on the Board of Trustees and is a founding member of Saint Mary's Giving Circle program.

For Elizabeth Dixon it was a little different. She began working at Saint Mary's and says it was so much

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fun for her to promote the school through her positions as an admissions counselor (1985-87), associate director of admissions (1987-1990), and later as advisor for high school students (1990-93), that by the time she began to reengage on her own, she realized how important it was for the girls to see women coming back to invest in them.

"When I see that only 24% of our alumnae give to the Annual Fund, it really makes me think that more people need to know just how important a gift of any size can be for our school, and that they can make a difference here," Dixon says.

When asked, both women said the next 50 years should be about setting up Saint Mary's to thrive. "We want to ensure that we are able to offer girls the same experience, encourage leadership, and grow their independence. That is why we give. Of course, we all want some things to change, but you also want some things to stay the same."

For these two friends, values are very important. Their most memorable times were spent in reflection, for which now they realize stemmed from the school's Episcopal heritage.

"Whether or not you were an Episcopalian, we were all fed here. And, having that as the center of focus very much was and is a part of our collective experience. For us, Chapel was a required aspect of our days, and it will hopefully be a requirement for girls in perpetuity. We both know how important those moments have been to lean on during our lifetimes. Saint Mary's and our religious activities instilled the values and principles of life, integrity which undergirds our work together to this day."

Both women also agree that their love for Saint Mary's only increased when their own daughters, Margaret Dixon '18 and Betsy Bryan Pitts Mandl '09, attended.

Elizabeth Dixon and her husband, Bill, live in Raleigh and have four children, William, Patteson, Jimbo and Margaret. The first two were born while she worked at SMS, and they have all grown up amidst portraits and portfolios. Outside of Portrait Associates and spending time with her family, Elizabeth enjoys the outdoors and traveling with Bill and friends as well as volunteering at her church and various non-profits and ministries.

Elizabeth Pitts resides in Charlotte with her husband, Rodney. They have a son, Carson, younger brother to Betsy Bryan. Together they contribute to the arts with their time and financial support. Both Elizabeth and Rodney are members of the Heritage Society, having committed to include Saint Mary's in their estate plan. Elizabeth is a member of the Art Society Board of the North Carolina Museum of Art and the Mint Museum Auxiliary as well as being an active volunteer with Saint Mary's and her church.

"For us, you might think: two years – what did the school do for me? Well, it fed and nourished us, and it was where foundationally it all started. We want to know this place will live on long after we're gone... I wish I had \$1 million to give, but for now we give until it hurts!"

Saint Mary's will be here for a long time if these two women have anything to do with it!

Saint Mary's alumnae like Elizabeth Patteson Dixon '80HS and Elizabeth Raspberry Pitts '79C 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. This duo's story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary's women

have to do big things their entire lives, and we're thrilled to share their story as friends, business women, and alumnae.

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