ALUM PROFILE

Castilleja's Lasting Impact: Two Sisters' Growth and Generosity

Jeanne Floyd Downs '80 and **Helen Floyd Sullivan '82** live in Massachusetts and Florida, but their connection to Castilleja remains strong, rooted in cherished memories, family ties, and loyal philanthropic support.



Jeanne Floyd Downs '80 (left) and Helen Floyd Sullivan '82

GROWTH AND FRIENDSHIP

When asked about their experiences, Jeanne described the school as a nurturing environment where she thrived academically and personally. "When I arrived, I was timid. By graduation, I felt like I could accomplish most anything." One pivotal moment was when, with the encouragement of her English teacher **Susan Sheehan**[HA] (now Mrs. Barkan), she decided to run for freshman class president as a new 9th grader. "Supportive faculty empower each student to become her best self," she said. Helen echoed these sentiments and emphasized small class sizes and the sense of community. The sisters recounted many unforgettable teachers, slumber parties, and lifelong friendships.

Jeanne credits Castilleja for instilling the foundation necessary for her education at Harvard and future career in banking. After time away from work to focus on her family, she now coaches swimming, a sport she played at Castilleja. Additionally, she recently served for ten years on her town's school board. Helen, who double majored in Spanish literature and economics at Stanford, spoke of her enduring connection to the language, which she learned from **Mercedes McCaffrey**[HA]. "My experience at Castilleja shaped my life choices," she reflected. Helen spent much of her 20 years in education as a Spanish and English as a Second Language educator and spoke Spanish at home with her three children, the oldest of whom is bilingual. In 2004, she and her husband pursued a new career in Christian ministry and she still uses Spanish in her work today.

GENERATIONS OF GIVING

Both women are dedicated annual donors and direct their gifts toward the Spanish and science departments and the swim team, to reflect their activities and interests as students. "It is important to us that faculty and coaches have the resources to do their jobs well," Helen said. Jeanne added that her parents always emphasized the importance of giving back. Their mother Mary served on several boards, including Castilleja's, and in 1989, she established Peninsula Bridge, the consortium of independent schools that provides summer programming for students from under-resourced communities. Their father **Bill Floyd** continues to be a role model through his ongoing involvement with organizations that mean the most to him. After Mary's passing, Bill and **Cynthia Kaiser (Roberts) Floyd '51** married and continue to support Castilleja. And now their blended family has six Castilleja graduates from 1951, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1985.

LEARNING RESPONSIBILITY

"Castilleja also encouraged us to give back," Jeanne noted. "**Mr. Westmoreland,** the head of school at the time, instilled in us a sense of responsibility. I recall his talk senior year when he encouraged us to donate what we could each year, $5 or $10, just to get in the habit."

The sisters passionately support the education offered by Castilleja, understanding from their own experiences its critical role in empowering young women. "Castilleja teaches girls how to be good stewards of the world and make a difference, whether in their neighborhood, city, country, or across the globe—or all of the above."