

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

### Constance Anastopoulo '81HS

Associate Professor of Law  
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Constance Anastopoulo '81HS grew up in Roanoke, Virginia, and her journey to Saint Mary's was unexpected, even though her mother, Harriet Vallas Apostolou '49C, and sister, Karen Apostolou Gliarmis '79HS '81C, both attended.

#### A Spartan Woman

Constance's grandparents George and Pota Vurnakes Vallas emigrated from Sparta, Greece to the United States in the 1920s, settling in Raleigh to raise their four children, Roxanne, Harriet, Vicky, and Ted. Together, the couple had a great impact on their home city, including helping to establish a small Greek Orthodox church in downtown Raleigh. And, as Raleigh's Greek population grew, Pota and George donated the land upon which Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church was constructed and still stands today at the corner of Lead Mine Road and French Drive.

Considered a pioneering entrepreneur and businesswoman, Pota herself traveled to Chicago in 1944 to purchase the distributorship of the National Sewing Machine Company, leading to the building of "one of North Carolina's leading interior design firms." National Art Interiors became a landmark for the finest fabric and furniture companies serving individual homes, businesses, and corporations across North Carolina.

Pota worked with major names like First Citizens Bank and Capital Broadcasting Company while also furnishing the Executive Mansion three times. Pota built National Art Interiors with her daughters and other family members and worked there until she retired in 2002 at age 94. In 2017, she passed away having lived to the age of 109.

Growing up with women like her grandmother, mother, aunt, and cousins, Constance, too, would become a Spartan woman – a woman of strength, character, drive, ambition, integrity, and the freedom to choose her destiny.

#### The Perfect Place for Me

Constance didn't choose Saint Mary's like most girls did at that time. She didn't choose it for its academics, athletics, or because her older sister was already a Saint Mary's girl. She also didn't choose it because her mother Harriet Vallas Apostolou '49C had also attended.

"I decided to go to Saint Mary's because of its proximity to Duke Medical Center," she explains. "My mother was battling breast cancer, and in those days there wasn't an oncology department or cancer hospital in every town."

Harriet spent long periods of time at Duke Hospital in Durham, far from the girls' home in Virginia.

"Attending Saint Mary's gave me the chance to spend time with my mom," she says. "But, in time, I also found it was the perfect place for me."

At that time, high school students at Saint Mary's could take college classes.

"I was challenged by the academics! I loved the rigor of biology and upper level mathematics, and the college English classes taught by professors with terminal degrees."

She also loved athletics and played on both the basketball and soccer teams, where she learned teamwork, perseverance, responsibility, physical endurance, commitment, time management, and personal and emotional health.

"One of my fondest memories was that my mother was able to attend a basketball game to see me play, despite being gravely ill."

Constance cherishes the memory of her in the stands, proudly cheering her on.

The same day Constance graduated from Saint Mary's High School, her sister Karen Apostolou Gliarmis '79HS '81C graduated from the college.



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"Our mom wore a vibrant purple dress that day to celebrate her two girls graduating from Saint Mary's," she shares. "That day was the last time she was able to walk, as the cancer continued to ravage her body."

Harriet passed away in October 1981, only a few short months after that beautiful spring day. "We buried her in that purple dress because she was so very happy on that graduation day."

Constance says she will always be grateful for what Saint Mary's gave her beyond an excellent education and the opportunity for athletic achievement.

"Saint Mary's gave me time with my mother and a chance to make her proud."

### A Journey to Public Service

After Saint Mary's, Constance went to the University of Virginia for her undergraduate degree and then went to work on Wall Street for a New York brokerage firm for several years.

"It wasn't the job for me," she says. "My father was an attorney, so I always had it in the back of my mind that I might want to do that."

Constance left New York City and moved back to North Carolina to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Law School. There, she obtained her Juris Doctorate.

After graduating, she applied for and received a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation to work with women in prison. Each day she would go to work and serve incarcerated women in Raleigh's Women's Prison.

"It was formative for me in discovering the kind of law I wanted to practice."

While at Carolina, she'd also met her future husband, Akim Anastopoulo, who was from Charleston. The couple moved there and launched a law firm together, building the practice over fifteen years. During that time, the couple began raising two daughters, Rossi – a former Morehead Scholar at UNC-CH who is now 23 and working in Los Angeles as a writer and food blogger – and Hali, who is in high school at Le Lycée Français de Los Angeles.

In 2003, Constance was named lead counsel in the seminal case *Gaskins v. Southern Farm Bureau*, which was chosen one of the ten most important decisions in the state of South Carolina by *S.C. Lawyer's Weekly*. But, by 2007, felt she was ready to get out of litigation.

"That's when the Charleston School of Law approached me and asked me to become a faculty member," she says. "I've been there ever since."

In 2009, Constance authored the "Amicus Curie Brief" on behalf of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina in the case of *Segars-Andrews v. Judicial Merit Selection Commission, et al.*, which received national attention. In 2011, she was chosen "Professor of the Year" by Charleston School of Law students.

Over the years, Constance was asked multiple times to run for South Carolina's Attorney General. "it was never the right time, because our girls were still young."

That all changed around 2016 in the lead up to the 2018 election. At the time, the acting AG's office was under investigation and Constance believed the people of South Carolina deserved someone whom they could trust. She didn't need the job, but felt her state warranted better.

"I felt the pull of the strong women in my life, my grandmother's legacy," she says. "I also thought that when my time comes, I wanted to be able to say I didn't stand on the sidelines. I got in the game and tried to do what was right. As a Spartan woman, I was now ready to run."

Constance became the first-ever woman to run for Attorney General of South Carolina. "Think about that! One of the original thirteen colonies, and a woman had never been AG."

It was a tough-fought battle that didn't result in being voted in, but Constance takes pride in knowing she stepped up when called. She also stays busy through her volunteer service, in addition to teaching law students. She served on the Board of Directors of My Sister's House, Inc., and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Women and Gender Studies Program at the College of Charleston. In addition, she also formerly served as Vice President of the League of Women Voters and is past president of Daughters of Penelope Philanthropy.

### It's a Small World

As a Saint Mary's alumna, Constance has kept in touch and built lasting friendships with classmates and other alumnae, including Mary Grady Koonce Bell '81HS, Hamer Dillard Salmons '80HS '82C (whom she sees a lot in Charleston), and Marilee Eagles Reed '81HS (who actually sees Constance's

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sister Karen often). She also has a connection to Saint Mary's Head of School, Brendan O'Shea.

"Brendan's daughter Janie and our daughter Hali were lacrosse teammates," she says. "At the time, he was the assistant coach. It's such a small world and I'm happy Brendan is leading Saint Mary's forward."

Constance and Akim believe in the power of single-sex education and the mission of Saint Mary's. "We live in Charleston and sent both our girls to Ashley Hall," she shares. "The kinds of environment schools like Ashley Hall and Saint Mary's provides allows girls to develop in different ways and to also develop different facets of themselves without distraction."

Constance also believes in the power of connection to other alumnae and has some advice for today's Saint Mary's girls.

"Tap into your network because these women will be important throughout your life. Take advantage of those connections and support others as you need to be supported. You have an instant link to Saint Mary's alumnae you know and to those who've come before you. It's a natural connection and one you can take advantage of to help find and guide your way forward."

Saint Mary's alumnae 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. Constance's story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women have to change their lives and thrive in new and different careers. She also embodies the spirit of Saint Mary's women who are educated to make a difference and who will help propel Saint Mary's forward into the future.

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