

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

Mary Beth Hughes '83HS

Client Relationship Manager
Invitae Corporation

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. Mary Beth Hughes '83HS grew up in Raleigh and attended Ravenscroft before enrolling at Saint Mary's high school. As a dedicated alumna, she believes in single-sex education and that Saint Mary's is more relevant than ever.

A Saint Mary's Girl

"Saint Mary's gave me the individualized support, coaching, and development I needed as a young woman," Mary Beth says. "I would not have been nearly as successful within a traditional environment."

Mary Beth believes that girls in an environment like Saint Mary's learn without distraction and put themselves first. "They can focus on learning and each girl can grow into a confident woman," she explains. "In traditional co-ed settings, and due to social norms, girls might not choose to speak up. At SMS, there was – *and is today* – a platform for inquisitiveness with diverse learning platforms tailored to the needs of the student."

With so many more opportunities and choices available in today's world for young people, Mary Beth also sees an enormous amount of pressure for kids to succeed. "In the Saint Mary's environment, girls are nurtured, and the culture rewards their freedom of expression and uniqueness, while building self-confidence. At co-ed schools, the curriculum is all the same, the opportunity is all the same. You are measured against an enormous group. At Saint Mary's, you are measured in an inclusive environment and rewarded for your individual contributions."

Even as a teenager, Mary Beth liked the environment of a small school. For a time when her family lived in Charlotte, she attended Charlotte Country Day School (CCDS). She then moved to Raleigh and attended Ravenscroft, and then finished at Saint Mary's. In between moves, she attended public school for a year and a half and "always felt a bit overwhelmed by the size and sheer number of students in my classes."

She also liked the idea of all-girls and the sisterhood it represented. "I also knew from having attended CCDS and Ravenscroft that in a small school, I could tailor my education."

While at Saint Mary's, Mary Beth was able to complete an entire year of college courses during her senior year and spent most of her time "obsessed" with becoming an artist. As a senior in 1983, she received the *Most Outstanding Artist* award.

"Bratton Hall has very special meaning to me. In fact, when I came back for the 175th Anniversary Gala, I went to the building and it still smelled of the same linseed oil and paints! It brought back flashes of so many wonderful memories." She also discovered the print making press on the top floor still in use, the very same one she used as a student. It's a hobby she still pursues in her free time.

As a student, Mary Beth had two types of experiences. Her first year, she attended as a day student. In her senior year, she came as a boarding student.

"Each had its own perks and challenges," she says. "I liked attending in both ways, but I did feel that my boarding experience gave me a second family. They were my 'school family.' It's something I even talk about today with my boyfriend who also went to a small, single-gender school in Virginia and then onto Hampton-Sydney."

Mary Beth also says it was at Saint Mary's that she developed a network of friends that would last a lifetime.

"Almost everywhere I go, I meet someone who knows someone that also attended, and that sets a great foundation for getting to know others as I move through careers and travel the world."



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Life & Career Changes

While at Saint Mary's, Mary Beth concentrated everything in the world of art. Later, she spent a lot of time shadowing her father at his work at a pharmaceutical manufacturer and spent a great deal of time in laboratories.

"I swore I would NEVER be involved in THAT," she says. "But, it's funny the direction life takes you."

In her journey to become an artist, she also made back-up plans for her cooking hobby. "I realized that if I was going to be an artist, I'd likely starve, so I took culinary classes and loved it."

After Saint Mary's, she went to East Carolina University (ECU) for art school but ending up with a degree in communications. She then went onto culinary school after a law internship in Washington, D.C. During the summers, Mary Beth and friends would take cooking classes at North Hills from Edwina Shaw (grandmother of Catherine Worth '09 and Sarah Scott Worth '12 and mother-in-law of Lee Scott Worth '76HS '78C) who told her there were cooking classes in Greenville and since she was there anyway, she should take them.

In Greenville, she reconnected with another Saint Mary's grad who was also a chef and is still her best friend, Robin Hardy '83C, who is also Edwina's niece. For a time, Mary Beth taught cooking classes in Greenville and reconnected with high school friend, Kathy Keel '83HS '85C, who would bring a whole crew of Saint Mary's girls from Edenton for cooking classes.

After college, Mary Beth traveled the world as a chef on a yacht, opened her own cooking school at Five Points in Raleigh, and bought a restaurant in the Outer Banks. When she sold her restaurant in 1998, she went back Greenville to get a graduate degree and began working as a private chef.

As a private chef, she worked for a principal who introduced her to Saint Mary's parents Henry and Tracey Smith. At the time, she was contemplating medical school while also helping develop healthy recipes for the Smith family. Henry (who was then president of Carolina Medical Products) told her she should be a pharmaceutical rep and that she'd be terrific at it. Henry then introduced Mary Beth to a friend who was also a pharmaceutical rep and the rest is history.

The Rest is History

"It was exactly what I said I'd never do," Mary Beth laughs. "Nearly twenty years later, I've had an amazing career in oncology sales and for the last ten years in medical genetics."

Mary Beth works for Invitae Genetics as part of the commercial operations team. In her role as a client relationship manager, she handles large accounts and biomedical/pharma collaborations and partnerships. She still teaches cooking classes on the side for her friends and renovates old houses for fun.

"We should encourage today's Saint Mary's girls to take as much science as possible as it is a foundation for so many other careers – even cooking!" she says. "When I got to college, I was so well prepared by my Saint Mary's education that I basically passed every placement exam for freshman level courses and was able to move right into subjects that really interested me. I also had the confidence to talk with my professors in a much more mature way than many students coming from more traditional schools."

Mary Beth's path took many turns and twists, but she used her networks and the foundation Saint Mary's gave her to try, fail, try again, and succeed. She took what she was good at in other industries to make an impact and uses that in her work today.

"I have a wonderful life. Not all of it is because of Saint Mary's, but so much of it is!" she shares. "Students should not to be afraid to change their majors – I did it many times, but I did it, so I would find not only what I'm good at, but what makes me happy and if I had more time, I'd still be taking courses today."

So much of Mary Beth's desire to always be learning was instilled by her experience at Saint Mary's.

One thing is clear. Mary Beth loves her school, her friends, and her career. "The friendships I made in high school are still some of my closest friends today. What I really value is knowing so many amazing women from all over the US and beyond whom I would never have had the opportunity to meet if I had gone to any other school."

She further explains this. "I'm super independent because what I always heard from my parents, my Saint Mary's teachers and professors whenever I was contemplating a change, was: 'How can we help you get there?' It's a message I want to share with young alumnae and current students. Change or failure isn't a finite thing. Take it as you tried, and then try again and be grateful for the experience."

Mary Beth's story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women have to change their lives and thrive in new and different careers and hobbies. She also certainly embodies the spirit of Saint Mary's women who are resilient, intelligent, resourceful, passionate, and nurturing, and who are educated to make a difference.