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Jill Mayo Forbes '03 Also Relies on Studies When Teaching, Speaking or Writing



Jill Mayo Forbes poses with her husband, Heath, and their children. Photo courtesy of e bea photography

Since she left Gardner-Webb University in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in religious education, Jill Mayo Forbes of Hanahan, S.C., has worked in a variety of ministries and jobs from retail sales and wedding planning to student ministry, missions and teaching children and adults. Her studies prepared her for each of those roles, as well as her most important job of being a mother. "I use what I gained in the classroom every day as a mom. Every day," she emphasized. "I'm teaching my kids the truth about Jesus and teaching them to critically think about their faith. Helping them to reconcile the world and their faith system. In my professional life, I rely on the basis of my education every time I write or speak."

She's also thankful for the learning that takes place outside of the classroom at Gardner-Webb. The small community creates opportunities for students to get to know their professors and each other. "Cultivating these relationships, away from the security of my home, was such a valuable life lesson for me," she reflected. "The third week of my freshman year, I began to meet the girls on my hall and we are still close. We still have girls' weekends and send each other flowers for our birthdays and text often. They are priceless to me. And the relationships with professors and staff and their families were important."

While she valued the influence of all her professors, a few made a special impact on her life and their advice is still relevant in her life. Professor Emerita of Religion Dr. Alice Cullinan helped her when she was going through a dark time. Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies and Philosophy Dr. Ron Williams challenged her in class and wouldn't settle for mediocre. He also led pre-marital counseling for her and her husband, Heath (also a GWU alum). "We rely on that daily, even after 15 years of marriage," she affirmed. Associate Professor of Biology Dr. Tim Zehnder made science interesting and he and his wife invited Forbes and her husband over to their home. Professor of Art Susan Bell taught Christianity and Art, which was one of her favorite classes. "Ms. Bell mentored me outside of the classroom," Forbes offered. "My parents have her art hanging in their house; she spoke at our wedding; and my kids call her 'Meme Susan.'"

She also learned how to lead mission trips by participating on teams led by the Office of Christian Life and Service. “A man named Charles Shelton used to take us college kids on mission trips with him,” she explained. “I’ve led 10-12 trips since leaving GWU. I learned about leadership and the purpose of ministry—how we need to be intentional in why we do what we do—not just doing what’s expected, but who we are reaching.”