

Best of student fiction

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A field trip to the basement

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The Blue and Gold

June 2016

The Student Newspaper of Murch Elementary School

Vol. IV No. 2

Murch Goes to College

By MARY LOUISA LEOPOLD
and NAOMI REA

Back in April, 10 blocks from Murch, a huge empty lot was covered in tall grass and poison ivy.

By the end of May, the grass and weeds had been cut -- and dirt, gravel and granite blocks appeared.

Soon all that will be replaced by a summer crop of 40 trailers, which for the next two years will become known as the Benjamin Murch Elementary School.

So life will be different for everyone at our school.

While the overcrowded 86-year-old Murch building gets a multimillion-dollar facelift, students will be learning, eating and playing on a University of the District of Columbia (UDC) athletic field.

An elementary school on a college campus has its pros and cons.

A big advantage is that Murch will be able to use some of UDC's resources. Students probably will have occasional access to UDC's gym and outdoor amphitheater, and possibly to the college's science equipment.

A disadvantage is that kids must share the area with college students, a possible safety risk. But Principal Chris Cebrzynski said that the trailer park will be fenced in to eliminate the problem.

"If we are positive about this move, it could be a



Photo by Aaron Epstein

Murch site at UDC with Chinese Embassy in background.

wonderful experience," said a pre-k teacher, Jacqueline Hines.

A tough two years may lie ahead for Murch, but perhaps not much harder than it has been in recent years in its overcrowded building.

"Murch has been through a lot," Ms. Hines said. "I mean, we've been in that ratty old building for years."

(see TRAILERS on page 8)

Just Ahead: Music for All Kids in A Major Key

By FRANCESCA BAN-GOODRICH, PAULINA STEWART-ADAY and RACHEL KOLKO

Murch has hired an experienced music teacher who promises to lead a greatly expanded program when school resumes in September.

Eugene Branch Jr., who has been teaching music at H.D. Cooke Elementary School for several years, will replace Catherine Pruett.

Mr. Branch didn't miss a beat when he heard that Murch was looking for a new music teacher. "I contacted Mr. C (Principal Chris Cebrzynski) immediately," he said.

He said that he wants to add more instruments and vocal work to the Murch program, organize a band, and take kids to the Kennedy Center to participate in the annual school district music festival.

"My goal is to set up a music program where all students in each grade level perform on stage (and

(see MUSIC on page 7)

One Girl's Fond Memories Of the School She Knew

By MARY LOUISA LEOPOLD

I'm leaving Murch in two ways. My fellow 5th-graders and I will be going to middle school, and Murch itself will move to a trailer park at UDC while the old building is being renovated.

I will miss walking through these halls and looking around at all the familiar faces. Maybe our building is old and could use a renovation. But the whole place glowed with good vibes and positive people.

I will miss the after-school scene when parents gabbed away with anyone because they knew everyone.

I'll miss the times when older students taught younger one how to use the monkey bars, gave them boosts and let them know that they could do it.

I'll miss the group games that anyone could

play regardless of weather because, of course, you're friends, so why not?

I know we are going to lose the walls of our building, but I hope that wrecking ball doesn't change the closeness we felt, whether faculty, staff, students or parents.

I have been at Murch for six years and I know the building inside and out. The only places I haven't seen are the basement and the cupola.

I've even been in the teacher's lounge to get things laminated. I've been in Mr. C's room for interviews, and in that creepy place behind the music trailer, where I found the winning hiding spot in a game of hide-and-seek.

I've been in every inch of the library at least twice, gotten paper from the supply closet, and been behind the 5th-grade trailers. My feet must've touched every corner of the playground and hill.

I've seen the playground get renovated and



A diagram showing the location of Murch's temporary trailer school on the UDC campus near the intersection of Van Ness Street and International Dr,

the school get a new principal. I've seen the number of students rise from 480 to 630, an increase of more than 30 percent. I've seen Murch get four more trailers than it had when I was in kindergarten.

This school was like a home for me. When there were too many things going on, I could always be alone at the back entrance or I could come to school early and read in the library. If I felt social, I could al-

ways visit one of my teachers and talk.

Murch made me feel as if I had a name and an opinion that mattered to others.

I am ready to move on now. Yet I will miss my awesome elementary school years.

When Teachers Were Kids

By LUCY CHAMBERLAIN
and LILLY SHAW

When Murch teachers were kids, most of them didn't think of doing what they're doing now.

We contacted a bunch of teachers to find out what their dream jobs were when they were students in elementary school.

We got different answers: Singer, scientist, chef, astronaut. A few actually said that they always wanted to be teachers.

But all of them have one thing in common: They're glad that they ended up in Murch class-

rooms.

Third-grade teacher TIM BRADY wanted to be an astronaut after seeing the movie "Apollo 13."

"I know my parents supported me. I remember my dad and brothers all helping me to build small rockets. We had a blast making them and launching them in a field near our house."

But later, he said, "I realized that I truly enjoyed helping others. By the time I left for college, I was pretty set on being a teacher, and I never looked back! I absolutely love what I do."

(See DREAMS on page 8)

Mustangs Shine in Track Finals

By RIGBY ZENTNER
and TESSA FURLOW

Bang! The sprinters are off. Down the track, the girls run the mile just as the sun comes out. The crowd cheers as Murch 5th-grader Ellen Hake crosses the finish line first in 6 minutes, 16 seconds.

Everywhere, the competitors look nervous. They try not to think about the fact that they are in the citywide elementary school track championships.

Later, 5th-grader Taylor Jackson of the girls track team says, "When you first get there, you're very freaked out. Then, at the end of the race, you want to run again."

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Overall, the speedy Murch Mustangs finished close to the top in those DC championships last month. The boys' team was second. The girls' team took third place.

The Murch boys were especially strong in the medley and relay events, finishing first in the 4x20 sprint medley and 4x400 relays.

Individual gold medals went to four Murch athletes: Ellen Hake (girls 1,600-meter run, Kincaid (Caid) Bergthold, (boys hurdles), Romell Randolph, 4th grade (boys 100-meter dash), and Cinechem (Chem) Ugochukwu, 5th grade, (girls 100-meter dash).



B&G staff: Seated, from left: Zoe, Rachel, Simon, Josie, Francesca, Paulina. Standing: Adrian, Lucy, Lilly, Maia, Naomi, Mary Louisa, Mr. Epstein

National Newspaper Group Highlights The Blue and Gold

The three-year-old Blue and Gold was featured in a recent publication of the National Elementary Schools Press Association (NESPA), an organization of 750 schools and individuals from around the country.

NESPA interviewed B&G editor Aaron Epstein, who said that he tries to fill staff positions with Murch students who are "smart, curious, inquisitive, motivated, creative, well-organized, well-organized, responsible, and able to write clearly and meet deadlines."

Newcomers are taught the basic principles of journalism, emphasizing accuracy, terseness, clarity, strong leads, self-criticism, rewriting and interviewing, he said.

"Is there anything your students have done that you're particularly proud of?" NESPA asked Mr. Epstein.

"In general, I am proudest of the fact that most of the students on The Blue and Gold staff improve their reporting and their writing," he replied.

Then he listed specific examples of outstanding work in the past by kid journalists at Murch. Among them, he said, were:

1. Two fifth-graders who went to the nearby home of a professional author of children's books and found out what the author was writing at their age.
2. The fourth-grader who reviewed the school lunches for three weeks and dared to write that one meal consisted of "chicken that was hard to chew, cornbread that was dry and difficult to swallow, and mashed potatoes that were far too greasy for my taste."
3. The fifth-grader who wrote a poem about bullying: "Taunting, teasing, chasing me/How did it all start?/Words come out like daggers/Striking through my heart."
4. The fifth-grader who began her lively profile of the school's "lunch lady" with this lead: "If you're ever in need of breakfast or a hot lunch, then Tiffany Darlene Massey is your woman. With a warm smile, she greets you every day with 'Good morning, baby. Whatcha need?'"
5. The fourth-graders who demonstrated courage and critical thinking skills by writing editorials about life in school trailers and excessive homework and testing.
6. The fourth-grader who began a report on classroom animals with a lead that focused on a female tarantula. "The kids in one kindergarten class have their own superpet: the amazing Spiderwoman," she wrote. "She can leave her skin, regrow her own body parts and walk on walls like Spiderman."
7. The fourth-grader who told of her frequent visits to the school nurse, humorously confessing, "My stomach always hurt in math class. If I have to have a stomachache, I'd rather have it during math, especially when we're dividing fractions."
8. The entire Blue and Gold staff, who politely but firmly peppered the architect of the school's multimillion dollar modernization project with dozens of prepared questions -- and then produced a lively, timely, informative and newsworthy report for Page One.

The Blue and Gold Staff

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Our First Commandment:
Thou Shalt Not Bore the Reader

Murch Sisters Help to Find Good Families For Lonely Dogs

By ADRIAN BELMONTE
and JOSIE WALKER

What are Murch kids doing in their free time? You might think that most of them would be playing outdoors or watching TV or concentrating on PlayStation, Minecraft or other video games.

But guess what? The Crouch sisters -- 4th-grader Katie and 2nd-grader Haley -- often help the Humane Society to find homes for needy dogs.

They go to the animal shelter and sign up to bring a dog to their house. Then they ask people whether they'd like to take the dog home with them.

"So far we have found about six or seven dogs a home," Katie said recently.

The Crouch family accepts many types of dogs, but usually it gets pit bulls to take home. (Pit bulls were created for strength and agility by breeding bulldogs with terriers).

Usually, the dogs stay with the Crouches for about a week. But, Katie said, "it depends, because you need to find the right home for them and it takes time to find them the perfect home."

In fact, Katie said, her family once kept a dog in their foster care for about a month.

When the sisters must part with a dog that has lived with them for a while, they're not unhappy about it.

"I'm not sad because I know that it will be a lot better, not just for me, but for the dog," Haley said.

And the sisters do have a dog of their own. It came from the Humane Society shelter, too.

Do you do something good for animals or humans in your spare time? If you do, please tell someone on The Blue and Gold staff about it.

What were their biggest Murch laughs? Grads Reply

By MAIA BESTER
and NAOMI REA

When asked to recall funny events at Murch, 5th-graders remembered things that happened years ago.

And the memories still make them laugh.

Many of these students told of accidents involving food, such as peaches, yogurt, apple juice and Coke.

For instance, Kennedy Spence, who is allergic to peaches, told The Blue and Gold:

"In second grade, it was field day and I had peaches. Then I accidentally threw up on Marlowe."

Genevieve Willens remembered when he was in 1st grade, "I had a Go Gurt (yogurt in a tube) and I knocked it on my forehead and it exploded."

Rubi Andreatta remembered a day in 3rd grade when "I spilled apple juice all over my pants, and one of the teachers asked me if I peed (in) my pants."

In a popular science experiment, Zachary Anderson dropped Mentos mints into Diet Coke. "I put the Mentos into the bottle and it sprayed all over my face," he recalled.

Recess periods and spring breaks of years past produced other memories.

Audrey Saenz thought back to a kindergarten recess when "the girls chased the boys, singing a song from 'The Sound of Music.' The boys ran away."

Ellen Hake told of a time when "I was here at Murch during spring break, and I brought my rollerblades with me. I was rollerblading, fell in a backflip, and landed on the turf."

Gus Confalone said his funniest memory happened way back in his kindergarten class. "We saw the snake poop," he said.



Photo by Aaron Epstein

Kids build a city in Jacqueline Hines' kindergarten class. At the center of the city is the school (cardboard box).

The Strange Case of the Stolen Mona Lisa

By ADRIAN BELMONTE

There was an emergency in Paris. The police got a call from the Louvre Museum on March 13, 2015.

"The Mona Lisa is missing! We need help!"

"Have you seen anybody?"

"No, but come fast!"

"We'll be right there, sir."

The police assigned 104 cops to the case, headed by Detective Jose Belmonte and his assistant, photographer Samantha Green.

Detective Belmonte and the cops went to the Louvre. Fifty of them stayed outside for protection.

Belmonte and his assistant arrived at the room where the Mona Lisa had been. They saw a frame on the wall with nothing inside.

"Thank the Lord you're here," said the museum director, Georges Clamantine.

"What happened? Did you see anyone? What about the cameras?" Belmonte asked.

"This morning one of our janitors went to clean up this room and reported to us that the Mona Lisa was not there," Mr. Clamantine answered. "No, we didn't see anyone take it. We checked the cameras and didn't see anything on them."

"We'll take it from here," Detective Belmonte said. "Don't worry. We'll find whoever stole it."

Belmonte and Ms. Green began looking around for clues. On the floor, they found a fingernail and sent it to the police lab. They dusted for fingerprints, too. But there were no matches for either the fingerprints or the DNA from the fingernail.

Two cops lifted the frame and a note fell out. It said: "I will away with precious painting to country where made."

They concluded that the thief was from another country, probably Italy, because the Mona Lisa was painted there by Leonardo da Vinci 500 years ago.

Detective Belmonte, Ms. Green and 84 other cops boarded a train from Paris to Rome, where they asked the Italian police about suspected art thieves.

The police told Belmonte about Francesca Santa Rosa da

Vinci, an art thief and a member of the da Vinci family in Florence.

"Where can we find her?" the detective asked.

"She's in prison in Florence for stealing a painting in Australia."

So Belmonte, Ms. Green and some of the other French cops drove to the prison in Florence to ask Francesca some questions.

"Where were you on March 13, 2015?"

"Here -- in jail," she replied.

But the prison cameras showed that she was not in jail on the day that the Mona Lisa was stolen in Paris.

"Where did you go on that day?" the detective asked.

"I'm not telling."

One of the French cops held a gun to her temple. Belmonte said: "I will ask you one more time. Where did you go on that day?"

"I went to the da Vinci house. Please don't shoot me!"

Detective Belmonte and his assistant went to the da Vinci house but found no one there. The policemen searched the house, and one of them shouted that he had found an open window and fingerprints on the underframe. They turned out to belong to Francesca and others in the da Vinci family.

Belmonte and the others took Francesca to police headquarters in Florence to question her again.

"I didn't want my family to be in danger or suspected so I helped them run away right after we heard about the Mona Lisa," Francesca said.

Detective Belmonte responded: "If you didn't help them run away, we could have questioned them and they could have proved

that they were innocent."

The Paris police officers then searched all around Florence for members of the da Vinci family, and found them in the house where Leonardo lived and finished painting the Mona Lisa in about 1515. He also did his scientific inventions there, such as a flying machine and an adding machine.

The police questioned each of the da Vincis, but found out that none of them could have stolen the Mona Lisa because they were not in Paris on the day of the theft. They all had alibis.

One of them told the police that the da Vinci time machine was gone. Detective Belmonte saw a janitor cleaning up. His name was Robert Munchkin.

"And what were you doing on March 13?" the detective asked.

"I was cleaning this house."

"Did you see anyone else here?"

"I saw something moving next to the time machine. I thought it was a bat."

The police heard from Julia da Vinci, the oldest of the da Vinci family, that there was a duplicate time machine in the basement. The police found it, and Belmonte asked if he could see if it worked. He

was told that he had to ask for permission from the Italian government, which owned the house.

"Yes, you can," an Italian government official said. "Just fill out these forms."

"This machine has never been used before." Julia da Vinci told Belmonte. "Please be careful."

Detective Belmonte and Samantha Green put on safety suits that Leonardo had designed, read instructions translated from the Italian, stepped into the machine, and turned a crank.

It made lots of noise -- z-z-z-z-z, sh-sh-sh-sh-sh -- until they were back in a time long ago. It was 1515. Belmonte saw Leonardo himself and started crying. It was so emotional for him to meet such a great man.

"Oh, my God! It's really Leonardo himself!" the detective said.

Samantha was excited, too. She got out her camera and took a billion selfies.

After that, Belmonte got around to the reason he was there.

"Do you have any enemies?" the detective asked Leonardo.

"I don't like the word 'enemies,'" Leonardo replied. "But I do have a bad friend."

"Who's that?"

"His name is Giacomo da Luca. He always wanted my paintings to fail. When we were little, we were friends and we said we'd always work together. But it didn't work out that way. We became enemies."

"What does he look like?"

"Black hair, blue eyes, about five foot seven, about your weight."

Leonardo told the detective that da Luca has anger issues and can be dangerous.

Belmonte and Samantha then told Leonardo that his Mona Lisa was stolen from a museum in Paris in 2015, and was the most famous, most valuable painting in the world.

Leonardo said he was surprised to hear that his painting had become so precious.

Another thing that surprised Leonardo was that his time machine really worked. But he warned the detective that anyone who didn't return within five days would turn to dust.

(See MONA LISA on Page 5)



Leonardo da Vinci, a major character in this story written last year by 4th-grade B&G reporter Adrian Belmonte.

Donuts: For Better Or Verse



By SIMON HOLLAND

CINQUAIN

Donuts

Tasty, creamy

Chomping,swallowing,disappear-
ing

Dunkin Donuts, Krispy Kreme

Mmmmmmmmm.....

ACROSTIC

Doughy, fried, delicious

Outstandingly amazing

Nougat, sprinkles, chocolate top-
ping

Um, what flavor?

Taste buds long for them.

HAIKU

Ooh, I love donuts!

Glazed, jelly, powdered sugar,

Donuts are the best.

RHYME

Donuts are yummy,

Ooh, my tummy.

Oh, for goodness sake

I've got a stomach ache.

Once upon a recent time

There were some evil trolls.

They stole all my donuts

And left me with the holes.

Editor's Note:

A cinquain is a poetic form that
uses a pattern of five lines.

An acrostic is a form of writing in
which the first letter spells out a
word.

A traditional Japanese haiku is a
three-line poem of 17 syllables, writ-
ten in a count of 5-7-5.

A rhyme is a repetition of same or
similar sounds, usually in the final
syllables of lines in poems or songs.

The Murch Mystery

#2 Detective Takes Case

By TAVALINE (BEAVER) INTHAVONE, 5th grade

One Thursday afternoon in Jan-
uary, there was a fire bell at Murch Ele-
mentary School. Everybody in the school went
outside. It was warm and cloudy.

Ten minutes later, when every-
one got back inside, Ms. Bell, the librarian,
yelled, "Oh, my gosh, all the iPads are gone
except one."

Then she ran to the principal's
office and said that 29 iPads were missing.

"That's impossible," the principal
said.

"Oh, but it happened. We had 30
and now we have only one," Ms. Bell said.

The principal went to look himself
and saw only one iPad left.

"I know who to call," he said. And
he called Detective Site Tavaline in Pennsyl-
vania. "He's the second most famous detec-
tive in the world," he said. (The most famous
detective is Seymour Sleuth, but he lives in
London).

The detective told the principal
on the phone, "I, Detective Tavaline, will get
there fast. See you tomorrow. I promise to
solve the iPad mystery."

The principal got some tape that
said "KEEP OUT!" and stuck it on all the
library doors and on the broken glass in one



Scene of the Crime: The Murch Library

of the windows.

On Friday morning, the day after
the crime, Detective Tavaline arrived with
Brandon Muggs, his 18-year-old driver.

"Where's the library?" the detec-
tive asked the principal.

When he
got there, Tavaline
found a clue: Finger-
prints on the table
where 29 of the iPads
were when they were
taken. He also found a
scrap of paper that said,
"2 baking powder, 15
milk, 15 buns, 15 lbs.
beef."

The broken
glass was outside, so the detective knew that
the thief must have broken the glass from the
inside to escape with the iPads.

"Who was still in the building
when the fire drill started?" the detective
asked the principal.

"Logan McIntosh, a 4th grade
teacher; Max Stone, my assistant; Alex Spain,
the lunch lady; and me."

Detective Tavaline asked Max
Stone, "What were you doing during the fire
drill?"

"I was helping the
principal in his office,"
Mr. Stone said.

"It's true," the princi-
pal said. "He was in my
office. We were working
on our computer sched-
uling a meeting with par-
ents and teachers."

Next the detective
walked to Logan McIn-
tosh's classroom and
asked him what he was doing during the fire
drill.

"I was in my room typing an arti-
cle for my class. It was about technology."

The detective looked at the arti-
cle and asked the aide if Mr. McIntosh did stay

in his room.

"Yes, he was in here typing when
we left," the aide said.

The detective excused the
teacher, then walked to see the lunch lady in
her kitchen. He found Alex Spain getting ham-
burgers, milk, carrots, salad, chips and cran-
berry cake ready for lunch.

"I am Detective Site Tavaline and
I'm investigating who stole the iPads from the
library."

"It wasn't me," she said. "I was
here in the kitchen waiting for the food truck to
come. I don't even know how to use an iPad."

The detective asked Mr. Stone,
the principal's assistant, when the food truck
came on Thursday.

"It was here at 11:15 in the morning
yesterday. Ms. Spain signed for the food her-
self. Here is the receipt with her signature and
the time."

(See STOLEN on page 5)

RUSTED

By MANA BESTER, 5th grade

I look out the window
It's dark
It's night
I push the window open
And feel a cool breeze on my face
I lean out the window and sigh
It's been a long week
And maybe now
I can get some
Peace

I need to go to my place of healing
My place of serenity
My broken
Bruised
Heart
Needs some rest
Some clarity

Gingerly, gently,
I let my tired hand feel the cool air that lurks
Outside the comfort of my room
My cave
My grotto
My hole
It clears my head
I breathe in the fresh air
I wish that I could have this kind of peace,
This kind of quiet
All the time

I pull my black hoodie on over my head
Yank some dark sweat pants on
And wonder if what I'm about to do
Is even legal
Even if it is,
I can't be seen
I clamber out of my bedroom window,
Careful not to wake my father
And listen to the sounds of the night around me
I can hear the chirping of crickets.
Feel the beautiful nature,
Taste the wind,
Touch the moon.
Out here I can be anything,
Anyone.

I start my walk,
Hands in my pockets
Head bowed.
To anyone watching,
I'm invisible.

I climb over fences,
Trudge through forests
Walk into and out of near-deserted cities
As I'm walking through a backyard
A man's dog starts to bark at me
And it wakes the man up
He comes out onto his porch and yells at me
In fluent Italian
Hateful words
I cross my fingers that he won't call the police
And in one swift movement,
I leap over his fence
And as I pass the "NO TRESPASSING" sign
That I've disobeyed so many times,
My heart starts a wild dance,
Doing a skip at the smell of salty air,
A leap at the sound of crashing waves
And creaking, rusted playground equipment
Like me
Rusted.

I finally see it, and feel my heart bursting in two,
With the wild music of memory,
The eternal tango of fate and longing
The dances so smooth and complex
Bound together
And yet so different.

I run to the sand, kicking off my shoes,
Gazing in awe at the vast white orb
That hangs in the sky.
Lady Luna
The moon, who kisses the waves
That now engulf my legs up to my knees
Touching the ocean softly with her rays,
And turning them her own milky color
And casting a cool glow over the sand
And old, tired playground that I adore,
So that even the most rusted rail
Can find the strength to shine.

I sit in the waves and stare
At Lady Luna for a time
Rocks tickle my ankles
And waves soak my sweatpants
But I don't mind
I don't notice
I sit and dream that I am floating
Floating away
To where, I don't know.
I don't know when I'll return,
Or even if I will at all
But I have hope, and strength
And a burning passion
That someday, everything will change
Because I have the power to make it change.

I stand up,
My mind freshly renewed with the thought that
Everything will get better.
I shake off my damp feet,
Slip them into my shoes
And bathed in Lady Luna's rays,
I set my foot onto the rusted playground.

Only one thing to do now.
I stand high up on the equipment
Gazing in Lady Luna's direction,
And give her a bow.

And though rust coats my hands,
And the playground is falling apart,
I dart up and down the steps,
Never running out of breath or enthusiasm
Feel like a child again as I slip down the slide
Dance across the monkey bars that made me feel
Like a ninja when I was small
And leap off of the climbing wall
And fall onto the pillowy sand
Giggling and wishing I could melt into it
And become a grain of sand.

Stay here forever
Safe
Warm
No past
No present
No future
Just waiting to go home to the sea
And drift off until I finally break down.

I sit on the dilapidated swing
And push, and pump my feet
And push
And pump
And push
And with every burst of speed,
I find myself with new courage
And power
Like I can do anything
Including piece my life back together.

It's getting lighter out.
Lady Luna is finally turning her back on me,
Her sleep is my signal to go.

So I walk in sopping sneakers to the sign
That reads "NO TRESPASSING."
I climb back over fences
Trudge back through forests
Walk back in and out of near deserted cities
With every step realizing that my
Hopes
Dreams
Goals
Are like the stars,
Are like Lady Luna..
They're always there,
Sometimes you just think that they
Are too far away to catch
But they are not.
In order to get to them,
You just have to reach far enough
Into the sky
And once you get there,
And catch one of your stars,
Your wishes,
You can go anywhere,
Do anything,
Be anyone.
You are no longer invisible
You are one of the stars,
Aiding Lady Luna's light
So that even the rustiest of swings,
Slides,
Or
Steps
Can finally shine.

*I can hear the chirping of crickets,
Feel the beautiful nature, Taste
the wind, Touch the moon. Out
here I can be anything, Anyone.*

Time Travel Helps Police Solve Art Theft Mystery

(MONA LISA from Page 3)

Before they tried to return to 2015, the detective and Samantha went to da Luca's house. They spoke to his mom and sister.

"The last time we saw Giacomo," his sister said, "he told us he wanted to try Leonardo's time machine. We haven't seen him since."

Belmonte and Samantha went to Leonardo's house so the great artist and inventor could show them how to go back to their century.

But before they left, Samantha took a last selfie of herself and Leonardo with her phone. Leonardo was amazed by what the Smartphone could do, so Samantha gave it to him.

The detective figured out a plan to catch Giacomo. About 70 police officers would stay in Italy and the rest would go with him

and Samantha to Paris. They went into the time machine and traveled to March 13, 2015, the day of the theft.

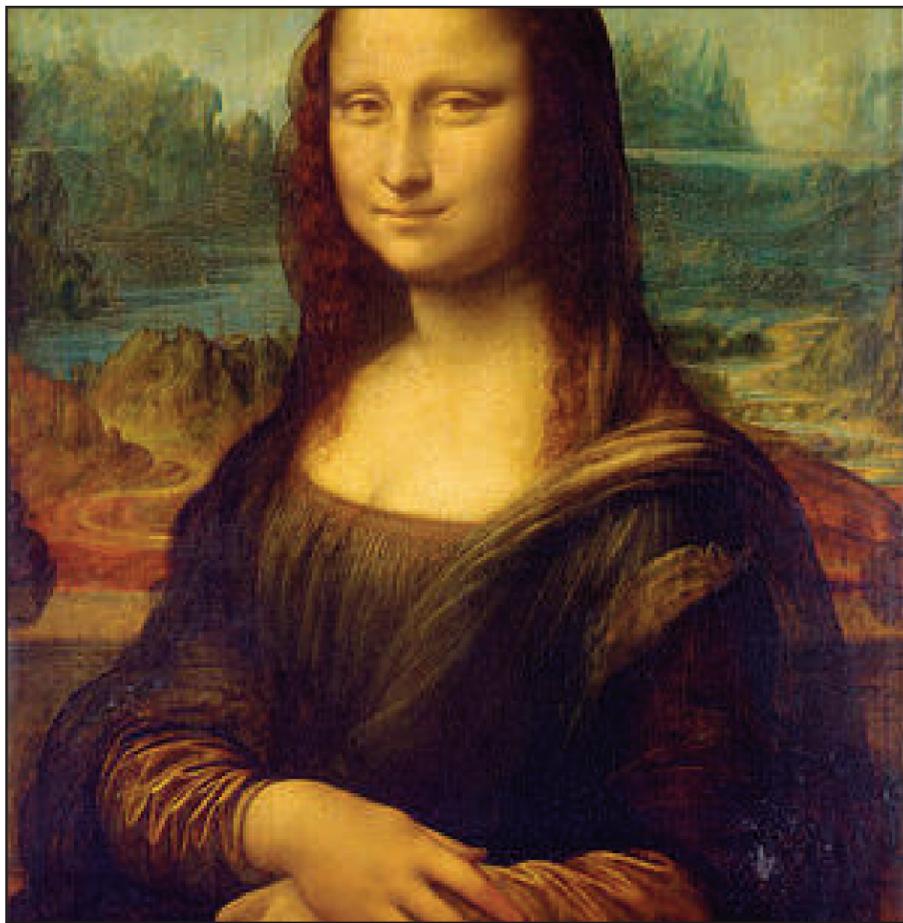
Detective Belmonte led the Paris police officers to the Louvre Museum that night and waited. They spotted Giacomo with the painting rolled up under his right arm. He had a knife in his pocket.

"You're under arrest for stealing the Mona Lisa and for carrying a dangerous weapon," Belmonte said.

The police took Giacomo to a Paris jail and threw him into a cell. Then they reported to the world that the Mona Lisa was back -- and safe in the Louvre.

Three days later, the detective and some policemen went back to the jail to question Giacomo da Luca. They went to his cell and looked inside.

They found only a big pile of dust.



The Mona Lisa actually was stolen from the Louvre in 1911. It was returned three years later. Its value in 2016 is estimated at \$782 million.

Murch Hires Detective, Catches iPad Thieves

(STOLEN from Page 4)

The detective looked at the receipt and said, "Now I know who the thief is."

He went back to the kitchen and told the lunch lady, "You are the thief."

"I am not," she said.

"Yes, you are because you lied to me about waiting for the food truck and because you wrote the note that was found in the library. You must have broken the glass and tossed the iPads out the window to your accomplice."

The detective asked, "Who worked with you?"

"My brother Aiden Spain," she said.

"Where are the iPads?"

"In my apartment with my brother."

"What is the address?"

"4849 Connecticut Avenue. Ellicott House, Apt. 819."

Detective Tavaline called the police, got into Mr. Muggs' car, drove to Ellicott House, went up the elevator to Apt. 819, and rang the bell as the police arrived.

A man opened the door. "Who are you?" the detective asked.

"Aiden Spain."

"May we check your rooms, please?"

"Yes."

Tavaline and the police checked the kitchen, bathroom and living room but found no iPads.

"There's only one room we didn't check on: the bedroom," the detective said.

That's where they found two big black bags with iPads in them. The police arrested Aiden and Alex Spain.

The detective had one more question for Alex Spain: "Why did you do it?"

"We needed money to build our own house," she said. "It's so noisy at night in the Ellicott House. We can't sleep."

"Well, there will be no noise in jail," said the detective.

please excuse me, teacher, but here's what really happened...

By RIGBY ZENTNER

You're late for class.

As you walk into your classroom, you suddenly realize that you've forgotten your homework.

You need to think quickly. The teacher has heard the traditional dog-ate-my-homework types of excuses many times. You need to be original and creative.

Here are some new excuses:

1. "I was running to school when my homework fell out of my backpack. I turned to pick it up when a rabid squirrel came along and shredded it."

2. "I was in the bathroom at home just before leaving for school. But when I went to get my homework, I saw that my younger sister (or

brother) had made a snowflake out of it."

3. "On my way to school, I looked down and saw a butterfly on the ground. It couldn't fly. So I made a paper airplane, put the butterfly on it and sent it back up to its family. I realized later that the plane was made of my homework."

But suppose you have your homework but you're just late. When you get to class, your teacher will want a good reason for tardiness. Try one of these:

1. "A unicorn knocked on my bedroom door last night and offered me a job at the unicorn factory. I accepted. But when I got there, the unicorn said he had no idea what I was talking about."

2. "My brother (or sister) choked on his (or her) juice this morning. We rushed to the hospital, where the doctor said he (or she) hadn't choked, but just hated the taste of the juice." (or

Cinderella Continued: A Twisted Tale

By TAVALINE (BEAVER) INTHAVONE
5th grade

After Cinderella and the Prince got married and moved into the castle together, they began to have some problems.

One problem was that the castle was dirty. There was dust on the TV, lots of spider webs and too many mice eating the food, running around and squeaking too loudly.

Another problem was that the prince and princess really didn't get along. The prince was too lazy to do stuff. He was always watching TV.

Cinderella said to him, "Act like a prince. Go kill some dragons and stop wearing your bed clothes all the time."

An idea popped into Cinderella's mind. She called her mean stepsisters on the phone and said:

"I have a special offer for you. If you come as fast as you can, you will get a bedroom in the castle and a nice dress for each of you. And you can stay here for one year."

"Ok, we'll be there in an hour," the stepsisters said together.

When they got there, Cinderella gave them some rags to wear and said, "Start cleaning up the castle. After it's cleaned up, you can stay."

The stepsisters said to Cinderella, "We thought you'd forgive us."

"Just forget about that and start clean-

ing," Cinderella said. "If you don't clean up, you won't get to stay."

They started cleaning. But they had trouble getting the spider webs out of the high corners of the rooms.

"Just stack yourselves, one on top of the



Cinderella's castle: without help, a tough place to keep clean

other, We don't have a ladder here," Princess Cinderella said.

So the fat sister went on top of the skinny one. But the skinny one couldn't handle that. She fell down and the fat one landed on top of her.

"Ouch, get off of me!" the skinny one yelled at the fat one.

"That was a stupid idea," Cinderella said. "How about the skinny one getting on top? That would work."

Four hours later, both stepsisters, breathing hard, asked, "Are we done?"

"You still have to do the second floor," said Princess Cinderella.

The Prince, meanwhile, was out buying some food. He forgot that he was supposed to be hiring some help.

A year later, the prince and princess got some help and sent the stepsisters back home. Cinderella had gotten her revenge.

And on some days, the prince and princess even got along. So they sort of lived happily ever after.

Hillary and Doing Good

By JOSIE WALKER

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: DO ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN by Cynthia Levinson (ages 8-12)

As a kid growing up near Chicago in the 1950s, Hillary Diane Rodham did not feel as if she fit in.

With her big, thick glasses, she stood out.

"Hillary sometimes took them off and let her friend Betsy Johnson lead her around school like a guide dog," author Cynthia Levinson writes in this biography for kids.

That is only one of the interesting stories in Ms. Levinson's book, which is mostly favorable toward the former First Lady, U.S. senator, secretary of state -- and now the likely Democratic Party candidate for president.

There were other ways in which young Hillary stood out from her classmates. She played sports, including baseball and basketball, which was unusual for a girl back then.



Student Hillary Rodham at Wellesley College

But she also tried to fit in by dressing with the proper look for young girls at the time: skirts and blouses with leather shoes known as Mary Janes, or dresses with oxfords.

At Wellesley College, she first began to question her Republican beliefs when one of her political science teachers told her to take a Democratic Party point of view for an assignment. By the time she left college, she realized that she wanted to be a Democrat.

Young Hillary was inspired by her Christian faith to do good for others. As a new lawyer for the Children's Defense Fund, she helped stand up for the legal rights of children.

Later, she founded a program that teaches mothers and fathers how to become better parents. As the wife of President Bill Clinton, she tried, but failed, to make health care better for the entire nation.

I recommend this book because it explains who Hillary Clinton is and what makes her stand out.

Jealousy and Belonging

By RACHEL KOLKO

CLAUDIA AND MEAN JANINE (The Baby-Sitters Club #4), a graphic novel adapted and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier from an original novel by Ann M. Martin (ages 8 and up)

From disagreements between sisters to a loved one's illness, the latest adventure of The Baby-Sitters Club is full of surprises and challenges.

It's summer and one of five girls hatches a unique plan to start a playgroup for young children three days a week.

But one of the girls, Claudia, has a bossy older sister named Janine. The sisters don't realize it but they are jealous of each other.

Claudia feels that her sister is her parents' favorite because she is smart and proper. Janine thinks that their grandmother, Mimi, loves Claudia more.

One night the sisters are alone in the house with Mimi. They are having another fight when their beloved grandmother feels tired and goes upstairs. Claudia tries to persuade Mimi to come back but it's no use. Silence. THUD.

Later, a doctor explains that Mimi had a minor stroke, which affects her speech and her understanding of the speech of others. But she does recover. Everyone in the family is relieved.

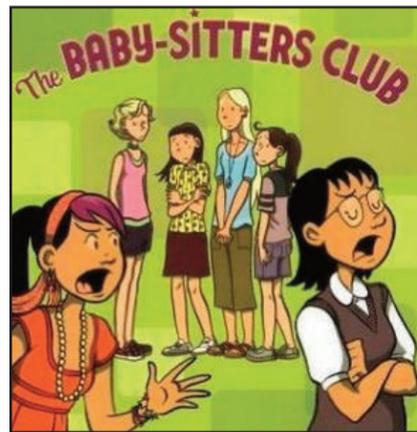
The girls also face challenges from the playgroup.

All the little kids play together except for Jenny. She refuses to participate. She doesn't want her outfits to get messed up. But the babysitters finally persuade Jenny to cooperate.

Even though this is the fourth and last in a series of entertaining books, those unfamiliar with the previous three volumes will find it easy to get to know the characters.

And readers will learn about jealousy and the feeling of being left out of a group. They also will begin to understand that the conflicts of siblings affect others, not just the siblings themselves.

The story may be in graphic form, but it's so amazingly realistic that it goes on in your head long after you close the book.



The book cover gives readers some clues to the story that's told inside

Thievery and Cliffhangers

By ZOE MOREHEAD

THE GLOWING HEART: A JOSEFINA MYSTERY (American Girl: Beforever) by Valerie Tripp. Illustrated by Juliana Kolesova. (Ages 8-12)

The glowing heart is a ruby ring belonging to the main character's stepmom. It disappears, along with a prized horse and an entire cabinet of silver.

So it is up to Josefina and her two sisters, Clara and Francisca, to figure out who stole the valuable items.

When their father decides to sell an important horse to get money for more important things, a man arrives to buy it and acts strangely. Could he be the thief?

This 169-page story, is a typical mystery with a conflict, detectives, several suspects and, eventually, a solution. Many of the chapters end in cliffhangers, which leaves readers wondering what will happen next.

But Francisca lightens the tension with her humor. Sometimes, for example, she mocks a fancy rich man whose only transportation is a donkey.

The book has a great storyline and some interesting secrets, but I didn't like the fact that the girls don't solve the mystery themselves.

The only thing they did was decide to get a statement from a suspect, who blamed another suspect, who just so happened to be the guilty one.

I prefer the Nancy Drew type of mystery stories in which the major characters struggle with the clues and suspects and manage to find the solutions themselves.

But overall, I recommend this book to anyone who likes adventure and mystery. Once you begin, you'll want to finish it.

You might learn some Spanish, too, since the characters sometimes use Spanish words. But don't worry. There's a glossary in the back.

Down the Staircase Into Murch's Past

By LUCY CHAMBERLAIN and LILLY SHAW

You might think Murch's basement has been filled for years with junk and more junk. Actually, it held valuable clues to our school's past.

The underground artifacts showed that Murch has long been a lively place. They also reminded us of how much students and technology have changed.

Kids rarely get to go to the basement, but we got permission to explore it in March for this story.

To get there, we first pushed open an eerie, blood-red door that read: "DO NOT ENTER. AUTHORIZED PERSONS ONLY."

When we entered, we saw an old wooden teacher's desk and smelled damp and musty air as we went down two flights of stairs.

The basement wasn't as dusty or cobwebby as we had imagined. In fact, a lot of it was squeaky clean. It was a bit dimmer than the rest of the school, though. Since it was still winter, we could hear the hissing of the boilers that kept Murch warm.

The storage rooms, though, weren't especially neat. There were chairs scattered around and file boxes stacked in seemingly random locations. An abandoned computer lay face down on the floor. But in the clutter we discovered some interesting items.

Two shelves of old trophies provided proof that Murch has always been a place for champions. There were first-place trophies for boys basketball and chess, and a big, golden trophy for third place in cross-country in 1984. Other awards recalled the 2004 chess team and the cheerleaders of 1999 and 2002-03.

Still other items showed that Murch has been a fun place through the decades. There were discarded board games, a helium tank for filling balloons, and such stuffed animals as a duck, an owl, a zebra, and even a fuzzy tarantula.

Propped in a corner were bows and arrows that older students would recognize from PE classes. Toy shovels and hoes reminded us of the old Murch playground, which had a sand pit. Brightly painted wooden backdrops from last year's Lorax play added some color to the dark rooms.

Some places looked like a technology junkyard: old printers, keyboards and some TVs shaped like cubes, not the flat screens we know today. There were even some typewriters from way back before computers became widely used.

But the most interesting thing was what the basement told us about people and how they've changed over the decades.

For example, in photos of 1963, which we found sitting in a box on a shelf, the kids were dressed formally, with the girls in fancy dresses and the boys in ties. Almost all the girls had bobbed haircuts, while the boys wore their hair short and combed back.

We compared those pictures with those taken in 1995. Those children were dressed casually and had a variety of hairstyles, showing that they

enjoyed greater freedom than the students of three decades earlier.

And there were lots of files showing evaluations of students and teachers of the past.

By the time you read this, the Murch basement will have been cleared of these materials. They are being stored in a school district warehouse.

Some of the items are expected to return when the new Murch is completed. Maybe one of them will be a colorful wooden bench that we found in the basement.

On the bench, some past graduating class drew designs and signed their names as a way of leaving their mark on Murch.

As graduating 5th-graders of 2016, we looked at that bench and couldn't help but think of how we, too, soon will become part of Murch history.

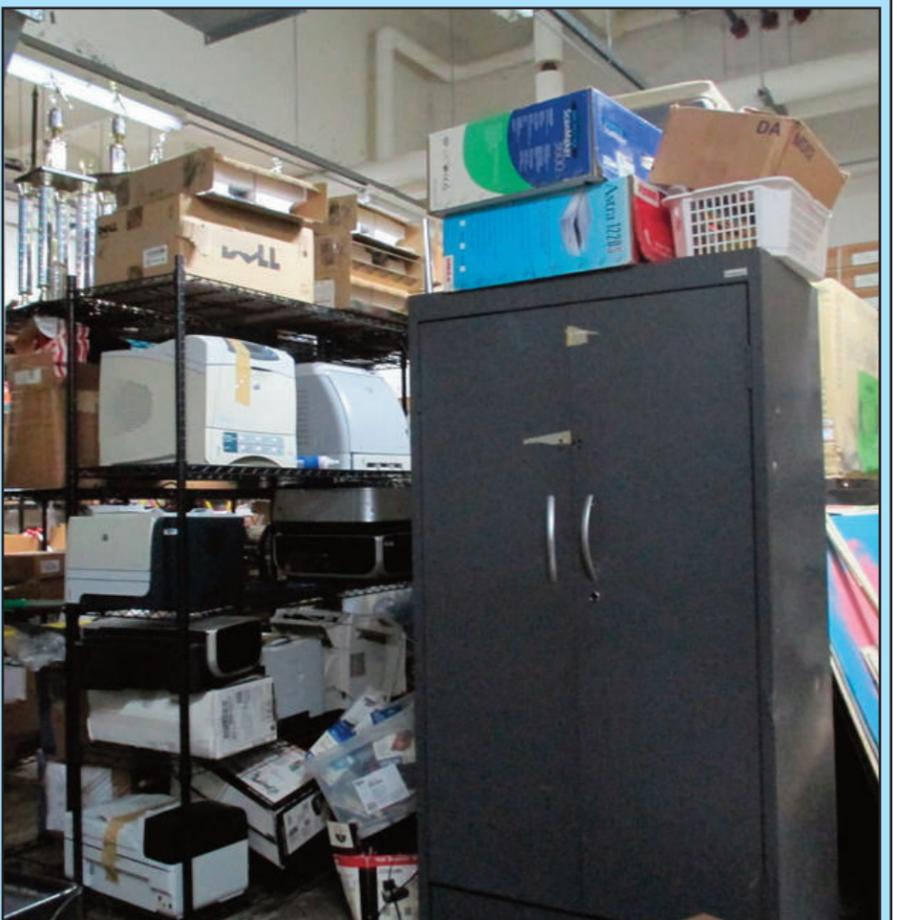


Photo by Simon Holland

A peek into the basement storage room, as it looked in March. Note the old Murch student trophies high on a shelf at the upper left.

More Mice Attend Murch Classes

Teacher shrieks, boy tries to trap them

By RACHEL KOLKO and ZOE MOREHEAD

For many years, mice have been nesting in the 86-year-old Murch Elementary building, searching for scraps of food and often interrupting classes.

Murch's rodent population appears to be increasing, and teachers and students have been screaming about it.

"I shriek and lift my feet off the ground," 4th-grade teacher Sarah Heist said.

Sometimes when she sees a mouse while she's teaching, she tries to hold in her screeches so she doesn't distract her focused students, she said.

Over in room 100, kindergarten teacher Sarah Seltzer recently experienced an annoying problem: Mice were chewing her paper, books and other school supplies.

They were not only disrupting her

teaching, but also spreading germs, she said.

Students realize that the mice must live in tunnels they're been digging around the old school building.

In Peter Snyder's 4th-grade class, one boy tried to capture the intruding rodents with a bucket and then set them free outside.

"I was sitting and reading, and a mouse skittered right past me, and into (the) bucket," recalled 4th-grader Sabrina Bergeron.

Students have noticed that mice were crawling behind Mr. Snyder's white board. Their theory is that they must live behind it.

Mice have appeared in other places, too.

Fifth-grader Rubi Andreaata remembered that when she was younger, stu-

dents heard screaming in the girls bathroom. She and her friends went in, and three mice jumped at them.

Why do the rodents choose to live at Murch?

Students gave these reasons: Murch hasn't been renovated yet, so the old building materials remain and are easier to dig through. Most students eat their lunches in classrooms, leaving many crumbs lying around for mice to eat.

In addition, Ms. Heist said, "they are not afraid of us."

And they need not fear an immediate counter-attack, either. "I asked for additional traps and have not gotten a response," Principal Chris Cebrzynski said in late May.

But he predicted that the two-year construction of a new Murch "will ensure a rodent-free environment."



Now that Murch is headed for renovation, its mouse population faces an uncertain future.

New Music Man Pledges Progress For All Students

More instruments, a chorus, better songs -- and a band, too

(MUSIC from page 1)

outside of school," he said.

Mr. C said he had no difficulty in choosing Mr. Branch because "he came to me highly recommended."

Mr. Branch, 46, a musician since childhood, has been a singer and an instrumentalist on piano, percussion and woodwinds. He has two master's degrees in music education.

When he arrives at Murch, he will enter his 25th year as a music teacher in public and private schools.

His ambitious program for Murch would cost money, which Mr. C said is not in the school's budget.

But he said the program "will likely happen" with help from the Home and School Association. He noted that Mr. Branch "has gotten people to donate instruments."

Mr. Branch said he will be "looking for major support from the students, parents, and the Murch school community. We can together bring a wonderful program (to Murch) that allows everyone to learn and take part."

Mr. Branch's proposed music program should address the complaints of many older students.

Younger kids said they enjoyed Ms. Pruet's classes, but many older ones did not.

First-grader Carlson (Charlie) Bergthold said. "We learn fun holiday songs on holidays and we make fun videos of them." (Videos of Ms. Pruet's classes at all levels are on the Murch website).

Kindergartener Umar Tahir said he learned to play maracas and thought it was really fun.

But many older students complained that the music program -- especially the songs -- are too childish and repetitious.

For example, 4th-graders were required to sing such lyrics as these:

"Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack
All dressed in black, black, black
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons
All down her back, back, back.

They jumped so high, high, high
They reached the sky, sky, sky
And they didn't come back back, back
'Til the 4th of July, ly, ly!"

"I learn a lot of songs I don't like," said Ana Reynolds-Collette, a 5th grader.

Some of the older kids asked Ms. Pruet to teach more mature songs.

But in a February, 2016, post on the Murch website titled, "Entertainment vs. Education," Ms. Pruet wrote:

"I get lots of questions like why can't we sing (Adele, Beatles, etc.) songs in music class? The answer is easy! Those songs are great for entertaining but not for kids learning to become musicians."

In an interview, she added: "The Beatles didn't write any songs to educate children. They aren't teachers."

Fourth grader Ian Wofford said, "(We) mostly learn the notes ti-ti-ta-ta. (We) have no clue about the scale."

But the school district curriculum recommends that kids learn the musical scale in the 4th grade.

Mr. Branch, though, may start even earlier. "The best time to teach students how to read music is around the 2nd and 3rd grades," he wrote in an email to The Blue and Gold.



H.D. Cooke 5th graders, led by Mr. Branch, perform at the 2016 DCPS Music Festival in the Kennedy Center.

"I will begin to teach students in grades 1-5 at Murch about the recorder, which will bring in the beginning stages of reading and sight-reading music."

Music is considered important in elementary school because it helps kids relax, express themselves, show their talents, and realize the importance of music and musicians in our history.

Unlike Murch, some public elementary schools in Washington offer more challenging music programs.

At John Eaton Elementary School, for example, 4th and 5th grade students have a choice of two music teachers, said Mia Gerson, a 4th grader at Eaton.

One teaches voice and the other teaches instruments and forms a band, she said. Together, they organize winter and spring concerts.



B&G Photo by Simon Holland

Mr. Snyder teaches kids to show to support their answers with evidence.

Murch is just right for this new teacher

By SIMON HOLLAND

Remember the fairy tale Goldilocks and the Three Bears? Well, Peter Snyder's careers have been like that. Let's call this story Mr. Snyder and the Three Jobs.

First, he was a stock trader from 1983 to 2003, buying and selling pieces of companies for customers.

"Very fast pace, just a lot of action. I liked the craziness," he remembered. But he said that it got too crazy, too overwhelming.

So he quit being a stock trader and became a fulltime immigration lawyer.

But that was not exciting at all, too boring.

"It was the same thing every day," he said.

So he studied education at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and started teaching 4th-grade kids at Murch this year.

And that was neither too exciting nor too boring. It was just right.

"Yeah, it's been great," he said. "I love it." So he plans to return next year when Murch moves to UDC, where he

learned to teach.

"I like being around kids," said Mr. Snyder, who teaches English language arts (ELA) to 4th-graders. "I've learned so much about being a teacher."

Mr. Snyder grew up in Plainview, N.Y. His mom was a social studies teacher and his dad was a patent lawyer.

As a kid, he enjoyed reading and playing hockey, basketball and other sports, then went to the University of Wisconsin.

Mr. Snyder lives with his wife, Karyn, an event planner. He enjoys reading, cooking barbecue and Mexican food, and occasionally going to the gym.

He dieted and lost 30 pounds this year. Is he "just right" now? No, he says he's still too heavy.

Trailers

(continued from Page 1)

The planners are trying to make the 40 trailers feel as much like the familiar old building as possible.

So, for example, the national flags in Murch's downstairs hallway will be moved and displayed in the UDC trailer park.

There will be many ways for kids to get to school.

With the permission of their parents, older students could board Metro trains to the Van Ness station at the entrance to UDC. Or they could take public buses, which stop close to temporary Murch.

Parents also may fill out forms to ask for school buses to stop near their homes, although some students live close enough to UDC to enable them to walk to school and back.

Many parents may prefer to drive their kids to school. Pick-up and drop-off points will be located on Van Ness Street across the street from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.

Overall, the class schedules in the trailer park will be similar to the way it has been: learning time, recess, lunch, learning time.

There will be a trailer with a full-service kitchen. Most students will get their lunches in the kitchen space and carry them to a cafeteria in a separate tent.

They should enjoy eating together, except that PE will take place in the same tent. Pre-k kids are expected to eat in their classrooms.

The location and size of play spaces for Murch students aren't entirely clear yet.

Pre-k and kindergarten kids will have their recess in an existing playground that is close to the classroom trailers.

UDC wants to install a turf soccer field in a large open space next to the trailers. When it is completed, Murch students could play there.

Until then, they would have access to a small, existing playground and possibly the UDC gym during school recesses.

Club activities and after-school programs are expected to be unchanged, although the details haven't been worked out yet.

WHAT TEACHERS DREAMED OF DOING WHEN THEY WERE KIDS

(DREAMS from page 1)

As a kid, pre-k teacher ALICIA GARFINKEL said she had three dream jobs: singer, ice skater, teacher.

"I loved to sing, and still do! I also remember watching the Olympics and loving Tara Lipinski, and I wanted to ice-skate like her. And I loved going to school and doing things to help my teachers...and playing school with my dolls."



Ms. Garfinkel as a kid



Ms. Garfinkel now

But in her freshman year in college, she said, "I took an education course...and I knew being a teacher was for me."

SARAH SELTZER, a kindergarten teacher, wanted to coach soccer because "my kindergarten PE teacher...played college soccer and often taught us how to play."

She said she became a teacher because "my mom and many of my family members were teachers...I love helping kids learn and feel rewarded when they succeed..."

Fifth-grade teacher VICKI OTTEN wanted to become an architect because "I loved math and shapes and creating shapes within shapes."

But in architecture school, "I felt I was choosing a profession that would take me away from working with people...I left architecture, a decision I have never regretted."

Spanish language teacher JOSEPH CASTEN dreamed of being a chef "so I could eat all the food."

"My mom said it was a great idea. To this day she enjoys eating every-

good. The canned sides -- pineapple or pear, for example -- were way too sweet and syrupy.

The veggie sides also lacked appeal, but for different reasons. The fresh broccoli was too spicy, and the glazed carrots were mushy and covered in a candy-sweet glaze.

So the hot lunches had their ups and downs. One day your taste buds sang, and the next day they groaned.

I recommend that the company that will prepare and deliver D.C. school meals next year should have kid-tasting sessions. Kids can help create menus with recipes that would appeal to most students. Then no one would have to go hungry though the afternoon.

But what I consistently liked about hot lunches at Murch were Wanda Fortune and Tanji Murray, the ladies who serve lunch with smiles. For me, their cheerful attitude made the hot lunch experience much better, even when the food wasn't at its best.

Q & A for Murch at UDC

Here are some frequently asked questions about the Murch trailer campus:

Q: How big will the classrooms be?

A: Each classroom will be about 800 square feet, or about the size of the current 3rd-grade classrooms at Murch.

Q: How will the trailers be furnished?

A: Most of the existing Murch furniture and rugs are expected to be moved into the trailers.

Q: What technology will be in the classrooms at UDC?

A: The school district plans to install a SmartBoard in each classroom. The entire complex will be connected with a public address system and computer network. The computers now used at Murch will be moved into the trailers.

Q: Will there be a library with books?

A: Yes.

Q: Will each resource class have its own classroom?

A: There will be an art and a music room in the trailer complex. Spanish will be taught in the grade-level classrooms as it is now. There will be PE classes in a gym "bubble" or possibly in the UDC gym.

Q: Will all walkways be covered?

A: Yes.

Q: Will bathrooms be in the classrooms or in separate areas?

A: A combination of both. The pre-k and kindergarten classrooms will have a bathroom inside each of their classrooms. Students in older grades will have multi-user bathrooms. Separate bathrooms will be available for staff members and adult visitors.

Q: Will there be a lane for parents to drop off children at UDC?

A: Yes. Safe drop-off and pickup areas close to the campus will be chosen soon.

Q: If students take the bus, how much will their day be lengthened?

A: The distance between Murch and UDC is short, so the ride isn't expected to add much time.

Q: Will students be considered tardy if the bus is late?

A: No.

Q: Who will provide supervision on school buses?

A: The driver and an adult aide.

Hot Lunches: From Yum to Yucky

By LUCY CHAMBERLAIN

Hot lunch. These two words make some Murch students grin while others grimace.

What's to like about it? "Hot lunch is healthy and tastes good. Also, your mom doesn't have to cook for you," said 5th-grader Tavaline (Beaver) Inthavone.

Hot lunch might be convenient and nutritious, but how does it taste, really? After sampling lunches and the opinions of other students for several weeks, I found that school lunches range from pretty great to pretty bad.

Here were some of the highs, followed by the lunch lows:

Homemade cheese pizza: A consistent hit, probably the best of the hot lunches. The pizza was always warm, cheesy and gooey -- a good choice for cheese fans.

Pizza bagel: A close cousin of the best-in-show pizza, this dish consisted of two whole-grain bagels slathered with sauce and

covered with a tasty layer of cheese. There's one word for it: yum.

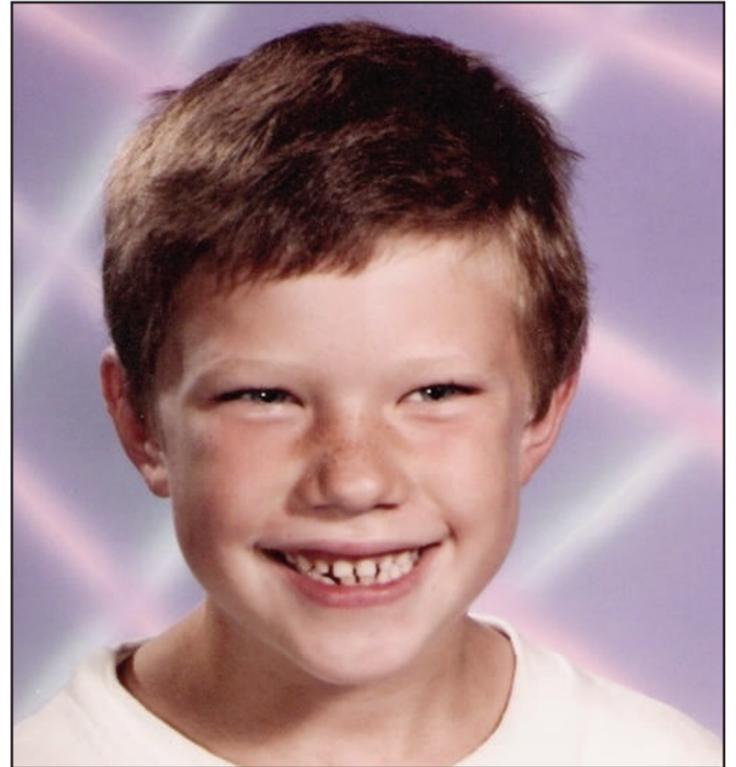
Chicken nuggets with mumbo sauce: The nuggets were meaty and crisp. The sauce had a unique taste, spicy and tangy. But most kids seemed to prefer their nuggets plain.

Buffalo chicken wrap: When I unwrapped this, it looked yucky, and my first taste of it confirmed that impression. The chicken was wet with watery mayonnaise from the coleslaw, a real deal-breaker. One bite was enough for me.

Spaghetti: The whole-wheat noodles and sauce were watery and lacking in flavor.

Korean bibimbap: This stir-fried chicken dish had an odd, strong flavor. Kids seemed like it or despise it. I am not a fan.

The fresh fruit lunch sides -- such as an apple, banana or orange -- were usually pretty



As a 2nd-grader, Daniel Hayden touched a piece of a whale in class. "I was hooked," he recalled years later. He wanted to become a marine biologist.

thing I make." But he turned to teaching when "I realized that chefs don't cook for themselves, but for others. That didn't seem as thrilling."

As a kid in the 2nd grade, DANIEL HAYDEN found his childhood dream when a marine biologist visited his class.

"When he let me hold baleen from a humpback whale, I was hooked," remembered Mr. Hayden, Murch's special education coordinator. He said his parents "were very supportive" but "I later realized that I loved working with children."

Teaching was always the dream job of LAUREN REED, a world geography teacher.

"I had some awesome teachers," she explained. "I loved going to school because of them, and I some day

wanted the chance to make school fun for kids...My dad was a teacher, so he thought it was a great idea...

"Every job I had (tutor, babysitter, counselor, camp aide, nanny) led me closer to being a teacher and this is my favorite job yet!"

LISA WALKER, a kindergarten instructional aide, wanted to be a horse veterinarian because "I was crazy about horses."

"When I told my grandmother I wanted to be a horse doctor, she told me she would disown (reject) me if I did... By the time I was 10, I had decided to become a musician instead.

"I worked for 20 years as a musician before retiring...(But) retirement didn't agree with me, so I began a second career as an instructional aide. I found my new passion."



B&G Photo by Simon Holland

Tanji Murray (left) and Wanda Fortune prepare to serve another hot lunch to Murch kids.