



The Blue and Gold

June 2019

the student newspaper of the Ben W. Murch Elementary School

Founded in 2013

The Unusual Journey of Pablo Giron

By KLEMENTYNA McGUIRE
and EMMA CAPPELLONI

The life journey of Pablo Giron took him from living in poverty in South America to teaching Spanish in Murch Elementary School.

Along the way, he studied economics in Paris and worked in a place that was so dangerous that he needed protection from criminals.

Born in 1953 in Cali, Colombia, Senor Giron, as he is called in his Spanish classes, grew up in a large family that included seven children. His father abandoned his mother when he was only three months old.

The family was so poor that, beginning at the age of 5, young Pablo had to sell newspapers for five pesos (about five cents) each.

As a child, he wanted to become a firefighter so he could save people. At age 12, he wanted to be an engineer because he liked math. But an engineering college was too expensive.

Luckily, he got an opportunity to move to France when his high school French teacher offered him a place to stay with her mother in Paris. He saved for the plane trip and went.

He graduated from the University of Paris Dauphine as an economist. He stayed in Paris for seven years (1973-1980). His first job there was teaching French to immigrants.

But he left France to move back to Colombia because "my wife was homesick and we



Blue and Gold Photo by Aaron Epstein

Kindergarteners re-tell a story in Spanish to a pleased Senor Giron.

wanted to be close to our family," he said. He got a job as the sales training manager for an American company, Colgate-Palmolive. Sometimes bodyguards were assigned to protect him.

"This was the time of Pablo Escobar (a famous boss of international drug smugglers)

and Colombia was very unsafe," Sr. Giron remembered. "Many American companies were cautious about safety."

(see PABLO on page 4)

spring brings
a new garden
to our school

By LLOGAN COLEMAN
and LILA DAVIES

Spring at Murch means a school musical, graduation – and this year the start of a new, improved garden of beautiful flowers and delicious fruits, vegetables and herbs.

But to make this happen, there must be the right combination of sunlight, water, and soil, and enough volunteers to pull up weeds and help keep the plants free of damage from insects and animals.

"It's so exciting and so new," said Alma Paty, a 5th-grade parent and the garden coordinator. "It's a work in progress."

Already, plants are growing in most of 30 new raised beds at the corner of 36th and Davenport Streets. Twelve of the beds are inside the fence of the pre-k playground, while 18 are outside the fence.

(see GARDEN ON PAGE 4)

The Urge to Teach: How did it begin?

By SAHAR GIOVACCINI
and CORA NUAMAH

We wondered when Murch faculty members first realized that teaching was the job for them. So we asked nine of them about the moment (or moments) that they decided to teach.

Principal Chris Cebrynski

He said that he knew a lot about dinosaurs in the fifth grade at Good Shepherd School in Chicago. So his teacher let him go into a third-grade classroom to tell the kids about dinosaurs.

"I felt in charge," Mr.C remembered. "I felt like they were paying attention to me."

In college, he was walking to an art class one day and accidentally went into an education classroom. He said he liked it so much that he decided to major in education.

Kindergarten teacher Sarah Seltzer

Ms. Seltzer grew up in a family of educators. Her mom was a kindergarten teacher and a director of a preschool. Her dad was a high school teacher. Her aunt was a principal of an elementary school.

Of all of them, it was her mother who excited and inspired her the most. As a 4-year-old kid, Ms. Seltzer said, she began playing school in her mother's classroom.

"I would help her decorate and set up the classroom," she recalled. "My mother had the greatest influence on me becoming a teacher because she loved her job and her students really liked her."

Third-grade teacher Timothy Brady

When he was 12, he would go home and do his homework on the kitchen counter. He also helped his 13-year-old brother, Chris, with his writing, organizing and editing his brother's papers on a computer.

Mr. Brady loved to help his brother. That continued all throughout high school. "It made me feel good to see the other person succeed," he said.

"When I was in college, I knew that I liked educa-



Blue and Gold Photo by Aaron Epstein

Ms. Brady gives writing help to Marina Valentina Hess and Nicholas Panwar

tion, but in my freshmen year, I decided to make elementary education my major."

First-grade teacher Katelyn Brady

She had a playroom when she was a first-grader. Almost every day after school and during the summer, she and her older sister would go to their playroom and play school.

They had a teacher's desk, pencils, and learning spots for all of their imaginary students. She even tried to make an overhead projector. "I used transparent paper, and then I would reflect a flashlight through it."

In high school, Ms. Brady worked at a childcare center, and realized that she loved working with kids.

(see MOMENTS on page 4)

Where Are You, Ben?

By ANOUK SCHNEIDER
and SONIA SKOLNIK

GHOST STORIES ARE USUALLY SET IN DARK, CREEPY SURROUNDINGS.

BUT WE'VE BEEN HEARING RUMORS THAT THE GHOST OF BENJAMIN W. MURCH IS HAUNTING THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAMED FOR HIM, EVEN THOUGH IT IS NOW A BRIGHT, CLEAN AND MODERN PLACE.

WE'VE BEEN WONDERING FOR A LONG TIME WHETHER THERE'S ANY TRUTH IN SUCH SPECULATIONS, AND WHY THE GHOST OF MR. MURCH WOULD HAVE ANY REASON TO HAUNT THE SCHOOL.

SO WE'VE ACTED LIKE DETECTIVES AND QUESTIONED THOSE WHO COULD PROVIDE SOME EVIDENCE. WE INTERVIEWED TEACHERS AND AIDES FROM VARIOUS GRADES, ASKING WHETHER THEY KNEW OF ANY STRANGE EVENTS THIS YEAR.

A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER, SARAH SELTZER, TOLD US THAT SNACKS HAVE MYSTERIOUSLY VANISHED FROM CABINET SHELVES.

A TEACHING ASSISTANT NAMED ARUNI HETTIPOLA INFORMED US THAT SUPPLIES WERE FALLING FROM KINDERGARTEN SHELVES WITH NO REASONABLE EXPLANATION.

(SEE GHOST ON PAGE 4)

Memories of Murch

By 5th-graders

It was April Fools Day in Ms. (Avis) McCoy's 5th-grade class. She promised to give a brownie to each of us if we behaved. We did. So she pulled out a piece of paper with an E written in brown crayon. It was really funny. I can't believe I fell for it. -- Lucy Spellacy-Baah

We went on a one day, 4th-grade trip to a ski resort last year. Finally, I got to the lift when

it suddenly stopped. I was so annoyed. We heard that someone had fallen off the lift higher up. At last the lift got moving. I was terrified that I was going to fall off. But we got to the top safely.-- Clementine Kovacs

It was near the end of the day at temporary Murch at UDC. A mob came down the hallway, screaming, "go back to your classroom!" It was a lockdown. A suspicious package had arrived at a nearby embassy.-- Amelia Hannagan

From A to Z: Absurd to Zany

By NAOMI MOREIRA

P IS FOR PTERODACTYL : THE WORST ALPHABET BOOK EVER by Raj Haldar and Chris Carpenter. Pictures by Maria Tina Beddia. (Ages 8 and up)

This is a unique alphabet book. It has many out-of-the-ordinary words, some of which you may not know or be able to pronounce. Yet the book never repeats itself.

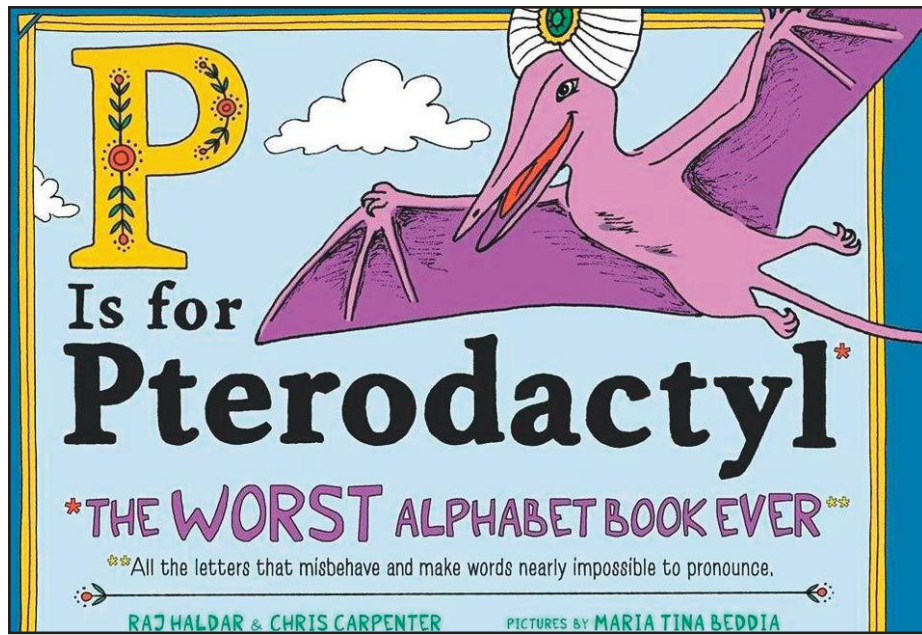
What makes it unique? Well, take the letter D, for example. "D is for Djibouti," the book says. Then it puts that word in this sentence: "The boat race begins when the handsome judge from Djibouti drops a handkerchief from the bridge."

I doubt that many people know what Djibouti is. Do you? (It's a country in eastern Africa. It says so in the glossary at the back of the book).

Ordinary alphabet books use short and simple words, such as "B is for bat," "C is for cat" and "D is for dog." Most alphabet books try to explain what each word means by putting it in a clear sentence.

This book doesn't do any of those things, so it's not the best book to teach your toddler the ABCs.

But I think that the authors are telling



I is not for Eye, N is not for Knot, U is not for You and Y is not for Why

us that alphabet books do not have to be boring. They can be funny. These writers find the humor in our language, and challenge readers with difficult and unusual words.

If you are interested in "P is for Pterodactyl" and want more books from its authors, I'm sorry. This is their only children's book so far.

Raj Haldar is best known as a Philadelphia rapper called Lushlife. Chris Carpenter develops computer software.

our newspaper staff -- and an email

5TH GRADE: Amelia Hannagan, Eleanor Hauser, Clementine Kovacs, Anouk Schneider, Lucy Spellacy-Baah, Sonia Skolnik
4TH GRADE: Jana Alkebsi, Lila Davies, Emma Cappelloni, Logan Coleman, Sahar Giovacchini, Jack Leon, Klementyna McGuire, Naomi Moreira, Cora Nuamah, Luisa Ronnenberg

EDITOR: Aaron Epstein

EMAIL FROM A READER

I thought (the February edition) was so informative. For example, I always see Ms. Berger but I did not know much about her.

And I thought there was some breaking news items in your interview with Mr. C - including the news about the baby mouse and the 3D printer.

I also had no idea there were that many pets at Murch. I'm so glad they are helpful to students.

And I learned about great new books. What wonderful reviews. My (2nd grade) daughters are younger than your reporters, so now I have some good ideas for books for them.

I was a journalism major in college and thought this was a great newspaper.

-- Laura Gross, a Murch parent

A Hidden Hero Of Civil Rights

BY JACK LEON

PIES FROM NOWHERE: How Georgia Gilmore Sustained the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Dee Romito. Illustrated by Laura Freeman. (ages 8-11)

One day in December 1955, Georgia Gilmore was cooking in her kitchen when she heard something on the radio that really upset her.

A black woman named Rosa Parks had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus to a white passenger.

The African-Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, decided to take a stand against the separation of blacks and whites. They refused

to ride the city buses. They walked instead.

Georgia Gilmore and other women made meals and sold them to the protesters and many community members. The money they collected was used to support the bus protest. Some of it was spent to buy gasoline and automobiles, so that the protesters could form carpools.

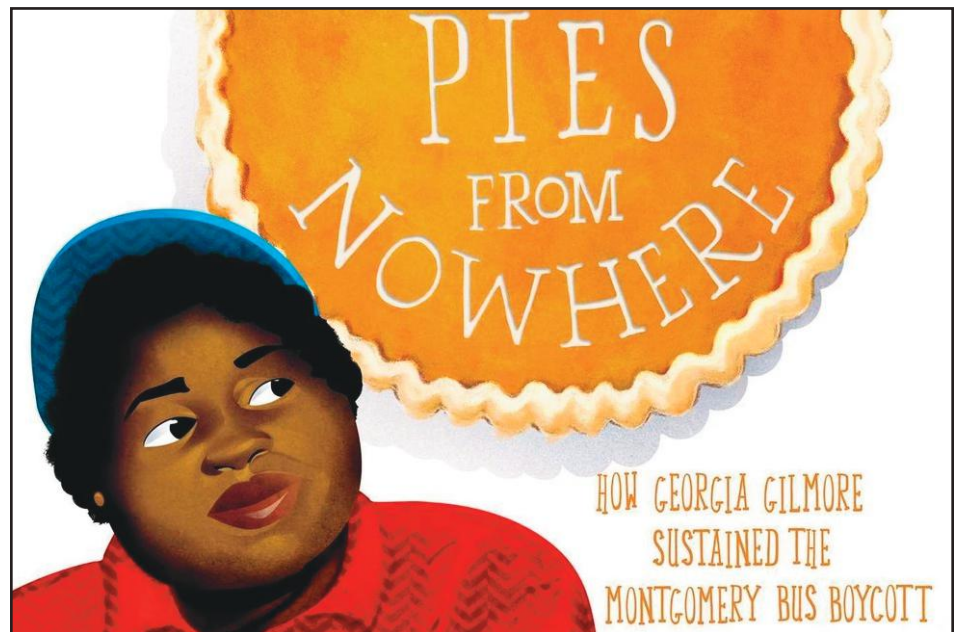
The book is called "Pies from Nowhere" because Ms. Gilmore and the other cooks had to keep their identities a secret so they wouldn't lose their jobs or be thrown in jail.

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King and U.S. Senators John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, who later became presidents, were among the famous people who went to Montgomery to eat Georgia Gilmore's food.

The protest lasted a little more than a year. In late 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separating the races on public buses was illegal. Georgia was thrilled.

This book made me think and feel how hard it must have been for blacks long ago.

If I had been alive back then, and if I had felt the way I do now, I would have stood up for people who sacrificed a lot to gain their civil rights.



Where did the food and the money come from? To anyone who asked, Georgia Gilmore would say that they came from "nowhere."

Women Who Pioneered

By JANA ALKEBSI



25 WOMEN WHO THOUGHT OF IT FIRST by Jill Sherman. (ages 9-12)

I found excitement, fascination and inspiration in the lives and achievements of these 25 unusual women.

One of them, Temple Grandin, caught my eye right away. As a child, she was quiet when she was supposed to be talking. Later, her mother found out that Temple had autism.

This book's helpful glossary defines autism as "a condition that causes people to have trouble communicating and forming relationships with others."

But autism didn't stop Ms. Grandin. She was first to write how it actually feels to live with autism. She invented the "hug machine," which uses pressure to relieve the stress of autism.

She became a college professor of animal science, and helped meat companies

improve their treatment of cows.

Among the other inspiring women in this book is Hedy Lamarr, a famous movie star who thought of a way to make radio signals keep changing.

Her invention made it harder for America's enemies to understand our code messages.

Rachel Carson grew up on a Pennsylvania farm, where she got a close look at nature and wildlife.

As an adult, she wrote books and articles that helped people realize the importance of protecting our environment from dangerous chemicals.

In the end, the government supported Ms. Carson and banned many of the chemicals she had warned about.

I want to mention one more woman, Jane Goodall, whose career came from her love of animals. When she was four, her parents found her watching hens lay their eggs.

The fictional Dr. Doolittle books, about a man who talks to animals, inspired Ms. Goodall to go to Africa and get closer to chimpanzees than anyone had before.

She discovered that these animals behaved much like humans, and she convinced people that the chimps were endangered and needed our protection.

ok, what's your excuse?

By ELEANOR HAUSER
and CLEMENTINE KOVACS

Excuses, excuses, excuses!

"I didn't have time."

"I don't understand how to do it."

"My grandparents didn't know how to do it."

Those are some of the excuses that 5th-grade teacher Vicki Otten has heard from students over the years.

Just about every teacher has heard them: alibis for being late or absent, or not doing homework, or skipping gym, or visiting the nurse.

Some excuses have become familiar school jokes, such as "My dog (or cat or hamster) ate my homework."

But others are truly unusual or weird or sometimes even creative.

Principal Chris Cebrynski, remembering his years as a teacher, said he once had a student who told him, "I couldn't do my homework because my dad got home late and my homework supplies were in the back of his car."

Another kid once informed Mr. C that he couldn't do his homework because "my dog had puppies."

Daniel Hayden, one of our two gym teachers, told of a mother who wanted her son to be excused from gym class because her family was having a fancy dinner that night and she didn't want the boy to get sweaty.

Three 1st-grade teachers recalled some unusual student alibis.

Tara Woods said that her niece once turned in a blank piece of paper instead of answers to a spelling test. The girl's teacher asked why the paper was blank. The niece explained that it was written in invisible ink.

"I had a student whose little brother threw up on his homework," Kathleen Bergin remembered.

And one of Katelyn Brady's students was late getting in line at the end of recess. That student's alibi: She was playing with her alicorn friends. (An alicorn is a unicorn with wings, a popular imaginary animal among some kids).

Tim Brady, a third-grade math teacher, told the story of a boy who said he was too busy to do his homework.

The boy explained that he had to attend a club after school, and then soccer practice, and then piano practice, and then a visit to his brother in the hospital — and by the time he got home it was midnight.

What do you care about?

4th-graders respond

Josepha
(Josie) Ritter



I hate when people leave the sink on or use too much paper towels. It's wasting water and trees.

Cameron
Bates



I want to see more girls playing baseball. No matter our race or our gender or how we look, we should all get the same opportunities.

Phillip (PJ)
Lee



I care about global warming because if the world doesn't have an ozone layer in the future, the world would end and we would have to colonize another planet and the world would be engulfed in flames and all living things would die.

Sarah
Currie



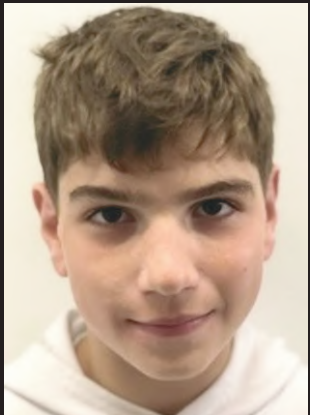
I worry about self-confidence. I want people to give kind comments, not unnecessary or rude or embarrassing comments. Nobody is perfect and there is no need to make people feel bad about themselves.

Jonathan
Lust



I care about climate change because many animals are losing their habitats and dying. Also, the ocean level is rising slowly due to melting ice caps.

Theodore
(Teddy) Kolasky



I want to have more time in school (so) we will get smarter and get better jobs.

Javier (Javi)
Williams



I care about having recess every day so I can play for the entire time. It's a break from class.

Sara
Curiel



Some animals don't have a home. Some are very mistreated. If you see that, you should report it. Give animals love and attention.

Llogan
Coleman



I worry about world hunger. Everyone deserves to be alive, but every six seconds a child dies of hunger.

Cora
Nuamah



I care about inequality. Whenever I see a homeless person out in cold or rainy weather, I feel so horrible because I am in my nice, warm, dry car.

Blue and Gold reporter LUISA RONNENBERG asked 4th-graders to express their opinions briefly in writing about anything that they really cared or worried about.

We are publishing 10 of their replies. They are lightly edited for reasons of clarity and space.

The students were invited to comment on almost any topic. Luisa, a 4th-grader herself, suggested subjects to the students from a long list of possibilities.

The list of topics included recess, lunch, homework, bullying, testing, sports, video games, sports, allowance, TV shows, the Internet, clothing, music, truth, equality, pollution, animals, space travel, climate change, immigration and President Trump.

Of course, many teachers at Murch encourage their students to write their thoughts and ideas.

You can walk around the halls of the school and find student responses on bulletin boards on the walls.

For example, Allen Travitz, a 2nd-grade teacher, asked kids in his class to "tell how you can make Murch, the USA or the world a better place."

One of his students wrote: "I want to stop pollution. If there is still pollution all the fish will die and the whales will die from the plastic."

Readers are invited to express their opinions on any subject by emailing The Blue and Gold's editor at aajacks@starpower.net.

Their Different Paths to the Classroom

MOMENTS from page 1

So she changed her mind. She wanted to teach. One Christmas, she got a chalkboard. "I used to help my teachers get their chalkboards ready for the next day, and I would go home, and make my chalkboard look like theirs."

Second-grade teacher Allen Travitz

In his youth, he wanted to become a veterinarian but he didn't. In college, he studied to become an accountant, but he didn't.

In 2006 he discovered his future when he worked at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. A supervisor asked him to teach some classes to children, ages 6 to 10.

"The kids I taught had great ideas, and helped me see things in a different way," he said.

So he studied education at American University and became a teacher.

Fifth-grade teacher Tatum Kelly

It was her sophomore year of high school, and she was a softball coach for disabled students in Newtown, PA. She liked the feeling of showing kids how to start with T-ball.

"We were rolling ground balls and we would set up the T so the disabled students could swing. I really felt at that moment that [teaching] was what I was meant to do."

Fourth-grade teacher Asha Mathur

As a child in India, "I would gather the kids in the neighborhood and pretend to teach them math," Ms. Mathur remembered.

During a summer in New Delhi, she taught three



Blue and Gold photo by Aaron Epstein

Mr. Travitz explains measurements to 2nd-grader Clara Sion.

or four kids on her porch, writing on a wooden plank that she had converted into a blackboard.

After each session, "I felt accomplished. I felt...good...If I couldn't be a doctor, my backup was to be a teacher."

Pre-k teacher Tashima Hawkins

As a child, she played school with her cousins, ages 6 and 7. But she didn't want to be a teacher then. She wanted to be a nurse.

That changed when she took a class in children's literature to fill in her college schedule and fell in love with teaching.

"I created an ABC book in my children's literature class, and I was very excited working through the process, and once I finished, I read it to a group of students."

The students loved the book and wanted her to read it to them again and again.

Hot Lunch: Good But Needs Fixes

By JANA ALKEBSI

In a week of tasting hot lunches in the new Murch cafeteria, I found that the main dishes ranged from "wonderful" to "needs improvement."

The wonderful dish was the quesadilla, a Mexican favorite consisting of a tortilla filled mostly with cheese and sometimes meats. The quesadilla I sampled at Murch had gooey, tasty cheese on it, and was even better with pieces of chicken.

On another day, I tasted the burger, which was ok but could have used more cheese. It came with ketchup and mustard, which helped.

Macaroni and cheese was my next main dish. It was tasty and had a nice melt in my mouth. But this time there was too much cheese. It is supposed to be macaroni and cheese, not cheese and cheese.

Next came BBQ chicken, served with moist rice and soggy carrots. The chicken was too soft. It could have used more texture. Overall, it was a good dish but needed more work.

Last came pizza. It was full of flavor and warmth. But it came in the form of a cup, which made it hard to eat. One bite made the sauce spill out.

So whatever the lunch ladies are doing, they should keep doing. But a few fixes in some of the dishes might not be so bad.

Kids Help Plants Grow

GARDEN from page 1

The new garden is an educational place for students in many classes to learn what makes a garden grow.

Pre-k kids, for instance, have learned to collect leaves and put them in two new bins. The materials in the bins are called compost and will be used to add nutrients to the soil.

They also practice their writing by putting up signs to protect the new plants.

"Plees Do Not Tatt," one sign says. Another reads: "Plese Do Not Tocth." What can people expect to see growing in the new garden in the coming months?

"If these raised beds are successful," Ms.

Paty said, "we'll see lettuce in June, peppers and eggplants in July, and maybe melons in early August."

And, she added, "we need to plant pumpkins soon" for the fall harvest. The plantings include such flowers as sunflowers and tulips, and such vegetables as kale, okra, cucumber, squash, onions, rutabaga and collard greens.

Some beds contain herbs, which make foods taste better. Among them are parsley, basil, dill, cumin, cayenne pepper and cilantro.

Principal Chris Cebzynski said that the plants were donated to Murch by UDC's College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Science (CAUSES).

Help with the planting came from Nona Kumah, a trained gardener. The raised bed frames were made possible by a community service project of Sofia Ronnenberg and Abby Bozell, two 8th-grade Girl Scouts at Deal Middle School.

Watering and other care of the garden must continue during the hot summer months.

"I live nearby and will be checking," Ms. Paty said. "But we will need help! Please!"



Blue and Gold photo by Aaron Epstein

Pre-k kids harvest greens for Quincy Jones, a pet guinea pig in Tashima Hawkins' classroom. Parsley is Quincy's favorite, Ms. Hawkins said.

THE MURCH SEARCH

GHOST from page 1



AND 2ND-GRADE TEACHER ALYSSA PINKS REPORTED THAT HER CLASSROOM DOOR OPENED AND CLOSED WHEN THERE WAS NO ONE AROUND, THE WINDOWS WERE CLOSED, AND THERE WAS NO TRACE OF A BREEZE.

FOR YEARS, STUDENTS HAD NOTICED ODD HAPPENINGS IN THE OLD SCHOOL. ANITA SHALLET, A 5TH-GRADER, RECALLED THAT SHE ONCE WALKED OUT OF A BATHROOM STALL, AND ALL THE LIGHTS WENT OFF AND ALL THE SINK FAUCETS TURNED ON.

WE WONDERED: WHERE WOULD REN'S GHOST HANG OUT? THE LOGICAL PLACES ARE THE CUPOLA, THAT CURIOUS TOWER AT THE TOP OF THE ORIGINAL BUILDING, AND THE BASEMENT.

BUT WE WERE INFORMED THAT THE CUPOLA IS NO LONGER THE MESSY, DIRTY AND SPOOKY PLACE IT USED TO BE.

SO, NATURALLY, WE HAD TO GO TO THE BASEMENT. ON A MONDAY AFTERNOON, ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR MARY ECKSTEIN AC-

COMPANIED US DOWN THE STEPS TO THE BASEMENT. BUT WHEN WE GOT DOWN TO THE SUBSTRUCTURE OF OUR RENOVATED SCHOOL, WE SAW A BRIGHT ROOM, FULL OF GIANTIC HEATING AND AIR-CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT.

WE GLANCED AT EACH OTHER, AGREEING THAT THIS WAS NOT THE TYPE OF PLACE FOR A GHOST TO STAY. BUT AS WE CONTINUED TO EXPLORE, WE BEGAN TO FEEL DIFFERENTLY.

MS. ECKSTEIN ESCORTED US INTO THE HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATION'S STORAGE SECTION, WHERE WE SAW SHELVES STACKED WITH CAULDRONS, JACK-O-LANTERNS, COSTUMES AND OTHER HALLOWEEN SUPPLIES.

HALLOWEEN IS GENERALLY ASSOCIATED WITH GHOSTS, SO WE FIGURED THAT THIS COULD BE A WELCOME SPOT FOR A GHOST OR PHANTOM.

WE WERE CURIOUS TO LEARN WHETHER ANYTHING HAD DISAPPEARED FROM THE BASEMENT RECENTLY. SO WE ASKED MS. ECKSTEIN.

SHE REPLIED: "DISAPPEARED? HMMM. TWO MURCH T-SHIRTS WENT MISSING."

WE LOOKED OVER OUR NOTES ON ALL THE INFORMATION THAT WE HAD GATHERED. WE COULD BLAME HUMANS, MICE, A GHOST OR A COMBINATION OF THOSE SUSPECTS.

WE WILL NEVER KNOW FOR SURE WHETHER REN W. MURCH'S GHOST REALLY IS ON THE PROMUL -- OR WHETHER IT IS ONLY SOME STUDENT WHO WANTS US TO THINK THAT.

Guess What Scared Sr. Giron

PABLO from page 1

Sr. Giron, wanting a better life for his wife and children, moved to the United States in 1992. He got an education degree at East Carolina University and started teaching at an elementary school in Wallace, North Carolina.

He had never taught young children before.

"I was so scared," he said. "They were all looking at me. So I started singing a song from when I was a kid and the kids joined in."

"The song went like this: 'Es los pollitos disen pio pio pio.'" (*The little chick says 'cheep, cheep, cheep'*).

"I had never sung before," he said. "That day I became a singer and a teacher."

But Sr. Giron said that he grew "tired of living in a place where everyone around me sees the world in black and white." So he moved to the Washington, DC, area, where there is a greater mix of people.

Last fall he began teaching Spanish classes to Murch kids. Each child from kindergarten through 5th grade attends a 45-minute Spanish class once a week. That isn't enough, he said.

"My wish is to expose more kindergarten, first and second graders to more hours per week...and have students in the fifth grade be proficient when they move to middle school."

But, he added, "I think I've been able to create a learning environment that invites students to love learning Spanish."

Mary Jane Webb, a 2nd-grader, agreed. Sr. Giron is "making kids more excited to learn Spanish," she said. "He lets us watch lots of fun videos. I have friends who are liking Spanish when they never did before."

After school, Sr. Giron said he goes home to Fairfax, VA, and chats with Gladys, his wife of 43 years and a retired kindergarten teacher.

He might prepare the next day's lessons, watch TV ("I never miss a Jeopardy game. I love it."), listen to music, or work on his poetry or short stories. He and his wife take long walks or ride their bikes on weekends.

They have two sons and a daughter: One son, Leo, teaches dance in Colombia. The other son, Olivier, has a degree in photography and works for National Geographic. Their daughter, Joelle, is a nurse in South Carolina.