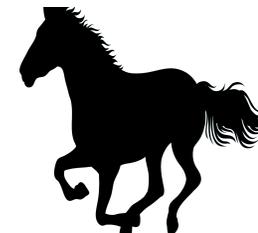


June 2021

The Blue and Gold



the student newspaper of Murch Elementary School, Washington, DC

Founded 2013

What Kids Learned During Long Homestay

Cooking, meditating, writing

By LILLY SHAW

At the start of my quarantine, I vowed to make good use of the additional time that I would have at home.

So I reorganized my room, perfected my roller skating turns, and learned to speak minimal Italian. I also gave my cats the attention they always beg for.

I had time to learn to cook, too, so I decided to try my recipe app, Tasty and Sally's Baking Addiction, to the test. I tried to make bagels for the first time. Altogether, the preparation, rising, boiling and baking of the dough took me five hours to produce about two dozen bagels for my family to enjoy.

Later, I figured that my time would be better spent on something that would last, something that would help me overcome my fears for our country, my family and friends.

(see LILLY on page 4)

Coping with stress

By RONAN SHAH

After I moved here from Brooklyn and went to Murch for a few months, we went completely virtual.

In Brooklyn I would go to friends' houses, or to the schoolyard to play, or to martial arts.

But since moving to Washington, DC, I've been mostly alone, and the pandemic made it worse. Being away from friends can be stressful and depressing.

Here are some things that may help. They helped me when I felt stressed, angry or sad:

1. READ A BOOK. One called "Alex & Me" was inspiring for me. It's about the 20-year friendship of research scientist Irene Pepperberg

(see RONAN on page 2)

Attending online classes

By ABIGAIL DANNENBERG

There is a lot of talk among adults about the pros and cons of distance learning for kids. But what's missing are the views and experiences of the kids themselves.

As a 5th-grader who has been attending online classes since March 2020, I can report that the technology, despite improvements made since the spring of 2020, remains the most frustrating problem.

Yet, even remotely, there was a lot of teaching and learning going on. In a 5th-grade social studies class taught by Margaret (Corri) Deegan, we spent a week on the causes of the Civil War. Students were asked to decide which event had the greatest impact and why.

"I think the election of 1860," Lucy Ziesler wrote, "because when Abraham Lincoln was elected, 11 states seceded and made (see ABIGAIL on page 4)

How the Pandemic Brought Us a Radio Show for Kids

By SAHAR GIOVACCHINI

A bug scientist, a star pitcher, and a head of the National Zoo. These were just a few of the guests on a year-long radio show called Kojo For Kids.

Every Monday on WAMU 98.5, kids were invited to call in and ask questions of whoever was chosen to be the guest of host Kojo Nnamdi that day.

Lauren Markoe, who booked the guests, said that she often asked others to recommend people who would appeal to kids. At other times, ideas just popped into her head.

One day, she recalled, "I saw a fire truck

on the street and I thought, 'we haven't had a firefighter on the show.' "

A few weeks later, the guest on Kojo for Kids was Tiffany Green, the first female African-American fire chief of Prince George's County.

Asked whether you have to be big and tall to be a firefighter, she replied: "No...I'm only 5'2."

Kojo for Kids began in March 2020, when schools were closed and kids had to learn from home, so "we started Kojo for Kids with guests that would interest kids," Ms. Markoe said.

The show ended about a year later after Kojo Nnamdi decided to retire from four of his five daily shows.

Kojo for Kids didn't steer away from controversial topics that many students liked to hear discussed.

For example, author Jason Reynolds talked about racism after the protests sparked by George Floyd's death in an encounter with police in Minneapolis. Many kids called in, among them 8-year-old Benjamin, who said he was scared of being a black person.

"It's okay for you to be afraid," Mr. Reynolds told the boy. "But also know that being a black person comes with a lot of amazing things." He mentioned black history, music and inventions, concluding (see KOJO on page 4)



Guess Who

Murch students are invited to name the three adults whose childhood photos are shown on the left. Hint: Each is on the Murch faculty or staff. Email your three answers to Editor, aajacks@starpower.net.

Vasco, Poco, a Shadow and a Polluted Moon

By CHARLES KERR

NONSTOP written and illustrated by Tomi Ungerer (ages 5 to 8)

It is the future and a man named Vasco is left behind while everyone else on Earth goes to the moon to escape pollution.

Vasco is alone with tumbling towns, a shadow who can guide him out of danger, and a baby alien named Poco. They must escape melting mazes, tsunamis, and more!

My favorite part of this unusual story is about how the moon turns pitch black because the people living there are polluting it nonstop.

The book also is great because of its vocabulary. I mean words like “scorched” (dried out by the sun or a fire) and “deafening” (a noise so loud that it is nearly impossible to hear anything else).

These words are not typically found in children's books. I had to look up some of the tough ones.

Tomi Ungerer, who died in 2019, wrote 140 books. He won the Hans Christian Andersen Award, one of the most important prizes that a children's book author can earn.

Mr. Ungerer once said that many of his books remained popular with kids because “they broke all the rules applied to children's books.”

In my opinion, *Nonstop* is a wonderfully creative book. I tested it on my little brother, a 1st-grader, and he loved it, too.

Readers React to "Pandemic Diaries"

Another wonderful issue. This one is so from the heart and it was fun to have articles from (alumni) Lilly and Rachel and Simon as well as this year's crop! Thanks for doing this in the midst of all the chaos.

— Vicki Otten, retired Murch 5th-grade teacher

I read all the stories and enjoyed them greatly. Loved the stuffed animal meeting, walks with Moose, the dog, the stresses and strains and interactions between kids and their parents, and so much more. The work (of) the Murch students will be something that they will remember throughout their lives.

— Jill Gross, Washington, DC

We are thrilled to have this volume. It is a jewel of a snapshot in time.

— Jennifer and Glenn Leon, Murch parents

Thank you for guiding these young journalists so beautifully — really loved that you cared enough to really convey journalistic principles, never talking down to them.

— Ingalisa Schrobsdorff, former Murch parent

This issue was especially meaningful and reading my son's journal entries, as well as those of his schoolmates, definitely helped me understand their state of mind better.

— Viren Shah, Murch parent

This was a terrific edition of the newspaper! Great idea to have the kids keep journals which seem very well written.

— Arlene Johnson, Fairfield, CT, retired high school teacher

The level of maturity and introspection is wonderful. Thank you so much for giving them a voice.

— Aniko Debreceeny, Frederick, MD, music teacher

It was a brilliant idea to do this and it was so well executed by these great kids. Some of them made me laugh, some made me want to cry, and all of them told their stories well.

— William Vance, Bonita Springs, FL, retired journalist

Wow! Thanks so much for taking the time to put this together. It is great to read now, but I can imagine how meaningful it will be to them as they age.

— Marybeth Snyder, Washington, DC, Murch parent

How to Beat Stress

(RONAN from page 1)

and an intelligent African grey parrot named Alex. Whenever I face something hard, I re-read “Alex & Me” to remind myself that I shouldn't get all worked up when others have bigger hardships.

2. GO OUTSIDE. After being inside on a computer screen all day, I found it difficult to go outside for a bike ride or a walk. But, trust me, it helps.

3. ATTEND VIRTUAL SCHOOL. You're probably thinking, “Virtual school is the worst!” But sometimes living with the family all day during the quarantine got on my nerves. Virtual school allowed me to take a break and interact with other kids.

4. RESOLVE YOUR DISPUTES. If you're ever in an argument or another unpleasant situation, sometimes it's wise to just give in. When my dad wanted me to wear a mask and I didn't, we started arguing. At last, I realized that wearing a mask made sense — and that I had no good reasons to refuse.

And that's the point. If you don't have good reasons for something, don't argue about it. After all, we've all heard those silly arguments on television -- and maybe in real life, too -- about things like who gets to eat the last cookie or gets to watch TV.

STAFF OF THE BLUE AND GOLD

5th graders: *Abigail Dannenberg,*
Ronan Shah

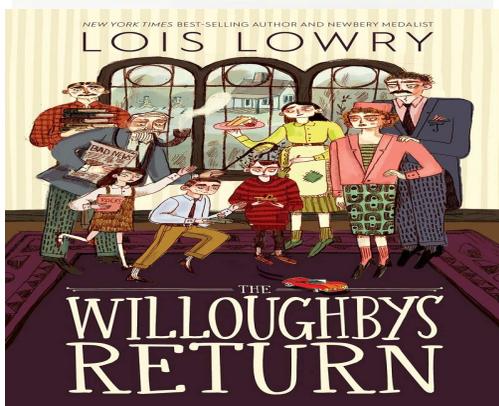
4th graders: *Halle Epstein, Sophie Kozar,*
Charlie Kerr, Jason Nuamah

Alumni: *Sahar Giovacchini,*
Cora Nuamah, Lilly Shaw

Editor/Journalism Coach: Aaron Epstein

First Rule: We Shall Not Bore the Reader

Parents, Frozen for Decades, Are Puzzled by Modern Life



By **JUSTIN NUAMAH**

THE WILLOUGHBYS RETURN by Lois Lowry (ages 8-12)

Imagine that you fell asleep in 1990 and woke up 30 years later in 2020.

That's what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby in this sequel to *The Willoughbys*. They returned from being frozen in the Swiss Alps for 30 years. They thawed when global warming started to melt the ice caps — and, amazingly, they had not aged in all that time.

So when they came back to the United States, they learned that they had become grandparents while still in their 30s.

And they knew nothing about modern technology and communication.

"That's it!," said Mrs. Willoughby. "I am so tired of all this Googling and YouTubeing and FaceTiming And Zappo-ing or whatever it is, and Instagram and — Skype? What on earth is that? Henry, we missed out on everything while we were frozen!"

Mr. Willoughby complained to his wife:

"The news was on TV while you were gone, Frances, and I understood nothing. What is Brexit? Who is Tom Brady? And what is Facebook?"

(Brexit refers to Britain's departure from the European Union. Tom Brady is a famous American football player. Facebook is a popular website on the Internet).

I have not read the first Willoughby book. But I did see the movie version and the parents were really nasty in it. They are not as mean in *The Willoughbys Return*.

One character, Ben Poore, who really is poor, tried to sell outdated encyclopedias. Really, who would buy outdated encyclopedias? Would you?

This is a funny book, especially because of the amusing comments on our modern life.

And if Lois Lowry's name sounds familiar, you may know her most famous book, *The Giver*. It won the John Newbery Medal, which is awarded each year to the best children's book.

Untold stories of women who fought for equality

By **SOPHIE KOZAR**

FINISH THE FIGHT by Veronica Chambers and staff of The New York Times (ages 8- 12)

This book is about women's suffrage and the strength it takes to fight for equal rights. The women in these stories come from different places, but they all lived at a time when women were not allowed to do the same things as men. *Finish the Fight* helped me understand how hard it was for the suffragettes to fight for what they believed was right.

Most of these fighters were women of color. A major point of this book is to correct the history of the movement to win the right of women to vote. In the past, white women, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, got most of the attention. This book tells about some of the women who were left out.

A story about Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, an African-American writer, reminded me of Rosa Parks, although she lived almost 100 years before Ms. Parks.

She was riding a streetcar when the conductor said she was not allowed a seat. She refused to stand and had to get off the

streetcar. She was furious. And to make matters worse, the conductor refused to accept her money.

When Mabel Ping-Hua Lee was a teenager, she decided to fight for American women's right to vote even though she would not be allowed to because she was born in China. Susette La Flesche Tibbles was a Native American woman who fought for the right to be a teacher. The authors tell us that "she never stopped speaking up for her people. She became a journalist, writing about white settler's violence against the Native Americans and other discriminatory treatment."

Jovita Idar was Mexican. Not as much is known about her, but according to the book, "Jovita originally worked as a teacher, but she grew frustrated with the unequal conditions for Mexican children, so in 1910 she joined the staff of her father's newspaper, where she could fight for change".

I found the writing a little advanced, but it did make me curious about what was going to happen next. Normally, I like fiction and fantasy books, but I enjoyed the thrill of these non-fiction stories, and the photographs from the past.

How Olga Traveled Without Leaving Home

By **HALLE EPSTEIN**

THE KIOSK, Written and illustrated by Anete Melece. Translated by Elina Braslina. (Ages 5-9).

Olga runs a small, open-fronted hut where she sells magazines, newspapers, candy, tobacco and other items. It is called a kiosk. Olga even lives in her kiosk.

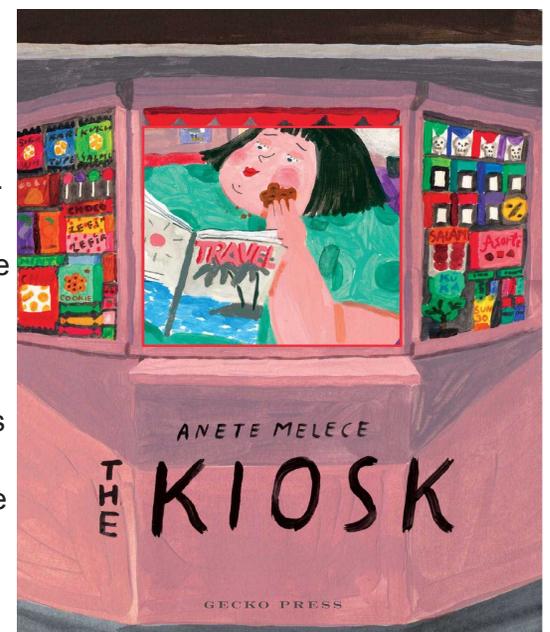
But Olga is bored. She dreams of distant seas and splendid sunsets. She wishes that she could somehow make those dreams come true, yet she is afraid to leave her kiosk to try new things.

Then Olga discovers that she can wear the kiosk like a dress, making it possible for her to walk without leaving her kiosk. When a crazy dog accidentally knocks her into a river, Olga finds herself on an unexpected journey.

By the end, Olga does reach her goal. She learns that even when something bad happens, a good opportunity may follow.

I love Anete Melece's creative story and bold, colorful illustrations. I could never have come up with the extraordinary series of events that happened in the story of Olga and her kiosk.

Ms. Melece is an author and illustrator from



Latvia, a small country just west of Russia. She also does film animation. In fact, she did the animation for a short film of *The Kiosk*.

I thought the film was a little strange because the characters made weird sounds.

You can see it for yourself on your computer by going to this address: <https://www.shortoftheweek.com/2018/03/05/the-kiosk/>.

The One-Year Life of a Children's Radio Show

(KOJO from page 1)

that black people have “more to celebrate than to fear.”

Host Kojo Nnamdi said he was motivated to do the show by “my vivid memories of my own childhood: about all of the things I liked when I was a kid, about all of the things I learned, about all of the people I met when I was a kid.”

If you're wondering about the bug scientist, baseball pitcher and zoo director mentioned at beginning of this article, those guests were Michael Raupp, the University of Maryland's expert on insects, better known as The Bug Guy; former Washington Nationals left-hander Sean Doolittle, and National Zoo director Steven Monfort.

"I spend part of my life telling people how wonderful bugs are and the other part telling people how to kill bugs," Mr. Raupp said.

Mr. Doolittle, who pitches for the Cincinnati Reds now, said he changed his Nationals jersey number to 63 “to honor my grandparents,” who were married for 63 years.

Mr. Monfort, the zoo director, recalled the 6th-grade teacher who helped him understand nature.

“We went on walks, and she would let us catch some bugs and she had a snake in the classroom, and we would put them in little tanks and terrariums.”

You can listen to all shows on your computer at this address: <https://thekojonnamdishow.org/projects/kojo-for-kids>.

“The Quarantine Taught Me What Matters”

(LILLY from page 1)

I discovered meditation, a practice of focusing my mind to develop my awareness, attention and compassion. I tried a variety of techniques. For me, the most beneficial method was journaling: writing about such things as gratefulness, my mood and my health.

In one entry, I wrote about “the little things that make life enjoyable: A giggle, a beautiful song, a new cuisine, a warm shower.”

I also described how hate can lead to violence and even death, but also how “small acts of kindness to everyone can make the difference in one's life.”

Visual mediation, in which I imagined scenery and images, also became incredibly useful. In the evenings, for example, I learned to visualize my next day or a travel destination after the pandemic .

I imagined a peaceful lake and forest, enabling me to relax without leaving home. I found that I could recapture past experiences that I cherish. I often recalled my grandparents' houses and their warm smiles.

Instead of focusing on the awful things of Covid-19, I was able to remind myself of such positive things as beautiful sunrises, the importance of gratitude, adorable puppies and kittens, the good health of my family and friends, and the kindness of my best teachers.

All in all, the quarantine has taught me that what matters the most will be with me no matter what.

Despite Tech Glitches, Students Learned

(ABIGAIL from page 1)

their own country because they wanted to keep slavery and Lincoln was going to try to get rid of it. But (the 11 states) started a war over whether or not slavery should be allowed.”

Another student, Darian Hendi, thought it was the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott ruling that enslaved black people were property and did not have the same rights as whites. That decision, Darian thought, “defined slavery in America” and “was a spark plug” for an uprising of opponents of slavery.

But online classes didn't go so well for a few students. Some of their screens froze. Others couldn't get into the presentation at all.

Aside from the technical glitches, I learned as well as I did before the pandemic. But it may have been easier for 5th-graders like me to navigate the online world than for younger students.

Overall, though, I think that kids got way too much screen time. When you add up online class time and out-of school entertainment online, that can be over six hours of screen time in one day.

That isn't good for kids. It strains their eyes and often prevents them from getting outside and moving around in fresh air.

But working at home does have its benefits. When I'm stressed or tired, my parents are always there with a hug. And there are no more lunches in ice packs being tossed around in my backpack, sometimes winding up cold and wet and messy. Lunches at home are warm and dry, and really quite yummy.

Another advantage: I used to have to get up at 7 am every morning in order to arrive at school by 8:30. But in the online learning world, I didn't have to get up until 8. That was an hour more of sleep. Ah, the luxury!

In some of the resource classes, distance learning was a real disadvantage. Not everyone had enough open space at home to do PE exercises. I didn't enjoy having to dodge the chairs at home.

And finally, the most awful aspect of all: no recess with friends.

Teachers had to change -- and so did Honey.

By CORA NUAMAH

For over a year now, teachers have had to change their ways of educating kids.

To understand this journey, I interviewed two teachers of the youngest of Murch's students.

Pre-kindergarten teacher Daniela Silver said she had to let go of much of what she had done at Murch. For example, her kids, ages 4 and 5, used to go with her on nature walks. Instead, she asked her kids to find objects outside, such as rocks or sticks, and share it with the class online.

Pre-k math games changed, too. Instead of using the materials in their classrooms, they found stuff lying around their homes to measure and compare.

Kindergarten teacher Sophie Schwadron said that teaching from home was like trying to learn a new job. She asked herself: How can I reduce the students' stress during online classes? Her solution: Get to know about her students' lives at home.

“A student got a puppy and everyone was very excited to see the new puppy,” she recalled.

Ms. Schwadron asked parents to pass out envelopes, stamps, and address labels so that students could write to friends, family members, and each other -- “one of the most fun ways to practice writing,” she said.

One Saturday morning, about 10 families got together online with a chef to make banana bread.

“Everyone gathered their ingredients at their own homes and we did all the steps together,” Ms. Schwadron said. “It was fun to learn a new thing together and the banana bread was super good!”

The life of the class pet, a bearded dragon named Honey, changed, too.

At Murch, the lizard lived in a tank on a classroom shelf. The kids fed Honey, bathed her, cleaned her tank and monitored her health.

But during the pandemic, Honey stayed in Ms. Schwadron's house. Yet Honey sometimes attended the closing circle.

That's when the young kids sit on the floor, share their memories of the day, and bring the class to a peaceful conclusion.

(Cora, a former Blue and Gold reporter, is a student at Alice Deal Middle School)