



# The Blue and Gold

June 2022

the student newspaper of Murch Elementary School, Washington, DC

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## My Years Abroad

A player's report on team's memorable 2022 season

By **COOPER BIRGFELD**

The Murch boys basketball team had a successful 2022 season, reaching the second round of the playoffs after a year off caused by Covid-19.

Murch finished the regular season with a solid 4-1 record, led by multiple scorers on offense and a strong 2-3 defense that shut down most of our opponents.

Being part of that team was the highlight of my seven years at Murch. All of us became good friends.

Our only defeat in the regular season was a 25-11 loss to Lafayette, usually a top team among our competitors.

Our defense fell apart in the second half but Coach Jordan Tama told the players afterward: "The game was a tough loss, but we may face them again in the playoffs."

That didn't happen, but we became eligible for the playoffs by overwhelming Stoddert, 30-8, in a wild-card game. In our first playoff game, we easily beat John Lewis by 13 points — and then met the strong Watkins Panthers.

Watkins had a player who was six feet tall and easily able to grab rebounds of missed layups. At halftime, Teddy Wallsten, one of our best players, told us:

"We are only down by 4. Not that much. The game will be won by whoever wants it most. Do not get too down on yourself."

But when the second half began, Watkins scored six

(see TEAM on page 4)



(left to right) Blue and Gold reporter Orla Ventresca, 10, sister Elsie, 12, and brother Hugh, 9, photographed last year in front of a World War II monument in Kyiv, capital of Ukraine. Elsie attends Alice Deal Middle School and Hugh is a Murch 3rd-grader.

By **ORLA VENTRESCA**

Before I came to Murch as a 4th-grader last fall, I lived in two other countries because my dad's job with the U.S. State Department required that my family move every few years.

So when we moved to Sweden for three years and then to Ukraine for one, I went to international schools where the students and teachers came from a variety of nations.

Living there was difficult at times, but I had experiences that I couldn't have had anywhere else.

You may be surprised to find out that in the winters in Stockholm, the capital of the northern European nation of Sweden, we had to go outside for two 20-minute recess periods every day — whether there was sun, rain, snow or below-freezing temperatures.

Often it was so cold that I had to wear lots of thermal layers. We didn't move around much. We just waited for recess to be over.

The school principals in both Sweden and Ukraine wanted as

little dirt or snow as possible in the classrooms. So we were required to change our shoes when going out or back inside.

I found it odd that we never got off on snow days or American holidays. That meant that we had to go to school on Thanksgiving. My brother, sister and I all thought it was unfair that our dad got off for the holiday but we didn't.

But we did enjoy some of the Swedish holidays. I remember the chocolate cake served after lunch on the day that honors Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite who left most of his fortune for prizes to people who did outstanding work for peace and in science and literature.

My favorite food in Sweden was kanelbula, a big cinnamon roll. There was even a Kanelbula Day. We still had to go to school, but my dad made some for breakfast. I was disappointed that Sweden had no American

(see ABROAD on page 4)

A few lessons teachers learned as kids in school

By **YORDAN SLANCHEV**  
and **JASON NUAMAH**

Chances are that if you've been a student for a few years, you've gotten into trouble or been embarrassed in school at least once.

So did many teachers at Murch when they were kids.

Fourth-grade teacher Timothy Brady, for example. He stopped doing his homework for a couple of weeks. Guess what happened next?

"When my teacher and parents found out," Mr. Brady remembered, "I wasn't allowed to play with (my friend) until I finished all the homework I didn't do, which took hours."

When Carrie Roling, a 5th-grade teacher, was asked to recall an awful experience in school, she answered this way:

"So one time I got in trouble in elementary school was when I had this brilliant idea of bringing a Walkman to school and listening to music during class."

(A Walkman is a personal stereo that you can stuff into your pocket, connect to earbuds and listen to local radio stations).

"I shrugged up my shoulders, hid the earbuds in my hair and hid the Walkman in my pocket," Ms. Roling said.

"I got to listen only a couple of minutes into my (see TROUBLE on page 4)

Blue and Gold reporter Rose Naughton asked students in Monica Davis’s 4th-grade class: WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT-- AND WHY? Everyone responded. Rose reported: “When I read over some of their statements, I thought about how today’s 4th-graders could change the world in the future.” Here are the replies of eight students:



**STAFFORD SWAIN**  
*The Earth. If it dies, we all die and everything on it.*



**CAMILA SHARAF**  
*Equal pay for women. Women mostly work harder than men do, but earn less.*



**ARYA ABEYAGOONASEKERA**  
*My dog Snowy. I care about him because he bites me and everything in the house.*



**DESMOND AJINKYA-BRAKE**  
*Cutting trees. If we cut down too many, we'll lose oxygen and destroy animals' homes.*



**BENJAMIN CONWAY -REHDING**  
*Stopping climate change. If the world overheats, all the ice in the coldest places will melt and turn into water and flood a lot of other places.*



**KHANH DO**  
*I care most about my family because they love me, care about me, protect me, and make me feel special.*



**EMMELINE BERNARDS**  
*I care about snacks. When I'm at someone's house for dinner, I could eat something first and not have to ask every second, "when's dinner?"*



**LONG PENWAL**  
*Going to Vietnam is important to me because my mom's whole family is there, about 20 of them..*

## B&G Contest Results

A year ago we asked readers to identify childhood photos of three adults on the Murch faculty. There were no correct replies.



The right answers: Principal Chris Cebzynski (left), former 4th-grade teacher Tatum Kelly, and former assistant principal Penelope Miller.

## *our reviewer tastes the hot lunches*

By **ZAHA PANJRATH**

From Jamaican beef patties to Mexican burritos, the hot lunches at Murch seem to be improving in taste, variety and options. But they could be even better.

In my two weeks of tasting the school’s food, I discovered, to my surprise, that the lunches offered a variety of foods from different countries and regions.

For example, tofu, also known as bean curd, originated in China. It absorbs flavors well and is typically served in sweet or savory dishes. At Murch, though, the tofu was flavored only with salt and pepper. Some students may think that’s delicious, but for me it was boring.

Jamaican beef patties are traditionally made from a flaky dough stuffed with seasoned ground beef. My patty was filled with vegetables instead of meat, but it did have a satisfying taste.

I tried the salads, too. They came in plastic containers with a side of fruit. The salads usually contained green leaves, two to three tomatoes, a few other vegetables, and dressing.

With each hot lunch, I had to get either vegetables or two fruits. Unlike the main dishes, there wasn’t much variety of vegetables to choose from. They were always the same: carrots, string beans, and corn.

I found out that the hot lunches at all District of Columbia public schools are prepared and delivered by a company called Sodexo Magic.

You may be surprised to learn, as I was, that a major owner of Sodexo Magic is Earvin "Magic" Johnson, a former college, professional and Olympic basketball star, and a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame.

### STAFF OF THE BLUE AND GOLD

5th graders: Cooper Birgfeld, Charlie Kerr, Rose Naughton, Jason Nuamah, Sophie Kozar, Saara Lee, Zaha Panjrath, Yordan Slanchev, Rohan Tatlow

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Our First Commandment:  
Thou Shalt Not Bore the Reader



## Bugs, Time Past, Time Frozen -- and Iggy

By MAGDALENA GLENN

By NOURA CONNOR

BUG BOYS by Laura Knetzger Ages: 7-10)

A stag beetle named Stag-B and a rhinoceros beetle called Rhino-B are best friends. They live in a bug town and have nine adventures, mostly out of town.

The two friends meet new characters along the way and often try to help them get out of trouble. That doesn't always work. For example, when Rhino-B tells a beetle how to escape. But the trapped beetle can't climb a ladder.

In another story, when Rhino-B is captured by humans, it made me sad to think about all the humans who kill insects just because the bugs look weird or frighten them.

Many readers might see that one of the bugs reminds them of someone they really know. That happened to me. I thought that Stag-B resembled a smart 4th-grade girl who reads books all the time and knows a lot about the things being taught in class.

This book is a graphic novel, which tells a story in the form of a comic strip. I can read graphic novels quickly and I can easily see how the characters feel and what is happening to them.



By OPHELIA ULLERY

THE DAY TIME STOPPED: 1 Minute, 26 Countries by Flavia Ruotolo. (Ages 6-9)

Imagine that one minute in time is frozen. Imagine, too, that in that same minute, you can see what people are doing in various parts of our planet.

By stopping time for a moment, Ms. Ruotolo gives readers an imaginative view of the different time zones and seasons around the Earth.

And so, in that same minute:

--"Aki, the penguin hatched" in South Georgia in the South Atlantic Ocean. It is 2:33 in the afternoon and it is winter.

--"Miguel discovered his favorite flower" at 10:33 in the morning in Mexico City, Mexico. That tells you that it's spring or summer, when flowers pop up.

--"Yuki's cat was awakened at 1:33 in the nighttime in



Sapporo, Japan."

I recommend this book, especially if you enjoy geography and learning about time and seasons and how they affect people in various places. It made me think about how other people live — in different places, different cultures, different climates.

I would have liked the author's drawings better if they had been more realistic, added more details and used more of the white space on the pages.

But I did like the image on the cover. It showed a sunny day on the left and a starry night on the right while a cartoonish Earth checked its watch.

Ms. Ruotolo, is an author, illustrator and designer of toys for kids in Genoa, Italy.

That's the place where she made time stop "just as I was taking the first bite of my popsicle."

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS AND WILL BE SO MUCH MORE by Johanna Schauble (Ages 5-9)

When you read or hear the familiar words "once upon a time," you probably automatically think it's a fairy tale.

But this book shows that there is just as much room for imagination in the real world as there is in fairy tales. It is about Earth's past, present and possible future — and yours, too.

It made me think about my existence in this world -- and the people and things that came before me, actually happened to me, and might happen in the next 10 years.

The many illustrations are a mix of acrylic paints and collages. Each beautiful scene fills an entire page, except for the caption at the bottom.

The unique pages get smaller as you get closer to the present, and bigger as you move into the future.

On the last page is a drawing of hundreds of lights in a city that look like stars. The author asks, "What do you wish for the future?"

For myself, I'd wish to be an Olympic athlete. For the world, an end to pollution.

This is Ms. Schauble's first picture book for children. She should definitely write more.

## HIS NAME IS IGGY -- AND THAT MEANS TROUBLE

By DESMOND AJINKYA-BRAKE

THE BEST OF IGGY by Annie Barrows. Illustrated by Sam Ricks (ages 7-10)

Iggy is a 4th-grader who always gets into trouble. Once he decided to turn himself into an old man. He locked himself in his bathroom and made a beard for himself with shaving cream. On his head, he applied eyeliner to look like wrinkles, and used lipstick as fake blood. His parents screamed when they saw him, but they didn't punish him that time.

He got into major trouble when he and his friends decided to pick up their desks and race around the classroom. They chose the teacher as the finish line. You can probably guess that the desk-racers slammed into the teacher, were sent to the principal's office and got suspended. It took a year for Iggy's parents to forgive him.

When Iggy returned to school from suspension, he felt so bad that he gave his teacher a get-well card. He had learned that apologizing is not so bad after all. "The Best of Iggy" is one of three books about the kid troublemaker. I loved how quickly Ms. Barrows made her chapters move. She kept me laughing. I liked the Ricks drawings, too, mainly for the details in them.

## A Dramatic Finish

(TEAM from page 1)

straight points and we were behind by 10.

Then the Murch Mustangs made a run. We chipped away at the Watkins lead, which dropped to only 2 points.

In the end, though, our team lost by 4.

"I am proud of everyone of you," Teddy told his teammates afterward.

So our season ended with a narrow loss to Watkins, which went on to win the championship.

Everyone of us on the Murch team knew we were the best that we could be.

## and how about that girls team!

By **ADELAIDE STITZIEL**  
and **ORLA VENTRESCA**

The Murch girls had never before played basketball together - yet they went undefeated until they lost the final playoff game.

"One of my goals was to win one game. They (the players) certainly blew that away!" recalled Coach Nicole Bates.

The team was 8-0 before losing the championship game to Janney, 25-10.

"Pretty amazing!" Coach Bates said. "The girls came together as a team and supported each other."

To her daughter, Skylar, a team member, the biggest disappointment was that "the season was too short."

# Pre-K Isn't Just Play



Reading time in Ms. Webb's classroom.

By **SOPHIE KOZAR**  
and **CHARLIE KERR**

If you think pre-kindergarten classes are simply fun and games, you're wrong.

Pre-k is so much more. For many kids of ages 3 and 4, it's the start of classroom learning.

On one recent day, for example, teacher Katie Webb divided her kids into five groups, each doing different activities at tables or on the floor.

At one table, Ms. Webb excitedly held up cards with letters on them. She asked each kid in turn to name the letter, make the sound of it, and name a word starting with that letter.

"G, guh, game," one girl replied. Then it was a boy's turn. "Z, zuh, zebra," he said. A third student, saw an "S," and said, "S is for snake."

Children giving good answers, were rewarded with cardboard monkeys, which they piled higher and higher until the monkeys toppled. The kids giggled. Sometimes Ms. Webb and a child slapped their hands together in an enthusiastic high-five.

A girl on the floor was putting together a jigsaw map of the United States.

That unplanned geography lesson grew out of news that one child was moving to California. "Suddenly there was a big interest in learning the names of the states," Ms. Webb said.

The birth of math skills could be seen in the pre-k classroom of teacher Tashima Hawkins as she joined kids on a crowded carpet to count Lego pieces.

Pre-k kids learn social skills, too, such as making friends and working with others on building projects.

Why is Pre-k important? Because research shows that the human brain develops most from birth to age 5.

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(Editor's Note: D.C. public schools were among the first in the nation to invest in optional pre-k classes over 50 years ago. In 2019-20, before the Covid-19 pandemic, DC ranked first in the nation by enrolling 79% of 3- and 4-year-olds, Rutgers University reported.)

## The Snows of Ukraine

(ABROAD from page 1)

chocolate, candy or hot dogs. But I did sample Swedish meatballs — and they tasted great.

Another new experience for me was being on a girls soccer team. It was hard to connect with the other players because they spoke Swedish. Luckily, the adults attending our practices spoke English and translated what I didn't understand.

Lots of children in my school in Stockholm knew Swedish. But even after three years of classes there, I never learned it.

During my year (2020-21) in Ukraine, a country between Poland and Russia, I went to an international school in the capital city of Kyiv.

The winter snows there gave me a new experience. That happened when Olivia, my friend from Finland, asked me and my family to try cross-country skiing. It was more difficult than skiing downhill but I enjoyed it.

Our families also got together for Little Christmas, a Finnish pre-Christmas celebration. Olivia speaks English, and my older sister Elsie still keeps in touch with her.

As a lot of Murch students may know, Russia invaded Ukraine several months ago. I feel sorry for all my Ukrainian friends there. They are probably refugees now. But I am proud that Kyiv and its people never gave up.

## when "the teacher caught me," it was "very embarrassing"

(TROUBLE from page 1)

favorite song until the teacher caught me."

Ms. Roling said she couldn't remember exactly what happened next but it was "very embarrassing."

Allen Travitz, who teaches 2nd-grade kids, said he got into trouble in elementary school for disobeying his teacher's instructions. He

sent Valentine's Day cards to two classmates who didn't celebrate that day.

"Our teacher told us specifically not to send them Valentine cards, so they were really surprised when they got cards from me."

The teacher scolded him in front of the class, Mr. Travitz remembered.

First-grade teacher Kathleen Bergin told of a morning when "I woke up pretending I was sick so I didn't have to go to school."

A few hours later, Ms. Bergin said she felt guilty and turned herself in.

"I didn't exactly get a punishment, but my mom had to tell me that I was

wrong," she recalled.

Finally, kindergarten teacher Lucie Mendelson remembered a day when "I refused to get in line after recess was over. I even hid from the teachers."

That event was especially embarrassing for young Lucie since one of the teachers was her mom.