

Head Work

"This one I can deal with"

One of the refreshing things about Penny Work is that she doesn't look or act or even speak like a school administrator. No edu-speak here, she comes to us without an education/administration background.

Now, don't get the idea that she's not educated... anything but. "I love to learn," she says passionately. "I was one of those nerds who adored school." It's just that she has come into teaching and academia through the back door, not the front. And it is a refreshing breeze.



Grymes Memorial School Head, Penny Work comes to us from the Washington, DC area where she grew up and later taught French, Medieval History, World History, Ethics and Religion at her alma mater, the National Cathedral School for 18 years. She is Grymes' eleventh Head of School since its founding in 1947.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Raised in Washington, DC, she attended the all-girl National Cathedral School until it was time to go to Princeton where she majored in French Language and Literature with a specialty in Medieval Lit. She briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a lawyer, even worked as a paralegal and decided to marry a lawyer rather than become one. "I was definitely cut out for the Middle Ages and NOT for a law firm," she rolls her eyes.

Back to grad school she went, where she earned her PhD in French, which she taught for five years on the college level at American University and Mount Vernon College. Then she had her two children and decided "None of this supermom stuff for me, so I quit."

But then an old teacher of hers at the National Cathedral School called her up and asked her to substitute teach Medieval History at her alma mater for just one quarter. "Eighteen years later, that stint as a substitute ended," laughs Penny. She also taught World History, Ethics and Religion. "I'm a lifer at the Cathedral Schools," she says wryly.

Meanwhile, 20 years ago, she and her husband

Peter, bought a country home in Madison County, where they religiously spent their weekends and summers. Not long ago, a friend suggested that Penny apply for the vacant Head of School position at Grymes. "A dream of mine had always been to be a Head of School...from the time I was really little." So she decided, "Yeah, I'll give it a shot." To her amazement, she won the job.

And so it came time to introduce her to the parents, faculty and staff at the beginning of her first school year at Grymes. She went home early, bathed, changed into a conservative dark blue outfit and headed back to Grymes. "And when I reached over for my shoes, there was one blue shoe and one black shoe; and one had three inch heels and one had two inch heels." She was mortified; the new Head of School can't even keep her shoes straight

She borrowed a pair of brown slides, four sizes too small, from the Business Manager. When Board of Trustees Chairman, "Doc" Garnett introduced her as a woman with "vision," she clumped up to the podium in the brown slides, set the pair of mismatched shoes out for all to see and said, "Well unfortunately, impaired vision." It broke the ice. "It was just one of those totally embarrassing moments that I had to make good."

Penny Work is just now finishing up her second school year at Grymes. "Because I've not been a full-time administrator before, it's a pretty steep learning curve," she says modestly of her transition. "There's a lot to be done here because it's a small



Grymes' Head of School, shares a laugh with third grade science student Grace Sherman, who is flanked by John Waller Goodwin (checked shirt, background), Katie Simpson (purple striped shirt) and Isabella Hansen (light blue shirt). Penny Work has made it a point to know the name of every student at Grymes. She greets them personally every day as they step off the school bus.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Every eighth grader at Grymes Memorial School must deliver an address to the entire school body before graduating. Here, Nick Caravana practices his speech under the watchful ear of seventh and eighth grade English and Drama teacher, Dana Bost.

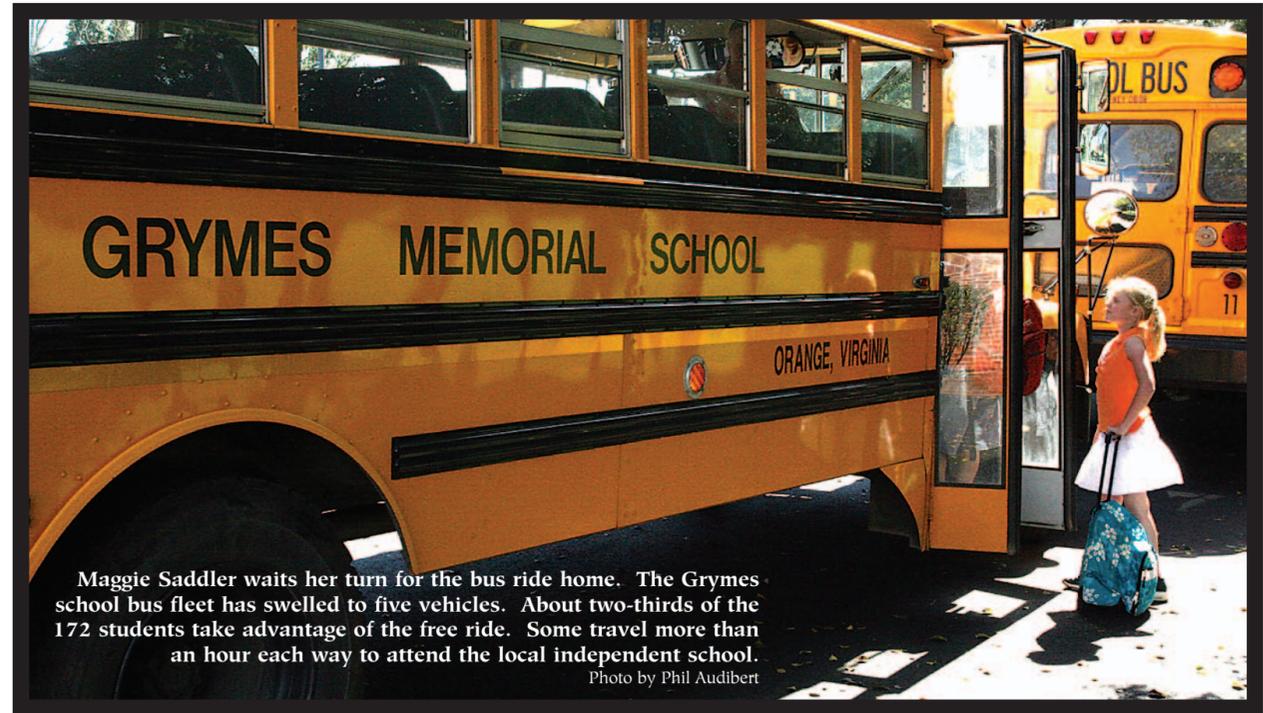
Photo by Phil Audibert

shop." But she quickly adds, "One of the things I love about the job is that I do absolutely everything...admissions, fundraising, you name it, I do it. And I can even be found with a broom from time to time, sweeping the floors."

How about the time little Beth Anne came to school in tears. Penny Work knows every kid's name—all 172 of them—and she greets them all personally when they arrive in the morning. "You have to look me in the eye and shake hands and say 'Good morning!'"

On this particular morning, this child with "clouds of blond hair; she looks like a renaissance angel; she got off the bus in tears." Penny feared the worst. She stooped to console the sobbing youngster. "My mother...(sob) made me eat my egg...(sob) before my...English Muffin."

"I'm soooooo sorry," empathized Penny dramatically, as her inner voice breathed a sigh of relief. "This one I can deal with."



Maggie Saddler waits her turn for the bus ride home. The Grymes school bus fleet has swelled to five vehicles. About two-thirds of the 172 students take advantage of the free ride. Some travel more than an hour each way to attend the local independent school.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Grymes turns 60

Emily Grymes founded her school in her home on Main Street in Orange in 1947 to memorialize her two children, Breck and Betty who both died within six months of each other. You can see their photos on the mantel.



Contributed photo

The Snake

It was the spring of 1958. I was eight years old. Billy Overman had just sold me a sturdy cage made of plywood and hardware cloth. It cost me maybe two months' allowance, but I wanted that cage. Now, I just needed something to put in it.

Lying coiled at my feet underneath a gate to a horse pasture was the answer to my dreams. Gingerly, I grabbed the colorful snake by the tail, put an empty feed bucket on its head, and dragged it up towards the house. He struck at me several times, but never made contact.

Monty Gay came by and secured the reptile with a hastily cut forked stick. I ran and fetched my brand new cage, put some grass in it for bedding, a small water bowl, dropped the snake in and closed the lid. Man, oh man, did I ever have a prize to show