

When an elementary school class embarked on an Internet search for the name of a Virginia woman who made a difference in the lives of children, one name came up over and over again: Joann H. Grayson, JMU professor of psychology.

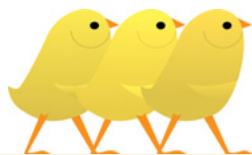


A V I R G I N I A
WOMAN *of*
HISTORY

Fourth-graders honor child advocate Joann Grayson *By Jan Gillis ('07, '11P)*

Amy Garrett was teaching Virginia history to her fourth-graders at Island Creek Elementary School in Alexandria and decided to use the Library of Virginia's "Virginia Women in History" project as an instructional tool. Each year, the project seeks nominations to honor eight women, past and present, who have made important contributions to Virginia, the nation and the world. "I am always looking for ways to challenge my students," says Garrett, "and this nomination project was a great opportunity to give them a hands-on task."





*'I decided to take baby chicks with no mother
as well as Henrietta and her chicks to the class,
so the children could see the difference.'*

— Joann Grayson, psychology professor and Virginia Woman of History

Garrett's class examined the achievements of past honorees and learned that altruistic endeavors and "breaking glass ceilings" were the general themes. The children narrowed their focus. "The class decided they wanted to nominate someone who made a difference in the lives of children," Garrett says. "At that point, Google took over."

As the children searched multiple terms — women, Virginia, child welfare — Grayson's name was repeatedly in the search results.

It's no surprise. Grayson, a 30-year veteran of JMU's psychology faculty, is a champion of child abuse prevention and treatment. Her list of accolades includes the 2006 Virginia Professor of the Year awarded for "extraordinary dedication to undergraduate teaching" by two national organizations, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, as well as the 2006 Champion for Children Award from Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, the 2005 Commissioner's Award for Virginia from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, and a 2004 TIAA-CREF Virginia Outstanding Faculty Award, administered by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and announced by the governor. Grayson has taken her advocacy for children to the U.S. House of Representatives Select Subcommittee on Education and is a past chair of the Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia. Since 1981, she has been the editor and publisher of the *Virginia Child Protection Newsletter*.

As the class read about Grayson's briefings on Capitol Hill, her work at JMU and in the community, and saw the leading role she has taken in advocating for children, they knew she was exactly the nominee they were looking for. Not only did Garrett's class nominate Grayson, but they also invited her for a visit.

Grayson, of course, is no stranger to the classroom. At JMU she teaches in the areas of child abuse and neglect, child clinical psychology, clinical psychology and field placement. Each year, she supervises scores of students in service-learning work. "We have more than 40 participating sites throughout the community that partner with the psychology department for field placements. For example, students work with First Step, a community organization for victims of domestic violence, prevention programs at Rock-

ingham Memorial Hospital, the Gus Bus literacy effort, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention program, JMU's counseling and psychological services, Healthy Families and Western State Hospital," she says. "The students grow and become colleagues. Many of our current site supervisors are people who went through the service-learning field program as students. So it's a nice system."

Nonetheless, educating a class of fourth-graders on the history of child protection presented a challenge for Grayson. "I talk to my JMU class about child protection history for 45 minutes, and I wondered what in the world I was going to say to fourth graders for two hours," she says. It didn't take long for the educational and child expert to come up with a solution.

She found the answer in the family farm's chicken house. Grayson observed one of the hens, Henrietta, sheltering a brood of chicks under her wings. "You'll notice that baby chicks are quite content when with their mother hen. They feel safe. Chicks that you buy, who have been separated from their mothers, are quite different. Their loud and constant peeping can drive you crazy," she says. "I decided to take baby chicks with no mother as well as Henrietta and her chicks to the class, so the children could see the difference." Grayson knew that Henrietta would provide the students an excellent example of the value of a protective parent.

Grayson's classroom visit was a hit. The kids learned the history of child protection, got acquainted with Henrietta, named the chicks, and received an introduction to JMU — Grayson showed the class a video from the university's admissions office.

Several weeks later, her mailbox was flooded with letters from the students thanking her for her visit. "Now I want to go to JMU for college. I showed my parents the pamphlet, and they agree with me! Also, do you think that maybe I could be part of that Virginia Child Protection group?" wrote Megan Miller. The letters also contained plenty of well wishes for the success of Grayson's nomination. "I cross my fingers that you win," wrote one student.

The positive thinking worked. Grayson was recognized as a 2009 Virginia Woman in History and was honored at a reception at the Library of Virginia on March 26. ■

* Read more about this Virginia Woman in History at www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwedo/k12/vw/2009/honoree.asp?bio=7. And, read some of the children's letters at www.jmu.edu/MadisonOnline.

Joann Grayson holds a photo from her trip to Island Creek Elementary School in Alexandria, where teacher Amy Garrett and her fourth-graders welcomed their 2009 Virginia Woman in History nominee. After the trip, Grayson received numerous letters from the appreciative fourth-graders thanking her for talking about JMU and for bringing her family farm's hen, Henrietta, and her chicks.



Dear Dr. Grayson,
Thank you for telling
us about JMU. I think
I am going to JMU.
Thank you for bringing
the baby chicks and
letting us name them.
Thank you again,
Love,
Mario

Dear Dr. Grayson,
Thank you again for coming to
our school even though it was a
1 1/2 hour drive from your home.
To our school I especially loved
the baby chicks you brought
and I loved how you protect
kids. It gave me a warm feeling
that you care about kids. I
also want to thank you for the
power point and the feathers.
Thank you so much.
Sincerely,
Elizabeth

