

Greenwood Friends School

The Greenwood Friend's School as told to Patchwork by Sheila Lunger
Interviewed by Hannah Rae Mael and Reta Carl in the spring of 2003

The Greenwood Friend's School is an independent school that follows the Quaker values of equality, simplicity, peace, and unity. The school also has a wider outlook for the future of their students than some public schools have. Not only do they encourage their students to strive for the best, they also teach them to reach out to others and believe that if everyone works together, the world will be a better place.

For the past 14 years, Sheila Lunger had been the Head of the Greenwood Friend's School. She is married and has three grown children who attended the school. She is the third person to take the position as Head of the school.

PATCHWORK: What year did the Greenwood Friend's School open?

LUNGER: The school opened in 1978. We rented a small space outside Light Street, and we had two students. We had four students in September but two sisters moved or left, and it left two students. We finished the first year with two students, but we got more students the next year and then it kept growing. We moved to Greenwood Valley in 1982, we bought this building from the Millville School District.

PATCHWORK: Were the two students in different grades?

LUNGER: I think the two who stayed were in the same grade, they were two girls, Sarah Sweeney and Christine Gail, and there's a picture of them in the hall. They finished the first year here. Then we also started a preschool at that time so we had some much younger kids there in preschool, but the actual kids in the elementary part of the school, they must have been in first, maybe second grade.

PATCHWORK: How big was the faculty at that time, since there were only two students when you first started?

LUNGER: Well we had one teacher, I think we had another teacher, or there was another teacher who had the preschool class. Then as it grew and we added more teachers. Some were part time and some came to teach special subjects, but the teachers did a lot, they taught a lot of subjects and did a lot of things. We had no one in the office, nobody to answer the phone, no one. Volunteer parents started doing it, that's how Shirley Broadt came to the school, she's our office manager, her son was a student the second year the school opened, the first year my child started going. She started volunteering because she could see that a lot of office work had to be done, and that there needed to be someone to answer the phone and she was willing to do that.

PATCHWORK: How are you connected to school?

LUNGER: Well, right now I am an employee, I'm the administrator. My title is Head of School, which is a term that a lot of Quaker schools use and independent schools. This is my 14th year and it's the 25th year of the school. I got connected to the school in the mid 70's when I had young children going to the school to have a special place to go, so I have been a parent at the school for a long time.

PATCHWORK: What about the school made you want to send your children here rather than a public school or another private school, what made Greenwood Friend's School stand out?

LUNGER: Well, I think two things, one, the general one, that I was not a Quaker, I was not a member of the Religious Society of Friends, which is the special title of Quakers, but I had been going to different Quaker meetings and different places and I knew a little bit about education and I knew about Friend's education. So I knew that there were a lot of Quaker schools in Pennsylvania and I knew that they had a good reputation. We, I know that I met a couple people that were starting the school, and that the school was going to be connected with Quakers, then I thought the school would be a good school in many ways. The other main driving reason for my family to do this is that my two oldest children are African American, and we live in a very rural, white community, and my son was in a public school system where he was hearing lots of comments. It's not the fault of the public school system the things that happen is society, but I wasn't feeling comfortable with what was happening to him. My husband I knew that with a small school starting that would be a Quaker school, we knew that he would probably have a better experience in a small community that could address the issues that were causing problems for him in society. So that's why I came.

PATCHWORK: What extracurricular programs do you have here at the school?

LUNGER: Well, because we're small, we don't have sports programs or maybe the kind of extracurricular programs you're talking about. We don't have sports teams, we don't have a lot of clubs that meet after school although we have had a computer club, we've had a chess club. Usually those happen during a school day at lunch or something. What we do is have a lot of field trips and a lot of projects that our different classes do, there is something going on all the time but it may not be a regular club or sport.

PATCHWORK: How would you say this school differs from other private schools, or independent schools in our area or that you've heard of and then after that, like how they differ from public schools?

LUNGER: I think independent schools are schools that are either run by a religious organization or a private organization, but we have a connection to a religious organization, the Quakers, but we are run by a corporation, we have a board of trustees, and we are not run any other group, so that's one difference. Obviously, public schools are large systems that are funded in large part by tax money and they get help from federal organizations, which is appropriate, it's what we do in this country to make sure that everyone gets education. For this school, we are different in that we are small, we have a lot of flexibility to try a lot of things and to do things such as big field trips, which are difficult for larger systems, because we are small. We have a class of 21 students, and we have parents as field trips drivers and we just do a lot of things like that.

PATCHWORK: Now that you were involved in the very beginning of the Greenwood Friend's School, do you know what inspired the people, who came up with the idea for the Greenwood Friend's School, and why did they want to have it?

LUNGER: Well, there were two people, neither one of them lives in the area anymore, but they were very strong educators here, they were two women, one was Ann Cedar, who lived in the Bloomsburg Area and who worked as a guidance counselor at the Bloomsburg School District and she had always wanted to be connected with the founding of a school and she met another woman named Irene McHenry who had the same dream. They ran into each other at some kind of conference for educators and they both found out that they had the same kind of dream and Irene was teaching in the Millville School District. So, they talked amongst themselves about how they would start a school and they began to talk to a

lot of other people, a lot of parents who had wanted to go to a school and other educators. We have a very nice group of people who founded the school from guidance counselors, to teachers, to school librarians, to professors of education. People from a lot of different education fields and then from other fields, who had a interest in the school, so these two women Ann and Irene, had the idea and they got other people excited about it and they connected with the Quakers in Millville who supported it. There used to be a Quaker School in Millville a very long time ago.

PATCHWORK: What classes do you offer here?

LUNGER: We have, well we serve children from preschool through grade 8, so we have a preschool for children three and four years old and then we have kindergarten, and we have an elementary program from kindergarten to grade 5, and then we have the middle school from grades 6-8. Is that what you mean by what you said?

PATCHWORK: What kind of classes, like do you teach what public schools teach like your history and math or like special classes, or not so much special classes but like things that aren't what you would normally find in a regular public school?

LUNGER: Well, I think that there are a lot of things that make it unique, the curriculum and the way we do thematic studies, then the way we, I'll explain what we do about teams, are different and they are unique. But the basic curriculum is what you need to be providing for children and as you said, all those course subjects, which are math and reading, social studies and science. For the upper grades we have math and language arts, history geography, social studies, science, and then in the Middle School we have then same, just on an advanced area, and we have special science that cover earth, life, and physical science in the Middle School. So they're the course subjects. We are a normal school, we are a regular school that has the basic things. We have art and music, we have physical education. We have two foreign languages, the younger students get French, and the Middle School students get Spanish, and so we get special teachers that come in and they work part time but there's a library and a technology class, so they come in to the room the we are in, the school library, and she is also a very knowledgeable tech person. She teaches the computer and technology classes for our Middle School, what you all are doing now in she has a video class and they are making a film in the spring, and they are going to submit it to a school film festival. They learn from video techniques and graphics techniques.

PATCHWORK: Is there a chance for children to take a class that's more advanced than what's in their grade?

LUNGER: Yes, I can explain that and explain our teaming. What we call teaming is we have three grade levels at three different stages grouped together. They're not together for everything, I'll explain what that means. We have kindergarten through grade 2 as a team. Grades 3 through 5 are a team. Grades 6 through 8 are a team. Now I'll go back to kindergarten through grade 2. Obviously a kindergarten student has different needs than a child at the second grade level, but there are a lot of things that they can do together. If they are exploring a science project or working on a map or something they can work together on it. That's what we do, we have to educate them for sure. This is Audra who is a teacher at our intermediate class and she and another teacher have three 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades together. Now they teach different math classes to different ages, depending on where you are. What we're trying to do is allow students to work at their own pace and at their own potential. The answer to your question is yes, because of the teaming. If we have a student who is in the K, is a kindergarten student, and is working well in math and can move ahead, than that person works with first or second grade math. We have the students in second grade who are doing third and fourth grade math, they leave their regular classroom and go to Audrey's class when she's teaching 3rd grade math. So we can move students around, depending on what they need, because we're not in separate classrooms.

PATCHWORK: You said when the school first opened, so how old is the Greenwood Friends School, the actual building?

LUNGER: The building we're in was built in 1942, so this is a 60 year old building.

PATCHWORK: So what was it before the school came here?

LUNGER: It was a public school, it was a Millville School District, and it was owned, it was built. There was a nice story with that, I'd like to say, because although it was not a Quaker school, it was Millville, Greenwood School. It was finished in 1942 which was a long time ago, I know, but it was when this country was in World War II, and a lot of resources were very scarce, and gas was one of them. The story I've heard from one of our neighbors that lived here was that the school was built that that the people who lived in Greenwood Valley came out to help finish off the building and landscaped it, you know, you have to fill in around a building when it's finished. So they used horses and graders, pulled by horses to finish off this building at a time when they couldn't get gas for tractors so, I think, why I think that's a nice story is, it's a community story, it says that people out here in Greenwood

Valley wanted a school for the kids, and they gave up something, and they made it happen at a time when it was hard to get a lot of resources. We've met people who went here, young children, one summer, a man that was down in Miller Town Road stopped by and said he remembered he was maybe in 2nd or 3rd grade when the school opened here and he held a flag at the opening ceremony. He remembered standing outside and holding the American flag when the sort of christened the school. So, I think the connection for my school, for Greenwood Friend's School, which values community a great deal, that's why one of the things we say we do, and we work hard at it for people to feel that they are part of a community. So to be in a place that started out as a community school, I think means a lot, and it give us a connection to the kind of people who lived here, even though we are a very different kind of school than it was when it was a public school. We have a parent in our school who lives down the road. His daughter's in Middle School, and he went here, as a young boy, and he and I were talking this year because we are in a building project. We are adding a wing on the school, we're going to do that right now, then eventually, we want to remodel the inside of the building, but what our neighbor, this parent, his name is Frank said, that he remembers playing outside under those two big cedar trees outside, which are wonderful, because they are always shady, and you can get under them and we have a sand box, and we are going to have to cut those trees down for the building project, and he, he was kind of sad about it. He said you know, "I've been thinking that maybe we can move the trees," but they are huge, they wouldn't survive a move, but I can kind of see the school through his eyes and think when you were a kid, what it meant. You know you've got some attachment to some things go.

PATCHWORK: Who supports the school, since this is an independent school?

LUNGER: Well, we have to work hard at that, the school, because we are independent, and also because were a religiously connected school. We are religious and we are connected with a religious body, that means that we are not eligible for some kinds of funding, that non-religious organizations get, but out parents and our board of trustees work very hard at it every year. About 80 percent, close to 80 percent, comes from tuition. That parents pay to send their children here. But that's not enough to run the school. Every year we ask for money, we send a letter to parents and alumni, and say, would you make a contributions to Greenwood this year. We raise about \$40,000 a year that way. We also look for grants, every year we look for foundations or funds that give moneys to special projects. We ask, we look for those kind of donations. Then a big chunk of money each year is raised by parents, and fund raising. We have an auction coming up in two weeks, that brought us in about \$25,000 last year. So, yeah, but parents work hard to do that, parents work hard, and teachers, the

board of trustees helps. People donate things to the auction, and they buy stuff, so that's what most independent schools have to do, because tuition doesn't pay the whole amount it costs.

PATCHWORK: How much is the tuition?

LUNGER: The tuition this year for elementary is about \$6,000. It will be a little bit more next year.

PATCHWORK: How long is this for?

LUNGER: The whole year. Parents don't have to pay that all at once, they can pay different ways, but that's what it would cost if you were to send a child here for a year.

PATCHWORK: Does it differ between the elementary and the middle school?

LUNGER: The middle school is more. Its more like, probably, \$7,500 this year. It'll go, everything goes up every year, so it will be a little bit more.

PATCHWORK: What were the original goals of the school? We talked a little bit about the Quaker values and stuff like that so like what was the school aiming for when it first started?

LUNGER: Well, we were aiming, we wanted to give a choice, for parents to have a choice in our area, and then my personal story is one, we were looking for our smaller school to really address the needs of our child. The Quakers, or Friend's education, focuses on what Quakers call testimony. The ones that we really look at are simplicity, peace, community, brotherhood. Things that we feel should be important in everything we do. So you are always asking yourself, is this program, what we are doing, fit with what we are trying to do. We work to provide an atmosphere in the classroom and in the community where people can feel comfortable living with one another, and they can also, we can learn together about conflicts, because conflict is very natural in life, we're always in something, but it's how you resolve it, and how you learn to work it, but that's a big motivator, for us to find ways to work out conflict and talk about things. In the daily life of teaching reading and writing and math and science, you're always together working on something, so you have opportunities to do that. Community service is a big project for us here and we have asked

all the children and the older students to do some kind of community service project, and a lot of the classes.

PATCHWORK: What was one of the things you would say to someone, to get them to try to come to the school, like how would you sell the school? How would you get them interested?

LUNGER: Well, I think that we do a lot of admission, we have a lot of people come thought the school and what we lot for people to see is that there are students actively, and happily working together in a classroom. We have a lot of opportunities to be themselves in a structured atmosphere where they are learning with their peers in a happy way and we like to see a busy school, and we really want to see people doing a lot of things. I like to show visiting parents our art, we have a lot of art displays in the hallway. I that that shows, not only student creativity, and that we have a strong art program, and we have a wonderful art teacher. But it also shows that we value the work that students do. You want your place to be full of things that belong to the kids who are here because it's their school. If you value that and you let them so that, then I think it's a stronger learning area. But I think that parents want that for their kids.