

Union Principal Starts Year With New Teacher's Enthusiasm

BY SUSAN USHER

Zelphia Grissett was looking forward to the opening of school this year with confidence and a smile.

After a year as interim principal at Union Primary School, she was appointed to the post on a permanent basis in July. She welcomed the news.

"I have the same kind of enthusiasm I had the first day I was a teacher," the Longwood native said in an interview several days before faculty members were to report to school in mid-August. "This has given me a new lease on life."

Mrs. Grissett says she likes knowing that the success of Union School depends in part on her and that she is to blame if it is not successful.

"If this school has a successful year, it is as much because of the faculty and staff who have rallied behind me as it is me," she said.

Mrs. Grissett came to Union five years ago as an assistant principal, moving from West Brunswick High School where she had taught social studies and history for 12½ years.

At first she resisted her placement at an elementary school, when her experience was at the secondary level. But a stint as summer school principal dealing with grades K-12 convinced her otherwise. "I had died and gone to heaven and didn't realize it," she said. "I was happy to come back to Union that fall."

This past year of transition was good for her, she said. "There were a lot of challenges, but I needed that. It was timely. I compete against myself."

In fact, at 40, she thrives on challenges, enjoys dealing with situations that are not routine and that she hasn't planned for that day.

"At a certain point in the classroom the challenges weren't there any longer," she reflected. "I was ready for a change."

"The responsibility I have now is good for me at this time. It is revitalizing," she said. "I think I'm better at this than I am at being a wife and mother."

That may be, but she certainly fulfills those roles as well.

"I'm still mama, chief cook and bottle washer" she said, to a family that includes Lynn, her husband of 18 years; Megan, a sophomore at West Brunswick High; Talya, a seventh grade student at Shallotte Middle; and Lynn Jr., a first grade student at Union. But, citing a lack of time, she recently "resigned" from helping in a family business operated by her husband, who is also a stevedore.

Mrs. Grissett considers herself a "pretty good" seamstress and recently took up wallpaper hanging. She's learned to appreciate the therapeutic aspects of yard work and enjoys reading historical romances. The manual-type work she chooses in her spare time frees her mind, she says, to think through ideas. Then she sits



UNION PRIMARY SCHOOL Principal Zelphia Grissett (left) meets a prospective volunteer, Patsy Rushing of Sunset Beach, between completing preparations for a new school year.

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

"When they come through your threshold, you give them everything you've got."

—Zelphia Grissett, Principal
Union Primary School

down to write, often for one course or another.

'Professional Student'

Since entering the classroom as an educator, she hasn't given up her own role as learner. She says she still has a great deal to learn in her new role, both about the young child and being an administrator.

She's enrolled in the Principal's Executive Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Once

that's completed, she plans to continue work on a sixth year degree with superintendent's certification.

Already this self-proclaimed "professional student" has a master's of education in secondary social studies from the University of South Carolina and a master's of education in administration from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

But soon her heavy schedule as a student will slacken

when Megan starts college. "I have three more years to be a professional student," says Mrs. Grissett. "Then I'll have to take it in bits and pieces."

In her high expectations of herself and others Mrs. Grissett is very much a child of the parents she speaks of with obvious respect and affection: Alease Gore, "a beautiful black woman," and Earle Gore, "a tall, big-boned man, a wise man." She adds, "He's always told me to do the best I could, but to keep things in perspective."

The oldest of three girls, she went to Longwood Elementary School, then Union High School. But with voluntary desegregation, in ninth grade she chose to attend Shallotte High School. During that year her mother went to work outside the home. The Shallotte school bus stopped two miles from the Gore home. For half a year, Zelphia Gore walked the two miles.

The following year, with her mother still working, she returned to Union, "with no regrets."

"I had some good experiences there," she said, "including an opportunity to attend Governor's School." That summer on campus led her to attend college, "a dream come true". In her 3½ years at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro she earned a bachelor's degree in history, and "always the obedient daughter," teacher certification in social studies, at her parents' urging.

She had no intention of teaching, though. When she came home that winter, degree in hand, "I had contacted the Air Force about officer training school," she recalled, a broad smile crossing her face at the memory. "But when the recruiter called the house, my mom told him I wasn't interested. Then she tore up the materials."

Her parents then made her "beat the bushes" for a job. She ended up as an interim fifth grade teacher for three months at the end of the 1972-73 school year.

In her five years at Union she has grown to appreciate the importance of the primary school level and the responsibility of those teachers. "This is where it all begins," she said. "If they get a good start here..."

She hopes that her enthusiasm will be as contagious among faculty and staff as it once was in the high school classroom.

And she wants her staff to be committed. "It's a big challenge. I take a hard line on people who come and mark time," she said, a hint of steel creeping into her voice and profile. "It's a moral thing there for me. It's our future we're dealing with. If you can't cut it, move on."

Her approach to the profession is as straightforward as Zelphia Grissett herself:

"If you become an educator that binds you to do everything you can do for the child with whom you are entrusted, to use all the resources you have available.

"When they come through your threshold, you give them everything you've got."

Wayside Interiors

LABOR DAY WEEKEND BLOW-OUT THIS FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND MONDAY ONLY

THE LARGEST
SELECTION OF
QUALITY WICKER
AND RATTAN
IN THE SOUTHEAST

BEDROOM GROUP
SPECIALS

RATTAN BARSTOOLS



Come In and
Pick Up Your
Complimentary
Issue of
HAVEN



15% OFF ALREADY LOW PRICE

90-DAY GUARANTEE—MONEY BACK
PLUS 20% IF YOU BUY SAME WICKER
AND RATTAN FOR LESS ELSEWHERE

WHITE ELEPHANT
ROOM WILL RE-OPEN
FOR THIS SALE

WAYSIDE INTERIORS
(803)449-3346 1-800-845-0819
OPEN 9 TO 5:30 MON THRU SAT



HWY. 17 N. IN THE HEART OF RESTAURANT ROW NEXT TO SLUG'S RIB • MYRTLE BEACH

CONTEMPORARY
UPHOLSTERY
SPECIALS

LIVING & DINING
ROOM GROUP
PACKAGES

CUSTOM FINISHES &
CUSTOM FABRICS

MATTRESS GALLERY
SALE

AUTHORIZED



KINGS DOWN
MATTRESS GALLERY
\$25 Minimum Delivery Charge