

Education changes lives. In this special feature, nine alumnae talk about their life-changing work in the field. They also reflect on ways in which their own teachers — and students — have changed their lives and thinking.

POWER of Education

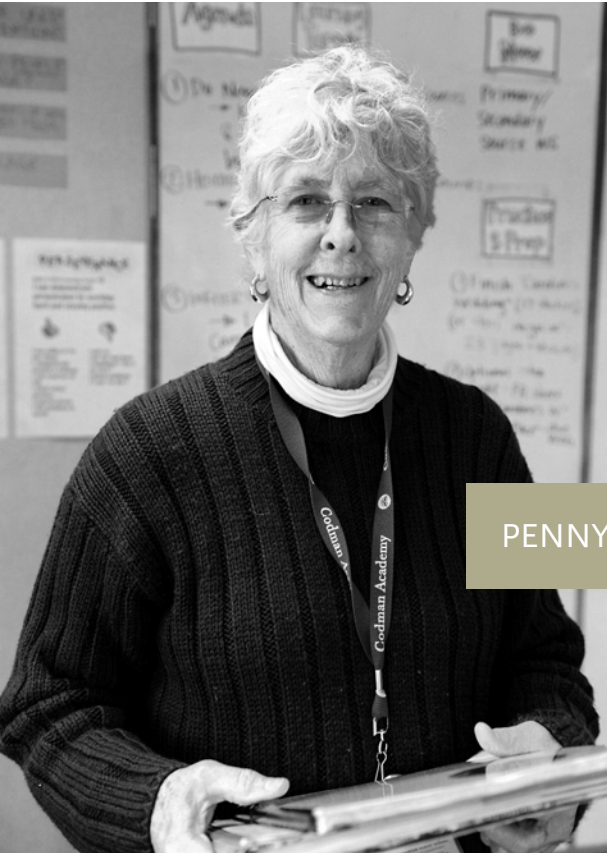
They are not only teachers but also administrators, adventurers, advocates, entrepreneurs, leaders, mentors, policy makers, scholars, researchers, writers and more (including sisters and classmates!).

By nature of the field, each often finds herself “navigating unfamiliar territory,” to borrow a phrase from Penny Demos Lawrence ’56. Their stories speak to a capacity to embrace the unfamiliar and imagine possibilities, in people and in subjects.

Their stories also speak to their lifelong passion as learners, a passion rooted in part in their Winsor experiences. “I love teaching because I love learning,” Jane Chaplin ’82 says simply.

Please enjoy this glimpse into their empowering daily work, a story repeated in the lives of hundreds of alumnae who have chosen to teach.





PENNY DEMOS LAWRENCE '56

Once a Teacher...

"PENNY DAYS." That's what the school's director says she calls the two days a week that Penny Demos Lawrence '56 volunteers at the Codman Academy Public Charter School in Dorchester.

Penny had just "totally retired" from teaching in the summer of 2001 when she read about this start-up school in the *Boston Globe*. She remembered director Meg Campbell as a "ball of fire" from their days working together in the Chelsea Public Schools.

Penny reached out to ask if Meg could use an experienced hand to pitch in. Nearly a decade later, Penny's

still volunteering there. She often works one-on-one with students who need extra support with reading or other skills. One of her favorite parts of her day, she says, is circulating in humanities class to work with kids in literature circles.

What keeps her coming back year after year is the students. "I like young people," she says. "I like teaching them." At Codman, "I admire these kids. They are so tough and resilient.

They work so hard. For many of them, they're succeeding against all odds. But they don't like being defined by that."

Coming from a family of educators, "teaching must have been in my DNA," Penny reflects. While it may have been part of her makeup, the trait took years to be expressed.

Her teaching degree is her third master's. After Winsor and Radcliffe, she initially pursued graduate studies in classical civilizations. After years at home with children, she shifted to public administration. Getting her M.P.A. at San Diego State on the eve of Proposition 13½ in California, she found public jobs in short supply. Instead, she put her skills to work managing several offices for a temporary help services company. She moved back East to open new offices for the firm.

Nearing age 50, she began to consider a different path: education. She remembers reading eye-opening books like Daniel Moynihan's *A Nation at Risk* and James Comer's *School Power*.

Locally, she became intrigued by Boston University's relationship with the Chelsea schools. She found herself assisting in the superintendent's office (under the guidance of Meg Campbell) and recruiting and scheduling B.U. students to serve as tutors. She also jumped in and tutored alongside them.

After a year of tutoring, Penny found herself back in Winsor's neighborhood, right next door at Wheelock College. As a graduate student there, she spent a year in a practicum, learning the skills of teaching firsthand in the Agassiz School in Jamaica Plain. She met once a week with classmates, exchanging ideas from their practice.

As circuitous as her path to the classroom may have been, "once I ended up doing it, it seemed very natural," she says now.

Penny went on from Wheelock to the Gloucester Public Schools, where she worked first as a paraprofessional and then taught third and fourth graders in the system's Multiple Intelligences Program—"a la Howard Gardner." She spent 11 years in Gloucester. "I loved it!" she exclaims.

She still looks back fondly on her "wonderful education" in the classrooms of her own Winsor teachers. "I'll never forget Miss Todd. It was never about her; it was about her students." She remembers Miss Dresser—"a lot of teaching is about performing"—and the "excitement of learning" with Miss Roelker. She still recalls staying up reading Plato at a sleepover. "Oh well, youth!"

As much as she appreciates what her teachers gave her, she sees enormous changes in pedagogy, in particu-

lar the shift away from lectures and “one right answer” and a push to let students draw their own conclusions.

Today at Codman, “I love being around these idealistic, brilliant, committed teachers,” she says. “I feel that I’m learning from them all the time,” she adds, noting how “just the other day” she talked with a teacher about how to change a classroom physically to engage all students. She enjoys being part of a culture where teachers are so open to trying fresh approaches.

She appreciates having been there from its beginnings and watching the school develop. She worries at times, though, about the sustainability of the model, given how much the teachers and leaders put into their work.

In the classrooms of Gloucester and Dorchester, the life lessons continue. Any classroom can be a place of “navigating unfamiliar territory,” she reflects. Whatever the differences in age and background, her students have taught her “the thread that we all share as human beings.”

And, in the end, “it’s really fun,” she says. So twice a week she hops on the train in Wellesley and then catches the Red Line to Codman Square. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are “Penny days,” after all.

“At Winsor, I had wonderful teachers who seemed to love teaching and to know their subjects well. That’s the kind of teacher I wanted to be.”

—SUSAN SHELMEKDINE ’72

The Sisterhood of Classical Archaeology

WHILE HER PEERS were home waving Bicentennial flags, Susan Shelmerdine ’72 spent the summer of 1976 covered in dirt, sleeping in a beachside tent in Turkey and bathing in the ocean with soap that “did **not** provide suds in the salt water despite its claims to do so.” Newly graduated from Smith College with an A.B. in Ancient Studies, she was helping excavate an archaeological site—a “dream come true,” she says. “The thrill of finding even the smallest items as we dug carefully through each layer of the soil never diminished.”

Her sister, Cynthia Shelmerdine ’66, shares her exhilaration. She too has worked in the field, as a student assistant on the Minnesota Messenia Expedition; co-director, museum operations, for the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project; and, currently, ceramic expert for the Iklaina Archaeological Project, whose excavation of Late and Middle Bronze Age buildings and artifacts is enhancing modern understanding of Mycenaean culture.

On a dig, says Cynthia, “every day is an adventure.” At Iklaina, she supervises the cleaning, sorting, and analysis of pottery from the site. Some of the shards join together, but “many

don’t—imagine taking 100 jigsaw puzzles, mixing up all the pieces, then throwing away two-thirds of them! What’s left is what we have to work with. But the right small piece gives you lots of information—the color and texture of the clay, the shape, the decoration (if any) all help you reconstruct the whole vessel, give it a date range, and suggest what it was used for. Put that information together with the walls gradually emerging in the excavation, and you can reconstruct a town and its history. Much of the work itself is painstaking and tedious, but the daily detective work as the big picture takes shape is just fascinating.”

Decades later, the sisters continue to excavate the cultural and historical landscape of ancient civilizations—in the classroom. “Part of the excitement of finding out about a subject you love is sharing with others what you’ve discovered,” they say. As professor of Classical studies and former head of the department at University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Susan particularly enjoys exploring Archaic Greek literature (c. 750–500 B.C.) and “the role of religion, myth, and folklore within early Greek culture” with her students.

Cynthia, the Robert M. Armstrong Centennial Professor (Emerita) and former department chair of Classics at the University of Texas, Austin, still lectures, researches and mentors graduate students. “It’s especially fun to help students figure out how a different language works, or a different cul-