

many of their children have been poorly served elsewhere.”

As the sweeping changes brought by school competition unsettle school districts, Farnsworth is pleased to see that his school, and others following the same traditionalist prescriptions, are shaking up the establishment. “Ben Franklin opens up and we see all these changes,” he observes good-naturedly. “We just try to give the children a well-grounded, solid, foundational education.”

In the process, they have given Arizona something else—a potent dose of free market medicine against educational sclerosis.

—Andrew Peyton Thomas and the editors

Marva Collins Preparatory School Milwaukee, Wisconsin

At first, it's surprising to see Marva Collins on a list of today's top educational reformers. “Wasn't she active in the 1970s?” you might ask.

True, Collins has been reforming schools for a very long time. She opened Westside Prep (now the Marva Collins Preparatory School) in Chicago in 1975. The “60 Minutes” piece which made her a national celebrity aired in 1979. The TV movie (starring Cicely Tyson) appeared in 1981.

Collins is no longer actively running schools; she's an educational consultant living in Hilton Head, South Carolina. But the “Marva Collins Way”—where students work hard reading classic works of literature—is still thriving at five schools. Cincinnati has one, Chicago three, including Marva Collins Prep, headed by daughter Cynthia. And in 1997, the Marva Collins Preparatory School of Wisconsin opened its doors in Milwaukee.

Ron Sadoff brought the Marva Collins Way to Milwaukee. He saw a 1996 “60 Minutes” update on their 1979 piece. The reporters located 33 of the 34 students profiled in the 1979 story and found they were either in graduate school or working in responsible jobs—teachers, police officers, Army officers. A statistician consulted by “60 Minutes” calculated that the typical Chicago classroom of 1979 would now have one person in prison, five on welfare, and one who was murdered. But all of the Collins students were still alive, none were in jail, none were on welfare.

Sadoff, who made his fortune as an investment manager, wanted to help poor people in Milwaukee. But he didn't want to be a passive donor who simply wrote checks; he wanted to make sure his money was improving lives. “I had concluded that education was the way to go,” Sadoff recalls, and after viewing the CBS broadcast he knew he wanted a Marva Collins school.

Sadoff went to Chicago, visited classes at Marva Collins Prep, and talked to Collins herself. “I told her, ‘I'm not leaving here until I get a license,’” he says. But Sadoff found Collins was picky about which schools would bear her name. At the height of her fame 20 years ago, a Texas entrepreneur offered Collins \$100 million to open 20 Marva Collins schools—and Collins turned the Texan down, because she did not want her name on institutions she could not personally oversee.



Principal Robert Rauh and students of the Marva Collins Preparatory School.

Eventually attorneys thrashed out a 20-page licensing agreement which ensured that the Marva Collins Preparatory School of Milwaukee follows the Marva Collins method. Meanwhile Sadoff found other philanthropists willing to assist him, most notably Junior Bridgeman, a one-time Milwaukee Bucks star who now owns a dozen fast-food restaurants. Bridgeman is so dismayed with the poor quality of the people he hires that he holds mandatory prep sessions before the work day to teach his employees the skills they should have learned in school. So he was eager to help provide local children with a sound education.

Shortly thereafter, Sadoff found his principal, Robert Rauh. Rauh had taught in a wide variety of settings, ranging from a posh suburban Milwaukee prep school to inner-city schools in Los Angeles. In 1989, Rauh won a fellowship to Columbia University's Teachers College, where he did his master's thesis on school vouchers. “The day before I defended my thesis,” Rauh recalled, “I read that school choice was coming to Milwaukee.”

Rauh has been a school choice pioneer ever since. In 1991, he became principal of the Urban Day School, the oldest nonsectarian private school in Milwaukee and an early recipient of school choice funds. But Rauh leaped at the chance to build his own school. “I was always a huge Marva Collins fan,” Rauh says. “Here was an opportunity to create a school from ground zero.”

Sadoff and Rauh immediately developed an excellent working relationship. Sadoff is the school's major donor, and both he and his wife Micky serve on the school's board. Sadoff talks to Rauh regularly, and visits the school at least once a week, helping children practice their reading. But Sadoff gives Rauh the authority he needs to do his job. “The school is only as good as its principal,” Sadoff says, “and Rob is phenomenal.”

The Marva Collins school is located in a former Catholic school in the Metcalfe Park neighborhood on Milwaukee's west side. The area has its share of both saints and sinners; the New Covenant Baptist Church on nearby North Street is only a few blocks away from Dot's House of Joy. But the neighborhood is slowly getting better. A block away from Marva Collins, a Jewel

Supermarket and Osco Drugstore—the first in the area in decades—are under construction.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Wisconsin opened in 1997 as a charter school. But a dispute over paperwork led the school to become a private school that accepts vouchers. This has disadvantages. While charter schools receive \$6,500 per child from the state of Wisconsin, a voucher-accepting private school only receives \$5,300 per child, and only children whose parents have incomes up to 175 percent of the poverty line are eligible. Charter schools can be somewhat selective about admissions; voucher schools must accept anyone who applies, holding a random drawing if applicants outnumber slots available. While charters receive four checks a year from the state, voucher school parents have to certify to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction every quarter that their children are attending a voucher school. Since there are 300 students at Marva Collins, this means the school must await 1,200 separate annual checks.

But there are also many advantages to being a private school. Rauh has total freedom to fill jobs as he thinks best. The cafeteria, for example, is subcontracted to a local restaurateur, who provides healthier meals at a lower cost than the school itself could. The school also contracts with specialist teachers; instead of a typical physical education class, Marva Collins Prep brings in experts to teach ballet and *tae kwon do*. And a science teacher at the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee) comes in a few times a year to present students with “Bill Nye the Science Guy”-style wizardry.

Rauh’s biggest advantage lies in hiring whatever teachers he thinks most effective. He uses financial incentives to reward those whose children do well on tests and have good attendance records. While the school gets its teachers from various sources, many are refugees from Milwaukee public schools. Third-grade teacher Jay Brown, for example, was an eighth-grade teacher in the public schools who grew tired of orders from the city school bureaucracy to promote children regardless of whether they were learning. Brown says attendance records were routinely fudged in her old school to make them artificially high. Nor did any supervisor ever give her any advice on how well she was doing or how she could improve her teaching.

Brown, from Chicago, had read Collins’s books. Last January, she told herself, “I can’t do this to children any more. So I called the school and said, ‘Do you have any openings?’ And Rob Rauh said, ‘Did you know we were placing an ad?’” Brown is happier at Marva Collins Prep than ever before in her career.

The school curriculum is a mélange of several proven methods for teaching elementary school children. Direct Instruction is used in the early grades, particularly in teaching phonics. The math curriculum is the Saxon series, well-regarded for its rigor and simplicity and very popular among homeschoolers today. The school also has Core Knowledge textbooks, though they are used more as references than as active parts of the curriculum. William Bennett’s anthologies are also used; the kindergartners study *The Children’s Book of Heroes*, and *The Book of Virtues* is used as a textbook, beginning in the second grade.

But the Marva Collins Way comes into full force in the reading curriculum. From the day a child enters the school, he is studying classic texts in Open Court readers, the most tradi-

tional of the standard elementary school texts. The week I visited, the kindergartners were working their way through *Aesop’s Fables*. The third graders were studying Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poetry. The fifth graders were starting to read *The Tempest*.

The students are barraged by inspirational maxims, sayings, and pithy quotations coming from Aristotle to contem-

porary motivational masters. A fifth-grade classroom has 24 quotations posted on its walls, from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Samuel Johnson, Martin Luther King, Ovid, Benjamin Franklin, even craft-movement advocate Elbert Hubbard. Few elementary school students elsewhere know anything about Virgil, but Marva Collins Prep fifth-graders know that he said “Fortune favors the bold.”

Many modern motivational techniques are used as well. Everyone at Marva Collins Prep has to write a mission statement. (Robert Rauh’s promises “to be true to myself in all decisions and actions I take” and to “be honest in my daily reflections with my Creator.”) Students are instructed in Stephen Covey-ish techniques for considering “Other People’s Views” (OPV) and “Choices and Consequences” (CC). And every day, class begins with a recitation of “The Creed.” Here are some of its 22 clauses:

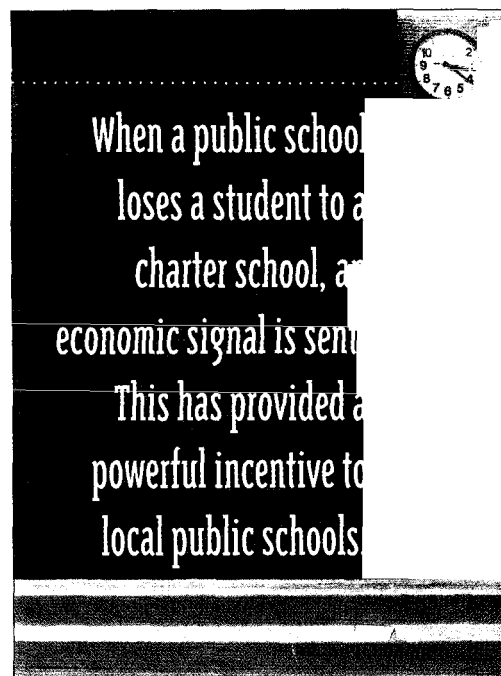
“I was born to win if I do not spend too much time trying to fail.”

“I have the right to fail, but I do not have the right to take my teacher and other people with me.”

“God made me the captain of one life, my own.”

Jay Brown recalls that when she was in Milwaukee public schools, “We always had ‘don’t do this’ discipline rules. But here we say, ‘Here’s what you should do.’ It makes us more compassionate.” Fourth-grade teacher Jillian Zacher notes that there is useful consistency. “In every single classroom we are all teaching the same values every day.” Even the kindergartners Allyson Reynoso supervises are absorbing lessons. When someone makes a bad choice on the playground, kids will say, “You’re not doing CC!” Reynoso also finds the moral lessons she teaches in school are practical ones she can use at home to tame her rambunctious two-year-old.

It’s too early to tell how well Marva Collins Prep students are doing. Iowa Test scores administered in April show that all students are well above the national average in math and reading. And because students at Marva Collins don’t get promoted over their heads, but are drilled and re-drilled until it’s clear they



Students here don't get promoted over their heads, because they are drilled and re-drilled until it's clear they understand the basic facts.

understand basic facts, under 10 percent of the students drop out.

But the school is still growing. Each year since they opened they've added a grade. They've just begun sixth grade and hope to expand to eighth grade by the 2002-03 school year. So no one has graduated from the school yet, and it will be several years before we know how the school's graduates do in high school and in life. But it's clear

most of the students are thriving, and being taught by teachers who are free to do their best.

—Martin Morse Wooster

Sale family home school San Diego, California

My wife Sharon and I and our two kids—John and Christine, 10 and 6—are in our seventh year of homeschooling.

When Christine was born, and John was ready to begin school, we decided Sharon would quit her job to be home. I took a job at a mortgage company and worked from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday. I also played drums professionally every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night, with frequent gigs also on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. We ordered a kindergarten program from the Calvert School in Baltimore, the nation's oldest home curriculum provider, and dived in.

But after two years I was laid off; meanwhile my wife's former boss was pleading for her to return. He offered her three times the amount of money I could command, as well as full insurance coverage for our family, a 401(k) retirement plan, and flexible scheduling to accommodate my out-of-town music playing. We accepted. I came home, she returned to work, and we haven't looked back.

When my wife went back to work, John was beginning second grade at home. He was reading, 'riting, and 'rithmeticking well, and Christine was starting preschool. We've mostly stuck to Calvert's program, which features classical liberal arts along the line of E. D. Hirsch's "core curriculum," although we substituted some intensive phonics books when first teaching our children to read. Calvert skips over printing and begins cursive instruction in the first grade. At third grade the pupil reads great legends, hero stories, and Greek mythology. In the fourth grade they do *A Child's History of the World* a tremendous survey. There are excellent grammar lessons, writing, and readings of classic poetry.

Calvert's math is top notch, and the science is a general program with frequent experiments in each grade. There are also excellent French and Spanish courses. One of the advantages of homeschooling is that you can add or exclude any subject you wish. So along with Calvert's curriculum, John has been learning Latin. All Calvert materials arrive in a large box that includes books, paper, pencils, erasers, art materials, tests, and an extremely clear teacher's manual. You really can't go wrong. The course finishes with the eighth grade, and homeschool guru Mary Pride suggests that by using this program, followed by a few college prep courses, most kids will be ready to take the SATs.

Still, we won't be using Calvert this year, because for some time I've had in mind a more streamlined and personalized curriculum for both kids. John will continue with Latin and Spanish, and use Saxon's excellent math program. Both kids will learn the Greek alphabet, and John will start an introductory logic course. For science we'll continue using general textbooks, read biographies of great scientists, and do occasional experiments using chemistry sets and anything else we find useful. History will be further walks through ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, using the Greenleaf Press materials sold in homeschool catalogues.

Most exciting is the literature we plan to read, including works by Kipling, Poe, C.S. Lewis, Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* and *Wonder Book*, historical novels by G.A. Henty, and selections from Britannica's *Gateway to the Great Books*. Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, proponents of the Great Books at the University of Chicago, edited this latter set in 1962. I recently heard Adler's Center for the Study of the Great Ideas is close to unveiling their own curriculum for homeschoolers, which is great news.

Our day typically begins at nine o'clock with a reading from the Bible and a chapter from a great book. This past year we read the first two volumes of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some Grimm's fairy tales, Greek myths, and stories from Collier's *Junior Classics*. Reading together usually ends up in discussion, and here is where we sow the most precious seeds of our family life.

We then move to the academic part of our show, which typically lasts until noon, and takes place at our dining room table. Some days we head for the zoo early in the morning to check on the tigers, and this means we put off school work till the afternoon. If some alternative comes up we may skip the whole day's work, except individual reading time and piano practice.

I often have to set my drums up in the afternoon for a gig that night, and I'll bring the kids along. If I'm hired to play in the afternoon they often join me; if circumstances won't permit, I hire a sitter. We visit libraries and bookstores almost daily. We hike and go to the beach. The kids play with their many friends in the neighborhood—our doors are open continually. They often spend the night at a friend's house or have friends stay at ours.

John was able to go to Africa with his grandmother for two weeks last fall, and we didn't worry about him missing school—southern Africa was his school. Both kids practice gymnastics with a large class once a week. Christine takes tap dance lessons; John, piano lessons.

We were well into homeschooling when I read for the first time Josef Pieper's *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. This book reassured me that we were doing the right thing, for the right reason. Pieper says