

Oremus, Earl B. 1942—2020

Educator, Hero, Instigator

Earl Oremus died peacefully in the early morning of Jan. 25, nine months after he was diagnosed with brain cancer. He was 77. A born teacher and leader with a booming personality and a mischievous streak, Earl believed our education system was cruelly failing young people who learn differently, and devoted his adult life to changing that. A graduate of the University of Kentucky (B.A.) and Harvard University (Ed.M.), he led Marburn Academy, a private school for children with learning differences such as dyslexia and ADHD, for 27 years, retiring in 2015. He helped to make the school a national model and to secure its future at a new campus in New Albany, which opened in 2017. He was known to all at the school as the beloved “Mr. O.” Beyond Marburn, he was a relentless advocate for better education of children with dyslexia and ADHD in schools across Ohio and the United States, and his work changed the landscape for students, teachers, and parents alike. One of his proudest accomplishments was championing the inclusion of guidelines from the International Dyslexia Association in the degree requirements for future teachers at Ohio colleges. Earl will posthumously receive the IDA Central Ohio’s inaugural “Inspiration” award on Feb. 3. Earl’s affinity for children unjustly written off as lazy or incorrigible was rooted in his own rascally childhood. Born in Yonkers, N.Y. with a name that he disliked, and transplanted by his parents abruptly to Lexington, Ky. at age 12, he faced life with an underdog’s defiance. He chafed at discipline and righteously rejected authoritarianism in all its forms, including school rules, various state and federal statutes, and an admonition from his great-grandfather not to lean back against a certain second-floor window. His youth and young manhood were punctuated by antics that formed the basis for family legends of Kerouacian road trips, a hostile takeover of the Lafayette High PA system, and a mysterious explosion in Kentucky’s Lake Harrington that local news outlets were at a loss to explain. An irony of Earl’s life, given his passionate advocacy of early diagnosis and intervention for



children with dyslexia and ADHD, was that his own rather evident ADHD was never formally diagnosed. Nonetheless, he became a pioneering educator and inspiring mentor thanks to his keen intellect, persistence, and genuine love of learning, teaching, and fixing broken systems. Along the way he found time to play pranks on his students and teachers. Few will forget the time he roared into the school gymnasium on a Harley, dressed like the Fonz, or the time he challenged his faculty to a water fight only to ambush them from the building’s roof with a firehose. A motto above his desk for many years summed up his *modus operandi*: “Function in disaster, finish in style.” A large man of robust energy and vigorous interests, Earl struck out for the California desert in his twenties; led canoe expeditions into Ontario’s Quetico wilderness in his thirties; sailed Narragansett Bay in his forties; and in his latter decades launched himself into such seemingly staid pursuits as cooking, gardening, and backyard birding with gusto. As his tastes matured, he relished Kentucky bourbon, California pinot noir, French cognac, and Mexican mezcal, each in its proper turn and distinctive drinking vessel. If something was worth doing, he felt, then by God it was worth doing right—and usually in large quantities. Of Earl’s passions, none was greater than simply spending time with his family. He became quite close in adulthood with his wise and forbearing mother, and ultimately too with his brilliant and unforbearing father. He was by turns a hero and a cautionary tale to his two younger sisters, and a devoted husband to his wife. In his daughter and son, Earl managed to instill his intellectual curiosity and *joie de vivre*, without passing on quite the same penchant for



About Earl B. Oremus

- Headmaster at Marburn Academy
- Advocate and pioneer for children with ADHD and Dyslexia
- Husband, Dad, Pop-Pop, Brother, Uncle

rule-breaking or peace-disturbing. A great joy of his life was working alongside his daughter Leslie at Marburn for 25 years. Over the course of his career, he served on the boards of the Central Ohio IDA; the Learning Disabilities Network; ResearchILD; and the educational software company Lexia. He served alongside his wife Stuart on the board of the Harvard Club of Central Ohio and the Wellington School’s Education Committee. Prior to Marburn, he was a teacher and administrator at Sayre School in Lexington, Ky., Purnell School in Pottersville, N.J., and St. George’s School in Newport, R.I., and later consulted for Lawrence School in Cleveland. He died moments after midnight on Saturday, in Worthington, with his son Will at his side and much of his family nearby. He is survived by his wife Stuart Oremus, of Columbus; his daughter Leslie Buford, of Worthington; his son Will Oremus, of Newark, De.; his sisters Beth Roberson of Bellingham, Wa., and Ruth Oremus of Nicholasville, Ky.; and his grandsons Dylan and Ansel. In lieu of flowers, please consider giving to the Earl Oremus Inspiration Fund at Marburn Academy, which will be used to help future generations of students who learn differently. Please make checks payable to Marburn Academy and send to Marburn Academy, Earl Oremus Inspiration Fund, 9555 Johnstown Road, New Albany, Ohio, 43054. Arrangements entrusted to the Schoedinger Worthington Chapel, 6699 North High Street.