



“FAREWELL, MRS. HOFFMAN!”

Moses Brown’s first female head of school departs after transforming campus

By Lee Chafee

“Thank You, Joanne.” And with these words, filmmaker Cherry Arnold’s tribute film to the retiring head of Moses Brown came to close and with it, more than 600 attendees of a farewell gala last month came to their feet.

After fifteen years at the helm, Joanne Hoffman, the hard-driving fundraiser and lover of poetry, has officially stepped down as the 225-year-old Quaker institution’s first female head of school. Hoffman led the school into the 21st century, overseeing more than \$40 million in campus renovations and new buildings during her tenure.

“Joanne Hoffman has totally transformed Moses Brown,” said former MB board chair and alumnus Darrell Ross. “When I think of her, I think of two adjec-

tives that work hand in hand: passionate and persistent. If Joanne gets something in her mind, she will not be deterred.”

Under the shadow of the few remaining elms, with the original brick buildings at its core, surrounded by deep green lawns and wrought-iron gates, the 33-acre Moses Brown campus has the appearance of a small college. Its origins date back to 1784, making it one of the oldest secondary schools in the country. But when Hoffman first arrived, it was obvious many of the buildings needed updating.

Hoffman drove the renovations of the middle school wing (recently renamed “Hoffman House” in her honor), the science center, student center, lower school classrooms and upper school language lab. New construction included the Ross

Building – a music center with rehearsal space for drama, dance, choral and ensembles; a new softball field; an extension to the field house; and an outdoor track and state-of-the-art turf athletic field.

But while the hard-working Hoffman seemed to thrive on 15-hour days, there is a contrasting poetic side to her as well. In her installation speech at Moses Brown in 1994, Hoffman (known in the Quaker tradition by her first name but as “Mrs. Hoffman” by students) quoted Henry David Thoreau, as she would do often over the years in her poetry readings to children from kindergarten to 12th grade:

*Though I do not believe
that a plant will spring up
where no seed has been,*

*I have great faith in a seed.
Convince me that you have a seed there,
and I am prepared to expect wonders.*

It was this mix of the poetic with the professional that seemed to have produced a perfect fit for the high-energy headmistress. It turned out her fervent belief in the infinite possibilities for the individual child – Thoreau’s “seed” – would coincide naturally with the school’s centuries-old Quaker teaching that every person possesses an inner strength worthy of respect and recognition. And Hoffman’s belief in young people and Moses Brown has been just that: fervent, impassioned – some might say zealous.

This is the only way to square simple Quaker values and poetry with the pow-

“When I think of [Joanne], I think of two adjectives: passionate and persistent.”

– Darrell Ross, former Moses Brown board chair and alumnus



erhouse side of Joanne Hoffman: a head of school who regularly put in long hours, ran her institution with a steely determination and raised millions in her 15 years with the hyper-focus of a CEO.

“I have enjoyed raising money. (But my focus) is about the students, programs, how we can enhance the learning experience,” Hoffman said during a recent interview, which she wedged into her rapid-fire schedule by starting at 7:30am. “I enjoy telling the Moses Brown story. It is such a full and textured story, with excellence at its center. Especially if you are going to people [alums] who have a connection – whether they come from the class of 1934 or 2004 – all graduates say these were the transitional moments of their lives.”

Current board chair and alumnus Habib Gorgi, father of an alumna and three current students, confirms this assessment of the outgoing head of school. “If you asked me how she is as a businesswoman, I would say she is very assertive, profits-oriented, disciplined and highly competitive,” Gorgi said. “Quakerly, but very competitive for her students.”

Quaker schools, also called Friends schools, foster moral development as well as academic development. The mission of the national Friends Council on Education, on whose board Hoffman served for eight years, states in part that “. . . the core purpose of its member schools is to create deliberate learning communities that are centered on Quaker values such

as simplicity, peace, justice, stewardship and integrity.”

MB students and faculty attend weekly silent gatherings at the Quaker Meeting House on the edge of campus. There, they are asked to reflect and to stand up and talk if they like. It is hoped that silent meetings encourage not only reflection but also confidence to speak one’s mind for the betterment of the community. MB students are required to spend at least 40 hours on community service – and they almost all opt for much more.

Creative problem solving, teamwork, tolerance, peaceful conflict-resolution, moral fiber and leadership are highlighted at MB, whose motto is “For the Honor of Truth.” Its numerous accomplished alumni include Christopher Hill, ‘70, recently named by President Obama as Ambassador to Iraq.

In 2007, under the elms, Hill spoke to the graduating young men and women on the cusp of their next life-step, reflecting on how his time on the MB lacrosse field and his Quaker education has enabled him to meet challenges around the world, particularly in its emphasis on “the role of conscience.”

While Friends schools value and embrace the diversity of cultures and religions in their communities, in the early 1990s MB pamphlets touting diversity often featured the same two or three African-American faces. Under Hoffman’s guidance, this fall 118 new students will enter the school, 21% of whom will be minority students.

MB figures place the school’s scholarship budget at a record \$3.15 million. Tuition runs from approximately \$23,000 per year (lower school) to \$26,000 (upper school) with the average scholarship award approximately \$15,000 per year.

But while moral values and teamwork are at the core of Quaker education, under Hoffman’s leadership academic achievement has been a clear priority as well. She expands on the misconceived inconsistency. “Quakers believe in being superb in every aspect of your life. So, Quakers believe in excellence in academics, athletics, art and music. We compete. We believe in confidence and respect.”

Proof of the school’s success is obvious in the fact that this year some 20 seniors (out of a graduating class of 90) received national recognition for their academic achievement. Thirty-nine students from within the school were recognized by the College Board as AP Scholars. And this year’s college admissions list includes virtually every good school you can think of: most of the Ivies, Stanford, Georgetown, plus many of the smaller New England and West Coast colleges one would expect. But where the students go to school isn’t what’s most important to Hoffman. “I’m more concerned that each young person achieves his or her fullest potential,” she says. “That’s at the core of Friends’ education.”

Despite her molding of Moses Brown into a “more Quakerly” school, to use Gorgi’s term, there is nothing gushy about

Joanne Hoffman. Her skin is porcelain; her hair silver and thick; her posture strong; her eyes direct. She greets with a bright smile a student who pokes her head into the office. In a swift motion, she takes from an armoire a folded flag for the girl to raise over the front circle. It’s one of a number of ways she has scheduled students into her day in order to get to know them.

Sophomore Hope Specter, one of Hoffman’s six advisees this past year, spoke at the video tribute that made up one of the highlights of the recent May gala honoring the departing head of school: “She has always surprised me about how much she cares about each person and she surprises you with how much she knows about you.” Another moving part of the event was when Hoffman’s daughter Caitlin, now a physician, added her own personal reminiscences of “Life with Joanne.”

Hoffman, 61, and her husband Richard, a teacher and coach at Belmont Hill School, have attended countless arts awards ceremonies, concerts and athletic events over the years. At the gala, a recurring theme was that Hoffman’s presence on the sidelines or in the audience for big events was a given. “Not to mention the intensity of that support,” joked several of the presenters.

“We Eat Quakers For Breakfast” read the signs waved by squealing green-painted girls at the Bishop Hendricken/Moses Brown boys lacrosse finals in June. The Quakers went on to shut down Hendrick-



Accomplished Scholar to Take Reins at Moses Brown

Matt Glendinning, *summa cum laude* graduate of Dartmouth College and a Fulbright scholar with a Ph.D in classical archaeology, leaves his position as upper school director at the Moorestown Friends School in New Jersey to become the new head of school at Moses Brown.

Dr. Glendinning replaces outgoing MB head Joanne Hoffman.

Glendinning has served in Friends schools for 13 years, having taught at Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia (1996-2004), prior to Moorestown Friends (2004-2009). He has training in educational leadership, non-profit fundraising and business management.

In announcing Glendinning as the new Moses Brown head of school, board chair Habib Gorgi said, "In making this decision, the [search] committee was guided by our need for an educational leader with outstanding vision, one who will maintain the Quaker identity of our school, lead us wisely through a national financial crisis, and provide continued focus on the priorities of our strategic plan. Matt is well prepared to serve our beloved school in this capacity."

Glendinning received his Master's degree in Education from Arcadia University in Philadelphia and his Ph.D from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

A former Latin teacher at Phillips Academy, Andover, Glendinning served as dean of students and program director at the Cambridge Prep Experience, a summer program in Cambridge, England. Glendinning has worked on archaeological excavations in Spain, Greece and Turkey and has led numerous school trips to Italy.

A Fulbright scholar in Greece, Glendinning has also been awarded the Edward E. Ford Fellowship in Educational Leadership by the National Association of Independent Schools. He has garnered research and publication grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Glendinning comes to Providence with his wife of 12 years, Katherine. The new head already has one exotic fall event on his plate. A dedicated runner, he is planning to run in a special anniversary run of the Greek Marathon set for Athens. Talk about a total commitment to classical studies!

en 10-5 to win MB's first boys Division 1 Rhode Island Interscholastic League championship.

Asked how she had fielded a winning lacrosse team from a high school of 200 boys against Hendricken, a school of 1,000 boys, Joanne replied, "We do that in all sports. The girls' lacrosse is in the semi-finals." "We've got good coaching," added Alex Rickler, an MB lacrosse captain.

MB athletics director Jeff Maidment observed, "As far as attracting coaches, I think it has a lot to do with the quality of student-athlete we attract. Over and over again I hear coaches say to me, 'I love coaching at MB because the kids are so great. They listen, they're respectful and they have a tremendous amount of pride in the school.'"

Opposing teams in the RILL would be mistaken to underestimate MB athletes as peaceful pushovers. State championships include: Football ('01, '04), boys soccer ('07), ice hockey ('02, '04), baseball ('05), boys basketball ('08, '09), softball ('08), girls lacrosse ('08), girls tennis (08), and field hockey (06, '07, '08).

One of Hoffman's most significant achievements at Moses Brown, however, has to be the dramatic turnaround in the music and arts programs at the school. While MB has enjoyed a long tradition of athletic success, the biggest changes have occurred in the arts. Student visual artists now supplement their studio work with exhibitions at

MB's Krause Gallery, which alternates as a venue for professional artists.

In the second year of her tenure, Hoffman hired music director Steve Toro. "At our first concert in December, 1995, we had six students, who had never been asked to perform in a concert; that was new," Toro recalls. "They played in the Sinclair Room and when they finished, the audience went crazy, but Joanne leapt up from her seat and ran to the front and kissed my hand. She keeps that tradition quietly now and finds me after every performance and kisses my hand."

Today, 175 MB children take music lessons and perform in one of 15 ensembles, with a third of the upper and middle schools playing and 50 lower school children as well.

Another of the uniquely challenging aspects for any head of a Friends school is the need to balance Quaker values with the pragmatic realities of running a complex entity like Moses Brown. For example, while charged with protecting the endowment assets of the school in challenging economic times, Quaker investment philosophy puts restrictions on the types of investments (most obviously ones that have a military component) that can be selected. The pacifism that lies at the heart of Quaker philosophy is frequently challenged in an environment that finds American soldiers in conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. And Board decisions have to

be made by consensus not majority voting. "It requires a more nuanced approach to leadership, but one which has been well served by Joanne's vision and leadership style," observed Barry Fain, a longtime former Board member, alumnus and parent.

Hoffman leaves Providence for her family home in Carlisle, Mass., and will volunteer her time at the Beacon Academy in Brookline, MA – a "gap year" school that prepares urban eighth-graders for admission to private high schools. Hoffman graduated from Marymount College and earned her M.A. in English at Trinity College. She began her career as assistant dean of students and English teacher at the Kingswood-Oxford School in West Hartford, CT, and served in a number of administrative capacities at the Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, CT. Before beginning her tenure at Moses Brown, she was associate head at Concord Academy.

A week before presiding over her last Moses Brown commencement, Hoffman was asked about her love of poetry, and what poem might end this story. "I think it would be the E. B. White poem," she said, the verses of "Natural History" flowing fluidly from memory:

*Thus I, gone forth as spiders do
In spider's web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken thread to you
For my returning.*