

Confessions of a Headmaster

Memoir by Paul F. Cummins

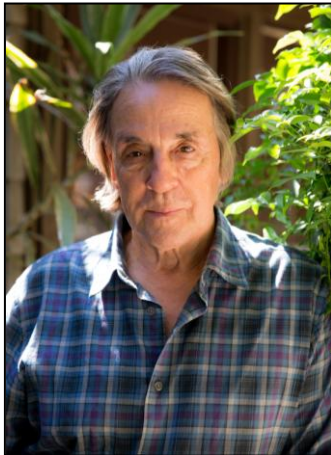
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Paul F. Cummins
Photo by Shelby Duncan



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In a book that is both a memoir and manifesto for education reform, Cummins . . . chronicles his remarkable career as a teacher, headmaster, and school founder. . . .

An inspiring memoir of a determined man committed to social change.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

In this entertaining and inspiring memoir, renowned educator Paul F. Cummins candidly shares his journey from privileged kid and ivory-tower scholar to hands-on progressive educator, working to achieve social justice through education for all youth—from children of celebrities to foster and incarcerated youth and those facing sometimes unimaginable circumstantial hurdles to education and accomplishment. In his journey, Paul proves time and again that all children can succeed given appropriate support, and that in the high-stakes business of education, joy, passion, and creativity are what work.

Praise for *Confessions of a Headmaster*

“*Confessions of a Headmaster*, by Paul Cummins, the legendary educator who brought his first school . . . from the brink of closing down in bankruptcy to national prominence, is the chronicle of a group endeavor. Cummins recruited teachers with a passion for the subjects they taught, and the school they created together treated the arts, athletics, community service, human development, and environmental studies as subjects every bit as ‘solid’ as the so-called core curriculum. This is also the story of a man who brought the romance back into teaching at a time when the field of education is a field of constant national controversy, and our most popular books have titles with militarist references, such as *The Teacher Wars*.”

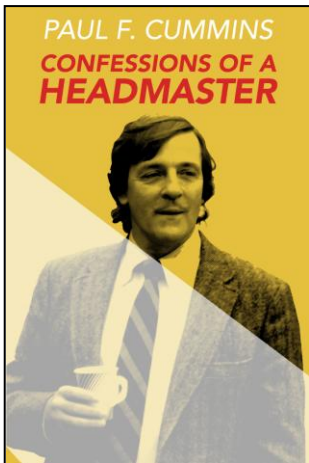
—Mona Simpson

“As Paul Cummins once remarked, ‘Passion without intelligence is of limited value’—and the inverse is also true—for who would want intelligence without passion? In *Confessions*, we see what can happen when these two qualities work in sync!”

—John Densmore, drummer for the Doors

Biographical Note

Renowned educator and founder of numerous schools, Dr. Paul F. Cummins reinvented progressive education and has proven that given appropriate support, all children can succeed, regardless of their circumstances.



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More Praise for *Confessions of a Headmaster*

“When Paul Cummins founded Crossroads School, in 1971 . . . Private school was for the rich, the white, the privileged. But Paul Cummins thought it was time for that to change. *Confessions of a Headmaster* is the story of that change, the story of the birth of the kind of open, enlightened, diverse education we all take for granted today, told in a warm and engaging way by the visionary in our midst who made it happen.”

—Victoria Shorr, co-founder of the Archer School for Girls, and of the Pine Ridge Girls’ School

“This book makes me appreciate the genius behind Crossroads—the first school that understood that poetry, music, and backpacking are as important to turning out great students as are mathematics and science. And if there hadn’t been a school where the whole kid mattered, I would never have been able to accomplish the things I’ve been lucky enough to do in this life. Paul Cummins and Crossroads changed my life.”

—Amy Pascal, former co-chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment

From *Confessions of a Headmaster*

My thirty-two years at Crossroads School were coming to an end. This spring evening of 2002 at the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica was to be the farewell celebration. Mary Ann and I picked up my ninety-two-year-old mother at her senior home nearby and drove to the hotel along the Palisades bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean as the sun, almost on cue, was setting.

I had been the lead founder of Crossroads, its headmaster for twenty-two years. I had stayed on an additional ten years as president, focusing on outreach programs. But thirty-two years seemed enough, and I felt it was time to move on to new ventures. At first my family tried to talk me out of it—none of them could envision the school without me. For my daughters, Anna and Emily, Crossroads had been the hub of much of their life’s wheel with me as a daily presence at the school. Mary Ann, who planned to stay at the school indefinitely, could not imagine my not being there.

The farewell celebration was upon us, and as we drove up to the hotel, I found my stomach in knots and my eyes already beginning to sting.

The forty-third president of the United States also came to speak—well, actually it was Harry Shearer doing a hilarious impersonation in which he pledged, along with his Catholic brethren, “to leave no child’s behind” (which engendered an audible groan of laughter) and that as “The Educationist President” he would serve education “all over the world—and elsewhere.”

Poignant moments came when two alums took the stage. First was Danielle de Niese, an international opera star who offered a rendition of a favorite song of mine, “Time After Time.” The second was Ahrin Mishan. Ahrin was a former sort of “Westside orphan” who came to Crossroads in the seventh grade and lived with our family for several years. Because Ahrin stayed away from home as much as he did, he had few places and spaces of his own. He was always a guest in someone else’s home.