



Hershey
by
Steven H. Biondolillo

If you care about at-risk children—including the many thousands who are stumbling precariously through the foster care system—here is the nation’s most persistently troubling story: the Milton Hershey School Trust *sitting on* its endowment, now \$17+ billion, *rather than spending it* to save the lives and futures of vulnerable kids. To put that number in perspective, only Harvard, Princeton and Yale among the eight Ivy League universities have larger endowments.

Many thanks to Spotlight PA and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for their excellent piece of journalism (May 28), from which the only thing missing is an explanation of Milton Hershey’s debt to Stephen Girard (1750-1831), whose Girard College for Orphans provided both the inspiration and, in part, blueprint for the formation of Hershey’s school.

Girard—who was the nation’s first self-made multi-millionaire and richest citizen—codified Girard College for Orphans in his 1831 will. The school opened its gates in 1848, and has since raised over 25,000 indigent children through high school and another estimated 50,000 for a portion of their childhoods.

Today, 173 years later, Girard College, which is located in Philadelphia—the heart of one of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas—is in need of an infusion of cash to keep up with its tired infrastructure and too-long waiting list. Astonishingly, the Milton Hershey School Trust, which had no problem diverting tens of millions of dollars from its mission in order to build the state medical school and purchase a golf course, will not entertain tossing Girard—the institution to which it owes so much—even a single crumb... er, Kiss.

Do I know about these matters from the media’s excellent reportage? In part. Another part: I served for six years on Girard College’s erstwhile Board of Managers, during which time I was apprised of off-line “sister school conversations” that happened, and preferable official ones that didn’t. Oh, yes, and my life was saved by Girard, which rescued me from a broken and impoverished home just before my 10th birthday and raised me through high school graduation, along with the hundreds of boys I now call brothers, a number of whom had biological brothers at Hershey.

For my friends and colleagues working in the nonprofit sector, this article is a must-read: <https://why.org/articles/americas-richest-school-serves-low-income-kids-but-much-of-its-hershey-funded-fortune-isnt-being-spent/>. The \$110,000 per year paid to each Milton Hershey School Trust board member, in particular, will catch your eye. For my other friends and contacts, you’re about to learn where the money from all those Kisses, Kit Kats, Mounds and Milk Duds is going... or, for the sake of accuracy, not going in the measure it might.

And for the denizens at the Milton Hershey School Trust, I offer this familiar jingle: “Give us a break/ Give us a break/ Break us off a piece of that/ Stuck estate.” PLEASE!