

# A.M.Y.'s first principal

by The Bulldog Staff

*This article is a compilation of articles written by everyone on the Bulldog staff. Specific contributors are credited after each paragraph.*

When you hear “time to go to school, “ what are the thoughts that go through your mind? Do you think something like, “Oh God, another seven hours of boring lectures”. Do you wonder who created A.M.Y.? Who came up with the name A.M.Y.? Who was the first principal of A.M.Y.? The man who started it all was Ned Van Dyke. Thanks to Ned Van Dyke, the marvelous creator of A.M.Y, this school is a great enjoyment. (Lisa, Paul)

On April 4, 2007 the staff and I had the great privilege of meeting the founder and first principal of A.M.Y, Mr. Ned Van Dyke. Ned was born and raised on the violent streets of the Bronx, New York. He was always a smart and eager young man, that knew what he wanted out of life. But he also knew it wouldn't be for free nor would he get it by sitting home in the Bronx. (Alexis)

Ned believed in No Excuses. He grew up in a housing project, so he knew a little thing or two about bad neighborhoods. So when a student uses that as an excuse, he doesn't believe in it. He is right after all, kids from bad neighborhoods can succeed too, all they have to do is want to do it, and care about it. (Kate)

Ned got a job at a teacher at Jones Junior High School. He hated that school. “Working at Jones was like working at a zoo, and the teachers were the ANIMALS!” (Alexis)

After a couple years put in at Jones Ned couldn't take it anymore. So he decided to share some of his ideas with a good friend of his. Ned wanted a school that would really catch the attention of kids. His friend told him,

“If you hate it that much why don't you start your own school?”

“Are you nuts? I don't have enough degrees for that!” screamed Ned.

“Aww, don't worry about that it'll work out!” said his friend.

“All right, what ever you say.” said Ned. (Alexis, Billy)

At the age of 27 he presented his ideas to the School Board of Education, which, as under the Supreme Court, wanted to have a mix of cultures of children in schools, but to Ned it was deeper than that. The purpose of his school was to bring together people of all races, cultures, and religions in a safe, protective, highly academic learning experience of a lifetime. He was open-minded and believed in himself. The board was amazed, but there was a lot of controversy about his thoughts and beliefs of how school should be run. People were very doubtful, but he paid no attention towards that. He compared the different races to a melting pot and salad bowl: “A salad bowl is not a melting pot. A melting pot is blended to make the same. A salad bowl has variety.” (Jordan, Billy)

Finally, Ned's voice had been heard and the Board of Education gave him his license to open up a new school. He was happy that he accomplished his task, but he knew that the struggle

wasn't over yet! He still had to find a building and hire teachers. So the search was on! The teachers were found in a very...strange way. Ned ended up putting very "far out" and "radical" posters up on telephone poles saying they were looking for teachers to teach in a unique school. He purposefully made the posters look too "far out" for any normal teacher to look at. He wanted teachers that would fit the school, which was exactly what he got. One of the teachers was Tony Day. (Alexis, Kate, Paul)

Everyone was called by his or her first name back then. Dennis then carried on the tradition by still being called by his first name. The parents of the students came up with the school name A.M.Y. (Alternative Middle Years). It was close to the French word *ami* (*ah-me*) meaning "friend." (Megan, Rhonda)

A.M.Y. was held in the Ethical Society Building in Rittenhouse Square. A.M.Y. was multi-cultural. By that I mean that all kids were of different colors religions and backgrounds. Now, the main heart of the school was the kids. A saying that Ned often said was, "A school is bricks and people, but the people count the most." (Kate)

He wanted everyone to be involved in it and have fun and help each other to succeed. Before he went to bed he would jot down some good ideas to help the school. This shows that it is true that he says that he didn't like his job, but loved it passionately. (Catherine, Megan)

One of the ideas that Ned thought of was what if they could let the children make the rules. This idea worked out great. Without any tips from the parents or teachers, the children came up with a rule to ban all unwanted touching. One of them was the Be Real rule. It meant that over any of the three natural breaks (summer, winter and spring) they wouldn't have any test after the break ended. Also he allowed them to do graffiti on a very big board so they could express themselves in their own ways. (Lisa, Megan, Catherine)

One of the classes was called Moral Dilemmas. The school had a different course content. Like in Social Studies they would not just learn about social studies but learn about getting along with each other. (Paul)

His hard work is why I can come to school every day wanting to learn. His thoughts and ideas are finally heard and have been heard for many years now. We are the next generation of the A.M.Y. family, and I don't know about you, but I am very proud of that. (Jordan, Shawna)

"Life is a book and you are the author." - Ned Van Dyke