

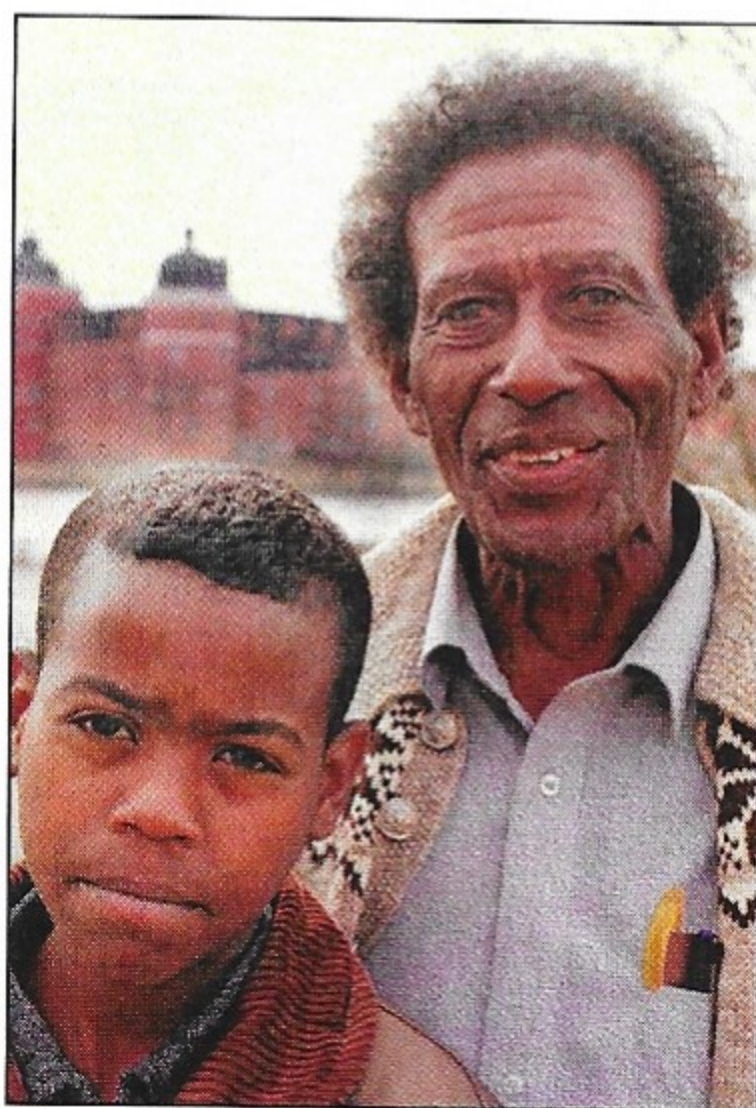
Revered educationalist who won the World Children's Prize

Asfaw Yemiru
1942-2021

Asfaw Yemiru, who has died aged around 79, was a former street urchin who founded one of Ethiopia's best and most famous schools, the Asra Hawariat School for the poor. Its name means "Footsteps of the Apostle", said *The Economist*, and by 2020, some 120,000 children had passed through it. They learnt core academic subjects, but also how to make pots, farm and weave. In short, they learnt how to make a living. In 2001, Asfaw was awarded the World Children's Prize. "People talk about basic needs, food and shelter," he said. "But for me, education is the key."

Asfaw Yemiru was born in the remote Bulga region of Ethiopia in the early 1940s, the son of a Coptic Orthodox priest. As a child, he spent most of his time tending to livestock, but when he was eight, he and his brothers were taken on a trip to the capital, to be made deacons in the Church. Impressed by the opportunities he saw there, he determined to return; and, aged nine, he set out alone to walk the 75 miles to the city. Things didn't go according to plan. For 14 months, he slept in a churchyard, often going hungry. His luck changed when he rushed to help a wealthy Turkish woman who had dropped her shopping. She employed him as a household dogsbody, said *The Daily Telegraph*, and allowed him to attend the local primary school between doing his chores. He finished all eight years of the curriculum in just two.

He won a scholarship to the General Wingate boarding school, run by the British Council, having turned up at the school, dusty and barefoot, and told its headmaster in English: "My name is



Asfaw: "education is key"

Asfaw Yemiru. I am here to learn." He was admitted on the spot. At the school, he had plenty to eat; in fact, he was amazed to see that leftovers were often thrown away. So he persuaded his headmaster to let him distribute the scraps to the hungry children outside the school gates. Soon, he recalled, "these ragged boys and girls began to ask for education as well as food", at which point he began teaching them himself, in the shelter of a tree in a nearby churchyard, at the end of his own school day.

Many of his orphaned and abandoned pupils slept on the site, and when more and more turned up, and church officials started to complain, Asfaw petitioned Emperor Haile Selassie for some land on which to build a school. He did so in the time-honoured fashion of throwing himself in front of the emperor's car, and was eventually given a plot next to the Wingate school. With the help of its headmaster, he built ten makeshift classrooms

– enough to accommodate 280 pupils. As word spread, he expanded his school with whatever funding he could get, eventually building 64 classrooms and an assembly hall. Later, he said the hall had been a mistake – a prestige project that had taken funding from his core mission. "Fine permanent buildings," he said, could come later, when Ethiopia was more developed.

His school often achieved the highest grades in the country. But Asfaw was not interested in certificates, or in churning out administrators and office workers: he wanted his pupils to be socially useful – to go back to their communities, and spread the seeds of the education they had had. This, he believed, was the way to alleviate poverty in the long term.

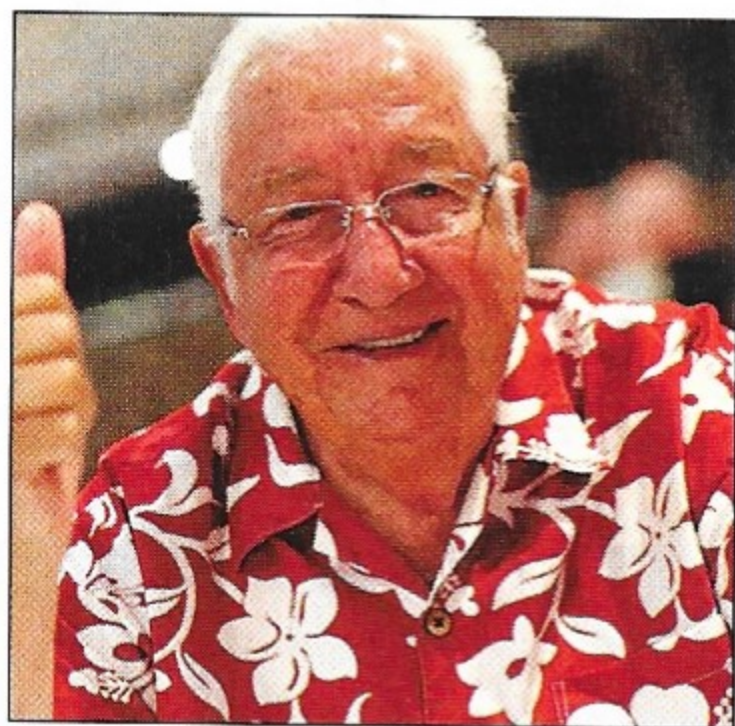
Entrepreneur who built a billion-dollar shoe brand

Paul Van Doren
1930-2021

Paul Van Doren, who has died aged 90, co-founded a shoemaking firm that, almost by chance, became synonymous with the skateboarding craze that took off in southern California in the 1970s, said *The New York Times*. More than 50 years on, Vans is a global brand that brings in revenues of around \$4bn a year.

The son of an inventor and a seamstress, Paul Van Doren grew up in a town outside Boston, and dropped out of school at 16. He made a living working at the horse track – until his mother told him he had to get a proper job. She found him one at Randy's (the Randolph Rubber Manufacturing Company), a local firm that made shoes. He worked his way up and, in 1964, was sent to California to open a factory. Two years later, he left to found the Van Doren Rubber Company, with his brother and two friends. He'd realised that the California climate meant trainers could be worn all year round, and his idea was simple: to sell good-quality shoes from an outlet next to his factory, in Anaheim, and allow buyers to customise their trainers in a range of colours and patterns.

But it was the rising popularity of skateboarding – promoted in the early 1960s as an alternative to surfing, for when there were no rideable waves – that gave the firm real culture and purpose, Van Doren noted. California's skateboarders spotted that Vans' rubber soles were unusually sticky, owing to a feature of the vulcanisation process, and, thus, ideal for gripping the board.



Van Doren: catered to skaters

Some designs also had an unusual waffle pattern, which made the soles less prone to cracking. As the shoes started to be worn in local skateparks, Van Doren realised he had a potentially lucrative new market – and he began to focus on it.

As the heel and toe dragging from a board often wore out just one trainer in a pair, Vans allowed its customers to buy individual shoes. It consulted skateboarders as to their needs, which led to innovations such as slip-ons; it kept tabs on new trends in the sport; and began sponsoring skateboarders and contests. "Everybody else was kicking these kids out of the park," Van Doren observed. "And here was

a company listening to them, backing them and making shoes for them." By the early 1980s, Vans were being sold all over the country, but were still a niche product. It was a film that turned them mainstream. In 1982's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Sean Penn wore a pair of black and white chequerboard Vans for his role as a teenage stoner. The film was a hit, and sales in the US soared. Meanwhile, in Britain, the shoes' popularity took off when bands such as The Specials adopted the same black and white chequered pattern, to popularise the Two-Tone movement, launched in the 1970s to promote racial unity.

Van Doren retired in the 1980s, but returned to the business a few years later, after an ill-fated attempt to compete with the likes of Nike by expanding into new sports had led the firm into insolvency. He restored its fortunes and, in 1988, sold it to a venture capital firm for \$75m. In 2004, it was sold again for \$400m.