

The Smartest Person in the World - A Czech-American from St. Louis

Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr.

Czech Americans are known for their numerous contributions, in just about every field of human endeavor.¹

Now it turns out that the smartest person in the world happens to be also a Czech American. We are referring to Marilyn vos Savant (née Marilyn Mach) (1946-), a native of St. Louis, MO, who is known for previously having the highest recorded IQ according to the *Guinness Book of Records*. Savant believes one should keep premarital surnames, with sons taking their fathers' and daughters their mothers'. That's why she is using her mother's maiden name. Her father's name was Joseph Mach, who descended from the famed physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach, a native of Brno, Moravia.

Although her family was aware of her exceptionally high I.Q. scores on the Stanford-Binet test when she was 10 years old (she is also recognized as having the highest I.Q. score ever recorded by a child), her parents decided to withhold the information from the public in order to avoid commercial exploitation and assure her a normal childhood. Her attempt at anonymity ended in 1985 when *The Guinness Book of World Records* obtained her I.Q. test scores from the Mega Society, a group whose membership is restricted to those with only the highest of the high-I.Q. scores (higher than 99.999 percent).

She went to Meramec Community College and studied philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis but quit two years later to help with a family investment business. Savant moved to New York City in the 1980s to pursue a career in writing.

She is a magazine columnist, author, lecturer, and playwright. Since 1986 she has written 'Ask Marilyn', a *Parade magazine* Sunday column where she solves puzzles and answers questions on various subjects.

In 1987 she married Robert K. Jarvik, the surgeon who developed the mechanical artificial human heart that bears his name. She was made Chief Financial Officer of Jarvik Heart, Inc. She has served on the Board of Directors of the National Council on Economic Education, on the advisory boards of the National Association for Gifted Children and the National Women's History Museum, and as a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. Toastmasters International named her one of 'Five Outstanding Speakers of 1999,' and in 2003 she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters from The College of New Jersey.

Guinness cited her performance on two intelligence tests, the Stanford-Binet and the Mega Test. She took the 1937 Stanford-Binet, Second Revision test at age ten. She claims her first test was in September 1956 and measured her mental age at 22 years and 10 months, yielding a 228 score. This figure was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. The second test reported by

Guinness was Hoeflin's Mega Test, taken in the mid-1980s. The Mega Test yields IQ standard scores obtained by multiplying the subject's normalized z-score, or the rarity of the raw test score, by a constant standard deviation, and adding the product to 100, with Savant's raw score reported by Hoeflin to be 46 out of a possible 48, with a 5.4 z-score, and a standard deviation of 16, arriving at a 186 IQ. As for Savant, she sees IQ tests as measurements of a variety of mental abilities and thinks intelligence entails so many factors that 'attempts to measure it are useless.'

¹ Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., *Czech It Out. Czech American Biography Sourcebook*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2015; Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., *Czech American Timeline. Chronology of Milestones in the History of Czechs in America*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2013; Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., *Czech American Bibliography. H Comprehensive Listing with Focus on the US and with appendices on Czechs in Canada and Latin America*, Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011.