

Miss Apple Daisy

BY ROBERT COLLINS

For 35 years, she taught little children to read and write. She also taught them love, loyalty and self-respect. They never forgot her, nor she them...

SHE was that most rare and precious of human beings, a born teacher. For 35 years she moved through Montreal's Royal Arthur School in double time, with small adoring children streaming at her heels. At five feet one inch she was not much taller than they, but she generated instant and affectionate respect. Her name was Iole Appugliese (pronounced Yolly Appul yazy), but her Grade I pupils couldn't say it so they called her Miss Apple Daisy.

Through all those years, until shortly before her death in 1973, Apple Daisy's self-appointed mission in life was to give her heart and soul to the beginners coming up from one of the least-privileged areas of Montreal. She sang to them, laughed with them and gent-



ly scolded them. She wiped runny noses, found lost mittens and dried copious tears. She taught her children love, loyalty and self-respect.

She also taught them how to learn, and proved that Grade I can be a turning point in life. In 1971, Dr. Eigil Pedersen, professor of

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education and now a vice principal at McGill University, conducted an achievement study of 60 former Grade I pupils from Royal Arthur School where he, too, had taught. He concluded that "those who had been fortunate enough to have Miss Apple Daisy as their Grade I teacher had subsequent records of higher effort, leadership and initiative. . . . In each of the six following grades their average academic achievement as a group was higher than that for children of other Grade I teachers in the school."

Her 1100 alumni included teachers, college lecturers, nurses, technicians, musicians, salesmen and social workers all over Canada and beyond. All of her pupils in Pedersen's study remembered being in her class. A third of the others could not remember their Grade I teachers, but ten percent of them thought they had been taught by Apple Daisy—a classic case of wishful thinking.

"We who knew and loved her," sums up her lifelong friend and fellow-teacher, J. R. LeRoy, "must rise up and say, 'This was a teacher.'"

Posting to "Siberia." Iole Appugliese was born in 1912, the daughter of an Italian silversmith. The urge to help children was ingrained in Iole so she trained to be a teacher. In 1933 she graduated with a first-class diploma and a medal in French from Macdonald College—111 pounds of hope and enthu-

siasm, with dark lively eyes burning from a dark oval face over a strong Roman nose.

But there was no job for her that year, nor the next. She rightly suspected that her Italian ancestry was a handicap, and dropped the "g" from Appugliese to make it easier to pronounce. (Later her friends indignantly insisted that she restore it.) Her father pointed out the discrimination in a courteous letter to the Protestant Board of School Commissioners. His daughter had graduated 25th in her class, he said, yet at least 11 other graduates with lower standing had been hired. The board chairman replied curtly that appointments were made on "the basis of teaching ability and not on the basis of scholarship."

Iole took supply-teaching jobs, and finally, in 1937, a glowing report from her inspector led to a full-time post at Royal Arthur School at a gross salary of \$950 a year.

To teachers of the day, a posting to Royal Arthur School was roughly equivalent to exile in Siberia. Then as now, the school stood on the wrong side of the railway tracks, in a district called Little Burgundy bounded by warehouses, dust, noise and the Lachine Canal. It was a tough, low-income district of mixed races, and Royal Arthur was a tough school.

Every morning, Iole arrived at school early and greeted each new school day with sheer delight. Some

of her colleagues nicknamed her "Jolly Yolly." But she was no soft touch. She kept control by sheer force of personality and her obvious affection for the children, never needing to lose her temper or resort to physical restraint. And she believed that each child was born with something to contribute to the world, and it was the teachers' responsibility to bring that contribution out. "It didn't matter what background or abilities the beginning pupil had," says William H. Ford, a former fellow teacher and now regional director of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. "There was no way that pupil wasn't going to read by the end of Grade I. It was a wonderful start for them, and it was a rare parent that didn't want their child in Miss Apple Daisy's class."

There was no particular magic in her technique. "How did she teach?" says Tassie Adamakis, a fellow teacher and one of Iole's closest friends. "With a lot of love!" "She left with us a profound impression of the importance of schooling, and how one should stick to it," adds former pupil Olga Brand, who grew up to become a social worker in Little Burgundy. "She gave extra of herself to the children who were slow learners. And we all loved her so much that sometimes we wished we were slow learners too."

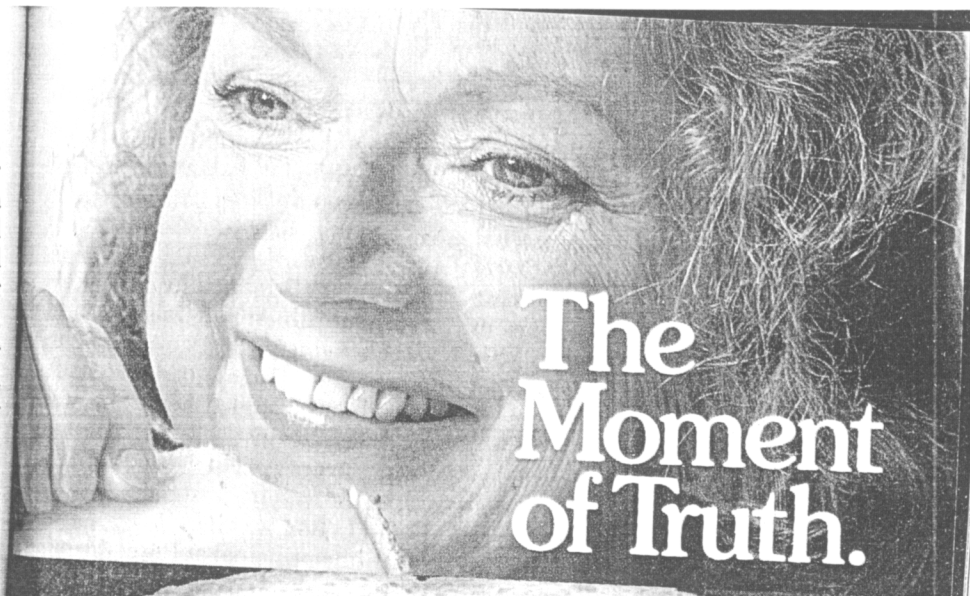
To Apple Daisy's pupils, school was not a hated routine but a

warmly shared event. For many, being raised by only one parent or an aunt and uncle, she became a mother figure. If a pupil needed bus tickets or clothes she scrounged them or bought them out of her own pocket. If they skipped lunch, Apple Daisy's built-in radar detected them, and she often gave them some of her own. Her day invariably ran late; she was always coaching a slow learner after hours, playing piano for the choir, helping run an operetta or supervising a roomful of rowdy kids at a film.

Wed to the School. The years rolled by but, a colleague remembers, "she never seemed to grow old." New pupils came, fully briefed by older brothers and sisters on what Miss Apple Daisy would expect of them. Parents who had been her pupils clamored to have their children in her class. Student teachers were inspired by her. Year after year, principals' and inspectors' reports showered praise.

In 1963 she won the Order of Scholastic Merit from the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers. By this time her salary had risen to \$5500 a year. But money meant little to Iole. She handed out forgettable loans to fellow teachers and quietly paid their share at tea and coffee breaks if they couldn't afford it.

Grown men and women kept dropping into Royal Arthur, asking "Is Miss Apple Daisy still here?" She would shape her hands into



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little frame to screen out the wrinkles or grey hairs or vanishing hairlines, squint through it into their eyes, dip into her phenomenal memory for the right name. Once, Betty-Lou Clyde, an engineering clerk with Bell Canada, met her in a downtown store. "I said, 'Miss Apple Daisy?' and she, after not laying eyes on me for 20 years, cried 'Betty-Lou!'"

Fellow teachers criticized her for not upgrading her professional standing and thus her salary level. Yet when the new math came in, she spent a summer vacation mastering it, and when new reading techniques replaced the long-running saga of Dick and Jane, Apple Daisy said, "Well, we'll try it" and did her usual superlative job. There were offers of marriage, too, and at least one shattered romance, but Apple Daisy was wed to her school, her family and her church. She read her Bible every night. "If I didn't have my faith I couldn't have survived," she once told Tassie Adamakis.

When her parents died, she lived on in the family house with her cat. Her only indulgence was music: concerts, ballet, symphony and opera. It was her nourishment and comfort in times of fear and depression (times that she admitted only to a very few intimate friends). To the world at large she was always Jolly Yolly, the tiny teacher with the huge heart, unquenchable optimism and limitless energy.

"Slow down," cried Tassie Adamakis once. "I'm half your age and I can't keep up!"

"I don't slow down," retorted Apple Daisy.

Burning Bright. The last years were painful. Apple Daisy's world was changing in strange and frightening ways. The era of labor strife baffled and troubled her. "She was dead set against all strikes and would never go out with the mob under any circumstances," says J. R. LeRoy. "When I served as substitute principal at Royal Arthur in the early 1970s, there was a brief strike by teachers. The whole staff went out except Iole and one other. She was, in effect, sent to Coventry by the others for her actions, but it didn't sway her."

By now, although few knew it, she was very ill with cancer. "I would love to stay teaching," she confided to a close friend, "but I can't handle it physically." So she retired in 1971 at 58, offhandedly telling the press and others that "you have to draw the line sometime." Other teachers and the parents threw a surprise party for her. Tassie lured her back to the school after dinner, saying it was a routine parent-teacher meeting.

"Do you think they're going to do something for me?" asked Apple Daisy, uncharacteristically nervous.

"Don't count on anything more than tea and cookies," Tassie fibbed, and led her friend into the darkened gymnasium.

Suddenly lights blazed, balloons burst, 130 parents and former students cheered and her nephew Frank walked forward with a corsege. For gifts there were a string of pearls and a bound volume containing the class rolls of all the students she had ever taught. For once in her life, Apple Daisy was speechless.

Even in retirement she could not bear to be away from children. She worked at the Montreal Children's Hospital as an unpaid volunteer interpreter. Sometimes she visited Devonshire Elementary School where Tassie now taught Grade 3, bringing candies for the children and singing with them. But she was increasingly in pain and less able to move. To the very end she continued, in her favorite expression, to "stick to my guns." But on the evening of December 10, 1973, she died in the house where she was born, with her nephew, a cousin and Tassie Adamakis at her side.

"There were many at her funeral but many more did not come," says Tassie, "because, I think, they wanted to remember her as she was. They refused to believe that she was really gone."

In a way, she is not. Her presence still burns bright among her friends. In her memory Royal Arthur has instituted an annual award for the pupil who has made the most outstanding effort. Appropriately, the first winner in 1975 was Grade 7 student Carol Boyce, who took Grade I from Apple Daisy.

For the rest, all the other 1100 that she taught, Iole left a legacy of love and high expectations. She taught them to reach far beyond what they had known and been. She sent them out into the world knowing that better things awaited them—except, perhaps, on one count.

"I have a five-year-old son," says Betty-Lou Clyde. "I only wish I could find an Apple Daisy for him."

Prose and Cons

FROM a *Time* book review of *The Rose Garden*: "Anyone who feels that books about raising roses are customarily too mulch of a mulchness should try this one."

COMEDIAN Pat Cooper read *Castles of Europe* and thought it was fair to medieval.
— Robert Sylvester, Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate

A FRIEND who read *Watership Down*, the English best-seller about rabbits endowed with human characteristics, concluded her review of it for me with: "I didn't cotton to the tale."
— Contributed by Leona W. Bigelow