

Shoes were for Sunday (2)

'Entertaining Angels unaware'

In the second extract from her autobiography **Shoes Were for Sunday**, Molly Weir recalls her schooldays.

Extract

1 We always had Bible teaching first thing in the morning at school and one of the phrases which greatly puzzled me was 'entertaining an angel, I thought? Surely they would be instantly
5 recognisable by their beautiful white wings and the clouds of glory round their heads? It never occurred to me that angelic qualities could be found in the most unlikely guises, hiding under very ordinary voices and in bustling everyday bodies.

10 My angel, as it turned out, hid inside the little figure of my school-teacher, Miss McKenzie. To me she was always a little old lady, with her roly-poly plumpness, her slightly bowed legs, grey hair framing a round rosy face and caught up in an old-fashioned bun on top of her head.

15 She seemed so ancient that I was astounded to hear her say one morning, in quiet explanation when she was a few minutes late, that she had been delayed waiting for the doctor to call to attend to her mother. Her mother! Surely she must be about a hundred!

20 Although I basked in Miss McKenzie's approval, I never really felt very close to her. We all held our teachers in some awe, and it never dawned on me to ask her advice as to what I should do when I left school. Surely there was only one thing to do? Get
25 a job and earn money to add to the household



Extract continued

30 purse as quickly as possible. But Miss McKenzie had other ideas. We in our house knew nothing of scholarships for fatherless children. The idea of a child from a working-class household going to college was the very stuff of story-books, and had nothing to do with the business of living as we knew it.

35 Unknown to us, she bullied the headmaster into putting my name forward for a special scholarship open to children who showed some promise, and who would benefit from further education. As I was the school dux, he agreed, although he was a bit worried about the expense of keeping me at college for a whole year from my mother's point of view. No earnings from me, and fares and clothes to be covered, for, of course, only the fees would be paid if I won.

40 Miss McKenzie brushed all argument aside. She came herself with me to the interview with the scholarship board. To this day I can remember my utter astonishment when, on being asked if she felt I had any particular qualities, and would benefit from such a scholarship, this wee old-fashioned elderly teacher banged the desk with her clenched fist, sending the glasses rattling, and
45 declared in an American idiom I never suspected she knew, 'I'd stake my bottom dollar on this girl!'

I trembled at the passion in her voice, and at her faith in me. 'What if I fail her?' I gasped to myself. 'What if she has to pay all the money back if I let her down?' I knew we hadn't a spare
50 farthing to repay anybody, and I was sick with a sense of responsibility in case I ruined this new, violent Miss McKenzie. As I've said, I was a natural swot, but even if I hadn't been, the memory of that indomitable little figure would have spurred me on when I felt like faltering.

55 At the end of my year at college I was able to lay before her the college gold medal as the year's top student, a bronze medal as a special prize in another subject, twenty pounds in prize money, and a whole sheaf of certificates.

60 And suddenly as I gazed at her, and saw her eyes sparkling with pride behind the gold-rimmed glasses, I realised how widely she had thrown open the door of opportunity for me. And I knew

Extract continued

for the first time what the phrase 'entertaining angels unaware' meant. For there, standing before me in class, was my very own angel, Miss McKenzie.



Questions



The answers to questions 1–3 can be found in paragraph one.

- 1 What puzzled Molly about the phrase 'entertaining angels unaware'? (2 marks)
- 2 Quote TWO features that she thought would make it easy to recognise an angel. (2 marks)
- 3 Quote the words which explain the meaning of 'entertaining angels unaware'. (1 mark)
- 4 In your own words, describe the appearance of Miss McKenzie, basing your answer on information in paragraph two. (3 marks)
- 5 What did Molly expect to do when she left school? (1 mark)
- 6 What did Miss McKenzie think Molly should do? (1 mark)
- 7 Why did Miss McKenzie's idea not seem a very practical one to Molly? (2 marks)
- 8 Explain in your own words: 'the very stuff of story-books' (line 29). (2 marks)
- 9 State two things that surprised the author about what Miss McKenzie did and said at the scholarship interview. (2 marks)
- 10 a) What worried Molly most about going to college? (2 marks)
b) Quote a phrase which backs up your answer. (1 mark)
- 11 Find a word in the passage that means 'stubborn, unyielding, not giving up'. (1 mark)
- 12 'I realised how widely she had thrown open the door of opportunity for me.' (lines 60–61)
 - a) Explain in your own words what this sentence means. (2 marks)
 - b) Comment on the use of the word 'door' here. [Hint: look back at page 10] (2 marks)