

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

~ inviting parents into the process ~

Once upon a Monday one early November, a sixth-grade class had just squeezed into Principal Ellen Strike's small office at Courtland Park School in St. Bruno (in the Riverside School Board). In her office with the menagerie of stuffed animals and glowing faux fireplace, she was set to read a chapter of *The Incredible Journey* to the children. A former resource teacher, story time activities came naturally to Mrs. Strike. She read to each class about five times a year. Sometimes a student would stop her in the hall and ask, "When are you going to read to us again?" Every principal has a 'special thing' and reading to students in her cozy little office was hers.

Ellen Strike was always a morning person. This was a good thing because morning is when most of the action takes place in an elementary school.

Mrs. Strike rose at 4:30 every workday and arrived at her bilingual school by 6:00. That was her quiet time. She got to catch up on paperwork and to greet her staff as they arrived.

Ellen Strike's best friend was her agenda: it allowed her to be a very organized person. That's a good quality for a principal, too, because hers was a job that required a great deal of detailed work.

But a principal also has to go with the flow a lot of the time, as interruptions can be continual. "Can I have a minute?" had to be the most common question she was asked, sometimes 25 times a day! "I could have the phone ringing, the outside door buzzing and someone knocking on my door all at the same time," she confided. Thank goodness for her capable secretary during those years, Mrs. Lucille Godbout!



Strike also liked to reach out to parents, phoning them sometimes just to tell them how well their child was doing.

"By doing this, when you need support, you get it," she said.

Mrs. Strike tried to 'close the door' of her office for one half hour in mid-morning, to relax and grab a bite, because the kids' lunchtime was often a very busy time for her. During the day she also visited classrooms, sometimes socially, sometimes to perform a teacher evaluation. If she had an outside meeting (principals sit on committees at the board level), she tried to make it in the afternoon. She tried to leave for home by 4:30 although that was not always possible.

There was always a sense of calm emanating from Mrs. Ellen Strike, so she must have liked her job very well indeed! What was the best part? "Helping the children," she said without hesitation. "The school must work as a team to stimulate them and give them confidence to go on learning." On that all principals will surely agree.