

# Former school teacher remembers Duke

by Darren MacDonald  
The News

When Kingston writer W.H. Coo wrote Schreiber Council looking for information about Duke the dog, he said the Humane Society had no record of Duke having received an award for saving the lives of two boys in the 1930s.

Well, according to Katie Verdone, there's a good reason for that—he didn't receive one.

"Never, never, never," says Verdone, who was a school teacher in Jackfish at the time of the accident. In fact, she says she taught grades "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and nine."

"The two boys (involved in the incident) were my pupils," she says. "Kenny McLeod and John Milani were there names, and they were about 14 or 15 years old at the time."

And not only did Duke not receive an award, Verdone says he didn't save both of the boys either.

"Kenny died," she says. "He froze to death before he could be rescued."

Verdone, who's 83, says the story all began shortly after Christmas one year during the 1930s. The mother of a man named Birch Lagacy—a forest ranger in Jackfish—had a stroke.

"A telegram had come telling him to come home at once, but he was out at the Empress gold mine, which was north of Jackfish," she says. "So the boys volunteered to take the message to him at the mine."

Verdone says the distance they had to cover was about 5 or six miles, and when they left, the weather was pretty good.

"But a storm came up, and it got worse and worse," she says. "So they lost their way and spend the night wandering around."

Volunteers continued searching for the boys through the night, but without success.

"And then the next morning Duke found the boys, and led a party of searchers right to them," says Verdone.

But by the time help came, it was too late for Kenny McLeod.

"When they found them, the dead boy was in the arms of his friend," says Verdone. "John said later he had carried his friend for more than an hour. You see, Kenny just wasn't as strong as John."

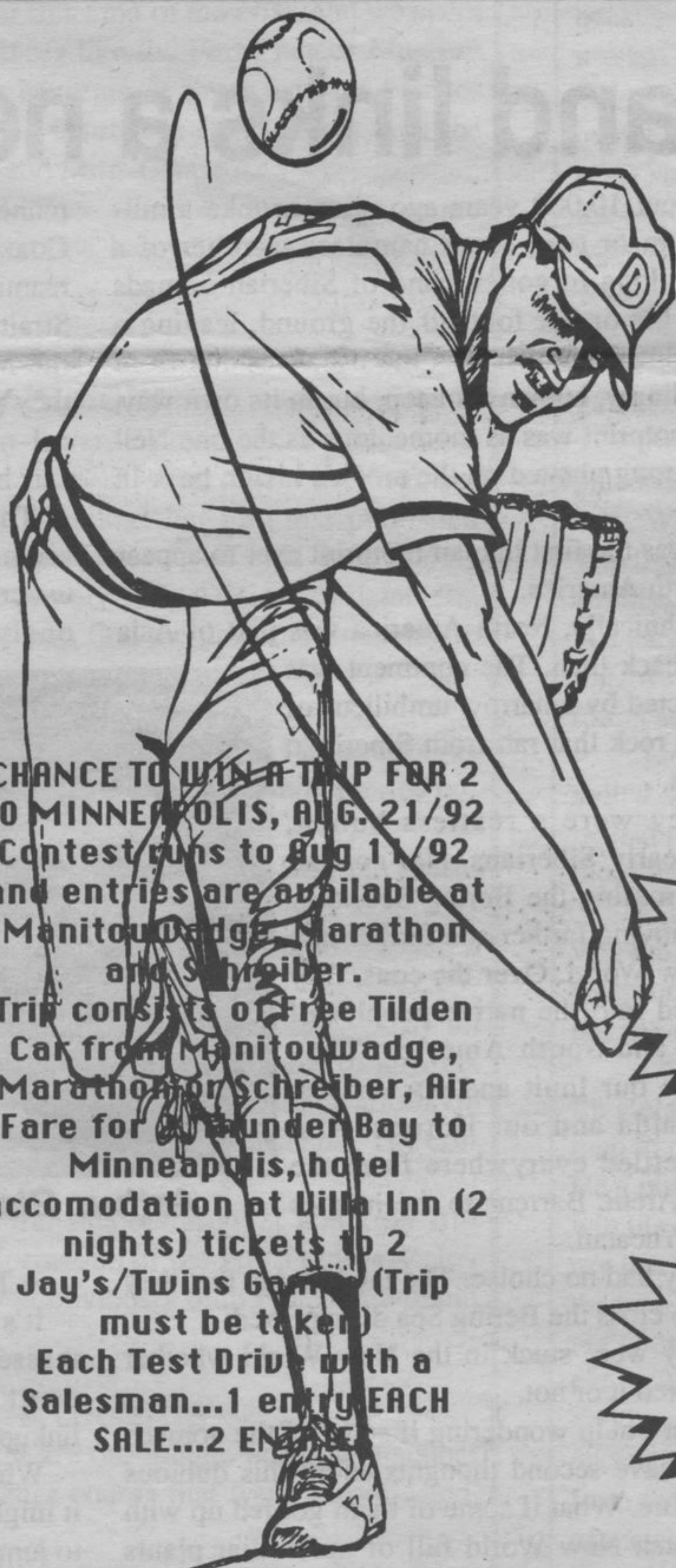
They rushed John to St. Joseph's Hospital where he eventually recovered, although he did lose all but two of his toes.

As for Duke, Verdone says he lived out the rest of his life pretty much as he always had. He belonged to Bill Fraser, owner of the Jackfish Motel.

"(Duke) pretended to be cross, but he wasn't really," says Verdone. "And everybody was afraid of Mr. Fraser because he was a very gruff man. But I wasn't afraid of him, so he used to let me pet Duke—but he wouldn't let anybody else pet him."

Author W.H. Coo was looking for the information for a traveller's guide he's writing for a proposed luxury train.

● **Katie Verdone (right) was a teacher in Jackfish in the 1930s when Duke the dog helped rescue one young man from the cold. The other person died from exposure.**



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