

# It Happened in LISBON

## *SDA Teachers Make a Lasting Impact*

By PIETRO E. COPIZ

**A** few years ago, Mrs. Coutinho faced a typical parental dilemma. Her son Rui had just celebrated his sixth birthday. Like all Portuguese children his age, he would have to start primary school in September. But what school should she choose for him?

A member of a well-to-do family in Lisbon, Mrs. Coutinho wanted the best education for her child. Public schools

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did not seem to offer what she was searching for. What was she going to do?

Mrs. Coutinho remembered the

small Adventist church school she attended in grades 1-4. Might this offer a solution to her dilemma?

In spite of her family's lack of involvement in religion, she decided to pay the school a preliminary visit. Although the school she attended no longer existed, a larger school, in a central location, had taken its place. The building was old and run-down, but the teachers inspired confidence and seemed to care about their pupils.

Though the teachers there had some peculiar ideas about religion, in the Adventist school Rui would not have to face the potential corruption and lack of principles of other schools. Mrs. Coutinho registered Rui, feeling greatly relieved about the quality of the education he would receive.

#### **A Missionary-minded Teacher**

From the very beginning, Rui was moved by the Bible stories that suffused the school program and provided a special setting for everything he learned. The gospel found in him a receptive heart.

In the fourth grade, Rui contracted tuberculosis and had to spend some months in bed. Maria Jose Marvao, his teacher, faithfully came to his home to explain the missed lessons and helped him to keep up with his schoolmates. She also talked to him about God and prayed with his family.

As he lay ill, Rui began to think seriously about God's messages and spoke often about Jesus. Mrs. Coutinho, however, became so discouraged that she attended some spiritualistic sessions.

The same year, shortly after returning to school, Rui had an accident and

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broke his leg. Again he was confined to bed and his teacher visited him regularly after classes. At the end of the school year, despite his long absences, Rui was promoted to the next grade.

In spite of Rui's trials, his faith continued to grow. As his mother considered the past year, she decided to request Bible studies. Almost naturally, these studies took place at the teacher's home. After a year, mother and son were baptized together. Later, Rui's brother Mario and their grandmother followed them in baptism.

#### **One Experience Among Many**

I listened as Horacio Caprichoso, principal of the Adventist school in Lisbon, related Rui's story. This beautiful experience is by no means unique. Mr. Caprichoso mentioned

another child from a non-Adventist family, who after only two months in the same school, told his parents he wanted only one gift for Christmas, a Bible! The principal went on to describe the baptismal class in his school, in which about 30 students are enrolled this year. It is a tribute to Christian teachers that this occurs. Without their positive influence, there might be no baptismal class at all.

Rui's story happened in Lisbon. But it could have taken place in other European towns, in large or small schools. The lasting impact of Christian teachers cannot be measured. They educate for this life and for eternity the children of Adventist families, as well as other young people attending our schools.

Other experiences come to mind: A non-Adventist family moved from Naples to Florence when their daughter graduated from the local church school so that she could benefit from the same kind of education at the secondary level. A non-Adventist mother made her children promise, on her deathbed, that they would attend the small Adventist school downtown. In a city full of prejudice against Seventh-day Adventists, where a few years before people used to spit while passing in front of the Adventist church, faithful teachers have made the difference.

It is devoted teachers who help keep Christ's little lambs in His sheepfold. A few years ago, a survey found that three-quarters of all the children from Adventist families who attended the small church school in Zurich were still in the church.

If, at least in our major churches, we could have schools staffed with qualified Christian teachers, statistics in secularized Europe would tell an encouraging story for Christ.

Adventist teachers start endless chain reactions in directing young lives according to God's will. The effects are seen in habits, decisions, and characters that shape the profile of the church. The multiple ministries of their former students are these teachers' finest reward.

Every year, many Adventist children begin their formal education. By the year 2000, they will be confronted with major decisions concerning their future: they will face real life. Among those making the right choice, a good number will owe their spiritual wisdom to teachers who nurtured them in Adventist schools. □

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*Dr. Pietro Copiz is Director of Education, Euro-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Berne, Switzerland.*