

**By Elizabeth Gordon**

She talks with a soft, Scots burr. She has an open face and a direct way of expressing herself. Moreover, she's clever and kindly and a positive thinker. And Lina Farrar utilizes all these assets in her important position as teacher specialist at the Victoria R.E.A.D. Society.

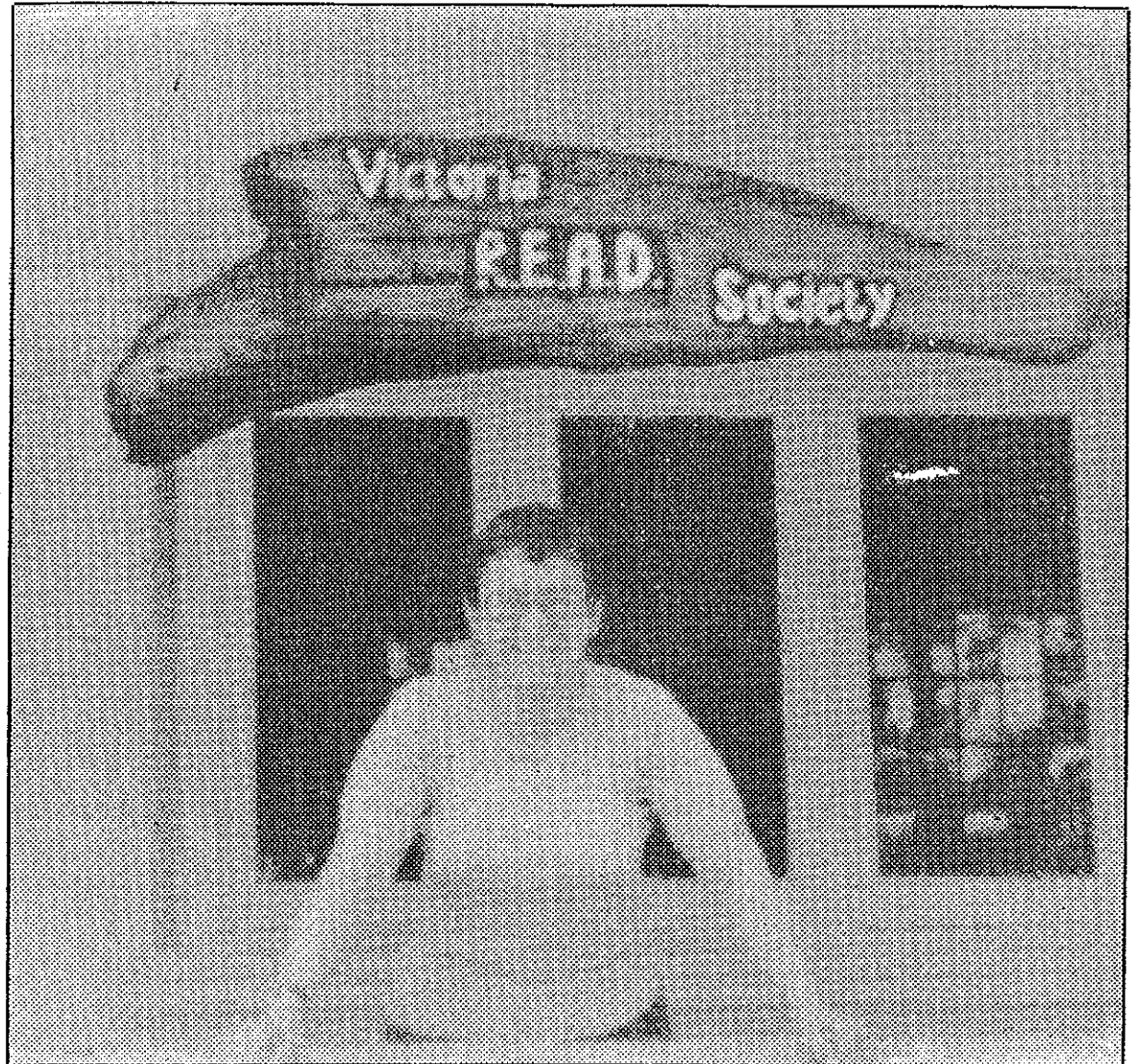
R.E.A.D. stands for "reading evaluation and development." The Society actually goes beyond its name and is involved in math, as well. However, as Lina says:

"We had about two days to find a name so that we could apply to become a Society. We wanted a name which had immediate impact and which would appeal to the people we would be dealing with. The daughter of one of those who started the society invented this name which we like and decided to use."

Lina, herself, is of course, one of the four people who began the R.E.A.D. Society, which is the only facility of its kind in B.C. It started five years ago, and is situated at 720 Linden Avenue.

Though the society deals with learning problems, Lina never used the word "dyslexia." She emphasizes that the term "dyslexia" merely means "the inability to read," or literally, "painful reading."

What Lina and her fellow teachers first try to do is ascertain the kind of learning disability a student has. And there are a number of different types of problems. For instance, visual perception could be the cause of someone's difficulty. In such a case a



**LINA FARRAR . . . specializes in learning disabilities.**

# POSITIVE LINA FARRAR

person may "see" backwards or upside down or may be unable to distinguish a figure in white on a black background, because he is seeing the black, not the white.

Visual memory, another learning difficulty, involves remembering what one sees. Auditory memory, on the other hand, deals with difficulties in hearing sounds. And some students are forced to cope with auditory discrimination problems involving, for example, inability to distinguish vowel sounds, such as "a" and "i". To such a pupil, both vowels sound the same.

Whatever the problem, Lina and the society offer practical aid, encouragement, and a positive approach.

Lina, herself, first began encountering those with learning disabilities when she began her teaching career on the shores of Loch Lomond, 22 years ago.

"When I first started teaching, there were certain kids I couldn't reach. I knew I couldn't reach them and I didn't know why. But I had one of those mean, old-fashioned types of principal who gives the newest teacher the hardest class. So he put me in charge of 45 children with all different types of problems ranging from retardation to learning disabilities, and I had somehow to cope without any special training."

Lina learned quickly to cope, however. And though she entered her special field "by the scruff of the neck," she soon discovered that she had not only sympathy for the children, but an ability to relate to them. She even began to ask specifically to teach children with learning problems.

From her teaching experiences, she realized that some pupils couldn't be helped very much in the school system the way it was, and eventually Lina and two other teachers plus a psychologist-diagnostician established the R.E.A.D. Society.

All the teachers at R.E.A.D. set times aside

every week for updating their training to keep abreast of new methods. Experts in various fields are also brought in from time to time to keep teachers informed of the latest advances in specialized fields. Recent experts included an audiologist, a speech therapist and a nutrition expert.

On the subject of nutrition, many of us are unaware of the relationship of nutrition to specific learning disorders. According to experts, quite a lot of learning disabilities may be related to food allergy, or what is termed "food sensitivity." Lina explains:

"A lot of people with learning problems are sensitive to salicylates in food, for example. Besides being a component of aspirin, salicylates occur in foods such as apples, raisins and cucumber, and they cause peculiar reactions."

The R.E.A.D. Society keeps a list of about 25 foods and this list is given to parents of salicylate sensitive children. Lina also points out that over-refined foods such as sugar and white flour, while producing a different type of reaction, are, in effect, just as harmful to certain folk.

Whatever the cause of his learning problem, a potential student at the R.E.A.D. Society is first given a battery of academic tests to determine grade level. From these tests not only can grade standing in language arts and maths be established, but also specific problems can be discovered.

A pupil, whether child or adult, usually has three to four hours tuition a week at the society. Cost of training is roughly \$135 a month for about 12 hours. But the R.E.A.D. Society is a strictly non-profit organization. Nonetheless, as Lina says:

"We won't turn anybody away. If there's a real problem with finances, we will find the money for the child, somehow."

The adult students at R.E.A.D receive special consideration, too. Lina is at present involved in writing two adult readers. The readers for children

are, of course, child-oriented, and they also proceed at too fast a pace for the adult mind. Children not only learn at a far faster rate than do adults, they also tend to immediately apply what they've learned. Adults, however, involved in jobs and the concerns of modern living, are not as involved in the process of learning for learning's sake.

Not only does Lina utilize her talents in creating adult readers, she also writes articles for such diverse publications as *Fate* magazine and *The B.C. Journal of Child Care*. Busy as she is at R.E.A.D. — she usually works from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. — Lina somehow finds time for curling in winter and tennis in summer.

"I'm dog crazy," she admits, laughing. She and her sister share a big house with three dogs and a cat. Lina enjoys gardening, too. A faithful church-goer, she's also a psychic, and teaches Tarot card reading and palmistry at Camosun College. And she smiles when she says:

"I'm a good example of what I teach. I read about eight books a week, myself."

But Lina's very serious when she discusses her work.

"An important thing that people learn here is that having a learning disability doesn't equal stupidity."

But the whole approach of Lina and the R.E.A.D. Society can best be illustrated by an anecdote:

A new student did an exercise in which he had 20 questions to answer. When he'd finished, the pupil wrote on his paper, "3 questions wrong." Lina quickly said to him:

"Oh, no, you must write down 17 right, please. I don't care how many you had wrong; I care that you had 17 questions right!"

The philosophy of R.E.A.D., and of Lina, herself, is best summed up in her own words:

"We always have a positive approach."