

Apple

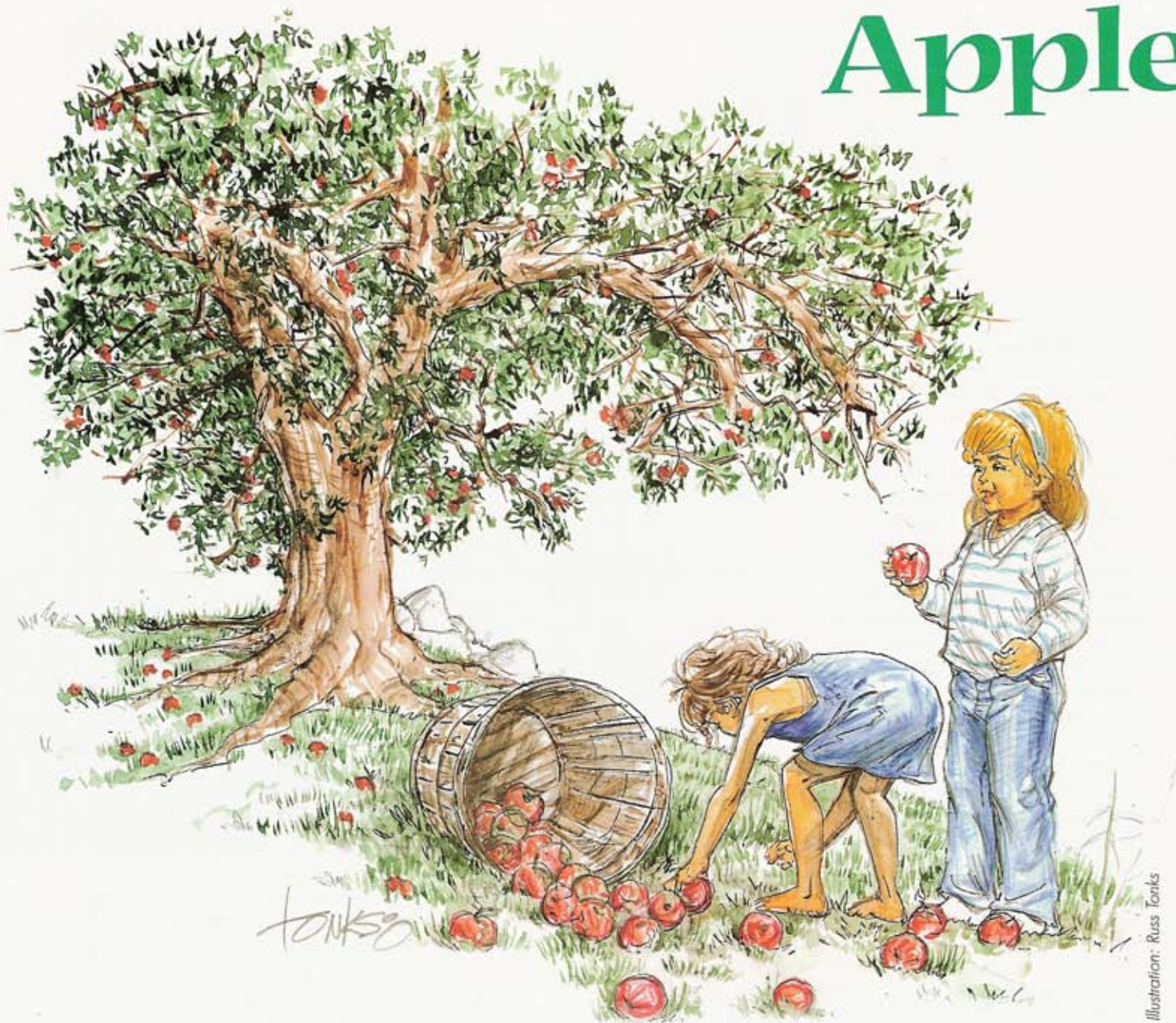


Illustration: Russ Tonks

As my family and I clamour aboard the hay wagon, our senses flood with the pleasures of a perfect autumn day. Our lungs taste the crisp pure air, our breath lingering in its coolness. We drink in the vibrant hues of the surrounding hills set against the backdrop of a sharp blue sky. My hands, tingling with cold, clasp my littlest one as the wagon starts its bumpy ride to the orchards. A nearby brush fire's smoky aroma tickles our noses.

Soon we see rows upon rows of trees. Their branches bend with their load. Children's squeals of "apples!" echo through the orchard as we jump to the ground; a carpet of leaves greet our feet. It's time to pick apples.

It only takes a moment for the children to pluck their first crisp apple. Reverently, they sink their teeth into its firm, white flesh - its sweet juice dribbling down their chins.

The apples we pick, having delicate aromas and ruddy hues, are miracles. Their entire life-passage has been nurtured and protected by God. I polish my apple on my jacket sleeve. It shines.

My apple, like all others, began its life last fall as a new bud on a bare tree. The bud rested, waiting for the coming of spring and new life.

When the milder days of spring arrive, the whole orchard becomes a mass of tender pink and white blossoms, filling the air with their fragrant beauty. You can catch

Trees and Honeybees

By: Barbara Dickson

the scent of apple in the wind. Each tree can produce upwards of one hundred thousand blossoms, all eager to become a succulent apple to savour.

A miracle must happen, though, before apples can be picked and enjoyed.

Each flower must be pollinated before it can become fruit. Honeybees, attracted to the scent and colour of the blooms participate in God's perfect plan and help pollinate the blossoms.

The busy bee desires the bloom's sweet nectar to produce honey, and the pollen to make beebread (baby bee food). In his eagerness, he bumps along the inside of the apple blossom, transferring pollen from bloom to bloom as he buzzes through the orchard. The pollen from one apple blossom fertilizes another, usually on another tree.

God has set a wonderful process in place. Honeybees need apple trees, and apple trees need honeybees.

Honeybees are so important that apple growers either keep their own beehives, or rent them, sometimes bringing in over one million bees to pollinate an orchard.

Once the blossom has been pollinated, apple seeds grow inside the apple with characteristics of both parent apples. Throughout history, over 8,000 varieties of apples have been discovered, thanks to the faithful work of honeybees.

As the hot, hazy days of summer arrive, the apple trees are thick with green glossy leaves and pea-sized buds. Each apple is nourished by 50 leaves.

Apples ripen after they reach their full size. Stored starch is converted into sugar that gives the apple its sweet taste. The sugar, along with sunlight, causes the apple skin to deepen into a magnificent hue.

God's bounty needs tender care. A freshly picked apple is as fragile as an egg, and any rough handling will bruise the flesh. Over 112 billion apples are harvested each year worldwide and most are still gently picked by hand.

As I hold this apple-masterpiece, I dream of its destiny. Will it find its way into a homemade apple pie, or perhaps a crisp or a crumble? My mouth waters at the prospect. Maybe it won't make it to the bag. I think I'll eat this one right now.

It doesn't take long to fill our bags and we're ready to head back. The coloured leaves and nip in the air shout that winter is on its way. ☺

Apple trees, honeybees and us

Our lives are much like that of the apple tree. We not only have a body and mind, we have a spirit. We therefore have the potential of bearing abundant, spiritual fruit for our Creator.

It is in the spiritual area that we can learn a great deal from our majestic orchard friend.

- *Just as the apple tree must be planted with purpose and forethought to produce high quality fruit, so must we.* To bear spiritual fruit, we must grow in Christ. We can do this through prayer and reading and obeying the Bible.

- *Once planted, an apple tree takes 10 to 15 years to bear fruit.* God moves in His own time. We must be patient.

- *Apple flowers are delicate. A late spring frost will kill them.* Discouragement and neglect can destroy God's beautiful fragile blossoms in our lives. Tender care must be taken.

- *Fragrant apple blossoms fill the orchard with their scent.* Lives that stay close to the teachings and spirit of Christ are filled with His fragrance.

- *God intended that the honeybee should provide a vital service to the apple tree in bearing its fruit.* Just like the honeybee, relationships with family and friends are vital for our nurture and support and we need to treasure them.

- *The glorious sunshine compels apples to grow dramatically. But so does a thunderstorm's driving rain.* It's hard to thank God for storms and turbulent weather. We must trust though, that He will use all things for our good, including torrential downpours and earsplitting thunderclaps. Life's experiences can serve to bring exquisite sweetness and colour to our fruit.

Thank you, God, for apple trees, honeybees and our lives! ☺