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TEACHER FASCINATED WITH INDIANS, BRINGS HOBBY INTO LIFE AND CLASS

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Summary

Apache McLean, a fifth-grade teacher at Emerson School in Salt Lake City, is so fascinated by Indians that he wears Indian clothing and Indian jewelry all the time, even when teaching his class of 35 students. And he wears his hair long in Indian fashion.

Apache McLean, a fifth-grade teacher at Emerson School in Salt Lake City, is so fascinated by Indians that he wears Indian clothing and Indian jewelry all the time, even when teaching his class of 35 students.

And he wears his hair long in Indian fashion. His students call him Mr. Apache.

McLean grew up in Salt Lake City - without a drop of Indian blood in him, as far as he knows - and graduated from East High School in 1948.

He earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education in 1961 and a master's degree in educational administration and physical education from the U. of U. in 1962.

McLean was given a regular name at birth, like Joe or Sam, but he had his name legally changed to Apache McLean several years ago because he is so interested in Indian culture. He doesn't want anyone to know his name before it was changed because, he said, "When Indians changed their names they didn't ever want to be called by the old name."

The schoolteacher has decorated his classroom with pictures of Indians and Indian artifacts he has collected and often tells his students Indian stories and punctuates their sociology and history lessons with details about Indian life and lore.

He has visited many of the Indian reservations from New York to California and has written one book, "American Indian Dances," published in 1963, and is working on another about Indian crafts and beadwork.

McLean spends his summers performing Indian dances at lodges in Teton National Park in Wyoming and traveling about the nation visiting Indian friends on reservations. He trades handicraft he has made for Indian-made items and buys Indian jewelry and handicraft that he sells at gun shows.

He will display some of his collection of Indian artifacts at the Crossroads of the West Gun Show Saturday and Sunday at the Salt Palace and hopes to do a great deal of trading at the show.

"I became interested in Indians in 1947 when Utah had its centennial celebration and some Indians came to East High and performed Indian dances. From then on I wanted to learn as much about Indians as I could."

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He has decorated the inside of his home with so many Indian items that it resembles a museum more than a house and he has collected more than 20 authentic Indian costumes.

"Indians and non-Indians need to understand each other more and need to learn to work together. Indians were mistreated by white people, but that was a long time ago and by other generations. We need to heal old wounds and strive for a better future for all of us," McLean said.

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