



Walsh's alter-ego Marg Delahunty puts the squeeze on Ogilvy's Nancy Vonk (above left), cozies up to "bantam cock rooster" Geoffrey Roche and corners Dentsu's Glen Hunt (far right, opposite page)

Oxfam Warrior

Armed with a sword, blue eyeshadow and a tart tongue, comedian Mary Walsh descends on Toronto ad agencies in the name of charity

BY JEROMY LLOYD

Geoffrey Roche is standing beside his desk, speechless, as a middle-aged woman wearing knee-high boots and a maroon bustier enters his office brandishing a sword.

"There you are, Geoffrey," the woman begins, "a great, puffed-up, bantam-cock-rooster of a man. I was afraid to come in, afraid you'd fire me!" She lets out a quick but hearty laugh as if to say 'just kidding Geoff' before launching into a diatribe on advertising, global poverty and Canadian apathy. It's all caught on tape by a television camera pushed right into Roche's face.

In a whirl of big hair, bigger glasses and bright blue eyeshadow, Marg Delahunty Princess Warrior has invaded Lowe Roche in downtown Toronto and demanded its president kneel and pray for the world's poor. Roche complies, unable to get a word in on Delahunty's mile-a-minute tirade. Outside the door, his staff suppress giggles.

Delahunty hasn't been seen since the character's alter-ego Mary Walsh co-starred on CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Back then she was famous for ambushing politicians with a camera crew and her thick Newfoundland patois. But Marg/Mary is in Toronto for charitable reasons, not political ones.

By ambushing the lead creatives at big-name shops, she and her St. John's accomplices have created a video call-to-arms—a tongue-in-cheek RFP inviting ad agencies to submit

ideas for an upcoming public awareness campaign for Oxfam Canada.

Walsh, a St. John's native, has been involved with Oxfam since the '90s. "In St. John's, Oxfam is very involved at a local level," she says, grabbing a quick bite at a nearby restaurant, still in costume but wearing a trench coat.

She first connected with Oxfam through the St. John's theatre community. The local office helps community and cultural groups alike. So while ensuring remote communities have clean drinking water, it also allows theatre groups to use its office and Internet connection. It was through such an arrangement that Walsh first met Bill Hynd, campaign co-ordinator for Oxfam Canada.

"We've been part of social justice work and educating people about issues in Newfoundland for more than 30 years," Hynd says. "Mary's always been a supporter."

After becoming a household name through shows like *Codeco* and *This Hour*, Walsh's first effort for Oxfam was a TV ad with co-star Cathy Jones. More recently, she travelled to Ethiopia to meet with Oxfam's agency partners and represent the St. John's office. "She's always encouraged me to make use of her," Hynd says, which he decided to do again this year for a Christmas campaign that will focus on public utilities in the third world.

After accepting Hynd's invitation, Walsh turned to Donna McCarthy, owner of Dory Advertising in St. John's, to help get the word out.



"I thought to get Donna on board because the [campaign's] message is kind of difficult [to articulate]." The campaign has international and local components, and involves both public and political lobbying. And with a working title of Taps, Toilets, Clinics and Classrooms, it could lend itself to some less-than-stellar ads in the wrong hands. Walsh laughs when she thinks back on earlier

"GENTLE GERMAN JESUS, NANCY," she yells. "How much more soap can we buy?"

in-house concepts. "Bill had an idea that there'd be a flushing toilet, which then cuts to my face," Walsh says, grimacing.

McCarthy says she was more than happy to reach out to the agency community to get work that was both engaging and beneficial to the cause. "A lot of people do public service to get attention for themselves," McCarthy says, "and it has very little to do with the charity. My question was how

do we capitalize on that and still do what we need to do? It's not about getting a beautiful ad with Mary that will get seen at award shows and not do a thing for Oxfam."

So McCarthy suggested resurrecting Marg Delahunty to grab some attention and kick off the agency initiative. Roche was but the first of the day's three victims. With lunch finished, it was off to Ogilvy & Mather to drop in on chief creative officer Nancy Vonk. Vonk is given a few minutes to prepare herself before Walsh, sword in hand, unleashes Delahunty once again.

"Look at us, Nancy," she yells, "two brassy bits of aging crumpet on the slippery-slope side of 45 and picking up speed." Vonk laughs, while Delahunty riffs on her "Evolution" campaign for Dove. "Gentle German Jesus, Nancy, how much more soap can we buy?" Instead, she suggests helping "one million people who don't have access to clean water; 800

million children, mostly girls, who don't have a school to go to; 400 women who will die in childbirth today because they don't have proper health care; and 4,000 youngsters who will die today from drinking dirty water."

Like Roche, Vonk says she'll help out. Delahunty is ecstatic, and when the camera stops rolling, so is Walsh. She thanks the crew at O&M before heading to Dentsu Canada to ambush Glen Hunt—who also agrees to lend a hand.

The videos of Roche, Vonk and Hunt are now starting to appear in email in-boxes, no doubt giving creatives a good laugh and a sense of relief that it wasn't them at the other end of Walsh's microphone. But the industry isn't safe yet. Walsh and McCarthy are planning similar ambushes on media planners in late November to make sure the work reaches the public in prime time.

You have been warned. Marg is still on the loose. **M**