

Entertainment Outlook

Pursuit of Child in Time

By JEANNETTE URBAS
Thomson News Service

To have a child irrevocably snatched from you is the ultimate dread of any parent. This is the nightmare that engulfs Stephen Lewis when his three-year-old daughter, Kate, disappears in a supermarket.

Ian McEwen, author of *The Child in Time* (Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd., 272 pages, \$14.95), says the novel, set in Britain, was inspired by an actual event. Around this central theme, he has developed an absorbing story about a couple's adjustment to the loss and a critique of the inadequacies of government. He also speculates on the meaning of childhood and time.

The book is a serious one, but richly leavened with humor. McEwen has a strong satirical thrust (he characterizes game shows on television as "a democrat's pornography").

The loss, instead of uniting the parents in their sorrow, drives them apart, each isolated in his or her own grief. The only thing that gives structure to Stephen's day is that, as

a successful writer of children's books, he sits on the sub-committee of the Official Commission on Child Care, set up by the British prime minister to examine child-care practices.

There are subtly hilarious sequences in which earnest advocates of various causes appear before the committee; a proponent of a phonetic alphabet, another who believes children should not learn to read or write until they are 10 or 12, a third opposed to illustrations in children's books.

CONTRADICTIONARY

No wonder Stephen decides that child care is a field in which speculation can be dressed up as fact, where - for three centuries - mothers have been subjected to contradictory advice, provided mainly by men. A crowning irony occurs when the committee finally submits its report and the cynical practices of a hypocritical government are revealed.

Theories about time are presented by a character named Thelma, a lecturer in physics, who wrote a thesis

on the nature of time. She is married to Charles, a successful man in the public eye who abandons a promising career to obsessively pursue the childhood he feels he never had, with disastrous results. Time is not an absolute. It goes beyond the linear, sequential time we accept as part of our everyday living. In a moving episode, Stephen sees something out of time, a scene that took place between his parents in a pub before he was born, now relived and repeated in his mind.

The lost child is also related to time, fixed by it into a three-year-old self capable of imaginary growth only in the mind of her father.

Two years after Kate's disappearance, Stephen is convinced he sees her in a schoolyard, skipping rope with a group of girls. He seeks out the headmaster in order to claim her as his own, but is forced to realize that he has made a mistake: she only looks like what he thinks Kate might look like at her age.

"Children change, you know," says the headmaster. "On top of that, you must be wanting it to be her."

SUSPENSE

McEwen deftly manipulates the suspense in the novel. It has elements of the detective story, not in the sense of reading on to find out "whodunit", but to see how the pieces of the puzzle he has assembled finally fit together.

They do fall into place at the end - in an unexpected and exciting way when Stephen and his wife, Julie, face their grief.

This is the first Canadian publication of *The Child in Time*, which appeared in the United States and the United Kingdom in the fall of 1987. The story is told throughout from Stephen's point of view, narrating his experience. Julie's corresponding emotional voyage is telescoped into the last few pages. One could wish that her side had been developed more completely, but it may have detracted from the effectiveness and urgency of the ending.

Jeannette Urbas teaches Women's Studies and Canadian Literature at Glendon College, York University.

Window dressing



Kevin Rypstra, 9, intently paints a bumble bee on a window at the Georgetown Children's Library. Kevin was one of a number of children on hand Saturday afternoon to help paint the windows and brighten the library for spring.

Be a park attendant

Are you looking for something to do with your evenings one or two nights a week or occasionally on weekends?

Do you enjoy being around adults and children, especially while they play or engage in friendly competition?

Challenge is up

The Town of Halton Hills has challenged the Town of Oakville in the Crownlife Participation Challenge!

On Wednesday, May 25 every resident of Halton Hills should participate in a physical activity like walking, jogging, swimming, etc. for 15 continuous minutes.

Thanks to a generous donation from Wm. Neilson Co. Ltd. the Recreation and Parks Department will again, this year, be able to register Fitness Challenge activity, by phone.

On Wednesday, May 25, after exercising for 15 minutes call the Neilson's Challenge Hotline, 873-2828 to be included in the final count.

Watch the newspaper for more details as the date grows nearer.

A blooming good time

Staff members of the Mountsberg Wildlife Centre welcome visitors to join them in exploring nature's awakening, on May 1 and May 8.

The centre is conducting wildflower hikes, which will consist of a slide show dealing with wildflowers, followed by a guided hike.

The Mountsberg Wildlife Centre is situated five kilometres west of Campbellville on Millborough Line, off of Campbellville Road, south of Hwy. 401.

For further information on any of the Mountsberg special events and programs, contact the Halton Region Conservation Authority, at 336-1158 weekdays, and 854-2278 on weekends.

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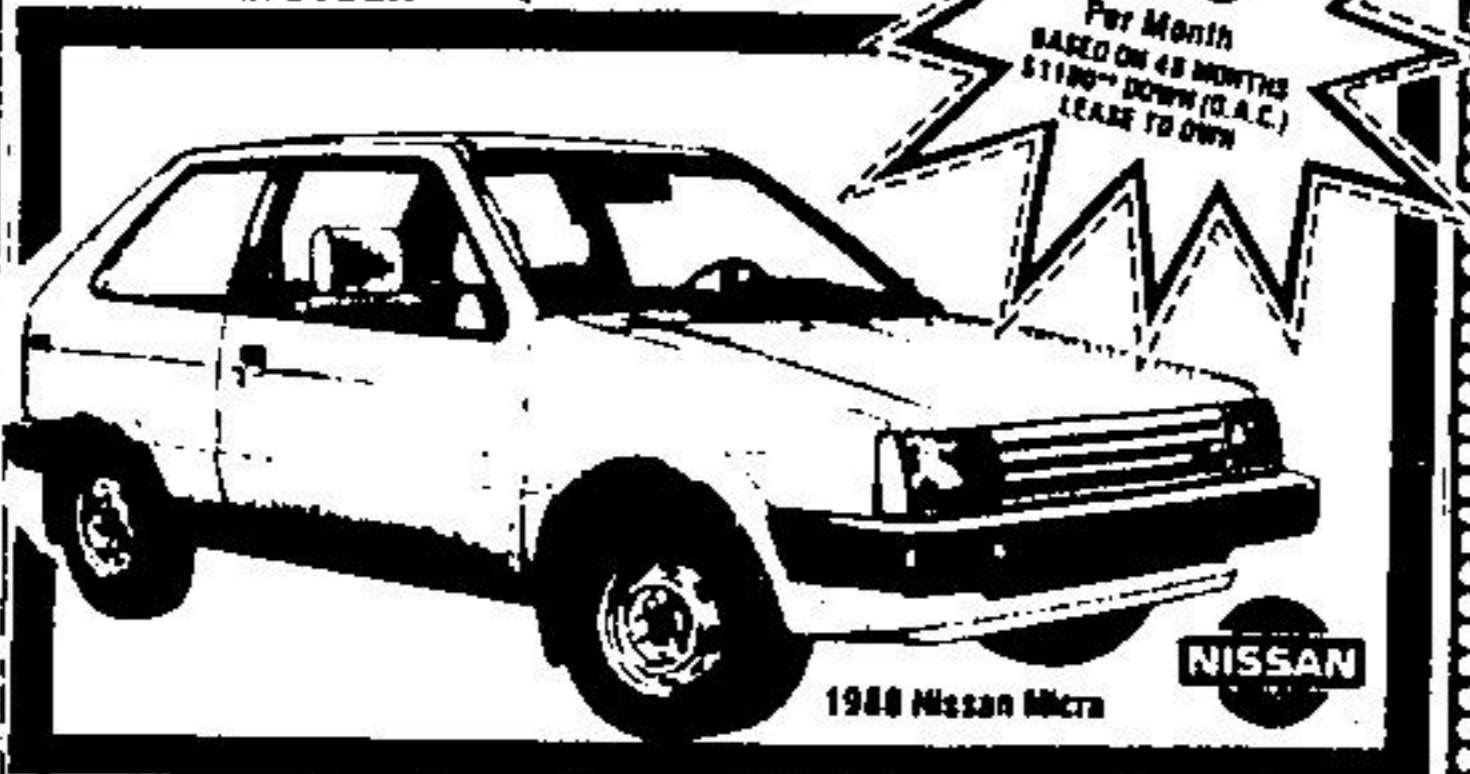
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