

book review

Rachel and The Soldiers

Kilbride author creates a story to inspire the young at Christmastime

By JENNIFER ENRIGHT

As seen through the eyes of a young girl, the nativity story takes on new life in Jean Burbidge's children's book *Rachel and The Soldiers*. The Kilbride resident has created a compelling heroine, Rachel, who finds herself assisting a young couple named Mary and Joseph as they search for a place to stay for the night.

For young readers or those not yet about to read, the story's power comes not just from the heroine herself, but also from the slow easy pace of the plot and the simple language employed by its author. This is a book that's meant to be read or read aloud. And it's also a book that deliberately follows a prescribed timeline, one that should assist young readers in understanding this story.

The author says she wanted to introduce a female heroine into the traditional Christmas story and, in this way, her book is intended to serve as an example to young girls. But the story, which features different scenes – one as Hannah sits by the window observing the night sky, with a large star shining in her window, and others showing her touching the baby Jesus and bringing food to Mary and Joseph.

The story begins with Mary and Joseph and relates how they find a stable to stay in for the night thanks to our young heroine. It's Rachel's idea to let them use the barn as a shelter, and it's this same initiative on her part that is revealed at various points in the story.

What Ms. Burbidge manages to capture in understated prose is really two stories: that of Mary and Joseph and the birth of their son Jesus and that of young Rachel. The author, who worked for many years as a schoolteacher, uses Rachel as a source of inspiration for her young audience. As an orphan, Rachel has come to live in the inn with Hannah and she is expected to help out. She doesn't mind living with Hannah, but memories of her past life still have the power to unsettle her. In one moving part of the story where she meets the baby Jesus and gets to touch him "she forgot the bad dreams, the hard work, the day soldiers had taken her Mom and Dad. Hannah was kind but Rachel missed her family."

It seems that Rachel's character undergoes a change in this story by her association with this special family. The first depiction of her, in the first of a series of illustrations in this story, shows her shyly standing behind Hannah as Hannah greets Mary and Joseph. In subsequent illustrations, however, we see Rachel emerge from

the shadows as she takes decisive action to help this family.

No doubt driven by her own loss, she is protective of Mary, Joseph and their young son; so when soldiers come to search the house for the baby Jesus Rachel acts quickly and bravely. The soldiers want to search the inn, but she is afraid that they will also search the nearby stable where the family is hidden. When one soldier points to the barn and asks her what's inside, she replies that there are only animals. Then she digs into a pile of manure just inside the door of the barn and splatters it near one of the soldier's feet. This keeps the soldiers away from the barn and gives her time to warn the young family to leave. Mary, Joseph and Jesus depart soon afterwards, fleeing to safety thanks to the efforts of Rachel.



Rachel meets the baby Jesus in the stable.

The book's illustrations complement the story, easily matching the simplicity of the prose. On each page, there is a depiction of

different scenes – one as Hannah sits by the window observing the night sky, with a large star shining in her window, and others showing her touching the baby Jesus and bringing food to Mary and Joseph.

This book would make a wonderful Christmas gift for a child, not only because the story is beautifully told, but also because the message is a hopeful one that young readers can identify with. Here is a girl, their own age, who acts bravely and grows personally as a result of her actions.

For information on the book, people can contact Jean Burbidge through her website, www.jlburbidge.com.



As an illustrator, Melanie Vanderzwet (left) teamed up with her mother, writer Jean Burbidge, to create a children's book entitled *Rachel and The Soldiers*. The two have created a compelling tale about a female heroine that bravely outsmarts her bigger and stronger enemies to save a family in her care. A book launch was held in September at Jean's farm in the Kilbride area. For more information, you can contact Jean at 905-335-5008. The email address is jean.burbidge@sympatico.ca.

Concert marks the first public performance for children's choir

By JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Kathy Tyers, president of the Milton Choristers, says the highlight for her at her group's Christmas concert was working with Milton's only children's choir.

The concert on December 12 at Knox Presbyterian Church in Milton marked the first public appearance for the Adoramus Children's Choir. Both choirs, directed by Sonja van de Hoef, sang Christmas tunes to a large audience gathered at the old church located on Milton's Main Street. Kathy says their music director helped make the performance a memorable one for her young singers. "She had those little kids just working away like crazy."

The concert, entitled *Catch the Sound of Christmas*, included well-known Christmas music such as *Silent Night*, but there were also less recognizable pieces including the *Norwegian Dance Carol*. The audience also got to listen to two Christmas stories and as part of the concert Santa and the Grinch came to visit. The Grinch was played by Stuart Charles, a member of the Milton Choristers. Stuart, who works as a librarian at Milton District High School, managed to look suitably grumpy in his Grinch outfit while Santa, being Santa, was there to spread some good cheer. Santa, played by Kathy's son Steve Tyers, walked the aisles of the church tossing out mini candy canes to members of the audience.

Founded in 1968, the Milton Choristers is a non-auditioned choir with a membership of about 40. Kathy says the group is always looking for new members, but she stressed that people don't have to be great singers to join. "We will teach you how to sing." For further information on the choir, people can call 905-876-3203.

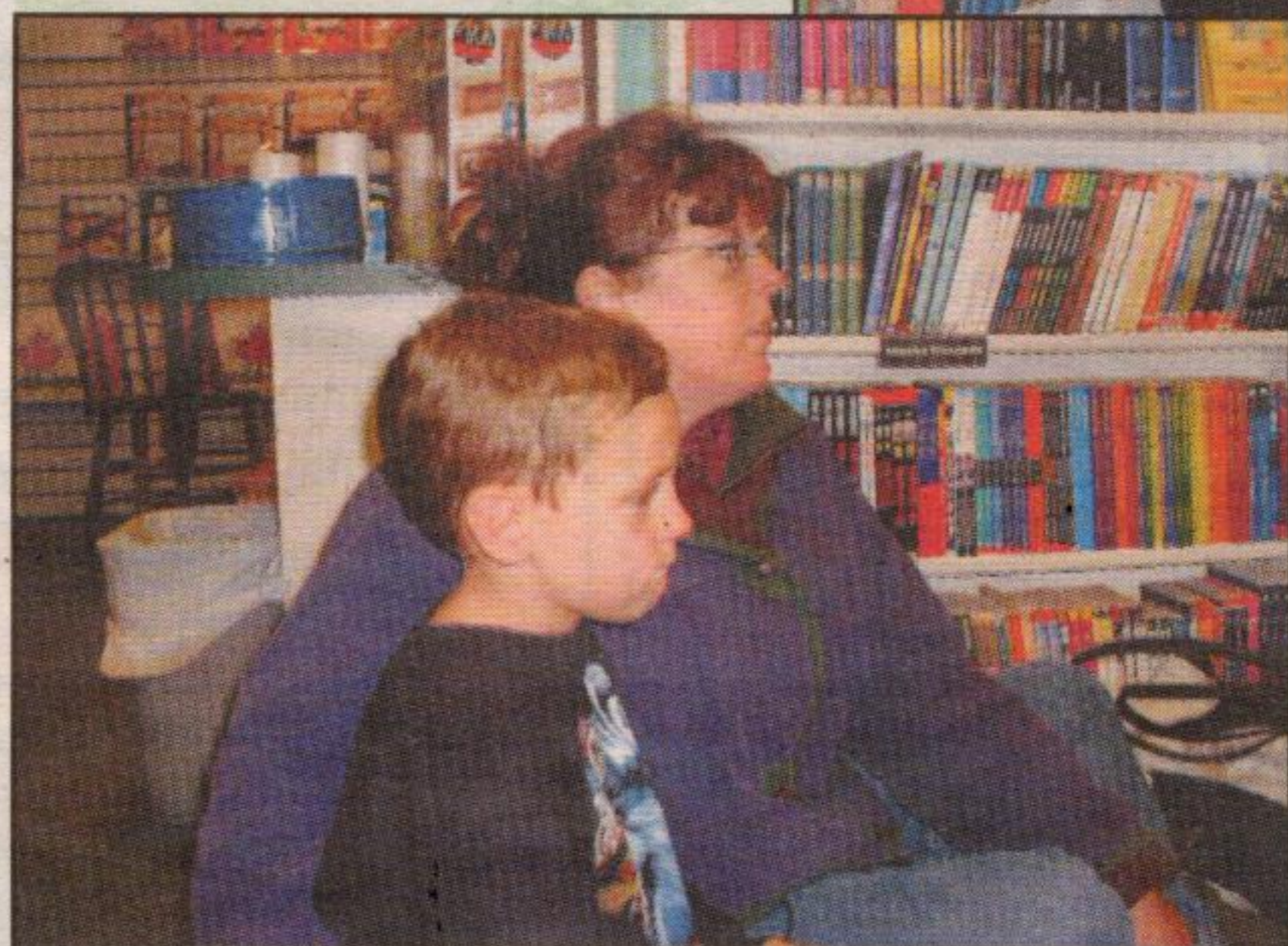
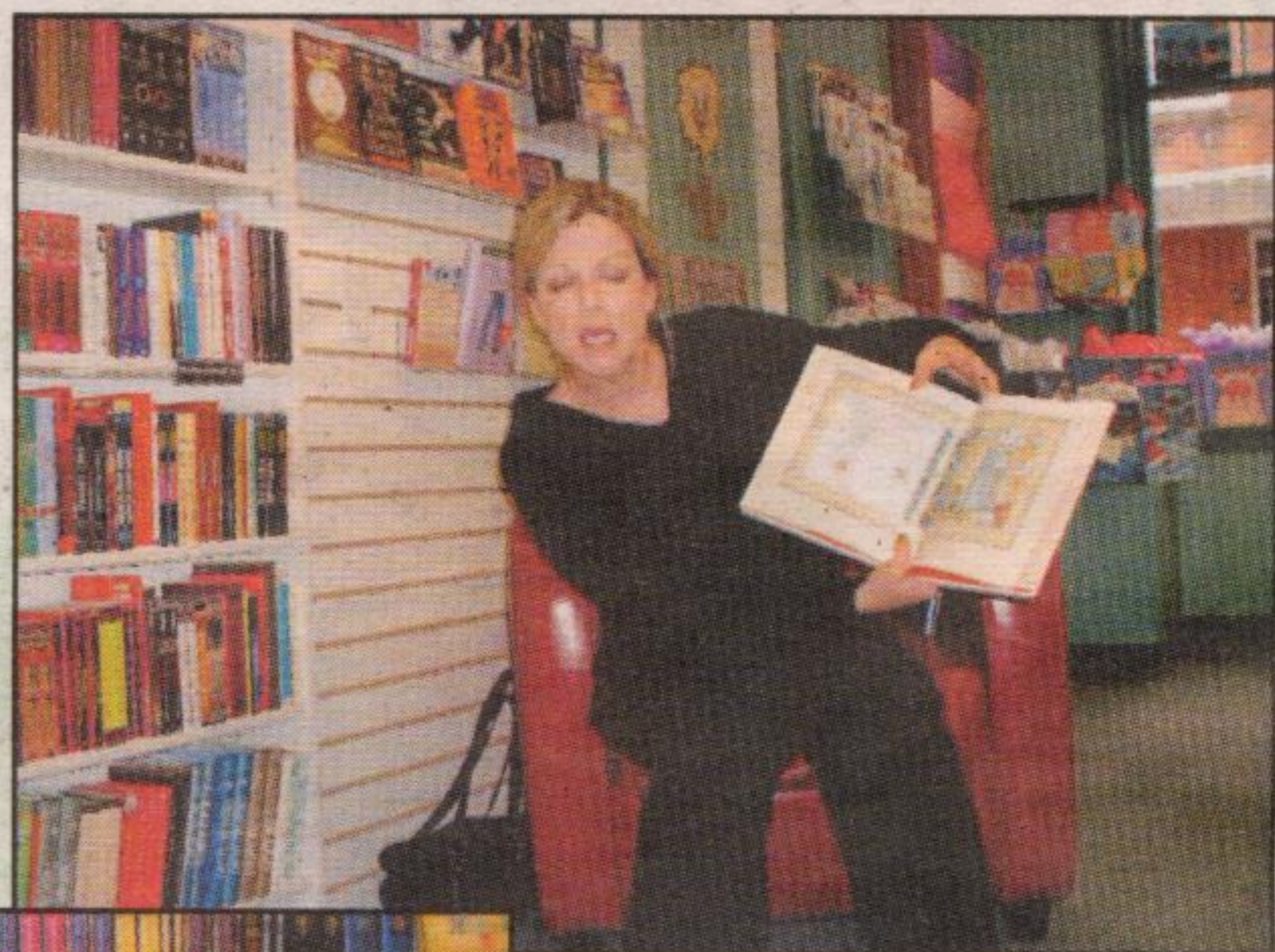
The Adoramus Children's Choir is a community children's choir for children ages six to 15 that studies both sacred and secular music. Anyone interested in the choir, can call Sonja van de Hoef at 905-878-6066. Her email address is sonja-conducts@hotmail.com.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

The Milton Choristers got people in the spirit of Christmas with their *Catch the Sound of Christmas* concert on December 12 at Knox Presbyterian Church. Under the direction of Sonja van de Hoef they sang such favourites as *Here Comes Santa Claus* and *White Christmas*. Here are choir members (left to right) Kirk Gustafson, Martin Yates, the president of Milton Choristers Kathy Tyers, and Sharon Piccinin.

Children's illustrator visits the Freckled Lion



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Joanne Fitzgerald, a children's illustrator and author, paid a visit to the Freckled Lion Children's Book Store in Georgetown on December 11. Joanne, who lives in the Orton area, read from a book she illustrated entitled *The Little Rooster and the Diamond Button*. The story, which is a retelling of a folktale, was an entertaining one for 6-year-old Grayson Fennell of Georgetown, who came to visit the Freckled Lion with his mom Kerry.