

FAMILIES: Only child, lonely child?

Avoid pitfall of giving too much attention

FROM PAGE 11

child to consider his own actions to be more significant than they are and, in addition, may give him the uncomfortable feeling of being under a microscope.

"A parent needs to have interests outside of her child and a child needs to have a life outside of the family circle," says Radcliffe.

Although da Camara tries not to over indulge or spoil, she also recognizes Bryce has flourished and grown as the apple of her eye.

She knows first-hand what growing up for seven years as an only child was like.

"Before my brother was born," she says, "I blossomed. I knew how much I was loved and I felt so special. I'd go over to friends' houses, played piano for them and loved the attention."

Today, da Camara still enjoys

being in the spotlight as an international opera singer.

While it's true parents of only children can devote more attention to their only child, Savolainen says siblings often help out in that role.

She says her children look out for one another — at home and at school.

She and Radcliffe agree that siblings, with the right direction from their parents, increase their negotiation skills, always have someone with whom to share and create deep, long-lasting relationships with each other.

But do siblings always live in a rosy, caring, sharing world? "There's sibling rivalry in our household, just like any other," says Savolainen, "but when there's a problem, I don't get involved unless I have to."

She says asking the children to

try to work it out for themselves has taught them to communicate better and to solve their own dilemmas.

Only children, given the right tools, can develop an increased level of imaginative play.

Although only children may not have as many opportunities to resolve conflict as their peers who have siblings, there are many situations in which an only child can learn to share and resolve conflict, such as at school, with neighbourhood children and, possibly, cousins.

For da Camara, a pre-school environment for Bryce that was very "people friendly" was a necessity. The whole family is pulled into

lots of functions and the child is very involved, not just during school hours, but on a social level, too.

In speaking of the pros and cons of having an only child, da Camara says that she believes only children, given the right tools, can develop an increased level of imaginative play.

"Growing up, my family always commented on my imagination. I had the most amazing stories I would weave around my dolls and would share them with anyone who would care to listen. Teachers always comment on Bryce's imagination, too."

One of the greater cons of being an only child, da Camara believes, is for the child in later life when his parents grow older.

"There's no one to share the responsibility of elderly parents with," she says, thinking of Bryce

and then of herself, "and what happens to us if Bryce wants to become an explorer and flies off to Mars? Even if all siblings are not equally as involved, there's always the illusion of them helping if absolutely needed. When there are no siblings, there's only stark reality."

Despite this negative aspect of being an only child, da Camara and her husband, like many others, have opted to have one child. Some don't have an option.

The bottom line is only children don't have to be lonely children.

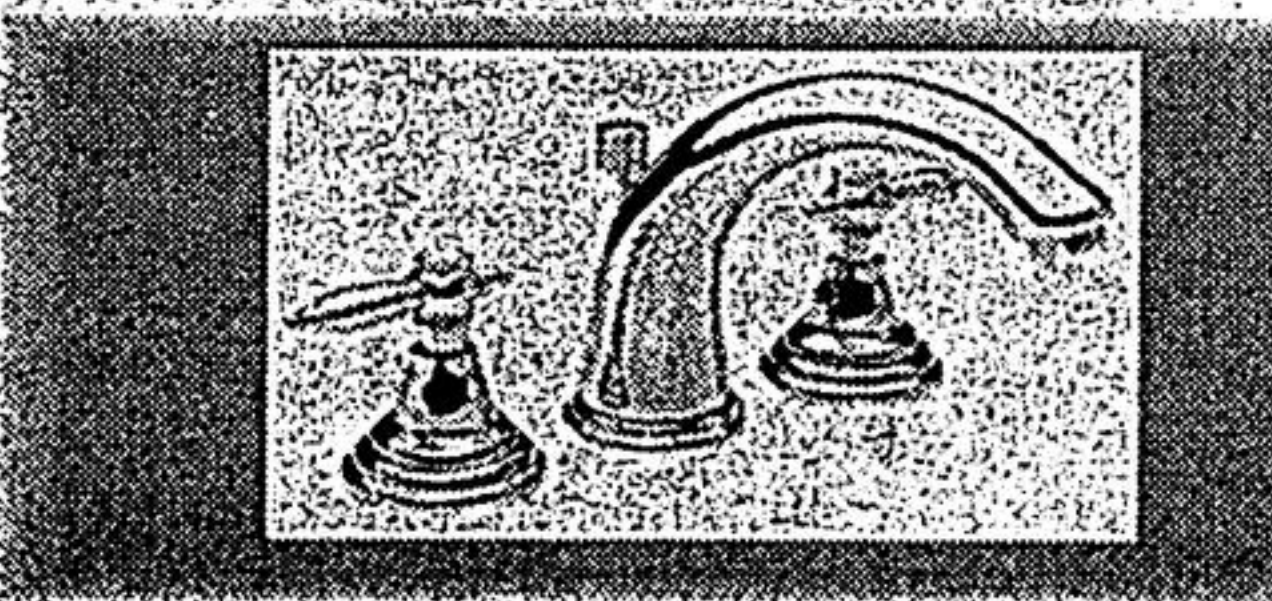
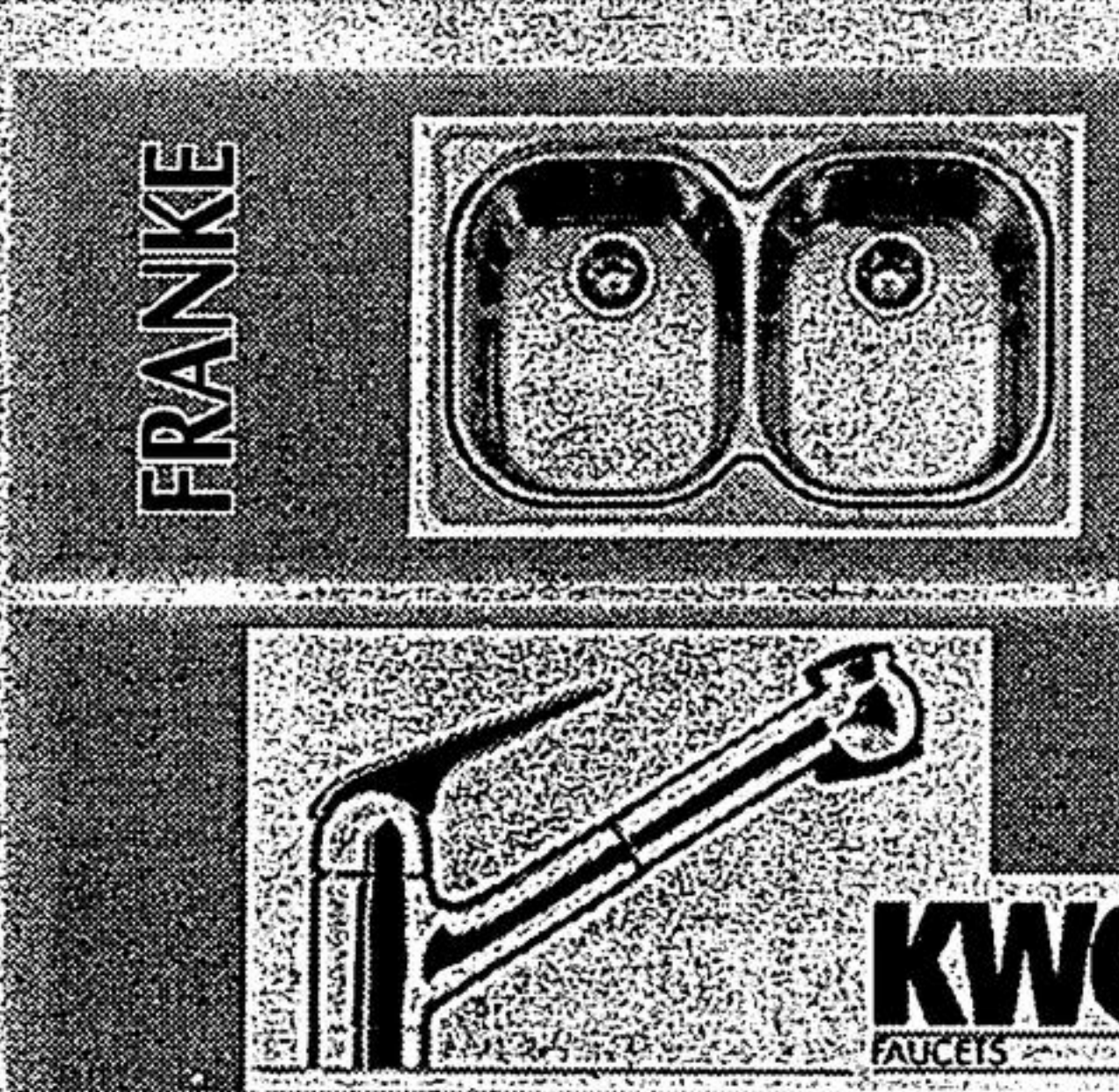
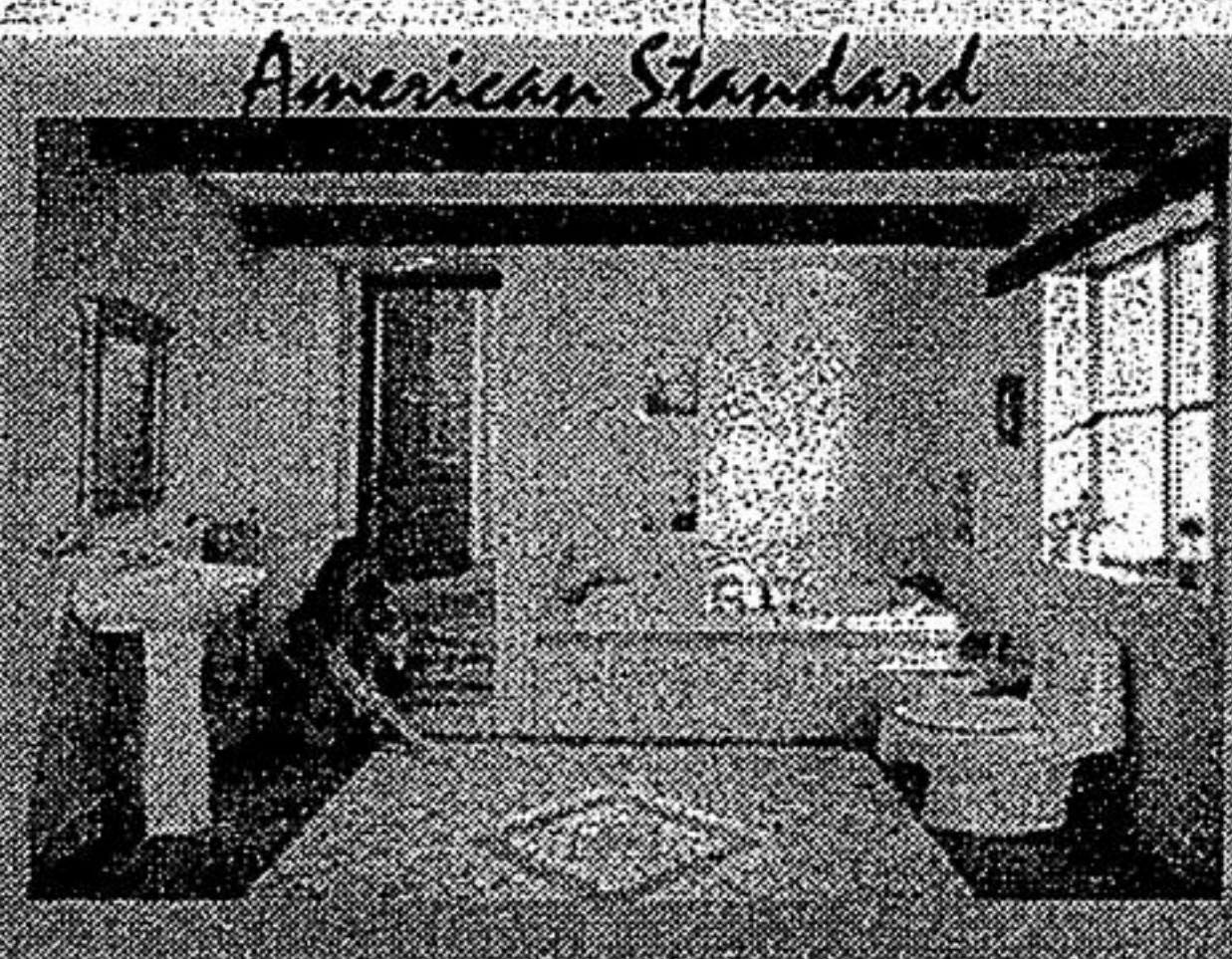
Although there is an increased risk of isolation and self-centredness, there are plenty of opportunities for only children to share, care and to be team players.

Sara Dimerman is a psychological associate and the director of the Parent Education and Resource Centre at Thornhill Square.

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CRIME BUSTERS



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

York Regional Police were on hand Thursday at Stouffville District Secondary School to promote Crime Stoppers as a way to curtail crime. Left to right are Const. Kim Killby, Const. Melanie Moffatt, SDSS teacher-police liaison Erik Jarviste, Const. Vern Ward, Const. Tom Korte and Const. Chris Palmer. In front are student Crime Stopper liaisons Samantha Alston, Grade 9, Heather Kennedy and Heather Craig, both in OAC.

KUDOS TO FESTIVALS



The 1998 Markham Jazz Festival was honoured for T-shirt design and best program by Festival and Events Ontario, and festival producer Judi McIntyre, left, and artistic director/associate producer Hal Hill showed off their plaques to council Tuesday. Council also heard that the 1998 Markham Village Festival was singled out for its poster. McIntyre was the manager of this event.