

Bingham Elementary

School sets students safety check

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

A new system to account for absent children at Bingham Farms Elementary, which is attended by some Southfield children living in the Birmingham School District, went into effect last week.

The system is being instituted in the wake of the most recent of a series of murders or suspicious deaths of Oakland County youngsters.

Principal Gertrude Green said she realized with the first news Friday of the discovery of ten-year-old Kristine Mitchell's body less than one mile west of the school that the school would have a lot of calls.

Under the new system devised by Mrs. Green, parents will report absences through neighborhood volunteers to reduce the number of calls to the school and thereby speed identification of the unaccounted for.

Prior to this, parents were expected to call the school themselves if their children were to be absent. Although the procedure was printed in the school's parents handbook, compliance was not uniform and was not enforced, said Mrs. Green.

A LETTER was sent to parents Tuesday explaining the new system. Each of nine different neighborhoods in the Bingham Farms attendance area has a designated contact person and in some areas an alternate. In addition, there are two contact coordinators, each with an alternate. Each family has been sent a list of the contact persons and coordinators.

Parents whose children are not to be in school, for whatever reason, are instructed to call their contact person (or alternate if necessary) between 8:40 a.m.

Each contact person will call the designated coordinator to report the absences between 8:40 a.m.

The system is expected to reduce to two the number of calls coming into the school to report the day's absences, Mrs. Green said.

"We will have the list before the children actually arrive at school," she said. By 9:30 a.m., when teachers report the attendance for the day, the two lists can be compared.

"ANY CHILD who appears to be absent but is unaccounted for will be known immediately," Mrs. Green said. "We will call the home immediately and notify the parent."

Parents have been instructed to call the next closest contact person if they cannot reach their designated one. They also have been given the num-

ber of the pay telephone at the school if they need it.

Mrs. Green said 25 children were absent on Friday and 24 on Monday. With only two lines into the school from the school district's central switchboard, she was looking for a way to avoid tying up the lines with calls from 24 or 25 parents each day and to have an immediate indication of any children who might be absent and unaccounted for.

"With calls coming from only two people it will keep the lines open for other kinds of messages that need to come through," she explained.

The system will be evaluated after two months to see how well it is working.

She looks back on youth



SUSAN MERSON

By SHIRLEE IDEN
There are those who use acting to keep from knowing themselves, says Susan Merson. "But it's nice to use it to know yourself better."

The off-Broadway actress, who grew up in Southfield, came home for a visit recently and did some reminiscing. A graduate of Southfield High School, she was already a seasoned actress when she entered that school. Her acting career began when she was only 13 as a performer at the Jewish Center and in various community productions.

Since graduating from high school, Ms. Merson, now 25, spent time at Boston University and then worked in the theater in Connecticut for three years. She is currently appearing in the off-Broadway production of "Vanities."

SHE'S MADE many trips home, but this time she also gave a performance. She appeared in her own one-woman show "Reflections of a China Doll" at Temple Israel in Detroit and also taught at her alma mater's drama department.

"When I went back to Southfield High, I felt

like I should still be going to school there," she said. "I had lunch with Virginia Borts, the drama teacher there for 25 years and worked with the kids."

"Mrs. Borts has watched a lot of changes happen. She said kids today have more problems. My times were simpler."

"WHEN I FIRST came to Southfield High, I felt like I was in a movie with the homecomings and the dances. I worked in the plays but the high school plays were a maturing experience for me rather than a theater experience. I learned a lot about myself as a person."

"If you understand what makes a character tick, you'll understand what makes people tick."

Her own play was written because many things impelled her to do it. "An actress is always beholden," she said. "She has to work with people. I wanted to do a one-person production. My cousin, who is a cantor in Bridgeport, suggested I work in the Jewish communities. I started with other people's words and found no one was saying what I wanted to say."

She said "China Doll" is about all the things that made her what she is. "It's about falling in love for the first time, about home and support, about first contacts with sexuality, about going to Europe, about the death of my father and even about parenting your parents."

The 60-minute play took her two months to write but "it was cooking and rumbling inside for a year," she said.

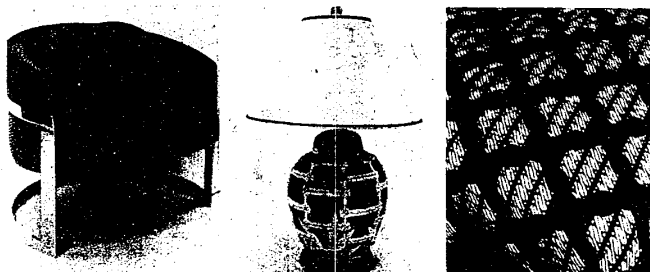
SHE SAID the play is essentially about first-generation American women and it deals with questions and not answers. "It works differently for different groups," she said. "And there are physical problems in creating the environment."

Ms. Merson never studied writing but finds it similar to acting. "I'm hoping to write another piece which will explain acting," she said.

The response to "China Doll" has been "lovely," she author said. "I've been asked to expand it, maybe for an off-Broadway show."

No longer studying acting, she said she hasn't the time or money for study but "in a sense you're always learning."

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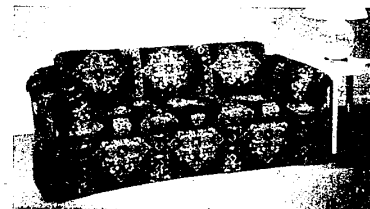
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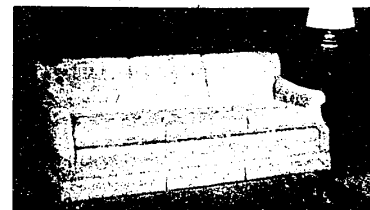
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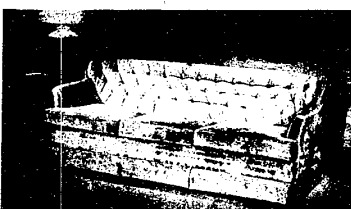
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