

Novel based on child killings causes controversy

By KATHY PARRISH

After months of writing and editing, author Patricia Welles is always glad to finish a book.

But winding up "Angel in the Snow," her novel based on the Oakland County child killings, was a real relief. "I got upset as I wrote it," said the Birmingham resident, who recalls forcing herself through "grotesque" scenes she felt were needed to tell the story.

"I'm so happy not to write a book like this again."

Ms. Welles, who says she usually puts a book out of her mind once it's complete, is finding "Angel in the Snow" hard to forget.

As soon as the novel hit tri-county area bookstores last week, it caused controversy. Birmingham Police, who helped the author with her research, voiced concern that its actual locations and realistic characters might make readers forget it is fiction.

"I didn't expect the controversy," insisted the author, saying she is baffled and "a little annoyed" by the police reaction. "Maybe I was dumb. Maybe that's my naivete."

Published by Pocket Books, the paperback tells the story of 10-year-old Johanna Miller's kidnapping by a

wealthy Birmingham attorney and his friend Billy-boy.

In Ms. Welles's book, the men also abducted the youngsters believed murdered by the Oakland County child killer between February 1976 and March 1977.

"IT'S AS IF the murderers went on to abduct another child," the author explained. "I sprinkled bits of the Oakland County child killing throughout to give it a sense of reality."

It's that reality — locations of actual places in Oakland County — which has gotten her in hot water with the authorities.

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ject.

"I didn't want to harm anyone," she added. "I knew the book would upset the parents of the abducted children, and I wouldn't recommend they read it."

The very serious nature of her latest book is a "departure totally" for Ms. Welles, whose six other publications were all humorously written.

She wrote detective stories as a child growing up in what is now inner-city Detroit, then later in northend Palmer Woods and Sherwood Forest. But she gave up writing when no one encouraged her efforts.

AFTER GRADUATION from Highland Park High School and a year studying English at Wayne State University, she studied acting in New York.



"But I couldn't stand the rejection," admits the animated brunette, who recalls being "more intellectual" then.

"I didn't talk much. Now I don't stop," she jokes.

Ms. Welles started writing again when she discovered she hated acting, but loved improvisation. "It really is writing, you make up your own lines," says the author of a play produced in London.

"I love writing dialogue. The most important thing to me is how people speak to each other, how they relate."

"Babyship," her first book published in 1967, was about a rebellious Detroit teen. "It was just a story I wanted to tell," said Ms. Welles, who had no hope of getting the book published.

"I did it because I wished to do it and it just seemed to flow easily."

She met a book editor at a party, he liked the book, and it eventually was published in several languages. That "very lucky" break led to more books, her play and a novelization of the screenplay "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice."

ADMITTEDLY A "news addict," Ms. Welles's newest book grew out of her interest in the Oakland County child killings. She had returned to the Detroit area after living in London, Boston, Los Angeles and Spain.

"This is the worst kind of crime — a crime against a child," she explained. "An abducted child is a victim with a capital V. Children want to trust people. They cannot understand that all grownups can't be trusted."

She read everything she could find on the case and taped conversations with the Birmingham police — which she says now she's sorry she didn't keep.

She said she asked Birmingham Lt. Jack Kalbfleisch if he wanted to read the book. "He didn't seem remotely interested in the book. I wanted him to look through it and see if there were any problem areas."

Ms. Welles said she tried not to glamorize the fictional abductors, who she calls "damaged goods."

"I made them out to be as horrible as I could without making them inhuman — they are human beings," she thinks "Angel" has "hardly any sex in it at all."

"I refer to a boy being molested. You can read about that every day in the newspaper, unfortunately," she added.

And she believes the book is very moralistic. "If only it could have happened in real life the way it happened in my book," explained the author.

"PEOPLE THINK we live in a normal world, but we don't. It's a crazy world."

Ms. Welles, who says she wants a "low-profile personal life," is finding it hard to be anonymous these days.

"I'd like to be rich, but not famous," says the divorcee, who insists that at 18 cents a book she's unlikely to become wealthy from the sales of "Angel."

She refuses to talk about her life and the people in it. Admittedly, she's a little nervous about the Oakland County child killer, although she kids about the possibility of him (or them, since she believes two people committed the crimes) reading her book.

She's even vague about her age, saying only she's in her late 30s. "I don't like to lie about my age," she says with a smile.

"But the papers are so snooty. Thousands of people will read the article and say, 'She's so old!'"

Though she feels the writer's life is insecure and very hard work, she's working on a new book — a humorous "who-done it" set in a Michigan country club. And she's thinking about a nonfiction book and possibly a children's book "with nothing that offends in it."

Meanwhile, she will continue to talk about "Angel in the Snow" — but only when she's asked, she says.

"I like promoting the book if people are friendly," she explained. "But not otherwise. I'm just not that hungry to sell my books."

Minister of youth comes for 2-day stay

Rick Bonfim, an ordained minister and Brazilian performer serving in the area of Youth Ministries throughout the U.S., will stop by the Orchard United Methodist Church for four programs.

The church is at 30450 Farmington Road.

From 1-3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 12, will be part of a Youth Leaders Workshop in the church. That evening, at 7:30 p.m., all youth in the area are invited to participate in a youth rally.

Bonfim will be part of the worship services at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Jan. 13. At 7 p.m. Sunday, he will give a concert, which is open to the public.



RICH BONFIM

Physical fitness classes continue to expand at Y

Physical fitness programs continue to account for 25 percent of all attendance at the Farmington Area YMCA. Gary Unruh, executive director of the local Y, said that throughout the nation there are some 43 million attendances at physical fitness classes and team events, which is more than 50 percent of all Y attendance.

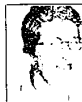
"The Farmington Area YMCA has continually expanded its physical fitness programs," Unruh said. "There is increased sophistication in Y physical fitness efforts, and programs are constantly being redesigned, with an intent of not only meeting the needs of groups of similar individuals, but in making physical fitness something more than a chore."

He continued by saying "the programs offered are often given cooperation of local groups, and programs for varying groups, from the busy executive to the working woman, are all aimed at fitness for living, making sound health an aim of daily life — not a sometime thing."

The Farmington Y's winter session begins the week of Jan. 14.

Some of the physical fitness classes offered are mens, womens, and co-ed, DanceFit, an aerobic dance class, a class called "Healthy Back," designed for those with back problems, and a smoking and weight control workshop.

Brochure for the next term will be sent upon request by calling the Y at 553-4020.



m.m. memos

Margaret Miller

Only 300 pieces to go

A holiday custom I think I've mentioned before is our family's annual jigsaw puzzle.

For quite a few years now, Santa has left one under the tree, increasing its difficulty as the puzzle-pieces grew more expert. Spreading it out on the diningroom table, usually on Christmas afternoon, we would make it a family project until the picture emerged in its fit-together magnificence.

A couple of years ago, we had a 1,000-piece and it disrupted family life completely. Nothing got done except work on that puzzle.

This year, the 1,000 pieces presented to us the opposite problem. Life goes on and the puzzle remains.

"SAN FRANCISCO by Night" is the title of this block-buster. It's all blues and blacks with some lights that seem to blink even on the interlocking pieces, and it's absolutely maddening to try to solve.

Christmas afternoon saw the border pieced together. Family members put in a few more pieces, and then went off

to other pursuits. Two days after Christmas, our invited dinner guests joined us at the kitchen table. Couldn't pull that border apart, could we?

Our youngest family member, the puzzle expert, made some headway in the next few days, but still not much showed but the night sky and the Trans-Am tower. Others among us fit a piece or two, occasionally. My own most determined and lengthy efforts rarely netted more than three pieces.

THE NEW YEAR came, and we had a larger gathering at the house. People gathered around the puzzle for a while and I saw my opportunity. "No one leaves until the puzzle is done," I announced. It didn't work. The whole bunch sneaked out.

I've begun some rough calculations. San Francisco has 1,000 pieces, and maybe 300 of them now are in place. At three more a day, the other 700 should take only 234 more days. In less than eight months we should regain use of the dining room table.

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