

## CREATIVE LIVING

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 18, 1994

## BOOK BRIEF



VICTORIA DIAZ

'Losing Jessica'  
is a compelling story

"Losing Jessica," by Robby DeBoer (289 pp., Doubleday, \$22.00.)

As you know, in a recent, much-publicized legal battle, Robby and Jan DeBoer of Ann Arbor lost the 21/2-year-old child they had raised since birth to the child's natural parents, Cara and Dan Schmidt, of Iowa. Known then as Baby Jessica (and since re-named Anna), the little girl has lived with the Schmidts for a little over a year now.

This sometimes surprising, up-close and personal account of that battle doesn't clarify everything about this heart-wrenching event, of course. But, keeping in mind that every story has (at least) two sides, "Losing Jessica" will certainly help anyone reading it to see the aspiring adoptive parents - and what they tried to do - more clearly. And, in a highly readable way, it will answer many questions about the legal system, especially as it relates to this case.

Reading this book is a little like sitting down with a loquacious friend (DeBoer made a speech at her own wedding) who is trying very hard to make sense of something that does not lend itself to logic: a full-fledged nightmare.

She stumbles from time to time. She contradicts herself now and then and, in doing so, confuses. Also, her frequent tendency to note how long and how often she wept during the nightmare threatens somehow to trivialize her emotion, and even to turn this highly dramatic story into melodrama at times.

Ultimately, though, "Losing Jessica" is a genuinely moving, quietly compelling story of this "venture into a dark place . . . full of pain."

"How was it possible that so many professional people could have been wrong?" DeBoer asks at one point.

## Good question.

It should be stressed at the outset that this book is not simply a single-noted, unrelieved cry of pain. Everyday life with "Jessi," who seems to have been a remarkably uncomplicated child, was apparently an ongoing, pleasure-filled adventure for the DeBoers. We watch as she grows, going with her to birthday parties, on Ann Arbor shopping trips with "Mamma," exploring her neighborhood at Halloween, experiencing Christmas, growing attached to a special cousin, forming a relationship with a playful uncle, visiting with adoring grandparents, courting around with Dutchy, the golden retriever, and other close friends.

But, for the DeBoers (almost from the start), a darkness lingered at the edges of the fun. With time, it seemed to creep into more and more corners, and finally to touch almost every aspect of their lives, until Jessica herself seemed, in a sense, the only light left.

For instance, though DeBoer does not really dwell on it here, the Ann Arbor couple came, early on, to be in rather desperate financial circumstances. (This may surprise many of us who saw them, in all the brouhaha, as not particularly affluent, but certainly not desperate.) Legal bills mounted at an alarming rate, forcing Jan DeBoer, a printer, to take on two jobs.

Eventually, Robby sewed curtains at home to help out. Jan was injured in an auto accident, Jessica needed minor surgery. Medical bills entered in. On the way to Iowa for yet another legal proceeding, their car broke down, and left them stranded just outside Moline, Ill.

The mechanic said he could repair the engine for \$3,000, or he would give us \$400," DeBoer writes. "We had just made the last payment . . . We took the \$400."

Friends and family later chipped in, enabling the struggling couple to buy a used car.

Another surprise in this book: a number of letters Cara Schmidt wrote to her infant daughter shortly after Jessica's birth. I'm not sure I ever heard Cara Schmidt utter a word during this entire controversy and, from that, I drew a mistaken conclusion that she was a rather emotionless woman who didn't have much to say, or if she did, couldn't think of how to say it. The letters, however, are strikingly articulate. One hopes that someday this rather shadowy woman will write her account of these events, also.

Victoria Diaz of Livonia, a long-time member of Detroit Women Writers, tracks the books and literary industry for the Observer & Eclectic Newspapers. You can leave a message for her on a Touch-Tone phone by dialing 953-3047, then her mailbox number, 1854.

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Tampa next week:

At Vieux Forts Overlook in Garden City as the cross-purposes campaign in time for the American Crafts Show at Overland Historical Village in Tampa.

At the University of Tampa art gallery.

THROUGH THE  
EYES OF A CHILD

Michigan's largest children's art show will be on display at the Plymouth Cultural Center

Art from outer space along with cartoon favorites like Kit the Cat and the Lion King spring to life in the fourth annual Children's Art Show Aug. 28 at the Plymouth Cultural Center. This is the largest exhibit of children's art in Michigan featuring more than 350 artworks by students ranging in age from 3 to 16.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMEN  
STAFF WRITER

Yvonne Lorenz of Plymouth believes strongly in raising her children, Katie, 10, and Joey, 8, to be well rounded. For the last two summers the Lorenz children have attended weeklong art camps run by D & M Art Studio and the city of Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department.

They along with 165 other budding artists from the summer camps will exhibit more than 350 artworks in a wide spectrum of mediums from painting, drawing and clay to scratchboard, sand and animation cells in "Art from Outer Space" 3-5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 28, in the Plymouth Cultural Center, 525 Farmer. The public is invited. A reception sponsored by the city of Plymouth Parks and Recreation along with the viewing of art, and a secret mural is free.

"It's a terrific self confidence builder to have their work in an art show and have people come and see it. That's just an excellent end to the week," said Lorenz, who worked as a teacher's aide during her children's camp session to help defray the costs.

"The kids have a great time. Both of my kids love to draw, love to paint, but Joey plays sports as well. They need sports for the physical exercise. They learn to cooperate and work together as a team with others. In the art camps, they get an

See K08, 21D



Young artists: Kristen Dillenbeck (top right) helps Angela Napolitano with her artwork. Kristen helped her mother, Sharon Dillenbeck, teach the class. Technique was stressed at this summer's art class. Matt Reuter, 10, of Canton Township used plenty of textured materials on his creation (above).



Helping hand: Jamie Tucci, an instructor at this year's art camp, offers some advice to young artist Sarah Bartholemew.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DEB BRESLER

## State art show has big news

BY MARY KLEMIC  
STAFF WRITER

It's a really big show at the Pointe Creek Center for the Arts. The Rochester center's eighth annual Celebrate Michigan Artists exhibition features many large-size pieces and local talent from Redford Township.

The show runs 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday to Sept. 23 in the Main Gallery at 407 Pine.

The show is big in other ways too. More artists are entering the event as its reputation grows.

"I was really impressed," said

Maria Luisa Belmonte, PCCA exhibition director. "I thought the quality was exceptionally high."

More than 200 artists submitted entries to this year's competition. Juror MaryAnn Wilkinson, associate curator of 20th century art at the Detroit Institute of Arts, selected works by 37 artists from 28 communities in Michigan.

"This show is a superb cross section of Michigan art, including many artists who have devoted impressive careers to working here, as well as some at the beginning of their professional lives," Wilkinson said in a statement.

## Award recipients

This year's first prize (\$1,000) winner is "Perfect Idea" by Nelson Smith of Ferndale, who earned a master of fine arts degree from the

See ART SHOW, 2D

Oil on canvas: Redford Township artist James Pujdowski displayed "Excursion," a scene of swans in which colors are angled to create a sense of flowing movement.



## PAINTING CLASSES

Westland artist, Sandra Wood kicks off the fall art class season Sept. 12 with instruction in watercolor and oil painting through Continuing Education Services at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

Learn basic techniques, color mixing, composition and how to control the medium from the award-winning artist who's painted for more than 35 years. In advanced oil painting, she will teach glazing techniques of the old masters, keeping a sketch book, enlarging a sketch and drawing, and painting landscapes with a limited palette. This semester, Wood diversifies the artist's subject matter taught by including: Drawing as a Business, and Marketing Your Art and Crafts.

## Art Beat

For information or to register, call Schoolcraft College's CES office at (313) 462-4448.

## POLISH ARTISTS WANTED

Calling all Polish American artists living in Redford, Garden City, Westland, Livonia, Plymouth and Canton. Artists of Polish background by birth or by marriage and who were born in Michigan or currently live in the state are invited to submit their work for the ninth

annual Richard Kubinski Art Competition to be held Oct. 2.

Deadline for entry is Sept. 24. Original art in all mediums is being accepted. A cash award of \$200 will be given to the work judged Best of Show. Other awards include \$150 for First Prize, \$100 for Second, and \$25 each for three honorable mentions.

The competition is sponsored by the Friends of Polish Art and the Orchard Lake Schools. Artwork will be exhibited Oct. 2-30 at the Galeria on the school's campus northwest of Detroit.

For more information and an entry form, call Johanna Bielecki at (313) 581-4198, or Marian Owczarnik at (313) 583-4345.