

Dybek stays tuned in to ethnic neighborhoods

"The Coast of Chicago" by Stuart Dybek (173 pp., Alfred A. Knopf, \$17.95).

Although the lazy, hazy days are almost upon us, I am not, repeat not, going to recommend that you add Stuart Dybek's "The Coast of Chicago" to your summer reading list.

Rather, I am going to strongly advise that you run-don't walk to your nearest library or bookstore and grab a copy of this short story collection now. Should you pass it up, you will have missed so very much.

In these 14 stories and vignettes, Dybek (who, when not writing, teaches English at Western Michigan University) takes the reader to the dream-like never-never land of a remembered adolescence in the Windy City during the 50s and 60s.

Dybek's work differs from much contemporary fiction in one important respect: he writes almost always of people who, though existing in a large urban milieu, remain essentially ethnic neighborhood people. His characters here, as in his first collection, "Childhood and Other Neighborhoods," are not the usual faded urban souls, or the troubled spirits of modern-day Academe, as we are in so much of today's literary short fiction.

In "The Coast of Chicago," his characters seem to be poised somewhere between then and now, be-

tween adolescence and adulthood, between innocence and knowledge. And, though these are certainly not ghost stories in the usual sense, his characters have about them a ghostly quality. But they are ordinary at the same time that they are bizarre, charmingly mundane at the same time that they are surreal.

Begin with "Chopin in Winter," set "in Mrs. Kublae's building on Eighteenth Street" during a winter in which Mrs. Kublae's unmarried daughter, Marcy, comes home, pregnant and disgraced, from a New York college where she has been studying music. The narrator, as a young boy, spends the winter evenings listening to her play Chopin's preludes, polonaises, mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, ballades in the apartment above the one in which he lives with his mother and his unspeaking grandfather. When winter is over and Marcy moves away, the music seems to remain in the airshafts, the walls and ceilings, the pipes, the flues, the dark hallways of the old building. And, after the echoes of the music finally fade away, "a pure silence beyond daydream and memory" remains.

"Even after no longer missed her," the narrator relates, "I could still hear the silence. . ."

In "Blight" (which won Dybek the 1985 Nelson Algren Award for li-



book break
Victoria Diaz

tion), four young friends are perplexed to discover that their neighborhood/world has been proclaimed an Official Blight Area by Chicago's Mayor Daley.

"They call this blight!" says one of them. "Hey, man, there's weeds and trees and everything. . ."

Perhaps more than any other story in the collection, "Blight" reveals Dybek's great gift for dialogue, plus his fine ability to create characters that seem to walk right off the page. One of the most memorable of these is Ziggy Zillinsky.

Even though Zig is just one of the boys, he wasn't really "reliable" even in the days before Pepper Rosado accidentally beamed him with a baseball bat. Zig sees Nikita Khru-shev on the streets of Chicago fairly often, along with Bo Diddley and Dwight Eisenhower, and Mayor Daley rummaging around in alleyway garbage cans. Plaster saints in the neighborhood churches often wink at him, too. But his biggest

problem is a recurrent nightmare: on the night the Sox win the pennant, Chicago is nuked, and Comiskey Park is at ground zero.

The story, vivid and dream-like at once, is one of Dybek's personal fa-

vorites, he has said, because it manages to "defeat time, and capture the past."

Other stories in the collection include: "Hot Ice," a winner in "Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards" for 1988, which has at its center a drowned neighborhood girl whose body is rumored to be sequestered away in an abandoned, neighborhood ice house.

"Death of a Flight Fielder," an off-beat, tragicomic tale with a special appeal for anyone who has ever played right field in a neighborhood

baseball game.

"Pet Hills," the concluding story in the collection, was included in the O. Henry collection for 1986. The story focuses on a young man who appears to be on the brink of leaving "the old neighborhood" to make his way in the "real" world.

"Today I've been drinking instant coffee and Pet milk, and watching it snow," it begins.

Irresistible opening lines. Irresistible story, too.

Splendid collection. See for yourself.

Teacher, students giving piano recital

"The Songs of Summer," featuring pianist Jocelyn Ruth Krieger and her students, will be presented at 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 6 at the Community House, 690 Bates, Birmingham.

The Music Minors, students of the Tunes for Tots music education program for 4-6 year olds, will make their musical debut. Appearing will be Brandalyn Fulton and Samuel Harry Wedes of Southfield, Alexandru Hurwitz of West Bloomfield and Brooke Turner of Bloomfield Hills.

Piano students will present a program of classical, Hebrew and Yiddish music. They include Shana Schochet, Leslie and Robyn Showach, Meriam Silverstein and Rechele Winkler of Southfield and Michelle Barr, Soril Bakst, Leah Berman, Shanin Cochen, Elissa and Marjorie Stern and Esther Tolwin of Oak Park.

Krieger, who studies with pianist Mischa Kotler, will perform "The Gollwig's Cake-walk," by Debussy, Adagio, Opus 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight") Sonata by Beethoven, Fantasy in D Minor by Mozart and the Warsaw Concerto by Adendell.

The free concert is open to the public.

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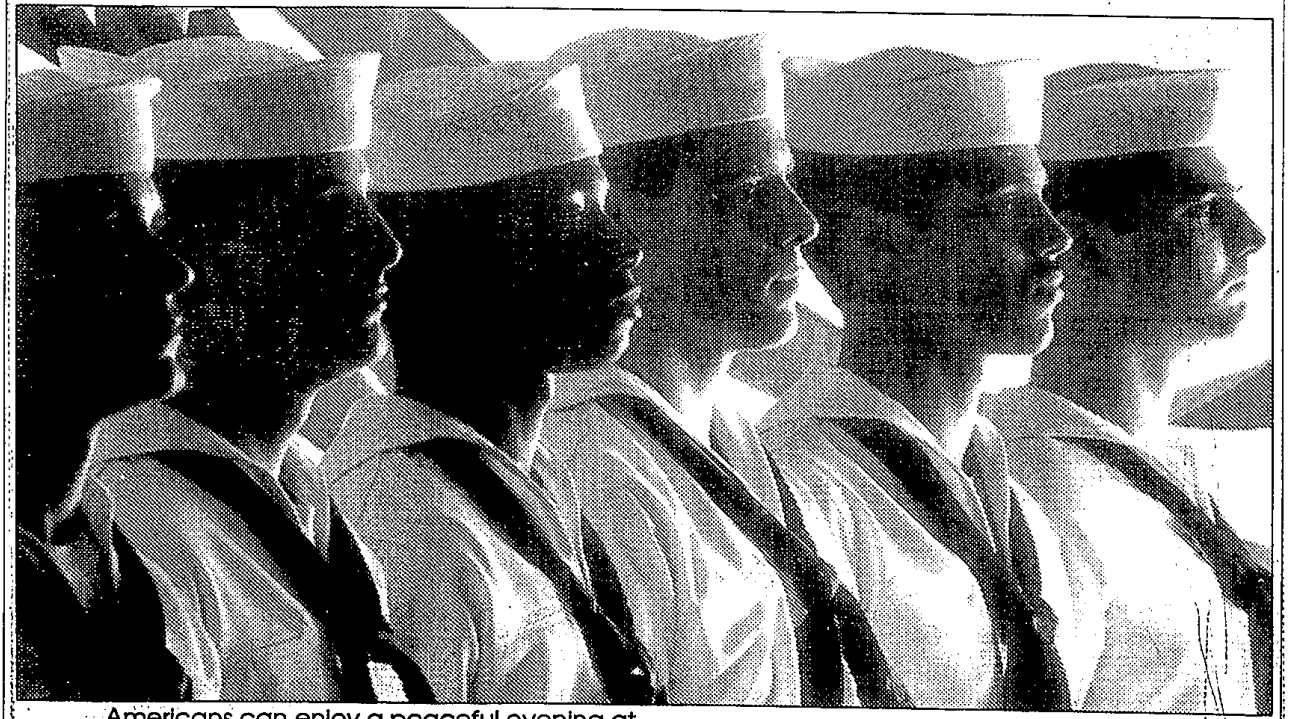
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