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Storybook nursery is a work of art

By Janice Tigar-Kramer
special writer

WHEN GARY and Suzanne Lichtman began making plans to decorate a nursery for their first child due in January, they decided to look for something out of the ordinary.

The Farmington Hills couple pored through dozens of wallpaper books, but nothing seemed special enough.

A bit frustrated with the search, Suzanne was ready to settle for one of the wallcoverings, but Gary wasn't sold on anything they'd found.

So they returned about 40 pounds of sample books and headed for the bookstore to look up nursery decorating. During the search, Gary found the answer: a painted mural.

"We'd looked through all of the wallpaper books and couldn't agree but we both liked this idea right away. It was different," Suzanne said.

HOPING TO find an idea for the mural, they stopped at the children's book section to look over classics such as "Alice in Wonderland" and "Wind in the Willow."

But when they rediscovered the stories of Beatrix Potter, they knew that Peter Rabbit, Squirrel Nutkin and the other charming, whimsical characters were perfect for the walls of the nursery.

"The illustrations weren't just pictures of children's characters," Gary said. "They were a piece of artwork."

A FRIEND told the Lichtmans about Julie Giordano, an artist from Northville who mostly paints portraits from photographs in oil, watercolor or pencil.

To select characters and colors for the room, Giordano and the Lichtmans looked over the illustrations and other Beatrix Potter material that the couple had collected. Giordano couldn't wait to begin.

"Murals create an environment. People don't become emotionally involved with wallpaper, but they do with a mural. They'll always remember the time it was painted," said Giordano, owner of the Giordano Gallery in Northville.

Besides creating a lighthearted atmosphere in the Lichtmans' nursery, the 7½-foot by 4-foot mural done in perspective gives the small room an illusion of depth.

"I wanted to push out the space and open up the room," Giordano said. "It looks as if you can walk right into the mural."

GIORDANO, WHO started to draw creatively as soon as she could hold a pencil, began the mural by dividing the picture to be duplicated in half.

To create balance, she also split the wall space in half and began to



The whimsical, charming characters created by Beatrix Potter highlight the Lichtmans' nursery. The colorful mural was created by Northville artist Julie Giordano.

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— Gary Lichtman

sketch the picture in pencil. First the left side, then the right. Even value changes were planned and marked in the sketch.

She then mixed and watered down latex paints and began to paint her favorite character, Peter's mother, old Mrs. Rabbit.

"Doing mural art isn't like painting in private," Giordano said.

"You start with one space and work outward. That way (the customer) sees progress and is hopeful right away. Their reaction charges me up, too."

WORKING THREE evenings after her studio closed, Giordano finished the mural in about 13 hours.

The painting of the inside of a colorful cottage includes about a dozen of Beatrix Potter's most endearing characters doing their chores.

A separate drawing of Peter Rabbit was placed over the light

switch and a group of resting bunnies was painted over the changing table.

SINCE THE price of Giordano's mural art is figured by square feet covered plus labor, the work generally is more costly than wallpaper plus installation.

But there is no comparison between a wallcovering and original artwork, the artist said.

Tarried with the result, the Lichtmans often walk into the nursery simply to admire the original, signed work of art on their walls.

They're already concerned about moving one day, worried that new owners might repaint the wall.

"When it was finished we made excuses to go in the nursery just to look at the detail," Gary said. "If the house is ever sold, we'll have to make sure the mural stays."

BEING PLANNERS and list makers by nature, it wasn't unusual for Gary, the media relations director for United Way, Southeastern Michigan, and Suzanne, a systems analyst for AAA-Michigan, to put such thought and energy into a decorating project.

"Gary even wrote an itinerary for our wedding reception," Suzanne said, laughing. "So, I knew the nursery wouldn't be a simple project."

Staff photos by Sharon LeMieux



Gary and Suzanne Lichtman spent weeks planning the mural art for their nursery.

Holocaust Memorial Center presenting children's opera

"Brundibar," a charming children's opera originally performed by Jewish youths imprisoned in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, is part of a yearlong project of the Holocaust Memorial Center of West Bloomfield.

Phase I of the project will begin at 8 p.m. Thursday with a concert "In Remembrance of the Innocents" in the Community Arts Auditorium at Wayne State University.

A preview performance of the opera will take place for school children at 11 a.m. Friday, also in the Community Arts Auditorium.

Phillip Fox of the Hilberry Theatre is "Brundibar's" director. Deborah Smith, Wayne State University music department professor, will conduct the interdenominational and interracial cast, featuring the Civic Youth Chorus of Detroit.

THURSDAY'S CONCERT will feature Sister Veronica, O.S.B., a German nun, rediscoverer of the work and director of the first revival of the opera; Cantor Harold Orbach of Temple Israel, West Bloomfield; and pianist Flavio Varani. Admission is free.

Friday's preview performance, also free, of "Brundibar" will be for students of middle and high school age.

'"Brundibar" is a story of children's hope, courage and perseverance, even during the most desolate of times.'

—Rabbi Charles Rosenzweig
Holocaust Memorial Center

Educators from public, independent and parochial schools and members of the public may apply to the Hilberry box office, 577-2972, for tickets.

AFTER THE opera, a panel of young people will discuss the significance of the Holocaust and Armenian massacre to young people today.

This contemporary significance will also be highlighted by a prologue and epilogue written by WSU Professor Guy Stern.

The premiere performance of "Brundibar" will be at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Community Arts Auditorium.

Tickets are a minimum donation of \$5. They can be obtained from the Holocaust Memorial Center,

661-0840, or the Hilberry box office.

At 2 p.m. Sunday, a performance of the opera organized by Orbach will be performed for families under the sponsorship of the Kefauver Family Concert Fund in cooperation with the Holocaust Memorial Center at Temple Israel.

Phase II will include expanding performances in the metro area and outside. Phase III will be the production of a videotape of the opera with accompanying curriculum materials.

"BRUNDIRAR" IS a story of children's hope, courage and perseverance, even during the most desolate of times," said Rabbi Charles Rosenzweig, Holocaust Memorial Center founder and director.

The opera, a morality tale, tells of a group of children trying to buy their mother from a cruel, money-grubbing man named Brundibar.

In its literal sense, "Brundibar" reflects the universal lesson of goodness triumphing over evil.

For information, call the Holocaust Memorial Center, 661-0840, or Wayne State University's music department, 577-1795.

Holiday season: It's a time to reach out to help others

Today's column is excerpted from "A Christmas Wish" by Dr. Twynny Towery and is reprinted here with his permission:

John was burned out on his job, marriage and life in general. He was quickly heading toward the hopeless feelings of failure and depression that have become epidemic in America. Then John was spared.

He happened to see a video that motivated him to spearhead a drive to repair needy people's houses. He and several church youth lived in concrete block huts for a week that summer, working by day and discussing their experiences at night.

As John continued to give time and energy to others, his life assumed dramatic new meaning. The more he reached out to help others, the more his self-esteem grew.

John found he could make a difference without being CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and probably a more meaningful one at that. During this Christmas season, when depression can literally be a killer, I challenge you to make a difference, too.

Interact with those you suspect are estranged, hurt or lonely. Remember who lost his job, had a heart attack, is struggling to start a business on his own, or whose wife dumped him.

MILLIONS OF men in our divorce-prone society are painfully separated from their children because of failed marriages. Sadly,



organizing

Dorothy Lehmkuhl

men down on their luck are often treated by other men as if they are lepers.

The male obsession with the idea that "real men" should always be winners often causes them to avoid asking for, or giving, the unique brand of strength and wisdom men possess.

Know that the man who flashes the \$54,000 smile during the day may be desperately struggling to survive the night. Talk about feelings instead of ball games for a change, even though it may be uncomfortable at first. If it's your own situation, share your feelings with others.

Don't judge who was right or wrong, who should or shouldn't have done what when. It's irrelevant. Just know that any man who is unemployed, part of a wounded family, or in any number of other of life's double binds needs friendship. Give it. Caring about others is an ongoing process.

The Christmas season is not the time to seek out the currently successful business executives who can

refer you business or become a lucrative client. You can do that any time.

Set aside some specific times to go after the tough cases. Those who can't help your practice, business or social standing one iota. Those who aren't as articulate, friendly and sociable as they once were.

AS A start, make a minimum of three "reach out" calls a day from now through Jan. 31. After connecting on the first phone call, make another and another. Get them, and yourself, out of the house for lunch or a walk.

Visit with at least one "revived acquaintance" every day. Who knows: maybe this will replace the Marlboro cowboy myth to become the symbol we identify with being a "real man."

What's in it for you? One of the greatest opportunities you will ever have to help yourself. You may find your reward far exceeds your effort.

Twynny L. Towery, Ph.D., is a Memphis psychologist, management consultant and professional speaker who writes "Malecall," a syndicated newspaper column. Dorothy Lehmkuhl is a Birmingham-based time management consultant.

Exhibitions: 2E