

'Ransom' hits a nerve

Kidnapping plot giving parents the chills

By LISA MARTINO
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ADRIAN — Jody Quinnell still remembers a trip she took several years ago to Mall of America in Minneapolis. She remembers one moment in particular, because of the fear she felt when she thought her kids could have disappeared forever.

Quinnell's two children, then 9 and 11 years old, left their mother to go on a ride in the enclosed amusement park. She waited for them at the exit gate, but — when they were gone longer than she anticipated — Quinnell began to panic.

"The feelings that go through your heart and your mind are just awful," said the 46-year-old guidance counselor at Tecumseh High School.

Fortunately for Quinnell, the line was longer than she could see and her children emerged 45 minutes later with smiles on their faces.

But for an unfortunate number of parents each year, their children never turn up.

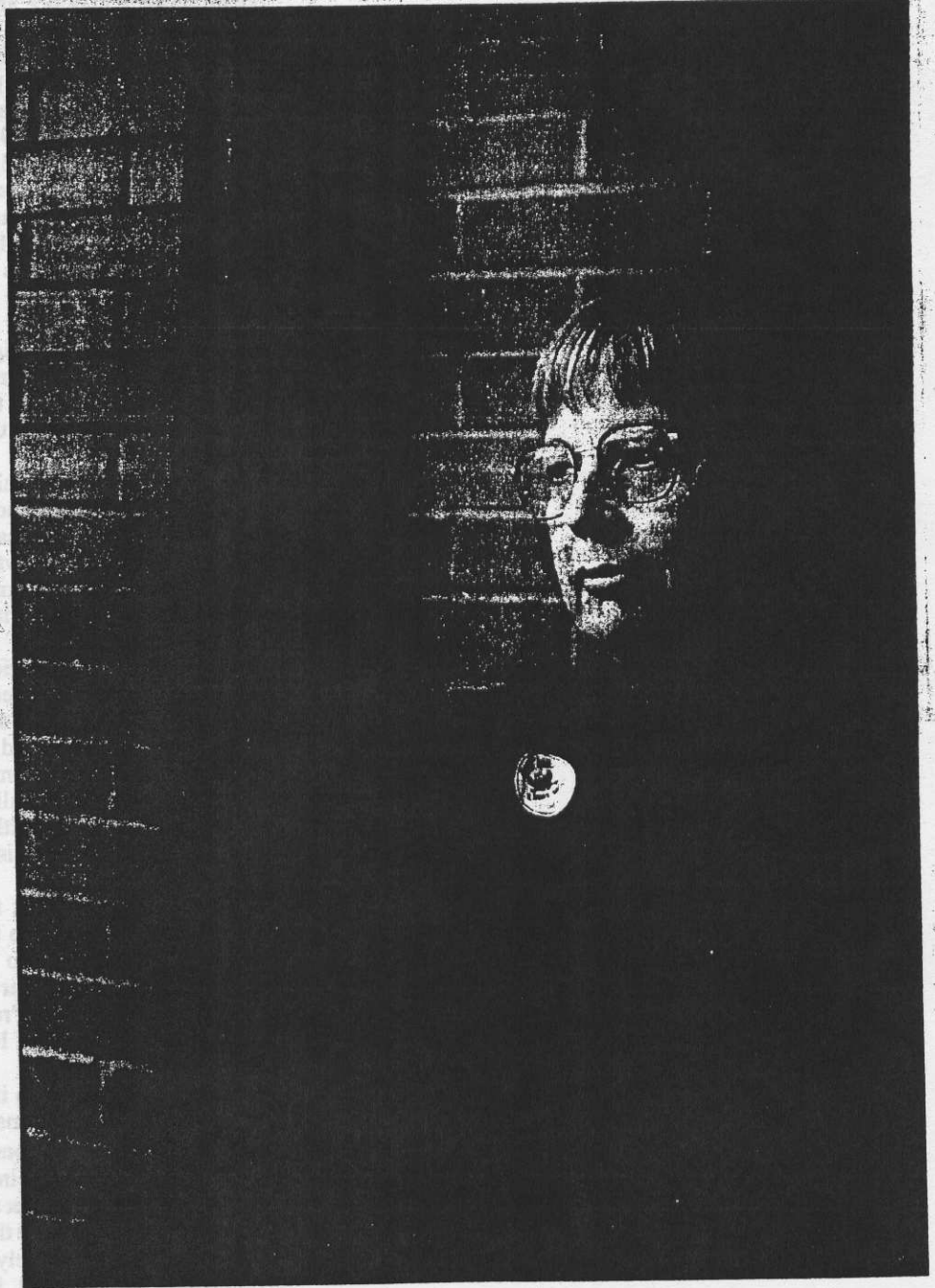
The movie "Ransom," now number two at the box office, has exposed one of the biggest fears of parents: kidnapping. Mel Gibson plays a wealthy entrepreneur in the airline business whose son is kidnapped at a science fair. In a moment — without warning — the child is gone and a ransom note arrives by anonymous e-mail.

In conjunction with the showing of "Ransom" at Cinema 6, the theater is offering free I.D. kits to parents, so that they can have a means of identifying their child and aiding police in the event something should happen. The kit contains supplies for fingerprinting as well as a place to keep a photo of the child.

What Gibson and his wife (Rene Russo) experience is a universal nightmare for parents, but, according to some local residents who saw the film, not entirely an improbability in their own backyard.

"We're not all wealthy public figures, but this can happen to anyone — these things can happen anywhere," said Quinnell.

"I think Lenawee County needs to be



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Parent Jody Quinnell says she was once overcome by a fear that her children had been kidnapped, something the movie "Ransom" incites in many parents.

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more aware that society's problems are our problems."

According to the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, in 1995 nearly 970,000 persons were reported missing to police and entered into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information Center. The FBI estimates that 85-90 percent of missing persons are juveniles, and of these cases, 99.5 percent were resolved successfully.

Although the U.S. Department of Justice reports that the majority of kidnapping cases are family-related, in 1990, 114,600 children were abducted by strangers. The statistics and the chilling portrayal in "Ransom" can give parents nightmares.

Dennis Shepherd, Cinema 6 manager and father of five, said the movie did make him think about the reality of the storyline.

"It does make you think. You don't have to be a self-made millionaire to be put in that situation," he said, adding that the growth of Adrian and surrounding communities continues to bring "big city" problems to the territory.

Jackie Noe of Adrian said she had a nightmare about her 12 year old being kidnapped even before seeing the movie. Noe said she could relate to the tension of the subject matter because her son occasionally walks home from school, and, although he is old enough to do so, he is still in a vulnerable position.

"Maybe not worry, but take precautions and teach kids to take precautions," said Noe, who has discussed the subject with her children but said she now plans to "revisit" it. "It's not just a thing that little kids need to hear."

The topic of what to do if a stranger approaches you or makes you feel uncomfortable is one Cindy Swift, a first grade teacher in Clinton, said she talks about with her students. Swift said even though she thinks Lenawee County is a relatively safe environment, she has had her own children fingerprinted.

"I do think about it, but I'd like to

think we talked about it enough that they would know what to do," she said.

According to Adrian Police Chief David Emerson, fingerprinting kits like the one offered at the cinema are things police consider helpful if a child is missing. Emerson said the department is looking at the possibility of offering fingerprinting opportunities through Neighborhood Watch programs in addition to the booths which appear at the mall from time to time.

While most of the time missing children reports around the city usually end up being no more than a child playing hide and seek and falling asleep in a concealed spot, Emerson said no parent should dismiss the possibility of their child being picked up by a stranger.

If children are in their teens, Emerson said the most reasonable precaution parents should take is to become more involved in their children's friends and whereabouts.

"One of the most important things we need to know is where our kids are and who they are with," he said.

Also, if parents have small children, they should try to keep them in groups when playing, as well as encourage them to play in a fenced-in area where they can't wander or be easily carried away.

Emerson said typical questions police ask in the event of a missing child include:

- What was the child wearing when you last saw him? Has anyone new entered his life recently?
- Who are his friends?
- And, where was he going the last time you talked to him?

Parents should always be able to answer these questions, he said, as well as update photos of their child every year.

If anyone is interested in obtaining a fingerprinting kit for their child, they should contact their local police department.

While "Ransom" ends on a happy note, real life isn't always so predictable.

"There's always a threat ... you've got to keep your guard up — not to the point of paranoia or panic, but just common sense," said Emerson.