

Along the way it has received some 12 Emmys. For this special edition, the show looks back at highlights from its long, sometimes silly, undeniably influential run.

A Birthday Tribute to Julia Child - Compliments to the Chef (PBS, 9-10:05 p.m.):

Members of the Boston Symphony play 'Fanfare for Pots and Pans' in her honor. Dan Ackroyd does his ludicrous impression of her. Celebrities salute her, and fans and friends pay tribute. It all happens at a birthday party - airing for the first time - that took place last April when TV's premier chef and America's best-known cooking instructor turned 80.

Please check local listings for all programs. PBS Pledge Month schedules vary widely from station to station.

Flowing Moments in Imagined Time

By **Simson L. Garfinkel**

IMAGINE what would happen if time passed slower in the mountains than in the valleys. In such a world, would not every person seek to live among the clouds in order to prolong their lives as long as possible? Would not height become status, with the truly wealthy building their homes upon stilts in order to squeeze additional seconds loose from the cosmos?

The world in the clouds is just one of many suggested by Alan Lightman in his first book of fiction, "Einstein's Dreams." Lightman, who teaches physics and writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is best known for books that explore science and technology, such as "A Modern-Day Yankee in a Connecticut Court: And Other Essays on Science" (1986).

"Einstein's Dreams" is a collection of short stories, each taking place in Switzerland during the first decade of this century. Each story is a psychological investigation of how people would be changed by

distortions in the way time flows.

After setting each stage, Lightman conjectures about the lives, passions, and loves of the people who inhabit that particular world. He does so with a lively and touching prose, rich and full of vitality.

In one story, time flows in a circle, and each person knows that he or she is destined to repeat every smile, laugh, and cry again and again for an eternity.

In another story, time continually stops and restarts itself in spurts, giving rise to uncertainty and a certain arbitrariness. In a third story, time flows at different rates in different cities: Few people in this world write letters to friends in distant lands.

Above all, Lightman is fascinated with love and love lost. In one world, people cannot remember the past; each person must carry a diary telling his or her personal history. Some couples retire eagerly to their beds, he writes, for each night has all of the excitement of the first. Others spend their

time obsessively reading and rereading their books, repeatedly rejoicing in their accomplishments and crying over their losses.

The stories are the fictional reveries of Albert Einstein himself, who in 1905 was a Swiss patent clerk struggling to create a new theory of time and space - his theory of Special Relativity. In one of the fictional glimpses of Einstein's life that pepper the book, the scientist tells his friend Michele Besso, "I want to understand time because I want to get close to The Old One."

The era and places Lightman writes about impart a touch of nostalgia to the stories; his attention to details such as the kiss of lovers and the embrace of parents adds to the sense of melancholy. Charming and thought-provoking, this hand-sized book makes for good, albeit brief, reading.

BOOKS

EINSTEIN'S DREAMS

By *Alan Lightman*
Pantheon, 179 pp., \$17

■ *Simson L. Garfinkel is a freelance writer who specializes in science and technology.*