

## Teen murders touch soul of city

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t brought those fears into the open. Children, parents, employers, teachers became disillusioned, fearful and angry.

"Thousand of people mourned and hundreds helped bury Jennifer Harrison, Sarah Harrison, Eliza Thomas and Amy Ayers. But the concern and fear remains.

"A crime like this can create a panic," said E. Mark Wynn, a University of Texas criminologist. "It suggests that the risk of being victimized has suddenly increased, or that we've underestimated the danger all along."

"It shaken you up," said Tim Tinsell, who said he escaped California's drugs and crime by moving his family to Austin. "You're really not totally isolated from it."

East Austin residents have worried about violent crime for years. As incidences of gangs, weapons and drugs have increased, some people have grown afraid to leave their homes and have seen their friends, neighbors and children fall victim to violence.

East Austin spent years seeking aid for the growing crime problem. But little help came before a 1988 gang-related shooting injured two bystanders downtown.

"Before it hit Fifth and Congress, gang shootings only happened on this side," said Robert Mendonca, an East Side activist. "Once it hit the west side of I-35, people became more aware."

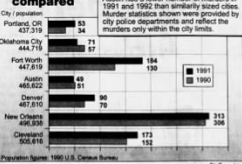
Although many people across the city say their fear of crime has increased, the crime rates in Austin have remained relatively stable when comparing 1991 with 1990.

Sue Horton, who analyzes crime statistics for the Austin Police Department, said, "Crime looks good. We will probably see a slight increase with a small increase," she said.

For the first nine months of 1991, there were 212 rapes, down from 219 for the same period in 1990. As of September 1991 — the last month for which statistics are available — there were 1,114 robberies, up 86 from the year before.

There have been 51 homicides so far in 1991, up two from the number of homicides in all of 1990. But for people across the city, the numbers don't seem to mean as much as the fear that comes with well-publicized cases like the yo-

### Murder rates compared



gurt shop murders.

"It doesn't make a difference what part of the city you live in. It's going to happen no matter where you are," said Tony Mendonca of North Austin.

Tina Hudson, who also lives in North Austin, said, "I hardly ever go out at night. If I do, I try to go with somebody."

"It didn't use to be that way," she said.

"Yes," said David M. Horton, professor of criminal justice at St. Edwards' University. "There is more crime out there. And it's more violent."

Horton said he thinks violent crime "tends to create almost a national psyche, a national psychological mood of fear and suspicion."

It's not an indicator of general overall health in a society.

The slayings in the yogurt shop brought back a flood of memories for Austin police officer Angelo Martinez, who has patrolled the city's streets for eight years.

Martinez grew up in Waco, where the killings of three teens, dubbed "The Lake Waco murders," galvanized that community in 1982. Now, Martinez has teenagers of his own, and the Dec. 6 killings brought renewed worries about their safety.

"When I first came here, it was like a small, quiet town," he said. "I did feel safe back then but I do now," he said.

Austin is no longer a small town.

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Sunday, December 15, 1991

Austin American-Statesman A29

## TALK OF THE TOWN

The fear of crime in Austin was on the mind of many Austinites last week after four teen-age girls were found slain in a yogurt shop.

"It's really scary. I'm just more aware. It can happen to anybody. I believe it's getting to that."

**MAKIN' SENSE:** 30, a fax and telephone technician, the 12-year-old daughter of a local businessman was the victim of a murder and 7-year-old son.

"I don't think it's a safe place. I feel sorry for them (the victims of the yogurt shop killing). We don't need any more problems like this."

**SARAH BENTON,** 41, an investment banker from Thailand who works at La Petite Cafe and has lived in Austin for three years.

"It seems like it's (crime) getting worse. That can happen to anyone, like Vietnam."

**DEVON HALL,** 20, a junior at St. Edwards' University and three-year resident of Austin.

**JOE SEPEDA,** 29, a 10-year Austin resident who says he thinks by the time his 3-year-old son, Joe Richard Sepeda II, and his 6-month-old child grow up, their freedom will be taken away by crime.

Staff member Carla Robinson contributed to this report.



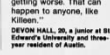
"That was sick. They were four kids. They don't know what life is all about."

**SARAH BENTON,** 41, a fax and telephone technician who was recently laid off.



"I used to be a fairly safe city. I think drugs have got a lot to do with it. I'm more careful. I make sure my door is locked."

**SUE CULBERTSON,** 76, retired.



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"What can other innocent teen-agers do? As soon as they catch these guys (yogurt shop murderers), it will be better for everyone."

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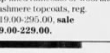
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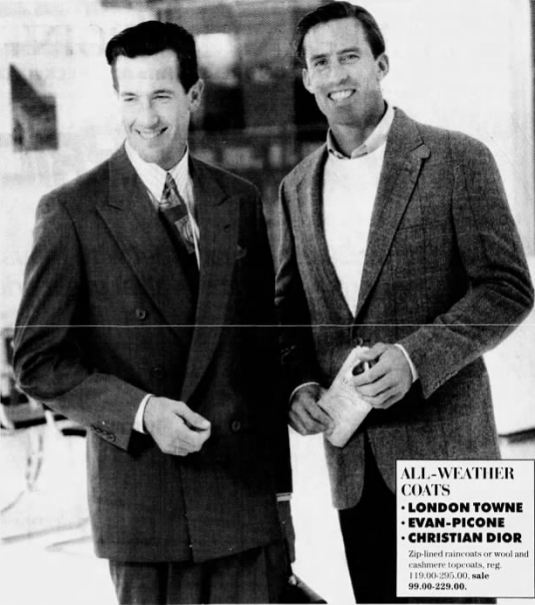
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