

A12 Austin American-Statesman
Wednesday, January 1, 1992
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Austin American-Statesman

COMMENTARY

EDITORIALS

Threads of lives woven into tapestry of 1991

As the final threads are woven into the tapestry of 1991, the first threads of 1992 are ready to take their place on the loom. It's hard to imagine what kind of pattern will emerge from the cloth of 1991. For all we can see from the side of the loom are the knots and tangles and ragged stitching of modern life. But there is a special thread running through every year. Call it fate. The ancient Greeks believed in the Three Fates, three old women who spun the cloth of life. There was Clotho who spun it, Lachesis who measured it out and Atropos who cut it. Some lives, some years are broad. Some are rough homespun cloth.

Chaos and change are woven into the fabric of 1991. That's the final fate of the Soviet Union. As it is ripped apart by internal problems, opposing forces are attempting to sew up the rift. And they won't have President Mikhail Gorbachev to patch things up anymore. President Bush, too, fell from grace. Stearing off 1991 as the conquering hero of the Persian Gulf War, he ended up as an economic failure, a leader who couldn't balance the nation's checkbook. The primary colors of 1991 are the bright red of violence and the muted shades of gray. George H.W. Bush added his own silk stain when he opened fire on a group of people

eating lunch at a Killdeer cafeteria. Add to that the innocent blood of four Austin teen-agers who died in a yogurt-store rampage. Americans were shocked — and transfixed — by the television spectacles of the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings and the William Kennedy Smith rape trial. In Louisiana, a new and improved David Duke tried to crawl out from under the flat rock of racism. From a biblical perspective, it seemed like the world suffered from every form of plague and pestilence except for the frogs and gnats. Bangladesh, endured cyclones, and floods. Texas is drying out after a devastating pre-Christmas flood. Basketball star Magic Johnson test-

ed positive for the HIV virus. But there are also brighter threads to the tapestry of 1991. The Soviet Union has thus far been spared the kind of civil war now devastating Yugoslavia. In the Middle East, old enemies are starting to talk and all but two of the hostages have been freed. The green in the tapestry is for a growing environmental awareness. Add a thread of blue for all the people in Austin who've rallied to preserve Barton Springs, to keep our lakes and rivers clean. Texas has a new mayor. Both are trying to build new consensus. The economy is one. The presidential race is another. The Soviet crisis continues into the tapestry of years and that's hope. It is often stretched and twisted by tragedy, but it never quite snaps. Hope is part of all colors, part of all people. Yes, it is a slender thread. But strong enough to carry from one year to the next.

Baseball returned to its roots with a scrappy, sliding-into-third-base-on-your-belly World Series between the Minnesota Twins and the Atlanta Braves. Nobody really lost, although the record books will say the Braves did. Like every other year, 1991 leaves its share of loose ends. The economy is one. The presidential race is another. The Soviet crisis continues into the tapestry of years and that's hope. It is often stretched and twisted by tragedy, but it never quite snaps. Hope is part of all colors, part of all people. Yes, it is a slender thread. But strong enough to carry from one year to the next.

As MHMR lawsuit ends, state's challenge begins

Texas should look with relief at the decision handed down this week by U.S. District Judge Barefoot Sanders. The ruling at long last closes the book on the 17-year-old class action lawsuit against the 13 state schools that house people with mental retardation. However, the settlement also should be viewed by the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation as a challenge to keep its houses in order and its business out of the hands of the courts. State officials should work diligently to avoid a fresh resurgence of protracted litigation.

The ruling also is a challenge to Gov. Ann Richards to put politics and local pressures aside and take steps that provide residents of state schools with the best possible care Texas can provide. Richards appointed a five member task force earlier this year to identify the schools that should be closed. The group's work is scheduled to be completed by March 31. Communities whose institutions are recommended for closure will complain loudly about the loss of jobs. It is critical, however, for the economic aspects of the situation to take a back seat to the human needs of the residents of state schools. Likewise, homes catering to these residents will have to be created and operated in communities statewide. But here again, it will be important to balance the requirements of people with mental retardation with the emotions of the neighborhood. At stake are 600 or more men, women and children who are likely to be transferred from institutions to smaller facilities where their chances of leading more normal lives will be enhanced. The case against MHMR has dragged for nearly two decades because the state was found to be in violation of the court's orders. Community homes have been found in other states to be a better option for many residents than larger institutions. But the state will have to take careful measures to ensure that these homes provide quality care and are not dumping grounds for the unwanted. The ruling closes the book on a difficult situation as it gives the state the opportunity to show it can install a new and improved day.

DON WRIGHT



Don Sargent will return

LETTERS

Searchers are heroes to drowning victim's family

EDITOR'S NOTE: Of all life's sorrows, perhaps the deepest is the loss of a child. Sadly, six Austin families recently experienced losses — five to the horrors of crime and one to the three of nature. Here are their thoughts and comments on those who have helped them and comforted them through their suffering. The first is a letter from the mother of Jay "Susannah" Drolet-DuWever, who drowned in the flooding.

Many people helped me find Susannah. I wish it were possible to hold each of them by the hand and thank them for their kindness and bravery and sympathy. The conditions under which the search for Susannah was carried out were dangerous in the extreme. The searchers risked their lives to find her. Each day men and women from volunteer organizations and from state, county and city offices searched for her during the daylight hours. Each day my friends and neighbors and brothers and sisters and cousins and son participated in the search or helped at the command post. The official search spanned the daylight hours, but many people did not stop when the command post was closed for the day. Each night, people in pairs and small groups continued to search. I wonder if your readers realize what it means to conduct a search in flood conditions. Simply finding your way to the location took courage. Almost all roads leading there were flooded; large chunks of some roadways were washed away; bridges were overrun with high water or had collapsed. The search covered seven miles of shallow streams which had become

Every searcher is a hero. They are competent, and more than that, they are caring and kind.

deep and broad white-water rivers. The floods on each side were calf-deep in water. Friday, Saturday and part of Sunday, the rain continued, leaving each searcher soaking wet and cold through long hours. Bread and butter and bananas and debris covered the area. As you moved down river, you were bent double much of the time, trying to find your way forward. Shouting was impossible because of the noise of the river. In many places the ground at the water's edge gave way if any weight was placed on it. There was also fire ants. Searching a pile of debris could have your head and legs covered with them. But no one was left unsearched. It is quite true to say that every square inch of ground was checked. When it became possible to get men in the water, their search took them to many deep pools. Let your readers know that every searcher is a hero. They are competent, and more than that, they are caring and kind. Each day I became aware that one of them had taken it upon himself to keep an eye on me. Each day they assured me we would find Susannah and would continue searching until she was found. Even with Christmas approaching, their time and efforts were given to Susannah. I would like to name them one by one and tell you what each of

them did for her. Since I do not know them all by name, let me cite the groups: the Dripping Springs Volunteer Fire Department, the Dripping Springs EMS Medics, the Trothwood Volunteer Fire Department, the Healy Volunteer Fire Department, the North Hays County EMS Volunteer Unit, the Oak Hill Fire Department South Water Rescue Team, Texas Highway Patrol Officers, Hays County Sheriff's Department, K-9 unit. A helicopter went out each day, and every day volunteers from the Goldenwood and Redstone communities, and from Dripping Springs, Duffwood and Friendship Beach were there. The Friendship Baptist Church became the command post. My neighbors were there, because of the rain and cold, one of them had a fever of 102 by Sunday morning. My cousins were there, my brothers and sisters and son were there. Praise for the searchers cannot be overdone. I hope some of your readers will help me do more than give them our admiration. All of these people continue to do the kind of work day by day, continue to place themselves in danger in order to help people in need. We often don't think of sending a donation to the DPS, but donations to the volunteer fire departments would help them continue their work. Don't think a small donation does not help. One of the men in the water did not have a picnic, a small donation would buy such a piece of equipment. To all the volunteers and officials and neighbors and friends: my family and I won't forget your courage and your kindness. To all who sent food and cards, to all who brought things, came to say goodbye to her: your love warms my heart. Many thanks from all of us.

MICHELE, JOSEF, LIKE and SARAH DROLET-DUWEVER



Sarah Harrison Amy Ayres Jennifer Harrison Eliza Thomas

Public support eases private grief

The parents of Eliza Thomas, Amy Ayres, Sarah and Jennifer Harrison wish to express appreciation to families, friends, students, churches, merchants and communities whose expressions of sympathy and generosity are providing us a measure of light on our journey from tragedy to recovery. The murder of these teen-agers on Dec. 6, 1991, has changed the lives of our citizens. Let us continue to help each other by displaying white ribbons, volunteering services and resources to Child Inc., sharing feelings through press releases and letters to the editors, and frequently contacting elected officials. While we suffer our private grief, we know that many others are grieving with us. We are grateful for all of the support that we have received from all of you, and also for the support that we will continue to receive in the coming days, months and years. We would particularly like to thank the following people: The staff of the Austin Fire Department, the Austin Police Department Victim Services unit, the homicide unit, and the motorcycle escort at the funeral, and all of the other AFD staff with whom we have dealt, for their kindness, patience and understanding. All of the people, known and unknown to us, who have written to us, left flowers and candles at the store or at the graves, or otherwise expressed their sympathy, kind thoughts and

The former customers of the yogurt store who have shared their memories of the girls with us, our employers and colleagues, for their support and help in this difficult time, both at work and personally. The Party House, for the wreath and lighted Christmas tree, Child Inc., and its board of directors, Cary Lazo, and in particular, Mike Tomasi and Glen Crouch. American Paging, and in particular, Jim Wineman, the employees of Dell Computer Corp.; Bruce Foad; The Doctors of Austin; The Knights of Columbus; TRAM Bank; and Northland Club. Our relatives, the Harrison, Ayres, McDonald, Kelley, Ayres, Thomas, Fowler, Banerji and Suraci families, and our friends, including: Dany Deberry, Jon Beth, Elaine Windom, Marc Petrik, Paul and Fallo Turner, Tom Linnert, Dan Lester, Harriet Drenthsen, Marty and Bob Macintosh, Cecilia Sussard, Marc McKinney, Bill Dowley, and many others. We also would like to express our gratitude to those who supported and nurtured Eliza, Amy, Sarah and Jennifer, including the faculty, students and staff of the schools they attended and the Future Farmers of America program of which they were all members. FRANK and BARBARA SURACI JAMES THOMAS and NORMA COWLER ROBERT, PAUL and SHAWN AYRES MICHAEL and DEBBIE HARRISON MARLA and FORBIA THOMAS