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Austin American-Statesman

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### No one forgot

The peace officers who methodically kept investigating the murders of four of Austin's children had something in common with those who were outraged by the brutality of the killings: They would not forget.

Eight years after the community awoke to the horrifying news that four of their young had been slain in what was to become known as the yogurt shop murders, arrests have been made.

It has been a long road to here, as Austin Police Chief Stan Kene and Mayor Kirk Watson noted Wednesday. It will be a longer road still before the case is officially closed.

What the arrests signify is the beginning of the end to a mystery that has haunted Austin since the deaths of the youngsters were discovered in the building that had been searched to cover the slayings. Their names were Jennifer Harbison, 17; Sarah Harbison, 15; Eliza Thomas, 17; and Amy Ayres, 13. Jennifer and Sarah were sisters; they all were friends.

Though Austin had been the scene of several random, brutal killings throughout its history, this one — as Watson noted Wednesday — we took personally.

Perhaps we took it personally because the constant reminders that killers or killers were still out there somewhere. Perhaps we took it personally, as some suggested, because the killings told Austin that it could not hide from the devil.

Yet it was not the devil's first visit. He was there when Susan Rigby and Shirley Stark, two Chi Omega sorority members, were killed in an apartment on Manor Road on July 18, 1986. The devil returned a year later. He was there on the University of Texas campus Aug. 1, 1986, when Charles Whitman used the University of Texas Tower as the platform for his murderous rampage. He was there when a teen-age named Elaine McCullation disappeared while riding her bicycle on a North Austin street in the summer of 1986. Her decomposed body was found six weeks later near Robinson, near Waco.

There were other killings before and after. The difference is that the perpetrators in all of the killings were apprehended in relatively short periods of time.

The yogurt shop case was different because it remained a "bovelling" mystery.

It took patience and teamwork on the part of Austin police in cooperation with state and federal law enforcement agencies to reach this point.

Homicide Lt. Shanna Jacobson described the case and Detective Paul Johnson did on the case as chip-sucking. Basic police work involved Texas Rangers and U.S. Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents.

The community, however, cannot think of the case as over. With a long series of hearings and trials yet to be held, it is far from over.

Notwithstanding, thanks are due to the officers for the hard work and the perseverance who have advanced the cause of justice for Jennifer, Sarah, Eliza and Amy this far.

### Austin needs water deal

Austin City Council's expected vote today on a proposal for a 30-year supply of water from the Lower Colorado River Authority will be one of the most important this council will cast.

SOS Alliance attorney Bill Branch has launched flare after flare for more than a month in an effort to derail the agreement reached between city staff and the LCRA. The SOS position is less about the cost of water than about the ability to use a limited water supply to restrict growth.

But now the vote is high and council members should look beyond the SOS rhetoric to find what matters to local residents. It is vital that the city be able to provide quality water supply for its residents and businesses today and tomorrow. Lacking up-iron-water for the city to thrive for the next half century is critical.

The SOS's kneejerk quest to scuttle the agreement has been misguided from the beginning. Austin unquestionably will need the water, and all indications are that the price is fair. Other thirsty cities, including Corpus Christi and San Antonio, will be paying far more for water than Austin will pay the LCRA.

After a series of public hearings to discuss the agreement, City Council should be fully versed on the soundness of the agreement and the importance of a water supply to Austin's future.

### Buy, burn, choke

The good times are rolling, and so are the big vehicles. That's great news for automakers, who just reported record sales. But it's bad news for Austin and other cities struggling to clean up their air.

"There are good times," a General Motors official commented to The New York Times after GM broke a sales record on unusually strong September sales.

What's selling best are the gas guzzlers.

Sales of sport utility vehicles, minivans and pickups jumped by more than 30 percent from the past year. Sales of cars, which burn less fuel, dropped by more than 5 percent.

Average fuel efficiency of vehicles sold this year also set a record — a record low since 1981.

Tailpipe emissions from cars are a major component of the smog that dims Austin's skies on ozone action days such as Wednesday. The more gallons of gasoline burned by the area's rapidly growing vehicle fleet, the more health and civic pride suffer.

A crackdown by federal environmental officials is inevitable unless the city cleans up its skies during the next year, which at this point looks unlikely.

"Choked roads and polluted air are spelled," this southern hometown's most valuable asset: its reputation as a pleasant place to live. "That was what The Wall Street Journal said recently of 'polluted Atlanta.' Austin could easily be next.

At about the same time that the record sales figures were announced, the Environmental Protection Agency announced its list of fuel-efficiency winners and sinners.

Guess what? The dirtiest fuel sippers account for 0.17 percent of the market, while the guzzlers account for more than 48 percent.

With the economy booming and a gallon of gasoline cheaper than a gallon of bottled water or a cup of coffee, consumers are on a beheading-buying and burn-burning spree.

High levels of smog like the city has had this week will have serious consequences for Austin and its drivers. People will get sick, businesses will find cleaner cities, tourists won't want to visit. It's not going to get better until one garage at a time — something changes.

Guess now, choke later.

### COMMENTARY

#### BEN SARGENT



### LETTERS

#### Dark side of life

My husband and I went to see "American Beauty," the movie that received the highest of the highest praise, as well as a five-star rating in the American Statesman. If you enjoy seeing what the dark side of life is all about, then this is the movie to see. It is thought-provoking and will not do to be in the same class as the classic cult movie "Blue Velvet." If, however, you don't want to be left with a queasy stomach, I would suggest that this movie is not for you. It was quite effective in showing the reality of today's dysfunctional families and the all too realistic results that can occur as a result of repulsive and loss of values.



Kevin Spacey and Annette Bening are shown in a scene from DreamWorks' new film, "American Beauty." This suburban family has week of a movie is already being talked about as a contender for next year's Academy Awards.

Currently, countries must undergo up to six years of harsh policies imposed by ESAF to receive debt relief. A couple of examples of the policy are to stop providing clean water for free and to increase charges for health care services by fivefold in Mozambique due before their fifth birthday. These countries should be spending 17 percent of their national budget on debt payments while their children are dying.

Now the IMF is going to renege ESAF to "Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility." A wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf.

EDLISE SUTHERLAND  
Phurville

#### Let's not forget

A Sept. 29 editorial, "No time for armistice," says that the flax over George W. Bush getting a National Guard slot in "newspapers" because everyone knows that "political influence helped gain those highly sought after slots."

The editorial states that instead of paying attention to "who got what 30 years ago," we should focus on the needs of today's military. I totally agree that attention must be focused on our armed forces.

However, let us not forget that some people can't pay attention to "who got what 30 years ago" because they died fighting in Vietnam. They served when called and did not "quit" or "quit" like some of our privileged "dink."

PATRICK J. McNEEL  
Lesterwood Colonel  
U.S. Army Reserve  
Austin

#### Blatant discrimination

I am appalled that a ballot for the Nov. 2 constitutional election for the State of Texas should carry a Spanish translation. In the first place, it is blatant discrimination. It seems to say to the many people in our state whose first language is neither Spanish nor English that they are not important. To require the counties to pay for reprinting the ballots because of a mistake made by a translator is outrageous.

My impression has been that anyone seeking citizenship in the United States is required to understand English. The one state that has held our country together has been a common language. As more overseas countries divide into smaller and smaller units, it can be noted that most of the warring nations are unable to understand each other because they do not share a common language. Translators have proved to be unreliable.

V. JOHNSON  
Austin

#### You decide

I noticed in the Sept. 27 American Statesman, that Brian Brantley was having a difficult time deciding between Al Gore and Bill Bradley.

I will never forget, nor should Vice President Gore, when he stood on the steps of the White House with Democratic members of Congress behind him, loudly proclaiming to the world that President Clinton, who had just been impeached, was "one of the greatest presidents in American history."

Clinton's break!

Little publicity has been given to the fact that Clinton's recent proposal that a 100 percent tax be levied against anyone or any entity taking out an ad to express personal viewpoints, so that the federal government could subsidize issuance of opposing viewpoints. Utterly ridiculous and dangerous.

So remember, Texas Democrats, there is a third very viable option to Al and Bill. The presidency needs, par-

#### Slap in the face

Reading Mr. Robert Clancy's Sept. 30 letter in response to Charles Waksch's letter (Sept. 27) regarding aid and intervention in Africa greatly disappointed me. Granted, there have been enormous challenges in supplying aid to Africa. But to simply ignore Mr. Clancy has done is a slap in the face to the needs of our fellow humans in Africa.

I have worked in Africa in medical development for 10 years. I have felt their pain and done my small share to help. I don't know what content Mr. Clancy has, but perhaps he would like to spend some time in the region. If he can't do that, maybe he should read the letter just above his. "But is there anyone sympathetic enough to think..."

THOMAS KROHN  
Austin

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