

# commentary

from other pens...

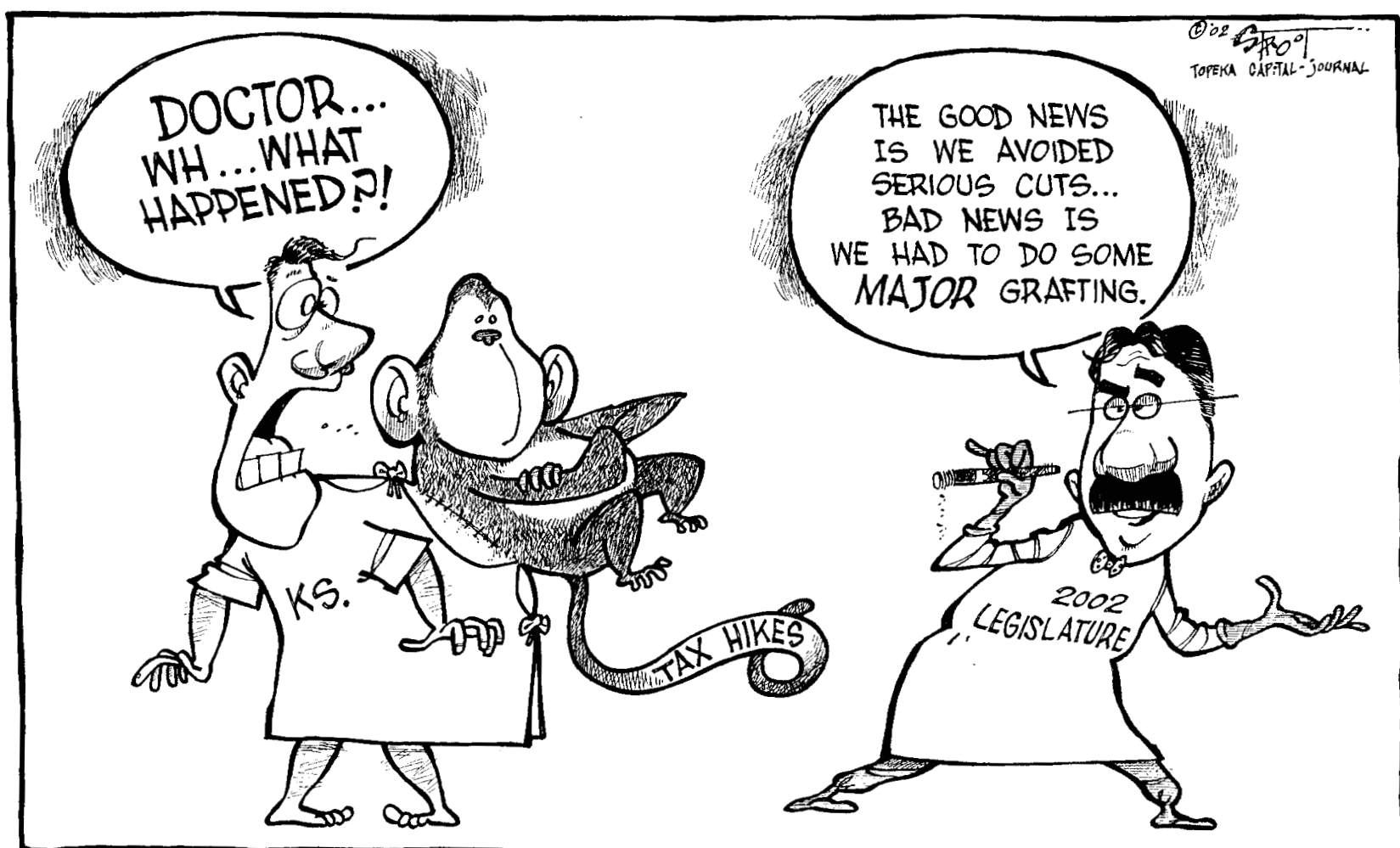
## Despite grumbling, Bush strong with base

Occasional grumbling by some prominent conservatives about President Bush sometimes overshadows his extremely solid support among stalwart Republicans and conservatives around the country. Many Republicans and Democrats seem to agree that support by itself does not tilt the 2002 elections toward the GOP. Some, however, say it could offset the gains the party out of the White House — Democrats, in this case — historically has made in midterm elections. “The general backdrop has shifted away from the Democrats over the last year to where we have a level playing field,” said Whit Ayres, a GOP pollster who works with Republican candidates. The Sept. 11 attacks shifted the political landscape from domestic issues favoring Democrats to national security and the terrorism, which favor the GOP. Democrats acknowledge the president’s strength, but will it carry over to other GOP candidates. “The president has put his popularity on the line in these congressional midterm elections,” said Michael Meehan, a senior strategist at the Democratic National Committee. “What remains to be seen is whether the intensity of the conservative base translates from the president to the candidates who are on the ballot.”

Meehan said data he has seen indicate the elections are more likely to be decided on the basis of individual candidates and local campaigns. Some conservatives have grumbled about the Bush White House handling of spending, steel tariffs, the Mideast and other issues. “Within the conservative leadership, there is increasing restlessness about some of the Bush’s domestic policy decisions in the last few months,” said Steve Moore, president of the Club for Growth, a conservative anti-tax group. Democratic strategist Jim Jordan dismisses such complaints as “strictly a debate among the Washington elites.” Polls do not suggest discontent among some conservative activists. “Bush wins overwhelming support from all Republicans and with strong Republicans it is all but unanimous,” said Thomas Riehle, president of Ipsos-Reid public affairs, which conducts a tracking poll for the Cook Political Report. “At this point in a president’s first term, you would expect to have alienated some faction of your own party, but that is not the case with George Bush.”

Bush’s approval rating among Republicans is in the low 90s and a bit higher among strong Republicans, according to an Ipsos-Reid poll. Georgia Republican Chairman Ralph Reed said most conservatives he talks to are quite content “the ball is clearly moving in the right direction.” That gives the GOP the latitude to reach out more on health care, education and other issues, he said. The president can do that by following through on issues he campaigned on and “make them a reality,” said Blaise Underwood, political director of the Republican National Committee. Democrats say that GOP proposals on many domestic issues fall short and are underfunded. Enthusiasm for the president could be important in a midterm election when turnout tends to be lighter, said Carl Forti, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee. Republicans acknowledge Democrats have had an advantage in getting out their voters. One definite benefit for Republican candidates will be the president’s ability to raise money for candidates, Ayres said. Jordan, executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee said money should not be a deciding factor. “We will not lose a Senate race because of a lack of resources,” he said. Conservative loyalty to Bush could give Republicans added leeway to move to the center on some domestic issues — excluding top GOP issues like taxes and abortion, said conservative analyst Marshall Wittmann of the Hudson Institute.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics and polling for The Associated Press.



## Speculation now turns to why, how

Less than three weeks ago, Robert and Susan Levy stood in front of their daughter’s Washington, D.C., apartment, saying they had a feeling, a hope, that she was still alive.

“We haven’t abandoned that,” Robert Levy said on the anniversary of his daughter’s disappearance.

As he spoke, Chandra’s body was four miles away in Rock Creek Park, under a mat of autumn leaves, waiting for someone to find her.

On Wednesday someone finally did: a man looking for turtles with his dog — a poignantly mundane end to a dark and tantalizing tale of extramarital affairs, Washington politics and even, in writer Dominick Dunne’s telling of it, slave-trading sheikhs.

The Levys got the news about the same time as the rest of us. After a year of focusing as much media attention as possible on their daughter’s disappearance, the Levys couldn’t face the cameras Wednesday. They had lived for a year in that suspended state of reality known by all parents of missing children, moving and talking in a steady rhythm of hopefulness that kept them from going crazy. Now they had to let go. They remained inside their Modesto home with friends, distraught and inconsolable.

As each month passed with no leads on the intern’s disappearance, few outside the Levy family truly believed that the young woman was still alive. So why did the discovery of her remains Wednesday feel like a blow to the gut, even to those of us who had never met her?

There was something so solid and strong about



joan ryan

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the 24-year-old intern we saw in those herky-jerky home videos and family snapshots. Her vibrancy made you wonder, against all reason, if maybe she was off somewhere exotic and remote and would show up one day with a good explanation.

The glut of media attention sensationalized her story to the point of embarrassment, but it also served to pull us into her life. We got to know her in the way we get to know characters in books and movies, and thus we couldn’t help caring about her. We become invested in her fate. What happened on that first day of May last year? Why can’t the police find her? How did she get involved with a guy like Condit? What must it be like for her family, waiting and waiting?

Chandra seemed like the purposeful and sensible middle sister who leaves town to make something of herself. She was emblematic of the kind of young woman attracted to Washington, D.C. — ambitious, lively, savvy. She went to the gym. She had lots of friends. She interned not in the rarefied world of nonprofit foundations or Capitol Hill but at the Bureau of Prisons, of all things. She could take care of herself.

So it was always difficult to reconcile the wild-haired Chandra we came to know on television with

her role as a victim. It didn’t fit. That’s why all the rumors about political intrigue made sense. Those rumors also helped keep her story at arm’s length. If somehow her disappearance were wrapped up in some sinister political plot, if we could keep it on the level of a daytime soap opera, then Chandra’s story wasn’t our story. It wasn’t about the risks and dangers of everyday life for us and our daughters.

But now we face the possibility that her death was random, that maybe this competent, athletic young woman was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, dying at the hands of a stranger who assaulted her during the course of an ordinary day.

In such a case, Chandra could have been any of us. She could have been any of our children who strike out on their own, full of confidence and promise, children we expect will always return home to us. It is this scenario that is more terrifying than any of the titillating speculations offered up during the past year.

Some say the discovery of her remains is, as the cliché goes, the parents’ worst nightmare. “Two parents have just received the most horrible news parents could ever get,” family spokeswoman Judy Smith told reporters late Wednesday afternoon. “Their daughter has died.”

But knowing surely offers more peace than not knowing. And only by finding Chandra can her parents let go of one hope and hold onto another — the hope of discovering how and why she died and, most important, of holding someone accountable.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

## Everyone should read the Bible; it moves hearts

Last week, I said I would be writing about the top 10 reasons everyone should read the Bible. This week, I’m at the no. 9 reason everyone should read the Bible.

That reason is discussed in Hebrews 4:12 which says, “The word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and their marrow, and is able to discern thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

God’s word moves hearts; it digs deep inside of a person to tell him who he is and who he should be. James 1:23-25 compares the Bible to a mirror in which people can see a reflection of their true selves. The Bible there says, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, this one is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, and off he goes and immediately forgets what sort of man he is. But he who peers into the perfect law that belongs to freedom and who persists in it, this man, because he has become, not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, will be happy in his doing it.”

By doing what God tells us in the Bible to do, we can be happy, as James says. And we will be better people. Many men would likely agree with the words of Proverbs 21:9, “Better it is to dwell upon a corner of a roof than with a contentious wife, although in a house in common.”

Not that women have cornered the market on bad behavior. Proverbs 26:21 says, “As charcoal for the embers and wood for the fire, so is a contentious man for causing a quarrel to glow.”

Since all people are imperfect, there are bound to be some conflicts and disagreements from time to time, but it is unnecessary for anyone to be so hard to get along with that everyone avoids him; nobody wants to spend any time with him because the experience is so unpleasant.

Ephesians 4:22-24 says, “You should put away the old personality which conforms to your former course of conduct and which is being corrupted according to his deceptive desires; but you should be made new in the force actuating your mind, and should put on the new personality which was created according to God’s will in true righteousness and loyalty.”

Why did the apostle Paul tell the Ephesian Christians to put on a new personality? Like many people today, before they became Christians, many people committed gross sins against God.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian congregation in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “What! Do you not know that unrighteous persons will not inherit God’s king-



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

dom? Do not be misled. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with men, nor thieves, nor greedy persons, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit God’s kingdom. And yet that is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of God.”

Many of the Christians in Corinth had practiced such sins, for Paul said, “That is what some of you were.”

But they changed. For them to be washed clean and be declared righteous, they had to stop committing those sins, for the beginning of verse 9 says they would not inherit God’s kingdom otherwise.

The apostle Paul had himself made major changes in his personality when he converted to Christianity. Before converting to Christianity, the apostle Paul went by the name of Saul.

Acts 8:1-3 says of him, “Saul, for his part, was approving of the murder of him. . . . But reverent men carried Stephen to the burial, and they made a great lamentation over him. Saul, though, began dealing outrageously with the congregation. Invading one house after another and, dragging out both men and women, he would turn them over to prison.”

Paul was a murderer, and he persecuted Christians, sending both men and women to prison, before he became a Christian himself. What kind of person was he as a Christian?

One Thessalonians 2:7, 8 answers that question, “We became gentle in the midst of you, as when a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, having a tender affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not only the good news of God, but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.”

What a change that was! Paul went from being Saul the murderer to Paul, a man who was as gentle as a nursing mother and who would give his life in behalf of fellow Christians.

Where did Paul learn these qualities? From his study of the scriptures and from following the example of fellow Christians. John 13: 34, 35 says,

“I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.”

Jesus gave his followers the command to love each other as he loved them. How much did Jesus love his followers? He gave his life as a sacrifice for them.

Two Timothy 3:1-3 says, “But know this, that in the last days critical times hard to deal with will be here. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection, not open to any agreement, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness.”

Isn’t it true these words describe many people today? The fact that in many cities people are killed for the athletic shoes on their feet or the money in their purses or wallets proves that many people are lovers of money and have no natural affection.

The untrue rumors going around prove that many are slanderers, and the attacks on the World Trade Center show how fierce people are capable of being.

All of these characteristics can be traded in for a Christian personality by any person willing to make a sincere effort to read the Bible and apply its words in his life.

Galatians 5:22, 23 mentions some qualities that can be gained, “On the other hand, the fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control.”

These qualities are the fruitage of God’s spirit, the same spirit that inspired the Bible writers to record God’s message for mankind.

Titus 2:4-8 says, “Recall the young women to their senses to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sound in mind, chaste, workers at home, good. . . . Likewise keep on exhorting the younger men to be sound in mind, in all things showing yourself an example of fine works.”

Do these not sound like better spouses than the contentious husband and wife mentioned earlier? Reading the Bible and applying God’s teachings can truly make people better spouses and better citizens and can bring them happiness as they stop causing unnecessary conflicts in their lives.

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