

commentary

from other pens...

A publisher views a city of contradictions

Katharine Graham was a Washingtonian for more than 80 of the capital's 202 years, listening and observing and finally guiding the work of those who wrote about the politics and policies that are the city's heartbeat.

"My whole orientation is toward this place," the late Washington Post publisher writes in "Katharine Graham's Washington," published posthumously this fall. "It is a city whose industry — first and foremost politics — got into my blood early and stayed there."

The book is an anthology culled from the writings of a legion of Washington watchers whose observations and experiences and memories bracket her life and the administrations of presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Bill Clinton.

It can be read as a gathering of background material for her first book, "Personal History." That best-selling memoir won the Pulitzer Prize in 1998, three years before Graham's death. It followed her life as she unexpectedly became the Post's chief executive and steered the newspaper's Washington coverage through and beyond the Watergate crisis that toppled a president.

Wilson, who was president when Graham was born in 1917, once offered this definition of the capital: "The city of Washington is in some respects self-contained, and it is easy there to forget what the rest of the country is thinking about."

Graham found the city more elusive, and more interesting, than that and set out to prove it in her final book.

"All of my experience relating to this place ... leads me to the conclusion that there is no one 'fundamental fact' about Washington," she writes. "It's not just one thing — it's one thing and its opposite at the same time."

"The contradictions inherent in this place are evident everywhere: it's formal and informal; it's public and private; it's social and political; it's a small town and the capital of the world. It's a city that's a symbol of democracy and yet thoroughly undemocratic, since it remains the only place in America where people are taxed without representation in the very bodies (Congress) that make the policies that govern them."

Graham's selections, and her own memories, are facets of a larger whole. Each of the writers she has chosen sees the city and its people from the slant of personal experience.

Among them:

—Columnist Marquis Childs, on the changing nature of the city: "Just when the capital is pleasantly arranged, as a monument, as a museum, the theater of a debating society, then some cataclysmic event sweeps in with the force of a tornado and the pattern is forever upset."

—Columnist Stewart Alsop: "It is good, too, to live in the midst of great events, to live in history — even as an onlooker, a mere provider of footnotes. And Washington is where most great events either begin or are molded and altered or end."

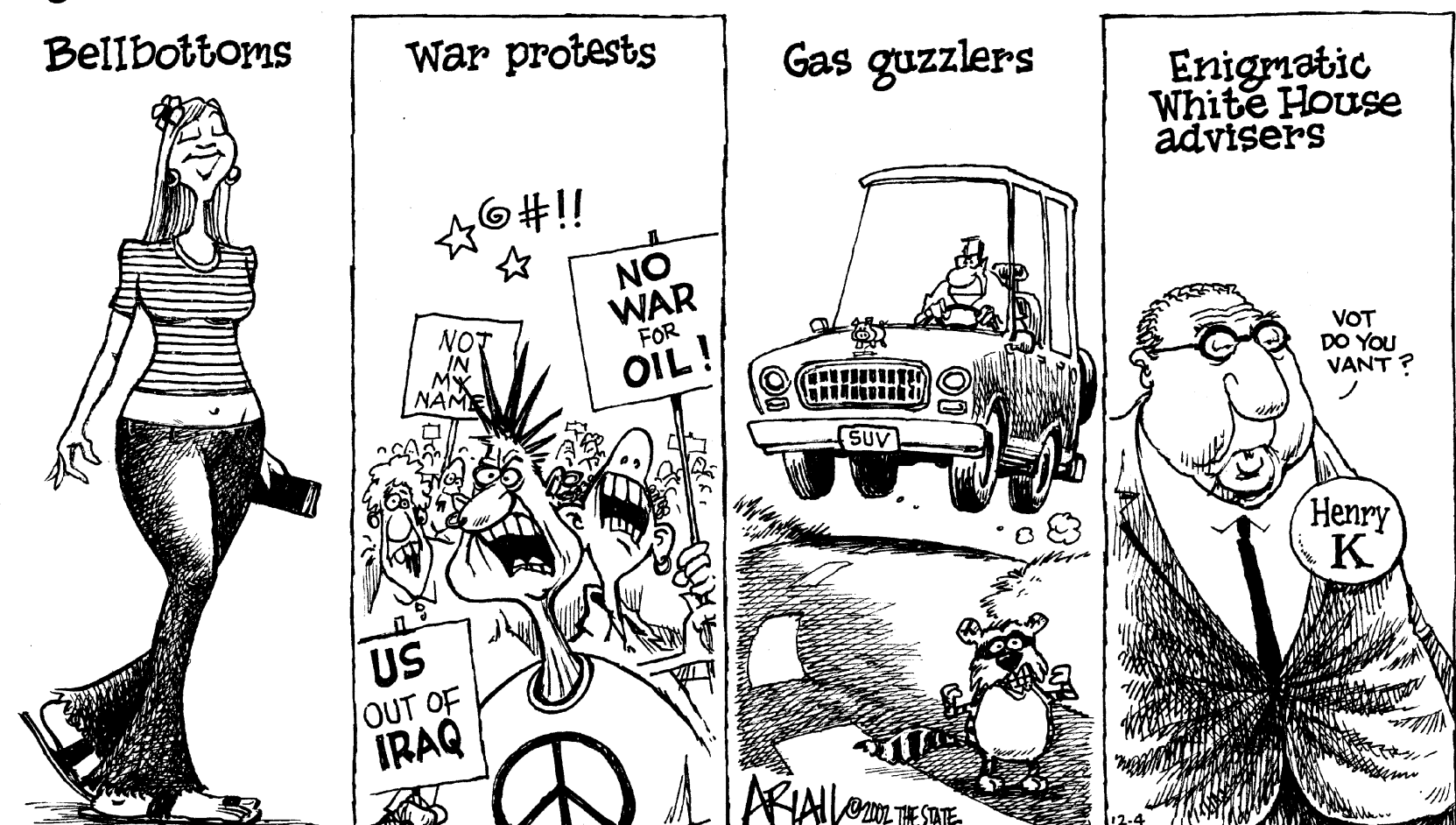
—Washington Post writer Henry Allen: "Some Americans don't care about Washington at all. To them, Washington isn't a city as much as a mailing address or a dateline or an abstract principle of power or scandal or foolishness."

—Associated Press reporter Bess Furman: "There are a number of ways of getting to Washington. Some get elected. Some get appointed. Some get drafted. Some get transferred. Some ride a lobbyhorse to this man's town. Many arrive as wives. ... Some come on pilgrimages and remain."

—Historian David McCullough: "What I'm drawn to and moved by is historical Washington, or rather the presence of history almost anywhere one turns. It is hard to imagine anyone with a sense of history not being moved. No city in the country keeps and commemorates history the way this one does. Washington insists we remember, with statues and plaques and memorials and words carved in stone."

EDITOR'S NOTE—Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 35 years.

Signs that the '70s are Back :



I have mixed emotions about leaving Goodland

Friday was my last day of work at *The Goodland Daily News* and I'm having mixed feelings about leaving for another job at *The Hutchinson Daily News*.

I'm really excited about moving to a larger town where there are more places to shop and eat, but I'm also a little sad to leave Goodland because I guess I've built a life here.

When I moved here from Oberlin to take the position of managing editor I was 23, now I'm 26. I was single when I came here and now I'm married to Mitch. My heart was set on moving back to Colorado when I first got to Goodland, now I'm moving deeper into Kansas.

I've gone through a lot of changes in Goodland and it all has sort of endeared the place to me. Not enough to make me want to stay here for the rest of my life.

I think a lot of people are disappointed that Mitch and I are leaving.

We're young adults who plan to start a family sometime down the road, and that's what Goodland needs most to survive and grow. I think I did a pretty fair job most of the time of covering news and sports in Sherman County, and Mitch helped start and was involved in several organizations to better life here.

If we were in Denver, most people would just pat you on the back and congratulate you. It's the same here, but you also get the feeling that people think of you as deserting Goodland — not that anyone has directly said that to me. (It could be some tinges of guilt making me feel that way.)

I've written so many stories about how Sherman County's economy is suffering because young people are moving away and not many ever come back. Now Mitch and I have become part of that trend. Mitch even more than me.

He grew up in Colby, where his father Warren Hixson is currently the mayor and owner of Home-



rachel hixson

• unraveling

land Real Estate. Mitch moved away shortly after high school and lived in larger cities around Kansas for more than a decade before deciding last year to move home.

He worked at the Homeland office in Goodland and became involved in the community right away. We met when he and Schyler Goodwin, another young northwest Kansas native who returned last year, came in to talk with me about a group they were starting to do community service projects.

Most of the members of the group were young people who had either returned to Goodland or moved in from a larger city. At least two people from the group have now moved away, and I know others have considered it.

Mitch and I have several reasons for moving away, but the heart of each one has to do with the fact that Goodland is simply a small town with not as much to offer as a larger town. We want more money, more choices in entertainment and recreation, more young people and more opportunities for advancement.

But, for me at least, that's really only part of it. I'm honestly just more comfortable living in a bigger city — I grew up in Denver — and I wasn't able to break a promise with myself that I would leave Goodland after a few years.

Mitch used to live in Hutchinson and still has close friends there, so we decided if we were going to move that would be a good place to go. I've visited Hutch several times and I like it because there are more people, stores and restaurants, but

the traffic and crime still isn't too bad.

Well, I've already explained myself more than I intended to, so I'll use the rest of this column to thank people in Goodland.

I first off want to thank Publisher Steve Haynes and the rest of the staff at *The Daily News* for anything and everything they've ever done for me. Leaving my job is bittersweet because although it was stressful most of the time, I've learned a lot more than I would at most, maybe all, newspapers. Steve has been a lot nicer to me than many bosses would be.

I also want to thank people who made my job easier by helping me get the information I needed, taking the time to explain things to me and just being nice and intelligent.

City Manager Ron Pickman, Superintendent Marvin Selby, all of the school board members and school board clerk Pat Juhl top the list. They have all been awesome to work with.

The new football coach Tony Diehl and the wrestling coach Randy Bahe were also great to work with. A lot of times coverage of a sport has more to do with the coach than the reporter. Diehl and Bahe are dedicated coaches who always have time to get information to the newspaper, and we really appreciate it.

Other people I would like to thank are Ken Clouse, president of Northwest Kansas Technical College; Larry Keirns, former college president; Sheriff Doug Whitson and staff at the sheriff's department; John Golden; Charles Schneider, Episcopal priest; County Clerk Janet Rumpel; Dave Floyd and other meteorologists at the National Weather Service; Dana Belshe, county agriculture extension agent; and Lynn Hoelting, Mueller Grain general manager. I know I'm forgetting someone.

There are definitely more nice people in Goodland than mean. That's only one thing I'm going to miss about this town.

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High nicotine tobacco smells like money

Tobacco farmer Dwight Watson's voice poured through the phone line like cream on a slice of sweet-potato pie. He was calling from North Carolina, where his family has grown tobacco for 150 years. He had read my column asking why, despite billion-dollar liability suits that slammed tobacco companies for their deadly and addictive product, cigarettes are still on the market.

"If people are going to point fingers at the tobacco companies and farmers, then you have to point fingers at the government, too," he said. "It's the government that won't let farmers plant low-nicotine tobacco."

I checked it out. He's right. Seeds for low-nicotine tobacco were essentially banned by the USDA in 1963. To this day, in order to be eligible for full government price supports, farmers must certify each year that they are not growing any low-nicotine varieties.

So, while the government sues tobacco companies for killing 400,000 Americans each year, it is enforcing laws that ensure cigarettes remain addictive.

"If you grow tobacco, everybody thinks you're evil," Watson said. "I'm not down here manipulating nicotine. I'm following the laws of the federal and state government."

The USDA's Minimum Standards Program, which requires nicotine levels in tobacco to fall within a prescribed range, was instituted at the urging of Big Tobacco. High nicotine makes American tobacco attractive around the world. It has a desirable flavor and, more important, it carries the satisfying chemical kick that smokers crave.

The purpose of the Minimum Standards Program is to give foreign buyers confidence in the American product, thereby protecting the financial interests of our tobacco industry. Of course, it also guarantees a steady stream of new addicts for generations to come.

This benefits the government almost as much as Big Tobacco. Dwight Watson told me that when he sells a 700-pound bale of tobacco, he clears about \$150 after expenses. That bale makes about 16,000 packs of cigarettes. If those packs are sold in New York City, the federal, state and local governments will have pocketed \$58,000 in taxes on



joan ryan

• commentary

Watson's bale of tobacco. Each year, the tobacco industry generates about \$13 billion in taxes.

States are also reaping billions every year from the 1997 settlement with Big Tobacco to recover Medicaid expenses for people harmed by cigarettes. Governments now count on this money in their annual budgets to cover items ranging from tuition scholarships to road repairs. Less than 8 percent of the settlement money has been spent on tobacco-control programs.

Obviously, none has been spent on developing low-nicotine tobacco, either. Tobacco-industry folks say low-nicotine cigarettes aren't marketable, so even if the tobacco were allowed to be grown, no company would buy it.

"It doesn't have the flavor or aroma," said W.K. Collins, a tobacco specialist at North Carolina State University. "It's like bourbon without alcohol."

Perhaps some of the tobacco settlement should go to researchers who can develop a satisfying cigarette with low nicotine, one with flavor and aroma but less addictive kick. Dr. David Kessler, former head of the Food and Drug Administration, raised the question in testifying before Congress.

Letter Policy

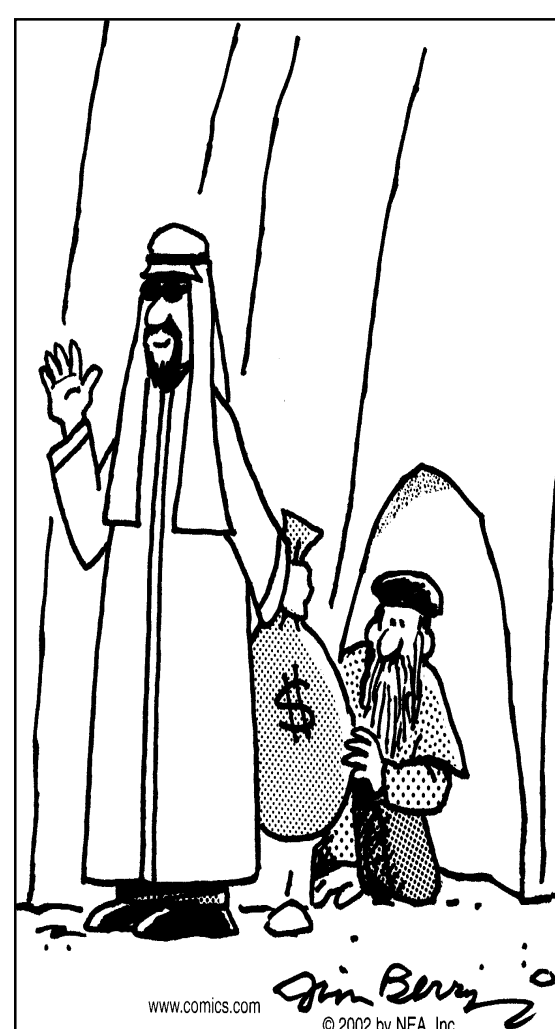
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"In many cigarettes today, the amount of nicotine is a result of choice, not chance," he said. "Since the technology exists to reduce nicotine in cigarettes to insignificant levels, why, one is led to ask, does the industry keep nicotine in cigarettes at all?"

Because our government is in on the deal. It scolds Big Tobacco with one hand and lights up with the other.

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

berry's world



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