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Segment of Ashtiani diary released

By Rich Jurgens and Randy Essex

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Excerpts from the diary of Bijan Atai Ashtiani, the Iranian student who died April 6 in the Lincoln Regional Center, have been obtained by the Daily Nebraskan and paint a picture of a young man caught up in a legal system he did not understand well.

The excerpts, dated Feb. 13, 14 and 20, were given to the Daily Nebraskan by a UNL Iranian student who said he was a close friend of Ashtiani. The Iranian student also said Ashtiani gave him (the student) the excerpts while Ashtiani was at the regional center.

Written in Persian on sheets of paper with "Douglas County Hospital Laboratory Reports" printed at the top, the excerpts were translated for the Daily Nebraskan by two native speakers of Persian working independently.

The translation was done by the UNL Iranian student and was checked Wednesday by UNL linguist and associate professor of English Hassan Sharifi. Sharifi said he talked to Ashtiani "many times" on a regular basis while Ashtiani was in the regional center.

After checking the excerpts in the presence of a Daily Nebraskan reporter, Sharifi said, "Parts of this (the excerpts) jibe with my recollection of what Bijan told me."

"Part of the story is what I'd heard from him (while Ashtiani was at the regional center), including the part about his experience in Douglas County Court," Sharifi said.

Newspaper experience

The UNL professor said Ashtiani also told him about his experience of trying to buy newspapers at the regional center, which was in the diary.

Sharifi compared the writing with other samples of Ashtiani's handwriting in his possession.

"I'm not a handwriting expert," Sharifi said, "But this looks like the same writing."

There were slight discrepancies in the UNL Iranian student's translation of the diary and Sharifi's translation. The UNL student used the word "cops" to describe guards and police officers. Sharifi said a more accurate translation of the Persian word Ashtiani used would be "agents."

Other discrepancies were similar and did not affect the content of the writing—only the wording.

Sharifi earned his master's degree in linguistics at UCLA in 1967, and earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1971.

In his diary, Ashtiani said that his bond originally had been set at \$25,000 and that a few minutes later, after a conference in the judges' chambers, it was changed to \$50,000 bond.

Ivory Griggs, the Douglas County public defender representing Ashtiani in a first-degree assault case stemming from the Dec. 20 stabbing of Ashtiani's landlord, Don Turner, said that the bond originally was set at \$50,000. However, he admitted the bond set for Ashtiani was unusually high

for an assault case.

In the diary, Ashtiani said that his bond not know what the charges against him were.

Griggs said the purpose of bond is to ensure that the accused will appear in court.

'Would have gone'

Ashtiani had told the court that he would leave the United States at his first opportunity, Griggs said.

For this reason, Griggs said, the court decided to set the bond high enough to keep him from leaving the United States.

In another portion of the diary Ashtiani wrote about his lawyers being changed, or

at least he thought they were changed.

"Ten minutes later they took me back to the previous room again. There, I saw a skinny man with a wicked face who told me he was a lawyer.

"I said, 'I have my own lawyer.' He told me back, 'Don't talk to anyone except me and your lawyer.'"

Griggs said that during arraignment Ashtiani was extremely confused, was on medication and was planning to protest during the hearing. He said Ashtiani had brought a sign protesting his case and that he had persuaded his client to put down the sign.

The CIA and the FBI also were bombarding him with questions, accusing Ashtiani of making unpatriotic and un-American statements, Griggs said.

Griggs said a police report alleged that Ashtiani had written signs that said, "kill Carter."

Griggs said that the man to whom Ashtiani probably was referring was Roger Holthaus, Ashtiani's attorney during his mental health hearing. Griggs said Ashtiani had not met Holthaus before his preliminary hearing, which may have been the reason for his confusion.

Griggs was not present when Holthaus talked to Ashtiani.

"I stayed away because I knew he (Ashtiani) would be upset," Griggs said.

Mental health hearing

Griggs said his main goal in defending Ashtiani was to keep him out of jail.

For this reason, Griggs said, it was decided to have a mental health hearing. It was found at the mental health hearing that Ashtiani was a danger to himself and later was committed to the hospital.

"I have no doubts that the charges would never have been filed," Griggs said and that Ashtiani would have been on his way to Iran by the end of April.

In yet another portion of the diary, Ashtiani wrote about the American hostages in Tehran. He considered himself a hostage, according to friends.

"As usual, the TV had some news about Iran. It said that the hostages won't be released soon. I smiled happily, even though I knew it would delay my freedom."

Griggs said he did not know Ashtiani's political views and said he never discussed politics with him. However, he said he advised Ashtiani not to make any political statements to anyone.

Sharifi said that Ashtiani gave him the impression that Ashtiani was used by one of his attorneys, because they knew he did not understand the American legal system.

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Iranian's account tells of 'prison called a hospital'

The following is the entire text of an excerpt from the diary of Bijan Ashtiani obtained by the Daily Nebraskan.

Feb. 13, 1980

Today, like every other day in this prison called a hospital, I woke up early in the morning. Probably it is better if I say I just got up from the bed since sleeping under these conditions, even by using several sleeping pills, is something impossible. Anyway, after washing my hands and face and reading some verses from the Holy Koran, I went to the window and waited for the sun to rise. I didn't have to wait long; finally the beautiful face of the sun began to rise, glowing, from behind the trees. This is my favorite pastime every day.

A few minutes later my roommate opened his eyes. He has been my roommate for 15 days. The first thing, he said was "Today I am leaving you (I will be freed)." I felt deeply sorry not because he is going and will leave me alone, but because I suddenly remembered the last 53 days of my life, every week hoping to be released, and also the false promises of my lawyer, and the savage treatment of the hospital employees because of the American hostages in Tehran. My future seems to be dark, since I don't know when they're going to release me. My eye caught the Bible which an American priest brought for me as a present. I turned a page and I saw this beautiful sentence, "You will be judged as you have judged me." This was my hope to God.

Then I went toward the office for my daily argument in order to get the newspaper. I had to sign a paper in order to get money from my account and buy a newspaper for me. I signed the paper and I went to the next room for breakfast. The same old breakfast—it reminded me of the grass my grandmother used to feed her cow; it was the same every day. As usual the TV had some news about Iran. It said that the hostages won't be released soon. I smiled happily, even though I knew it would delay my freedom.

Then I went to the office to get the newspaper, and they said it would arrive at 10 o'clock. I waited, paging through an old Newsweek magazine of Nov. 26, 1979. There was an article about Iran. Even though I had heard

because of the cigarette smoke, so I sat down in a corner and started thinking. Then the nurse who was responsible for me today—though she did not know anything—came to me and asked "What happened, Bijan?" I told her that I had wanted a newspaper, but they had answered me, "Do you want to see your name in the newspaper again—?"

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The day the scarecrow of imperialism kisses his wife on TV to celebrate the recent bloodiness...

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the news dozens of times, I read it again in order to waste some time.

At 10 o'clock I went to the office again to get the newspaper, but they told me they already ran out and there are no more. That made me very angry, and I felt like shouting, but suddenly I remembered the anesthetic shot I had last month, the last time I complained. They had taken me to a dark and cold room and given me a shot which put me to sleep—as they said, "to calm your nerves." Now I went to a room in which I could hardly breathe

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