

Perspectives



Friend remembered on bus trip

By Kim Wilt

On the bus to visit a friend. The air conditioner is working at a minimal level, high enough to make you aware of the heat, not so high that you are allowed to open the windows. The passengers don't seem to mind; they're mostly drowsing, with their children or an unopened book in their laps, staring unseeing out the window at the wheat and the faroff irrigation systems.

He sits down, and lights a cigarette. We make small talk about the weather, the scenery (or lack of it), and our respective destinations. It's not hard to talk to seatmates on buses, if you know what they're looking for — a chance to tell someone their story, a chance to get a stranger's perspective.

The man in front of us is finishing the Omaha World-Herald, folding it and putting it away. My seatmate leans forward and asks for a section. I lean forward and ask for the rest of the paper. He motions to me.

"Look." Points at an obituary. "This was my partner." I'm not sure what he means — he had spoken of going to Hastings to do some construction work for a few weeks. A work partner?

The obituary lists a young Omaha man, 19, many relatives. Services that day at 2 p.m.

"He died July 4th. He was riding a motorcycle, got caught between a van and a car. Went into a coma, died at the hospital."

An answer required? A question? "He and I were like brothers. Just like that," holding up two intertwined fingers. "We'd go messing around . . . I was

from St. Louis, he was from Kansas City — met in Omaha." He shakes his head. "All his girlfriends were calling that night — 'Where is he? Have you seen him?'"

What did you say? "I told them he was in the hospital. I didn't tell them . . . the guy told me when I called, he said he was in a coma. Probably wouldn't make it. They didn't know."

No, he's not going to the funeral. He was called back to work at Hastings after a two-month layoff, and he's glad.

"He was telling me, about a week before, that he wanted to be cremated."

Was he? "No, he was buried. I told him, 'Man, don't expect me to come to your funeral. And don't come to mine.'"

He points out the window, at clumps of trees and groups of buildings, as we come near Hastings. They'd party out there, he says, late at night. Bread-loaf shaped structures rise up on the left side of the bus.

"They stored bombs there during the war. We'd play war games out there, running around, down the hills."

The bus wheeling into the depot, sleepy passengers waking children, pulling down suitcases and backpacks. He stands up and reaches for his hat, pulls it down over his eyes. It's a hundred degrees outside, Hastings shimmers emptily in the heat. No one is on the streets.

Don't you want the paper? "No, take it, keep it. Nice talking to you," he says and walks down the aisle, off the bus.

I give the paper to a young mother, wait for the bus to reach the town where my friend is waiting.

Letter to the editor Another opinion on abortion issue

In regard to Randy Essex's article, "Pro-life supporters exaggerate issue," it is necessary to clarify a few points about the pro-life movement. First of all, Mr. Essex believes that abortion shouldn't be a pressing issue because there are more important issues such as possibilities of wars and inflation. The reason all these issues are important is that society is concerned about sustaining life. Why are we concerned about sustaining life? The very first and last reason for respecting life is that life is there. The constitution guarantees "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness," life being the most important. Therefore, the most important value in this society should be the respect for life — including unborn life. Our society is becoming so inhuman because they are advocating the killing of the unborn child. If it is a crime to take an eagle's egg from a nest, then why is it not a crime when it comes to the killing of an unborn child? Is life so cheap that the act of sex is more important than the life that results from it?

It was stated in the article that "They (pro-lifers) are far more concerned with forcing their morals on society than they are about the welfare of unwanted children." This is a great misconception, however. Pro-lifers show much concern for the welfare of unwanted children through various agencies. In Lincoln there are several agencies that will help a mother either with the cost of her pregnancy or find good parents through adoption agencies.

The subject of abortion is not a moral toughie; it is as black and white as the print on a page. The issue is life or death. What do the people of our society value most? It should be the dignity and preciousness of each individual human life.

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Richard Queen's release by Iranians is confusing

By Randy Essex

The release by the Iranians last week of hostage Richard Queen is confusing, just as the last 257 days have been.

It is, of course, encouraging that Queen was released for medical reasons — an apparently humane act by a regime that allows and supports blackmail and terrorism. Even more encouraging, as pointed out by a spokesman for the remaining hostage families, is that Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini still has the power to order a release, and that Iranian authorities were able to get Queen out of the country unharmed.

Although apparently inspired by Queen's deteriorating neurological condition, it could be that the Islamic regime was practicing a bit of one-upmanship on the United States, which failed to return an Iranian, Bijan Ashtiani, to his homeland alive.

Ashtiani died in the Lincoln Regional Center in April, and the body returned to Iran was that of a martyr. Surprisingly, the Iranian government did not level its standard attacks on the United States when Ashtiani died, nor did it immediately question the stated cause of death — an epileptic seizure — even though some Nebraska doctors questioned that pathological finding. An attorney is seeking Ashtiani's medical records, and the incident may resurface in a most unpleasant way for American and Nebraskan officials.

If the Iranians want to make an issue of Ashtiani's death at a later date, they certainly could not take the chance of Richard Queen's death while under the care of their doctors.

That simply is speculation — it is not known how the Iranians feel about Ashtiani's death, but their uncharacteristic silence should not be assumed to mean they were and are pleased.

Parallels exist that could help explain Iran's sudden bolt toward "Islamic hu-

maneness," as Khomeini called it. First, Queen, in the eyes of the Iranians, was

accused of a crime. It never was suggested in their rhetoric that Richard Queen was not among the spies and "agents of the devil" captured in the Nov. 4 raid on the U.S. embassy.

Ashtiani also was accused of a crime — assault, in connection with a December knife attack on Ms. Omaha landlord.

Iranian doctors, as Queen was released, suggested that he had psychological problems, which has been denied by the State Department.

Americans probably would like to think the release was a truly humane act, but the basis for the embassy takeover suggests otherwise. Way back in the fall, when oil company profits were the top news every day, when Edward Kennedy was leading Jimmy Carter, when Ronald Reagan was "unelectable," inflation was running at a 15 percent annual rate and Soviet troops were only preparing to invade Afghanistan, the hostages were taken with a demand that the ailing deposed shah be returned to Iran.

It angered the Iranians that a bit of Yankee humanitarianism was permitting the shah to get some of the world's finest medical treatment. The United States perhaps had other than altruistic motives, but Mohammed R Pahlavi was admitted to the country for medical treatment, which seems terribly humane.

And Queen's release is the first hint of "Islamic humaneness" since Khomeini and his band of mullahs seized power. Hundreds have been executed in barbaric fashion, including firing squads, stonings and hangings. Some Iranian executions

almost make the electric chair seem humane. Almost, but that's another issue.

Ashtiani did not stand trial because he was undergoing psychological treatment — a route his lawyers told him they thought was his best way back to Iran.

And the deliberate stalling of debate on the remaining hostages' fates is particularly cruel, considering Queen's non-shocking revelation that the Americans are blindfolded whenever they are moved from room to room. If Queen did not have psychological problems, as the Iranians alleged, he is a very, very amazing man. But only physical problems evoked what the Iranians called sympathy.

After the aborted hostage rescue mission, some thought at least hostages would be killed to discourage further military ventures. They were not, and it seemed almost crystal clear that the Iranians do not want to suffer the consequences of Americans dying at their hands.

In fact, the militants and officials have quite a dilemma on their hands. They cannot be sure what the United States will do if the hostages are released; reprisal may be in order even if they are unharmed. The Iranians can make a very educated guess as to what will happen if the hostages are killed. But if the hostages aren't killed, the Iranian people may well start a second revolution.

So resolution of the matter is delayed. It seems more and more clear that Iran does not want Americans to die at its hands. Perhaps President Carter's warning that Khomeini and his henchmen are responsible for the Americans' safety led to Queen's release.

Through all the confusion, however, a few things are certain. One more American is home. Fifty-two more still are held under the threat of trial. And, finally, Iran must resolve the issue soon, or the health and age of some of the hostages will further deepen the grave Iran has dug for its future, both domestically and internationally.

The hostages must be kept alive because the political lives of many Iranians Richard Queen's release — especially considering Bijan Ashtiani's death — was not a bad idea, but I seriously doubt its humane intent.