

# Convicted murderer: 'Trying to get myself together';

By Patti Gallagher

Winfred Samuels is a man with several titles.

First, and foremost, he is a student. Five mornings a week, Samuels rises with the sun, early enough to make his 7:30 class at UNL.

He is also a Moslem, a faith he says helps him believe in God and in himself and prompts his desire to be called Rafiq. His faith, he says, is inherited. His father, grandfather and uncle were Baptist preachers.

Samuels is also a Nebraska resident. He lists his address as the Lincoln Post Care Center, Air Park West. He shares his home with 72 others who, like him, previously lived at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. Now, because of good behavior, Samuels and his "roommates" live at the care center.

Samuels' residence gives him another identity — that of a convict. Winfred Samuels is a convicted murderer.

That title is not one he likes to discuss. Interviewed last week at the post care center, Samuels elaborated on the crime that sent him to the state penitentiary four years ago.

"People make mistakes. It never should have happened," he said. "He had a gun; I had a gun. It could have been me."

But it did happen. On the night of Oct. 16, 1978, Winfred Samuels and another man, both Omahans, approached a man in a car. Newspaper accounts said Samuels' companion claimed the man in the car "turned around and saw me and Winfred and he went for his gun." Before the man fired, Samuels pulled a .25-caliber pistol and shot Ronald E. Cunningham of Oklahoma City at point-blank range.

The prosecution entered a first-degree murder charge; the defense said it was self-defense. Samuels was found guilty of second-degree murder and was sentenced to 13 years in the penitentiary.

He started serving that sentence in April of 1979. By last June, Samuels had earned himself a place in the educational-release programs at the low-security post care center. By July, he was enrolled at UNL, beginning his major in fashion design.

"This is something I always planned to do once I got in trouble," Samuels said of his education. In fact, he said he decided to pursue a college degree during the first night he spent at the penitentiary.

Sitting in the common room of the Air Force hospital-turned state facility, Samuels talked more about classes than convictions and more about the future than the past.

The 28-year-old black man smoked one Kool cigarette after another, growing quiet when the reporter took notes, talkative when she stopped her pencil.

Samuels is carrying 15 hours. His travel on campus is restricted to his class build-

ing, Love Library, the Nebraska Union and the Coliseum gymnasium. He is dropped off each morning and picked up each afternoon by a center supervisor. If he wants to go off campus he has to let his supervisor know.

Samuels is not trailed by a guard on campus nor is the center surrounded by guards. But he follows the rules and stays in the buildings he is supposed to. Samuels has his own personal guard: "He's up here," he says, pointing to his head.

Avery says Samuels — he calls Winfred by his last name even in his presence — is doing "pretty good" at the university.

"Sometimes we find they do real well the first semester," Avery said of his ed-release residents. But then, "sometimes their grades have a tendency to slide a little."

Samuel's grades did slide. Last semester he was put on academic probation.

"I got two D's that I shouldn't have got," he said. His goal for this semester is to maintain a C average; center rules set that minimum for their ed-release students.

At one point in the interview, Samuels slid his small, thin frame from his chair, rose and volunteered to fetch some mementos from his room. He returned with two plaques, one from the Jaycees for being a loyal and efficient treasurer and one from the Toastmasters for highest honors in speaking. He also brought out a pair of black cotton pants, stitched for a class project on his old black Singer sewing machine.

The plaques remain unhung; no nails allowed in room walls, Avery says. The pants remain unhemmed, a defect that earned Samuels a C-plus mark.

He read a Daily Nebraskan story about Charles Starkweather's 1958 murder spree and was worried about the impression it left. After reading such accounts, he said, "people think that everyone who commits a crime is insane." That impression made him worry about granting an interview and allowing his crime to be publicized. Only a few teachers and students know where he lives and why.

"I'm trying to get myself back together," he said. Being a university student and a Moslem help in that effect, and he said he is rebuilding some of the motivation he had before committing his crime.

He expects to be released in two years — if his sentence is cut in half for good behavior — and to have completed his fashion design degree. Then, he'll probably leave Lincoln and try to open a tailor's shop somewhere.

He doesn't expect to get in trouble again — especially not so close to the end of his sentence.

"Sometimes you can be out there in the world and forget about how good you have it," he said.

He forgot once — on Oct. 16, 1978. Chances are he won't forget again.

# Culture Center . . . .

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Perez said the Terrace Hall space may be underestimated, because the plans the task force saw showed two floors of multi-purpose space, able to hold 60 people each. The present center can hold 75 to 100 people, Perez said.

Vaughn Anthony, entertainment chairman for Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, said although he has not been in the Terrace Hall building, he understands it has a full basement that could be used for parties and other functions.

Most of Kappa Alpha Psi's functions are off campus or in the union, he said, but the group would like to use the Culture Center more.

"The present Culture Center doesn't have the kind of atmosphere you need for parties," he said. "You really wouldn't want to get dressed up to go there."

Before the Culture Center can be moved into Terrace Hall, the NU Board of Regents will have to approve the bond funding, which causes concern among the students.

"A group is forming just to keep the Culture Center in Terrace Hall now," Perez said.

Both Schwartzkopf and Smith said they would like to meet with each other to discuss the issue.

"That dialogue needs to occur," Schwartzkopf said. "There would be no reason for moving someone someplace they don't want to be."

The university decided not to purchase the school building last year, but the NU Foundation is considering buying the building and donating it to the university, Armstrong said.

Schwartzkopf said the result of that purchase would be to house the Culture Center or the Recreation Department in the building.

"I just don't want to see the Culture Center moved just to be moved," he said. "If we're going to move it, let's really improve the space and meet the needs of the center."

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