

Diversions

The inside bits of Lincoln edition . . .

Inside The Capitol building

By Jim Hanna
Staff Reporter

Even though I grew up in Lincoln with the towering state Capitol hanging on the skyline every day, it wasn't until I was about 15 that I first heard anybody refer to it as "The Penis of the Plains."

I'm not sure how I made it to age 15 without the phallic implications of our Capitol building slapping me in the face. I'm surprised that when I was 13 or 14 and in the throes of puberty, it still didn't occur to me that our Capitol looked like a petie.

I didn't realize the added touch of a sower spreading his seed from the tip of the Capitol until almost a year later.

Now, I'm 22 and I think I have a pretty good command of the sexual nuances of nearly every building in the city.

With my sexual identity now secure, I ventured into the Nebraska State Capitol last Sunday afternoon.

Here's what it was like. I went in the north entrance under the main stairs. (The stairs were closed. I'm not sure why.)

Perhaps my favorite feature in the entire building is located inside the ground-level doors of all four entrances. About 20 feet in from the doors, there is a place where sounds like footsteps echo between the floor and the ceiling. I can't really describe it, but I spent about five minutes just groovin' on the super-cool echo.

But there were other sights to see.

Straight down the hall from the north entrance is the Hall of Governors. (I don't know if that's the official name but it's what I call it.) On the walls are pictures of every governor in Nebraska's history. Five points if anybody can tell me the name of the last governor on the wall. (Hint: It's our current governor.)

Actually, this hall was kinda boring because I look at it every time I go in. I'm not sure why.

Fortunately, I made a new discovery in the hall that extends from the west entrance. I call it the Hall of Senators. On the walls were yearbook-style pictures of every Nebraska senator since 1937.

It was interesting, but only because I'd never seen it before. I'm not sure how I'd managed to miss it during earlier visits.

I noted with a chuckle that Sen. Ernie Chambers had the same picture up from 1972 to 1986. I had visions of him vainly rebelling and refusing to have a new photo taken. I thought that was pretty cool. I also noted that current Omaha Mayor P.J. Morgan looked like a real dork when he was a senator in the early '70s.

The four hallways that come in from each ground-level entrance converge in the center of the building, where you will find the infor-



mation desk. I've always been intimidated by the information desk. I suppose it's a holdover from my younger days when the people who staffed the desk were just there to pick on little kids.

"Where do you think you're going? You can't go in there! Where are your parents?!"

Now that I'm an adult I suppose they'd gladly dispense information, but I still was a little scared so I avoided it.

I made my way upstairs to the second floor where all of the action was, the main rotunda. I love the main rotunda.

This truly is an amazing place. Intricate tile art covers the floor and walls. I remembered when I was about 7 years old, I thought it was so neat that a public building had tile pictures of naked women on the floor. Now, of course, I appreciate it for its artistic merits.

Some of the art that was way up on the walls around the rotunda and along the halls of the main hallway leading up to it almost

borders on tacky. If there's a drawback to this awesome structure, it's these rather gaudy murals.

But I can live with it. Since I'd seen the main rotunda about three zillion times, I didn't stay there long.

I wandered around for a while and finally came to rest on a small bench in some interesting nook or cranny not far from the information desk. I made sure to be quiet so the information people wouldn't see me and give me a hard time.

I lay down on the bench and looked at the ceiling for about 30 minutes. No big deal, but it was nice.

Finally, I decided I would leave and come back tomorrow for a visit to the 14th floor -- the highest point in the building that tourists can visit.

On Monday, I returned. For variety, I entered through the west, ground-level doors. I passed by the Hall of Governors and climbed a flight of stairs to the second floor where I found an elevator.

I noticed that the elevators looked like crypts with automatic sliding doors, a none-too-comforting thought as you're about to enter and ride it a few hundred feet into the air.

I got into one by myself and the doors closed. It looked really old on the inside. These are the kind of elevators Lizzie Borden probably rode in.

I rode the elevator up 14 floors with my Walkman turned all the way up so I couldn't hear the cables creaking around me.

I made it safely to the top and made the mandatory walk around to each viewing deck. The west side was closed for repairs.

I chose to heed the warning I read that said, "Don't drop anything from this level."

I quickly got bored looking at Lincoln from above and went into the rotunda area. This also is an interesting place.

Circling the walls of this area about 25 feet up was a series of engraved words. They ran a com-



David Hansen/Daily Nebraskan

The state Capitol at night

plete circle around, with the last word of the phrase running right back into the first word so I didn't really know where it began.

Finally I deciphered it as follows: "With malice toward none/With charity for all/With firmness in the right/Let us strive on to finish the work we are in/To bind up the nation's wounds/To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan/To do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

It was from Abraham Lincoln's

second inaugural address. I forgave Abe for the sexist, military notions I saw in his passage and chose to appreciate the wisdom of the rest.

Our city has a pretty cool namesake.

And with that comforting revelation, I decided I was ready to go. I traveled back down to ground level and headed out the west exit.

The sun was setting, the weather was pleasant, and I was totally centered.

I really love the Capitol building. **D**