

E. HUGHES SHANKS

Killing no answer to crime

I used to be in favor of the death penalty. But something changed in me. I used to support a lot of things: pot in the '70s, Ronald Reagan and Rush Limbaugh in the '80s. Over time, small and big revelations helped me change my mind.

I'm no longer in favor of killing people or of killing animals for sport. Killing for food I can tolerate.

When I supported the death penalty, I had some strange ideas about human life. I thought it was all right to decide what to do with people who did things I didn't like. I was in the military, and I was ready to kill.

My plan was to obtain a jet, fly low into South Africa at breakfast time and crash that sucker right into P. W. Botha's house — family and all. Another plan was to become a mercenary there and kill white folks. Looking back, I spent a lot of time hating. I call it my pro-death phase.

Shortly after that, I had a small revelation. I say small because I had not figured out that I was out of my mind with hate. This time, I had a plan to round up all the rapists, murderers and drug dealers. They were to be put in the least-populated Western state and imprisoned for life. I named this territory AMERBERIA. Now, I look back and say, "What a whacko I was!"

The key to my salvation was to have experienced a realization that changed my thoughts about other people. It isn't something I can put my finger on, but at some point I began to say, "It isn't OK to kill." The battle had only just begun, however. I had some other strange ideas.



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Looking back, I see the contradiction in my views. I'd grown to the point of not wanting to see people killed, but I still wanted to see some people hurt.

I remember teasing my good friend Ron Kurtenbach. "Don't worry," I said. "When the black man takes over, I'll tell 'em you're a good one, and you'll be spared." At the time, I thought it was funny. But playing God with people's lives isn't funny — it's sickening.

This past Saturday, my wife and I happened to walk past a demonstration of death penalty supporters. We had no idea what was happening as we approached. I joked that because they were carrying American flags, they probably didn't have our interests in mind. So often, it seems, American flag-waving goes hand-in-hand with denying people's rights.

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In my seven years of working in human services, I've never seen these people actually working with the could-be Harold Lamont Oteys of tomorrow. Instead of going to the

prison to visit Otey, they should volunteer at Youth Services' Freeway Station or the Family Services' Schools Out program.

It might be a little late to salvage Otey's life. The State just might kill him. So when it finally is decided, I'd like all the pro-death penalty folks and all the anti-death penalty folks to give me a call.

Let's talk about changing people's lives before they end up in Otey's situation. Let's get through to a child long before he becomes a made-to-order marketing ploy, like Willie Horton was for the Republican campaign against Michael Dukakis. Then we'll really accomplish something.

Otey is society's worst nightmare come true. He is poor, black and uneducated, and he was convicted of the brutal rape and murder of Jane McManus. He is the embodiment of societal fears. Willie Horton, a man who destroyed lives while on furlough from a Massachusetts jail, is another example of society's worst nightmare come true.

I wish they'd put these people in a hole, never to see the light of day again. But society should not kill.

Shanks is a graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

KIM STOCK

Teachers need 'code of ethics'

Ahh ... I smell newness in the air. Another year, another semester, another chance to redeem yourself from past academic sins. I love the first day of school.

Friday, I listened to Chancellor Graham Spanier greet thousands of new freshmen. His speech was upbeat, as it is every year, and full of promises of wonderful opportunities for freshmen if they try hard enough. It was the same "Students beware ... take responsibility for yourself" speech we've all heard before.

As a warning, or perhaps as a threat, Spanier told us one of every four freshmen fails to return for his or her sophomore year. If only three of four freshmen return for their sophomore year, I wonder how many freshmen actually graduate?

Spanier did offer some suggestions on how students could succeed. He told us to befriend a faculty member early in our college careers so that somebody from the university was on our side. This is all part of how students can take responsibility for themselves.

Responsibility — what a grown-up word. I agree with Spanier that students should be responsible for themselves in order to prosper in college. I also agree that students should find a faculty person to help them.

But how realistic is it to ask students to make an effort to get to know their professors, when most of their professors don't know they exist? It would be different if Spanier gave UNL faculty the same pep talk. Maybe he could ask teachers to also live up to their responsibilities.

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Because no written "code of ethics" for professors is in my university handbook, I have devised a list of professors' "should be" responsibilities:

1) Remember students are your clients. Last time I checked, students paid tuition to attend classes, and professors received a paycheck for teaching them. Because students help pay their salaries, professors work for students. In the real world, employees show respect for the clients who support their livelihoods. Why should it be any different in an academic setting? Without students, professors would be unemployed.

2) If, as a professor, you expect students to abide by your rules, abide by student policies. Remember the dead-week policy forbidding professors to distribute unannounced quizzes or exams. Last year, I had a professor who violated this policy and was shocked when several students reported him to his department. It is unfortunate that this professor couldn't understand the importance of following student-friendly policies.

3) Students will only learn if you are here to teach. I realize UNL is a research university. However, if professors consider themselves researchers first and teachers

second, they are confusing their priorities. Educational systems can only be successful if students are willing to learn and teachers are willing to teach.

4) If you expect students to attend your classes, then you also must always attend. Missing class for a conference is understandable, but missing class for seven conferences is not.

5) Do not play games with students' grades. Perhaps too much emphasis is placed on grades. However, at the end of the semester, all students can use to measure their success is a grade. Teachers should clearly lay out their grading policies and their expectations at the beginning of the semester.

Luckily, most professors already follow this code of ethics. This list is addressed only to those teachers who think they're doing students a favor by simply being here. We don't need professors who will not live up to their responsibilities to their students.

For the new year, students and professors should make a promise to mutually respect each other. We need teachers who will give us 100 percent of their effort, and in return we'll give them 200 percent of ours.

Stock is a junior secondary education major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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