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Otey is executed



Harold Lamont Otey waves from a window of the Nebraska State Penitentiary. Otey was pronounced dead at 12:33 a.m. this morning after receiving four 2,400-volt surges of electricity.

Shaun Sartin/DN

Witnesses describe Otey's final moments

By Matthew Waite
Senior Reporter

INSIDE

■ About 2,000 people gathered at the Nebraska State Penitentiary Thursday night supporting and protesting the execution of Harold Lamont Otey. See photos, stories on pages 7, 8, 9.

was not allowed to question those witnesses.

Boellstorff, the first to speak, was visibly shaken by what she had witnessed. Her hands shook as she spoke to reporters.

"The electric chair isn't a very dignified way to die, but Harold Lamont Otey died with dignity," she said, her voice trembling as she told her story. "He smiled and said 'I love you' to the witnesses, to his witnesses who were there."

McKnight said Otey did not have any last words but looked every witness

See EXECUTION on 7

Victim's family feels 'calmer' after execution

By Kara G. Morrison
Senior Editor

OMAHA — Thirteen members of the McManus family calmly gathered outside Joan McManus' Omaha apartment Friday morning to say 17 years of pain had ended.

"It's over now," Joan McManus said. Joan McManus led family members onto the porch of her Omaha apartment minutes after hearing her daughter's killer had been executed.

Harold Lamont Otey was electrocuted at the Nebraska State Penitentiary at 12:23 a.m. Friday. Otey was convicted in 1977 of raping and murdering 26-year-old Jane McManus.

"I can maybe think of Jane now in a little different way — a little more peaceful way," Joan McManus told reporters. "I feel a little calmer now that I know it has reached finality."

Joan McManus said she felt for Otey's family but thought the execution was a necessary act.

"It's an unfortunate thing to have to know there was another death tonight because of this," she said. "... I'm sorry

that the other family had to experience that pain tonight, but so be it. It had to be that way."

The McManuses thanked Attorney General Don Stenberg and Gov. Ben Nelson for their support, and Joan McManus thanked "everyone who helped us get the news across that Jane will not be forgotten."

Jane's sister, Laura McManus, said it was too early for family members to explain their feelings, now that the execution finally had been carried out, but said the family was glad it was over.

"I don't think any of us have an emotion right now. I think its something we need to sleep on," Laura McManus said. "For us it's over."

"I've suffered especially over the last three years of fighting this. ... Harold Otey killed our sister."

For Joan McManus, Otey's execution meant an end to legal proceedings and public appearances for her and her family.

"Tomorrow we're going to go back to being private people again, because it has been very difficult for us to be in front of the camera."



"The electric chair isn't a very dignified way to die, but Harold Lamont Otey died with dignity."

■ Leslie Boellstorff,
Omaha World-Herald reporter
execution witness



"I can maybe think of Jane now in a little different way — a little more peaceful way."

■ Joan McManus,
mother of murder
victim Jane McManus



"My life has been enriched by his friendship."

■ Hanno Klassen,
retired Minnesota professor
and Otey follower

Judge Merritt denies Bjorklund's request for new trial

By Jeffrey Robb
Senior Editor

Roger Bjorklund will not get a new trial, a judge ruled Thursday.

District Judge Paul Merritt, in denying Bjorklund's motion, wrote in a six-page decision that prayers given by Judge Donald Endacott before the jury last October were harmless and failed to influence the verdict. Endacott had assigned Merritt to review the effect of a prayer, if any, on jurors.

Endacott will sentence Bjorklund on Sept. 20. Bjorklund was originally scheduled to be sen-

tenced in May 1994, but the sentencing was delayed pending the ruling.

Bjorklund was convicted last November of the rape and murder of Candice Harms, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln freshman. The prosecution has said it will seek the death penalty against him.

Merritt wrote in his decision that after jury selection in Sidney, Endacott met with jurors and asked them to join hands and bow their heads. He then said, "God be with us," Merritt wrote.

Attorneys for Bjorklund heard about Endacott's prayer during a meeting with the judge in February and later filed an appeal, saying their defen-

dant's right to a fair trial had been affected.

"The prayers were very short in nature and were not interpreted by the jurors as being comments by Judge Endacott on the evidence to be presented in the case or on how the case should be decided," Merritt wrote.

"From the time the 12 jurors were selected and sworn up to the time the case was submitted to the jurors ... Judge Endacott continued to remind the jurors of their duty to keep open minds and base their verdict only on the evidence presented."

In April, Endacott denied Bjorklund's appeal, but prosecutors decided to take the issue further to

avoid a future appeal from Bjorklund.

Lancaster County District Attorney Gary Lacey said Merritt had taken enough steps to determine that the contact didn't pollute the jury. All the jurors told Merritt the prayer didn't affect them, Lacey said.

"I'm pleased (Judge Merritt) decided the way he did," Lacey said. "It allows the case to be finalized."

Bjorklund's attorney, Scott Helvie, was unavailable for comment Thursday, but he was reported as saying any appeals would have to wait until after sentencing.