

E. HUGHES SHANKS

Death penalty focus wrong

I called last week "Death Week." It was the aftermath of the recent execution of Harold Lamont Otey. Otey was dead and Roger Bjorklund was sentenced to death. In the press, I noticed a local preoccupation with death.



While Otey became a folk hero to some, Attorney General Don Stenberg became a hero to others. I didn't like either one. It seemed the whole business was hateful and mean-spirited.

It was not by accident that people wound up at the State Penitentiary having a tailgate party honoring Otey's execution. I suspect it is not by accident that the focus remains on news about Bjorklund's conviction and which current death row inmate will be executed next.

One area newspaper even printed a story about Bjorklund's "First night on death row." I couldn't put my finger on it, but something seemed kind of screwy. I wondered what people were doing. What were people thinking about? I hear more talk about who will die next, yet little talk about how to stop it.

State Sen. Ernie Chambers announced his intention to run as a write-in candidate for governor as a response to public "dissatisfaction with and condemnation of what the governor did." Chambers was quoted as saying in the Lincoln Journal last Thursday. Chambers' announcement is the first real move I've seen to end the killing. Where is everybody else? Are any other leaders as dedicated to stopping capital punishment?

I was very critical of the protesters at the penitentiary who screamed for Otey's "barbecue." I also was very angry with Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty for calling my private phone number. A representative called my home and asked me to participate in a rally on Otey's behalf. I felt he was being made into an object by both sides.

Don't get me wrong. I'm against the death penalty. But, somehow, things got all mixed up. The focus seemed to have been on the wrong

things: death and martyrdom. The real martyrs are Jane McManus and Candice Harms.

While Otey became a folk hero to some, Attorney General Don Stenberg became a hero to others. I didn't like either one. It seemed the whole business was hateful and mean-spirited.

I wanted to lash out. But I didn't want my hate to get the best of me. So, before I judge others, (no matter how obviously wrong they are) I should judge myself first. What is it that I don't like about me? What can I change about me so I will like myself more? The more I like myself, the less hate I feel for others.

Hate doesn't happen by accident. If that's the case, then there's an excuse for Otey and Bjorklund's despicable crimes. I think it takes a lot of hate to want to see someone die. I could easily end up on the same level as those damn fools at the penitentiary screaming, "fry the nigger!" It takes work to avoid hating others, and I'm just as capable of hating as the next person.

How much ill will do I have? How long is the list of people I might like to see harmed or dead? How much of my time do I spend hating others?

How much hate will I act upon in the future? Now, that's what scares me, not Roger Bjorklund. I don't feel any safer with him in jail.

Actually, I feel less secure knowing so many people are so willing to publicly state their desire to see others die the way they did when Otey was executed.

How long is the list of people who the Plainsmen think should die? Is their list only as long as the number of murderers they know? Where does it stop? Do proponents of the death penalty only want to see murderers, rapists and drug dealers dead? Where does the desire to see others die stop?

I see it sort of like ethnic jokes, which are often presented as innocent jokes. Once you hear a Polish joke, the "dumb blonde" jokes are soon to follow. After those come the Arab jokes and on and on. Hatred starts small.

These aren't "innocent" jokes. It all has to do with how we treat people and how we think they should be treated. We don't mistreat people by accident. Nor do we mistreat people a little bit.

Jane McManus and Candice Harms aren't dead by accident. Roger Bjorklund isn't on death row by accident. But they all have one thing in common: What we remember most about them is the result of what hate did to them.

I don't want to see others die, and I'm proud of that.

Shanks is a graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

KIM STOCK

Family roles not set in stone

Every now and then I see the real him. It's not often that this happens, but sometimes he lets down his guard and shows me a glimpse of the real Arthur.

Otherwise I always just see him as "Dad."

But when the mood is right and I happen to be at the right place, he shows me something that I've never seen before. I can learn from a simple expression on his face. Perhaps I catch him in the middle of a thought, and he chooses to share his mind with me.

Several years ago — I couldn't tell you when this occurred — my father and I were outside. It was the kind of day that despite what misery you fought, you couldn't help but be happy. The sun was shining in full, the breeze gently wrestled its way through your hair, and the sky seemed to entrap you in its brilliant blue color where the clouds were allowed to puff and re-puff themselves into different objects and animals.

My father looked up at the sky, paused, and told me without taking his eyes off the clouds, "Look at that sky. How could anyone look at a sky so beautiful and not believe there's a God?"

This is one of the rare times my dad has let down his "fatherly guard" with me. Usually when my dad speaks to me, it's only to tell me what I need to do.

People often say, "I know my mother well. I tell her everything. I could talk to her about anything." They misinterpret being able to talk to their parents as knowing them well. I'm going to bet that none of us really know our parents.

Think about the times you are able to talk to Mom. Who does all of the talking? You probably tell her your problems while she listens. She probably gives you advice —



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all mothers feel compelled to give advice.

Do the two of you ever switch places? Can you recall a time that she told you one of her problems and you did the listening and advice giving? This may occur occasionally. However, I doubt that she calls you up at college to tell you what's new in HER life, like you do every week.

The truth is, we don't want to know our parents in any way other than as "Mom" and "Dad." It embarrasses us when parents use certain lingo in their speech. We roll our eyes when Dad says the car in the magazine was "cool." We are appalled at the thought of mom wearing a tight, leather, mini-skirt. If parents did act out in this manner, we'd gently tell Mom and Dad "to act their age."

In a friendship, it's OK to occasionally have someone be more assertive in the relationship. What's normal in friendship is thought to be unacceptable in parent/child relationships. Daughters and sons resent having to "parent" their parents.

I have a friend who must often worry about her parents. She lectures her father when he stays out too late. She often plays counselor to her mother. I can see the frustration and stress she feels because of her reversal of roles.

We can't accept that our parents often are weak. We want to think of them as unreal figures who are only loving and strong. In a sense, we can't allow our parents to show their true feelings.

Also, parents don't want us to know the person they really are. Parents, even in speech, never step outside the role of who they are. Parents use formalities when referring to the other parent. If mom tells you to "ask dad," she never tells you to "ask Gordon."

If parents were your friends could they be effective parents? You could tell a friend what you really did at that party last Friday? Could you tell your father and not expect at least a lecture? Could you tell your father and not at least want a lecture? Sometimes being a parent means remaining a parent.

We don't really know the people inside our parents' bodies, and we can never expect to know them. But we're all adults now, and if we try harder, and they let us, we might just see a faint picture of who our parents are.

Occasionally, we may trip upon something unexpected and for the first time, meet "Sue" and "David."

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