

Violence 'hits' close to home

When I was younger, on the Fourth of July, we launched rockets from Coke bottles and set off firecrackers in empty soup cans.

It was the closest I ever came to a bomb.

Oklahoma City is almost a day's drive from Lincoln. But Wednesday morning, as the first news reports hit the wires and scenes of utter devastation flashed across the television screen, Oklahoma City seemed quite suddenly much too close to home.

And at that instant, all I wanted to do is leave work and head home.

Suddenly I wanted everyone to get up from their desks and go home. Home, where we will all be safe.

But we are home. This is home — Lincoln, Los Angeles, Oklahoma City — and there is no place to hide.

Suddenly, the metal detectors, security guards and alarm systems that have become a part of everyday life in the late 20th century seem so woefully inadequate.

Suddenly, a walk downtown, a trip to the City-County Building seem fraught with danger.

Suddenly, whatever thin veneer of safety we thought we had in the land of the free and the home of the brave is stripped away.

It's much too soon to assign blame, to root out the perpetrators of this ungodly act and bring them to justice.

For now, our president asks us to pray. To pray for the victims and the survivors, for the parents of dead children and for the citizens of Oklahoma City.

Maybe we should do more.

Maybe we should pray for ourselves as a people.

Cindy Lange-Kubick

Maybe we should do more than wring our hands and talk about tragedy and terrorists and insanity.

Perhaps we should do the unspeakable and look to the roots of this violence — unjustifiable roots — but deep spreading fingers that somehow touch us all.

The U.S. Embassy in Beirut: 1983. The war in Iraq. The L.A. riots: 1992. The World Trade Center: 1993. Burned out buildings and buses in Israel and Palestine. War-torn Sarajevo.

When my children fight, as they invariably do, they follow a certain set of rules. The most important guidelines for their arguments seems to be retribution. Tit for tat. An eye for an eye. Revenge.

If one child hits another, the unwritten rule states that the violence must not go unanswered.

Childhood squabbles ended — never really solved, only exacerbated — through physical force.

Kicking the dog. Swatting the kids. Pushing the spouse around just a little bit and for "her own good."

Shootings at the mall and at traffic lights. Killing strangers on the street for a pair of tennis shoes. Opening fire on ex-wives and alienated co-workers.

Bombing a building. My children use their fists to get

back at one another. Gangs use guns. Terrorists build bombs.

Sometimes all we do is stand at the sidelines and watch. Maybe we hope that the little brother will learn his lesson if his older, stronger sibling rings his bell. Or that next time our spouse will get supper on the table on time and hot if we blacken her eye and break her nose.

Today's news was shocking, but not surprising.

More than 20 dead — at least 17 of them children, hundreds missing and injured. It was news to make a mother — any mother, anywhere — break into tears.

Somehow we knew it was coming. Maybe not in Oklahoma City, and dear God not in Lincoln. But the seeds had been planted long ago, the roots set down firm in our psyches.

We answer violence with violence, on the playground, on the streets, in our homes and offices.

Somewhere, someone thinks they have been wronged. Instead of starting a fistfight, they threw a punch in the form of a thousand-pound explosive.

Somehow, someone put together enough firepower to destroy the nine-story Alfred Murrah Federal Building.

Several years ago they outlawed bottle rockets in Nebraska — firecrackers, too.

But somehow, the burned-out buildings of the Middle East have come home.

And none of us can pretend to be safe anymore.

Lange-Kubick is a senior news-editorial and sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Take chill pill when poring over Juice

"I was talking to my bookie," Slat's Grobnik said, "and the odds are getting real big that O.J. will beat the rap."

That's what most legal experts say — that there will be a mistrial or a not-guilty verdict. Either way, Simpson will wind up a free man.

"Well, if that happens, this country is gonna have to deal with one big question."

Yes, whether the legal system really works.

"Nah, that ain't the big question."

Of course it is. Even now, serious doubts are being raised about the jury system and the way selection can be manipulated by sharp lawyers and consultants. And the concept of equal justice for all, when the accused is rich, is also under fire.

"Sure, but if O.J. walks, that's not the big question."

It isn't? Then what is?

"So what?"

What do you mean, "So what?"

"I mean, that's the big question."

The big question will be, "So what?"

"You got it."

That's ridiculous. If there is convincing evidence that Simpson is guilty but he goes free, you can't just shrug and say: "So what?"

"Why not? Would he be the first guilty guy to get away with murder?"

No, I suppose not.

"You bet. Look at that lawyer in the Chicago suburbs and his lover boy. All the evidence says that one of them killed the lawyer's wife. But the lover boy beat the rap, and the husband ain't even been charged with jaywalking."

Such things happen.

"So, why is the O.J. case any different? What do you think will happen if he walks — maybe thousands of blond white women in L.A. will go out on the streets and riot?"

No, that's unlikely. But there could be sufficient public outrage to bring about a reform of the jury system.

"Oh, sure. Like the politicians who'd have to change the laws ain't mostly lawyers, they're all banged-up blond wives and bad-luck waiters."

But the spotlight of public opinion would be turned on flaws in the criminal justice system with an intensity never seen before.

"Right. So that means Ted Koppel will stay on the air for an hour instead of 30 minutes, and he'll have on some real mean-



Mike Royko

talking women from New York and some lawyers and some black guys, and they'll all yell at each other. And I'll say, 'So what?'

But you can't simply say, "So what?" Have you no social conscience?

"I used to have one, but then I found out that I slept better and didn't get heartburn if I just said, 'So what?' You ought to try it."

No, I can't. If the jury rejects compelling evidence, it will be an outrage and every self-respecting pundit and editorialist will be obliged to seek meaning and significance in the case.

"Oh, sure, there will be more than enough meaning and significance to go around. Like how is O.J. going to lead the good life in California after he goes broke paying off the lawyers?"

How he will again live the good life? You consider that significant?

"Sure. Just watch, that'll be the big story."

Nonsense. Who would pay him to do anything?

"That shows how much you know. If he can come out with a best-selling book while sitting in the jug, imagine how many new books he could peddle if he goes on 'Larry King' and the 'Today Show' and talks about how he's still in love with Nicole and is looking forward to seeing her in heaven. Hey, and what about movies?"

"Why does he need a few decent movie studios when all the rest will be trying to buy his story? Remember, to a lot of people he'll be a bum. But there's a lot of people in this country who think that it's no big deal if a superstar football player gets a little ticked off at his wife."

People are just insensitive. "Just watch. He'll be able to sell his autographs for 100 bucks a scribble."

Preposterous. Would you pay \$100 for his autograph?

"Nah."

See? You do have a conscience.

"Sure. I'd offer him \$50 and resell it for \$100."

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Semi-famous cop bad attitude

As a reporter for the Arts and Entertainment section of the Daily Nebraskan over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to interview artists and performers across the whole range of fame to infamy.

From Offspring to David Spade, I've talked to a number of people in the limelight and those in only the lemon-lime light (it's kind of like Sprite, but not as sweet).

I have found few problems with those who are superfamous — except for the obvious one. They think they're too damn big to talk to a low-life like me.

I know that Trent Reznor doesn't normally speak to press people, but it's me, damn it! I listen to his music. I go to his concerts; can't he spare an hour or two to kick back and enjoy a beer with my charming persona?

I guess not.

I also haven't had any trouble with people who are eager to make it big.

These people are so desperate for fame, they'll let you interview them even if you're only from some lame little college newspaper.

Hey, wait!

But it's true. If you're in a band called The Beefatin' Chickens, you'll talk to Rush Limbaugh if it'll increase your popularity (although that seems like an oxymoron).

It's the ones who are semi-famous that I have the most problems with. The people who think that they're on the way up, instead of realizing that they're about 12 minutes through their 15 minutes of fame.

I can tolerate being turned down by Maya Angelou, but when Wesley Crusher gives me the snub, I'm



Joel Strauch

going to take offense.

I mean, the guy's a dweeb.

He might have saved the Enterprize a few times, but the only reason that he was even on the ship was because Picard wanted to show Dr. Crusher the captain's log.

I called him about a week in advance and he was too busy for the interview. Well, actually I called his mom/agent (she didn't sound too much like Beverly — it was weird), and I think she said that he couldn't talk to me until he ate his vegetables.

I overheard him asking if he could just go play for a little while, and she screamed at him.

"If you don't eat them greens, I'm gonna beam 'em into your gullet!"

I got scared and hung up.

But I understand. He is a busy guy. Isn't he starring on ... No, he's writing that book about ... But he is on that TV show ...

Can we say "flash in the pan?" But he's not the only tiny legend who thought his britches were too big for me.

Carrot Top, the wacky comedian with the even wackier hair (how did he get that name, anyway?) was a little too busy for the likes of me.

His agent said that he was going

to call me during his 10-minute layover in Denver, but he was in too much of a hurry.

What a pansy.

I mean the guy only does like 380 shows a year, flies red-eye flights coast-to-coast and he can't spare a few minutes for a phone call?

Come on.

But the semi-popular hero who irked me the most was Jeff Dunham. You know — he's the comedian with the puppets.

He used to be a nice guy (I interviewed him last year), but ever since he added that new puppet, Chuckie, he's been acting pretty weird.

His agent (who personally scoffed at our paper, for which she will be eliminated) said he was going on vacation, and if I didn't talk to him "RIGHT NOW!" then we could just forget the whole thing.

So far I haven't lost too much sleep over it, but I have been going through puppet withdrawal (you don't want to know what the symptoms are).

I'm just curious where he had to go on vacation in such an all-fired hurry. I guess the dummies were hankerin' for some beach sunshine and wouldn't wait for some two-bit reporter to talk to their master.

I know I'll never be some big shot at Rolling Stone, talking to the immortals like Harrison Ford, Wesley Snipes and Jim Carrey, but I want some respect, damn it!

If I can survive an interview with the Jerky Boys, I deserve a little bit.

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Mike Luckovich