

Joubert

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Joubert when he was committing crimes. The other from Sister Helen Prejean, the author of Dead Man Walking, which was recently made into a movie.

After Pitre read the letters for the broadcast media, questions followed.

Again, the question of his chances came up. "Everyone is telling me 'hey, you don't have a snowball's chance in Hell,'" he said.

"I'm just going to keep pushing myself."

More questions, another claim that he made no attempt to delay the execution, and another asking why the state was hurrying to execute Joubert and the press conference ended quietly.

Three blocks away and twenty minutes later, the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union held a press conference to talk about actions they filed.

The NCLU, all on Monday, asked the State Supreme Court for a stay of execution, claimed in Sarpy County Court that death by electrocution was cruel and unusual punishment, and raised other legal appeals in U.S. District Court in Omaha.

By Wednesday, all three were rejected in their respective courts.

At the conference, Matt Lemieux, the executive director of the NCLU, showed the media pictures of bodies after execution by electrocution. The bodies were burned and discolored.

Lemieux, after outlining the court actions and stats on the few states that use electrocution, recognized that they would not turn some Nebraskans away from supporting the electric chair.

"But those Nebraskans who can understand and recognize the sheer brutality and cruelty of state-sanctioned death by electrocution ... will surely realize that the electric chair has no place in our society and our state, no matter how gruesome the crime," he said, reading from a press release.

Again, questions followed, clarifying what the NCLU was doing. The conference broke up, and some media headed for another demonstra-

tion outside of the governor's mansion.

Wednesday

It is only noon, but Pitre is already nervous. The hearing to consider a clemency hearing is a little more than an hour away.

In the sixth-floor conference room in Gold's Galleria, Pitre, two volunteers and only three media members sit. Pitre, whose hands are shaking, but not as bad as the day before, speaks fast.

Today, Pitre reads a letter from Pope John Paul II's representative in the United States, Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan. The archbishop, in the letter, makes a plea for Joubert's life on behalf of the Pope.

"The most important spiritual leader in the western world is appealing to the governor, the attorney general, the secretary of state of the State of Nebraska," Pitre said.

An hour after the conference, Pitre meets all three face to face.

The Nebraska Pardons Board, made up of Gov. Ben Nelson, Attorney General Don Stenberg and Secretary of State Scott Moore awaited Pitre.

Before the hearing, Pitre admitted he was intimidated, but undaunted. He prayed with friends before speaking to the board.

In a room with seven TV cameras, three newspaper photographers, more than 60 people and the state's three most powerful men, Pitre made his plea for a clemency hearing for Joubert.

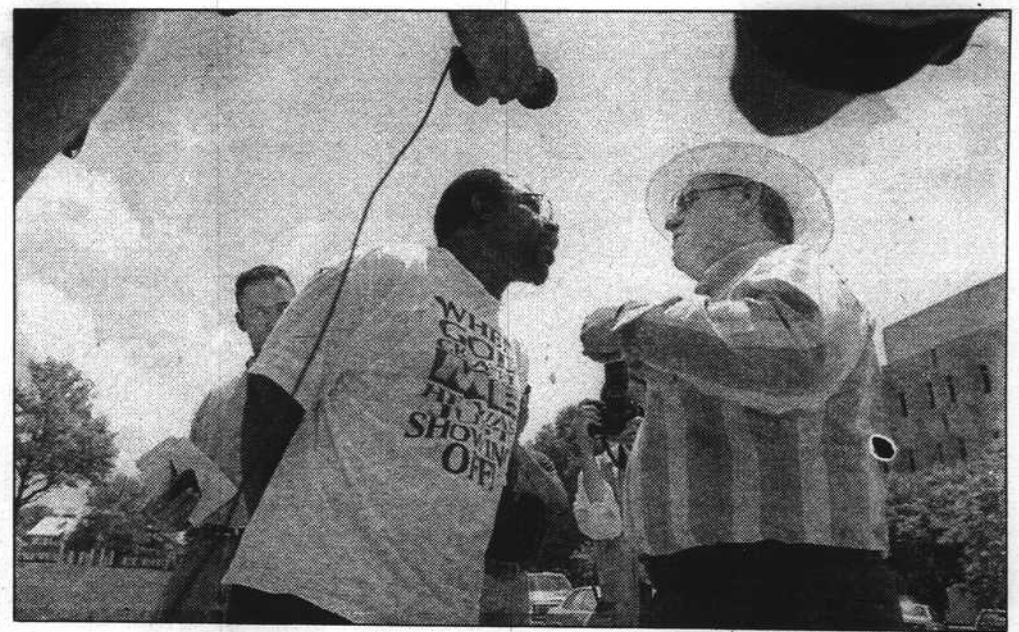
In a speech that lasted only fifteen minutes, Pitre told the board he is not an attorney and not making a legal appeal.

"I have come here not to appeal to the law but to your hearts," he said.

Pitre said a hearing was needed so the board could see Joubert's change, not read about it in documents. In a hearing, he said, the board could hear how he is consumed with remorse.

Joubert's therapist, Laurel Ban Han, gave short, unprepared testimony, repeating Pitre's plea for a hearing.

Just as board members were to close down the hearing, Eric Sheers, the executive director of the Murder, Assault, Rape, Robbery Assis-



Tanna Kinnaman/DN

Quoting Bible passages, Jessie Myles, left, and Larry Ball, president of the Plainsmen, face off Sunday during an anti-death penalty rally held at the State Capitol Sunday. Myles was against the death penalty, Ball for it.

stance Center, asked to speak. He had a letter from Judy Eberle, the mother of one of the victims.

In the letter, Eberle said Joubert should be executed because Joubert gave no thought to her son's pain and suffering. She wrote Joubert answered her son's pleas to take him to a hospital by stabbing him to death.

"Was Danny asking for something close to clemency like Joubert is today?" Sheers read to the board. "I think so, and Danny deserved it."

Eberle wrote that she lives in fear that Joubert would get a life sentence and get out on parole. She wrote she knew Joubert would come for her if he did get out of prison.

"I don't want to suffer any longer," she wrote. "This is enough. You will help our families out very much if you just get this over..."

Pitre was given a chance to rebut the mothers letter, but it did no good.

The board unanimously denied Joubert a hearing. They then unanimously denied commuting his sentence.

"I am at peace with the decision," Nelson said before the vote. "I am not at peace with the crimes committed, nor will I ever be. Nor will anyone ever be."

In the crush of media outside the hearing room, Pitre said the result was not unexpected. "What can I say? People told me this was going to happen."

Pitre said he would spend the next days with Joubert, up to the execution.

He turned, hugged a volunteer, and walked away from the crowd of media.

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