



Tanna Kinnaman/DN

Troy Stolp, from Council Bluffs, Iowa, shows his opposition to the death penalty in a peaceful demonstration outside the Nebraska State Penitentiary Tuesday night.

Anger and anguish

Only hours after John Joubert professed his acceptance of his fate, demonstrators outside the prison expressed their own feelings

By Mike Kluck
Staff Writer

It was tough for Marianna Ashley to determine what was more sickening as she stood outside the Nebraska State Penitentiary late Tuesday night — the murderer inside or the crowd outside.

Inside the penitentiary, convicted child-killer John Joubert was being prepared for his execution set for early Wednesday morning, while 20 yards away from Ashley, people were chanting "fry him."

"They're celebrating a killing," said Ashley, a member of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty. "I wanted to be here to show that not everyone favors the death penalty and not everyone thinks John Joubert should be killed."

As the chants continued, Ashley passed out songsheets to the crowd of more than 150 people gathered to oppose the death penalty.

On the front side of the sheet were five songs, while on the back side were suggestions for good conduct.

Some of the suggestions included maintaining a respectful, prayerful, dignified demeanor at all times; avoiding verbal and physical confrontations; and treating opponents and police with respect.

But as the group began singing "We Shall Overcome," the pro-death penalty side, which numbered more than 600, also began singing: "Na na na na, na na na na, hey hey hey, he'll fry."

However, Vicki Edwards of Lincoln, who was one of the first death penalty supporters to arrive at the penitentiary after 10 p.m., wasn't singing.

Edwards, who was leaning against the fence facing the penitentiary and away from the chanting group, said she wanted to be at the penitentiary to support the death penalty.

"I wanted to be here to see justice served...finally!" Edwards said. "Anytime a human being dies it's saddening, but for justice, the criminals have to know they are going to pay for the crime they commit."

But Edwards was drowned out as a roar went up from the pro-death penalty crowd.

James Protaskey of Bellevue unveiled his sign on a sheet which won the approval of the crowd: "Mr. Owl, how many volts does it take to make the center of Joubert Pop? Let's Find Out 1-2-3...3."

Protaskey said he needed to be at the penitentiary and be present for the execution of Joubert.

Joubert was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue in 1983 when he murdered two Sarpy County boys.

"A lot of our neighbors lived in fear in 1983 because of Joubert," Protaskey said. "This is the beginning to the healing, but we will never be totally healed. Bellevue will always have a scar from this episode. This will not be a finality but at least justice will be served."

Protaskey's friend Lem Lampkins, also of Bellevue, was a security guard at Offutt in 1983. Lampkins said many of the anti-death penalty supporters would support the death penalty if they saw the pictures of the boys Joubert murdered.

"This has been way too long in coming," Lampkins said. "I can't put into words what I'm feeling right now."

Betina Schuchardt of Hanover, Germany, also had a tough time expressing her feelings at the execution. Schuchardt, a graduate student in history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the scene at the prison was "very strange."

Schuchardt, an anti-death penalty supporter, said it was difficult to understand why a civilized country like the United States had

such an uncivilized manner of punishment. Germany doesn't have a death penalty.

"I owed this to myself to come out here and stand to my political opinion," Schuchardt said. "This is also a part of history and something I'm interested in."

As midnight approached, the anti-death penalty crowd turned from singing to silent meditation, while the pro-death penalty crowd became restless and started chanting, "we'll dig the grave."

At least three different times throughout the night, water cups were thrown into the anti-death penalty crowd, while smoke-bombs and fireworks from the pro-death penalty side were thrown into the area separating the two groups.

Nebraska State Patrol Captain Arlan Anderson said Wednesday that two arrests were made throughout the evening, with one involving a pro-death penalty supporter who ran into the anti-death penalty crowd at about 12:15 a.m.

After words were exchanged between the man and the group, state patrol officers quickly escorted the man into a pickup and drove him away.

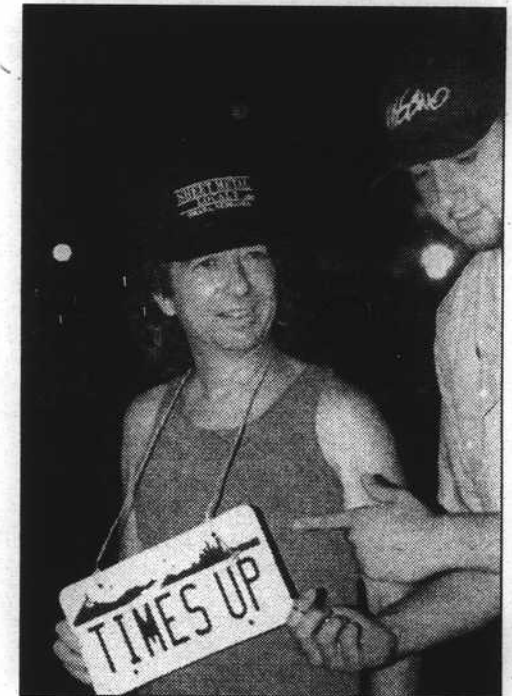
Lisa Pepin, a senior at Lincoln East High School, said the scene at the prison was "twisted" and made her sick to her stomach.

"I don't agree with this," Pepin said. "This isn't any way to have justice."

Ron Merrill of Lincoln said the actions of the pro-death penalty side were ironic.

"They (death penalty proponents) say they are against violence, but here they are trying to incite it," Merrill said. "This is a tough night and we can't forget the children John Joubert killed or their families. But I don't believe we should judge. It should be up to God to decide."

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Mami Speck/DN

Charlie Blessing wears these specially-made license plates to show his support for the death of Joubert.