

Hidden thoughts hurt

Repressed fears fuel racial problems



LORI ROBISON is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

It was probably the most difficult interview I've ever had to prepare for.

Two weeks into my research for a report on Internet hate sites, I sat at my desk, phone by my side, gazing at the phone number for the main chapter of the Aryan Nation's Church of Jesus Christ Christian.

The interview questions were written below the phone number of the assistant pastor of the church. But other questions bounced around in my head, inquiries that could not be scratched out on paper.

What will a conversation with an active member of a group devoted to intolerance be like? Will he be a raving lunatic? Will he attempt to convert me to his point of view, rambling on and on about the "evil" minority element in our society? Will he be hostile? Aggressive? Rude?

Visions of burning Southern churches, Nazi rallies and angry marchers with raised fists danced in my head. Images of the scores of hate sites I reviewed for the report — the hateful rhetoric, the ghastly illustrations, the anger and fear portrayed in them — crowded my memories.

And I began to wonder if I could maintain my composure while talking to a representative of a group whose basic core beliefs stood in such stark contrast to my own.

But after about an hour, the interview was over. Actually, it was fairly painless, much to my surprise. The person who answered the phone didn't sound like a raving madman. His speech and manner seemed sane enough. He might have been a neighbor I stopped to chat with on the way to the mailbox or a student from a class of mine who passed me on the way to the Nebraska Union and stopped to talk a while.

In fact, it was the very "normalness" of this 30-year-old father and husband that stood out for me. He was an "average Joe." A golf-club repairman living in a small Northwestern town with his wife and his 5-year-old daughter. He goes to work, he pays bills. He has good days and bad ones just like the rest of us.

And it's that average makeup that revolves around the whole issue of intolerance.

Because if bigots and those filled with intolerance glowed in the dark, it would be a simple matter of spotting them, avoiding them and not falling prey to the web of half-truths and lies they spin.

But as this man demonstrated, those filled with hate don't stand out from the general population, from the rest of us "average Joes." These people work beside us, live among us, share our con-

versations over coffee.

According to an Internet organization called Hatewatch, there seems to be a hate organization for everybody. Like the bars that line the roads outside some military bases, there's one for whatever tastes a person has. Hate sites and group subjects vary from the well-known white supremacist organizations to anti-homosexual groups to sites devoted entirely to bashing Bill Gates with darts. (I guess the Web surfers don't have Barney to kick around anymore.)

And the more I pondered the fact that most of the people belonging to these groups devoted to hate and bigotry were probably indistinguishable from anyone else, the more I came to pity this assistant pastor I interviewed. He talked of his experiences living in the inner city of Phoenix. He spoke of the fear he had for his family and little girl — fear of rising crime, fear of the violence and drug use he saw on the streets of his home touching his loved ones.

Many of this nation's citizens live in the same fear and apprehension. We watch the news reports, the trials of 12-year-old killers who led miserable lives themselves. We hear of carjackings, gang-related drive-by shootings and young people dead for nothing more than the jacket on their backs or the party they attended.

As parents, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, we all worry. We all hope the ones we care about will be safe from harm in a world that appears at times to be steadily falling apart.

But the answers don't lie in the falsehood of isolating a single group of people for blame. The color of someone's skin or the ancestry of someone's family cannot be realistically singled out as the cause of society's woes.

Most reasonable people know this, at least on an intellectual level. But Bob Wolfson, director of the Anti-Defamation League in Omaha, pointed out that the dangers of intolerance reside not in the extremist viewpoints, but in more-subdued philosophies.

Many people don't consider themselves neo-Nazis, Wolfson said. These people simply live with a pervasive "insider/outsider" mindset. And it's this

basic, repressed mistrust and reliance on stereotypes that is the true danger of intolerance.

In other words, normal people with normal problems and a rising fear of things beyond their control are the real core of hate in America.

Fear can do odd things to a person's mind. Some studies have shown, for example, that many Caucasians experience apprehension when approaching a group of young blacks on a street at night. However, the vast majority of violent crimes occur when the perpetrator and victim belong to the same racial group, according to FBI crime reports. So where does the fear come from?

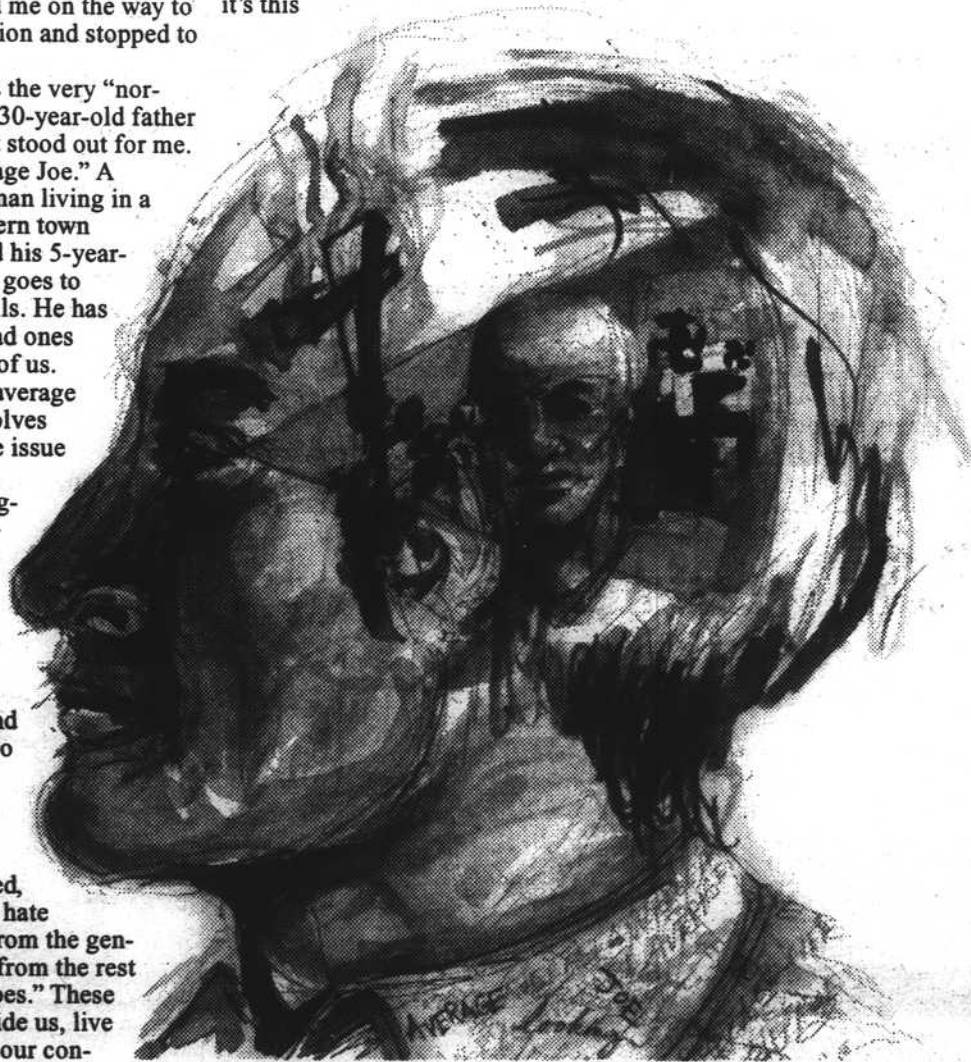
Fear certainly is not exclusive to a single group of people, just as hate and intolerance transcend race and ethnicity. Perhaps it's just easier to fear — and maybe even come to hate and blame — a single, concrete cause for what we see happening to our society and our loved ones. Perhaps it's easier to point at a group of people and say it's because of them that we lost our jobs, or that our friend was assaulted or that our neighborhoods aren't safe.

Because if we can place the blame, it follows that the answer should also be easier to find. Surely it's a lot easier than examining the complex socioeconomic roots underneath our real fears.

The Nazis had a name for that answer. And despite reassurances that group was solely responsible for "the final solution," many of us forget that an anti-Semitic atmosphere of subdued fear and hatred existed in Europe and the United States long before the first death camps were erected.

The viewpoints of that assistant pastor and his organization and the myriad of similar groups dedicated to intolerance don't exist in a vacuum. They merely serve as a reflection of a more pervasive, and in the end, a more dangerous, less-visible problem.

And, just as a virus, the problem has the potential to grow and develop to an all-out disease, killing our collective minds and bodies if left unchecked by the "regular Joes," the "normal ones," in our society.



MELANIE FALK/DN

thinking about
business
school?

Kaplan can help.

If you're interested in taking that next step to success, come to Kaplan. We'll walk you through the admissions process and help you get a great test score on the GMAT.

Classes start Thursday
March 19, 1998.

Space is limited.

Call 475-7010 Today!

the leader in test prep and
admissions counseling

KAPLAN
1-800-KAP-TEST
www.kaplan.com

thinking about
grad school?

Kaplan can help.

If you're interested in taking that next step to success, come to Kaplan. We'll walk you through the admissions process and help you get a great test score on the GRE.

Classes start Monday
March 23, 1998.

Space is limited.

Call 475-7010 Today!

the leader in test prep and
admissions counseling.

KAPLAN
1-800-KAP-TEST
www.kaplan.com

EARN \$370 IN 3 DAYS

ASSIST MEDICAL RESEARCH

You can earn **\$370 IN 3 DAYS** by participating in a medical research study at MDS Harris. If you are in good medical condition and meet the criteria below, call **474-PAYS** to find out more.

- men and women
- 20 to 45 years old
- smokers and nonsmokers
- availability: three day stay

Harris testing pays. Call **474-PAYS** today!

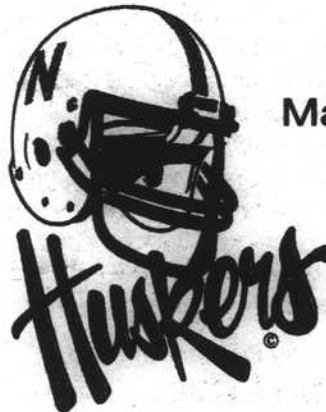
BE PART OF THE CURE
MDS Harris

621 Ross Street, Lincoln

1998

STUDENT FOOTBALL TICKETS

SPRING LOTTERY



March 16 - March 20
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Applications available at
Athletic Ticket Office
625 Stadium Drive, Ste. E
and
Student Accounts--
110 Adm & East Campus
information desk.

ONLY FULL-TIME STUDENTS MAY APPLY DURING LOTTERY.
For more information call 472-3111.



Price
(6 home games):

Student: \$107.50
Spouse: \$215.00