

OPINION PACES

Our VIEW

Crimes of dispassion

People, not laws, need to stop hate crimes

Matthew Shepard's friends say he was worried about being accepted at the University of Wyoming because he was open about his homosexuality.

So, imagine how good he probably felt when two men approached him in a bar and made him believe they understood how he felt, made him believe they were his friends.

Maybe he was too trusting.

Arthur Henderson and Aaron James McKinney allegedly told Shepard they were gay in order to lure him away, rob, tie up, beat and, ultimately, kill him.

President Clinton has denounced this horrible act and continues to ask Congress to pass legislation that would make it easier to federally prosecute hate crimes. Good.

But hate-crime legislation is not enough. What happened to Shepard is not some rare occurrence, but the culmination of anti-gay and lesbian sentiments rampant throughout our society.

Homosexual people have been made scapegoats. They have been blamed for the disintegration of the American family, never mind the fact that many homosexuals want a marriage and family and hold them in high esteem.

City and state governments have tried, and sometimes succeeded, in making laws that actually make it legal to discriminate against homosexuals.

And how often do people who would never describe themselves as being homophobic use the word gay as a synonym for stupid, as in "That's so gay."

Why is it so easy to forget that homosexuals are individuals? Having feelings is not a trait inherent to heterosexuals. The two men in Wyoming are evidence of that, and the images and words society uses hurt gays and lesbians very much.

And now, as if Shepard's family hasn't experienced enough pain, members of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan., have said they will demonstrate at his funeral Friday.

Can't they afford his family the same respect and dignity they would want for theirs for at least one day?

Matthew Shepard's life was taken from him; it is important his personality and autonomy are not. No one should forget hate crimes have a face.

Shepard was a person who had a family and friends, who like the rest of us probably wanted companionship and support from others.

Instead, two men decided they were justified in taking his life because he was gay.

And unfortunately, until society stops spreading hateful and hurtful messages against homosexuals, Shepard will not be the last.

Mook's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Gone, but not forgotten

They could not join other fraternities, even had they wished to do so. Not that they weren't intelligent or qualified as decent, bright and well-mannered young men. But they were Jews. Ineligible.

And it was not the Middle Ages. It was the 1920s and probably today, too.

So, they formed their own group and in 1926 became the Sigma Omicron chapter of Sigma Alpha Mu, a national Jewish fraternity.

During the next 30 or more years, despite a usually small membership, their contributions to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln scene were of such magnitude that a brief summary is in order and is an important part of university history.

This small group was the perennial house on campus in scholarship, with many Phi Beta Kappas, Beta Gamma Sigmas, honor roll listings and leaders in almost every campus organization and council.

In one five-year span, from 1936 to 1941, three editors in chief, a business manager, news and editing managers and many reporters, all on the Daily Nebraskan, were Sigma Alpha Mu members. One member, along with another campus personality, was almost wholly responsible for the development and building of the student union, which opened in 1938.

Sigma Alpha Mu proudly had members of the Innocents Society for 10 consecutive years. Athletes from the house were varsity members of football, basketball, swimming and gymnastics teams in the 1930s and later. Professionals in every field, arts and sciences, engineering, teaching, medicine, law, religion, writing, soldiering, politics, drama, etc., were commonplace among its alumni. Several were professors at UNL.

The head of a nationally famous hospital, a Federal District judge, a Nebraska Supreme Court chief justice, a chief judge of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Court, a U.S. senator, the mayors of two large Nebraska cities ... were Sigma Alpha Mu men.

A Broadway playwright, the writer of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, presidents of synagogues and temples, were or are Sammies.

A presidential confidante and White House inner staff member and chairman of the Federal Power Commission, an elected Nebraska

state auditor, two national supreme priors of the fraternity itself, a Pennsylvania commissioner of Consumer Affairs, the founding contributor of the University of Nebraska Center for Judaic Studies and cancer research grants were all Sammies from the Lincoln chapter.

The record of public service and contribution to the welfare and well-being of their state and America and of the university itself was reflected further in the armed forces duty of many members in World War II and Korea, many of whom returned home with Purple Hearts and some of whom perished.

The Sigma Alpha Mu chapter in Lincoln was a model, a shining light in the national organization. The chapter was always a competitor, and eventually a winner, for the Founder's Cup, and its honors record among the campus activities and organizations was outstanding, having provided leaders in almost every group on campus.

In the 1970s, the fraternity changed its constitution to open pledging, regardless of religious choice, and later began to pledge non-

Jewish men. But nothing could prevent the demise, as headlined in The Daily Nebraskan a few weeks ago.

"Alumni face end of defunct chapter: Traditionally Jewish house closed doors in 1990."

The national office tried several times to reorganize and revive the chapter, even though the house had become almost a derelict structure.

We of that not-too-long-ago era may salute ourselves and those who have left us. We are thankful for life, love, friends and family and wonderful memories of those glory days.

Norm Harris
pledged 1938
UNL class of 1941
Daily Nebraskan editor in chief
1940-1941

Friendly foes

I was reading through The Daily Nebraskan to see what you all were saying about Saturday's game. Between what I read, and what I have experienced from Nebraska fans over the past years, I am thoroughly impressed.

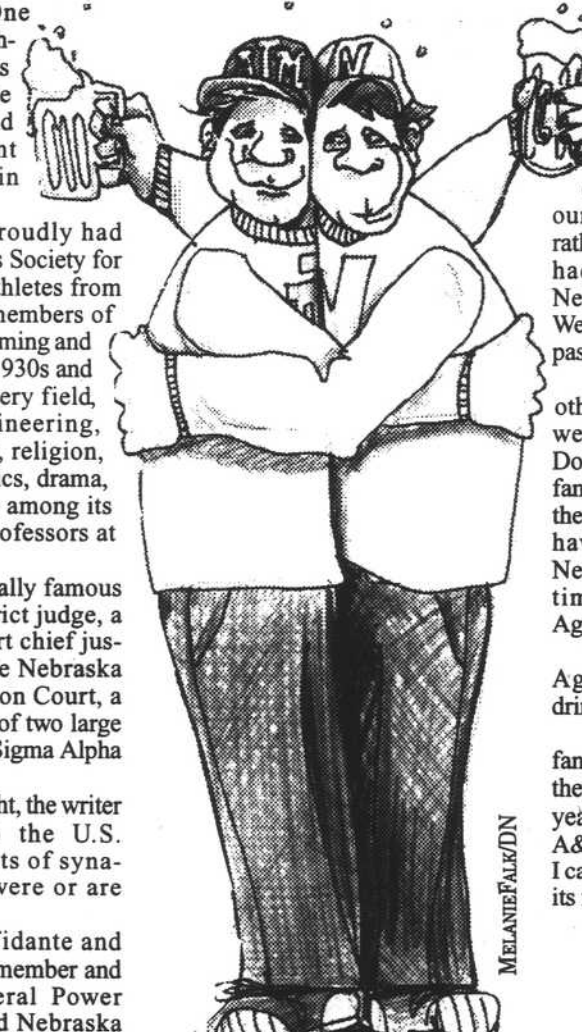
Last year in San Antonio, a horde of Nebraska fans showed up and watched a much more powerful Cornhusker team crush the Ags in an embarrassing Big 12 Championship. After the game, the NU fans I came in contact with complemented me on our band, and the Corps of Cadets, rather than gloat over the punishing we had just received. I left feeling Nebraska fans had enormous class. Well, that opinion was reinforced this past weekend.

On Friday night, as with every other Friday night in Aggieland, Ags were out partying around town. Dotting the town also were Nebraska fans having some fun the night before the game. But unlike other teams that have rolled into College Station, Nebraska fans were having a good time with Aggies, not in spite of Aggies.

It was a pretty common sight to see Aggies and Cornhuskers buying drinks for each other at local bars.

Then after the game, Nebraska fans continued to show the same savvy they show after a victory. In the second year of the Big 12, it seems like the A&M-NU rivalry is the one to watch. I can't think of a better class of team or its fans to have such a rivalry with.

Tony M. Camilli
commander, Co. E-1
Texas A&M Corps of
Cadets



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