

# Time served

## Law imposes unfair punishment on sex criminals after prison sentence



*There is a knock on the door, which Ted goes to and opens. There stands a normal-looking man in jeans, a T-shirt and a denim jacket.*

*"Hi," says the man at the door. "My name is James, and I've just moved in next door. I'm required by law to tell you that I served a six-year prison sentence for various sex crimes. I've been rehabilitated now, though, and I'm looking forward to living next to you. Have a good afternoon, neighbor!"*

Luckily, this scene doesn't have to happen in Nebraska. But in other states across the country, ex-convicts are being required to go door-to-door to inform neighbors about their prison sentences. The federal mandate, known as Megan's Law, is in effect in every state in some form.

After sex offenders are released from prison, they are evaluated on how

high a threat they are. If they fall into a high-risk category, they are forced into the notification program. In some states, the list is at a police station where citizens are forced to go get the information. In others, the ex-convict is forced to go door-to-door and notify both the neighborhood as well as all schools and day cares in the area.

Nebraska's law is less malicious than those of many other states — the list is available on the Web for anyone concerned. If a citizen is concerned about the Level III (high-risk) offenders in the Lincoln area, they have to go look on the Web, although churches, schools and day cares are notified of Level II (medium-risk) and Level III offenders in the area.

Nebraska's law generally relies on the media to do its dirty work, which apparently we did virtually unquestioningly. In a cover story on Friday, the Daily Nebraskan informed some ex-convicts' neighbors of their new neighbor's presence on the sex offender list, a move with which I wholeheartedly disagree.

One neighbor of each of the three ex-convicts was interviewed for the story, most of them having been, until that moment, unaware of their neighbor's history. Some of the neighbors were accepting of their neighbor's

past; one wasn't. Beyond this, we published all three of the ex-convicts' names, as well as the names of their neighbors. Not only do the neighbors now know who these people are; thousands of people who read the Daily Nebraskan know their identities as well.

In reporting on the law, I believe this newspaper showed an incredible lack of news judgment. According to the news desk, very little discussion went on about whether or not we should have printed the names. The editors stand behind their decision.

Instead of saying, "We're not going to print these names," we did. It was our call — no law requires us to print the names — and instead of using our voice to protest the law, we bought into it hook, line and sinker. Instead of speaking out against a law that encourages citizens to take the law into their own hands, we simply printed the names and gave the matter little thought.

Journalists have an obligation as the source of information of a community to make decisions on when not to run information. There are times when journalists should simply say "No." But we didn't. And it was given hardly more than a moment's consideration.

And, even more than just printing

the names, we contacted the neighbors to find out what they thought about it, which had the practical effect of informing them of their ex-convict neighbors. As a result of our efforts, those three neighbors will inform others almost definitely.

Perhaps the ex-convicts will be harassed and perhaps not. But instead of just a few concerned individuals knowing the past of their neighbors, thousands more now know.

I can offer only my most sincere apologies to these ex-convicts for what further harm we may have caused them. You should notice that I have referred to these people as ex-convicts often, because that's what they are — former convicts. These people have served their time and been released from prison.

I am sure some people are fuming, thinking that I am insensitive to the 30-50 percent recidivism rate of these offenders, but I assure you, I am not. My solution is very simple: If criminals are not rehabilitated, then they should not be let out of jail.

Some may claim the idea of imprisoning these people is worse than letting them out under the microscope of the public. But which is worse — the imprisonment of someone for twenty years or the public lynching of a non-

threatening person? I'll give you a hint — you can ask both people and only one can give you an answer. The other's dead.

Megan's Law was a knee-jerk reaction to a problem. Rather than address the failings of our legal system, the government employed a quick-fix remedy, and people's rights were trampled on.

Is it really fair to prisoners who have served their time and have been released to endure harassment every minute of every day, to be haunted by their mistakes until their lives become a living hell, regardless of whether they will ever commit another crime?

If you said yes, what kind of person are you? In your thirst to see what you think is justice served, you have overlooked the rights of every citizen to a fair trial and to avoid cruel and unusual punishment.

When Megan's law was passed, one of its supporters said: "You can take your child by the hand, point that person out and say, 'This man hurts children.'"

Tell me again the law is for justice, not vengeance, and I somehow don't think you'll be able to convince me. Tell me that you need it to feel safe. But which is more important — your safety or someone else's rights.

*Cliff Hicks is a senior news-editorial and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*

# 48 hours in Hollywood (OK, 41. Sort of.)

## In the sunny City of Angels, rails, Retardo and whipped cream rule the day



WESTWOOD, Calif. - You want an idea of how Los Angeles works?

Five blocks from the UCLA campus is an arcade. Outside it, a couple of cars: Mercedes, Lexus, Audi. Leather interiors. All owned by 16-year-olds.

The money standards are different. Car standards, different. Beauty standards, different. L.A. is just like you, all right, just more full of everything.

Press junkets for movies; production companies do them all the time. And nearly everyone there is from a college, like me, getting put up in a hotel, like me, getting fed and watered, like me, getting thousands of dollars spent on them, like me. All for a new teen comedy called "Road Trip."

The money Dreamworks, the film's production company, spent on us is likely near \$100,000.

It's a two-day deal: in and out, up and down. None of us college folk are pros at this; neither are the people who are running it — they're our age, too. Lackeys on the ground floor of the film industry.

"Did you like the movie? Did you like the music? How's the party? Think it's cool? The DJs — no one is out there dancing, so at the end of the night, will you go tell him he's doing a great job? Because he really is, and I just want people to appreciate all the work he's doing and ..."

Breathe, sister.

She's been to L.A. so many times — like vacations, you know — but she's a tourist nonetheless, holding out her voucher like she's at Grand Central. She's BU, you know — Boston University — and she's got her cell, her glasses, her four outfits, her formal dress (just in case), her smudged lipstick, her crusted mascara that makes her look like she's crying.

Brianne has interviews Monday in New York, you know, with MTV, you know, and she does these movie things all the time, and she has to call her roomie Emily at BU and tell her that

Some guy named Retardo is downstairs and he's trying to get into the room and — April Fools! — not really because she did the joke last year when her roomie Emily really fell for it, and Emily will think it's hilarious this year because, you know, it's a

running joke now. There were still 15 minutes of car ride to go.

I saw not one lick of North Carolina vs. Florida in the Final Four. OK, one lick — the tipoff. And then the Dreamworks man turned it off.

"Gonna watch some trailers," he said.

After trailers, there was talk of catch-phrase films in all the catch-phrase language — a medley of hyperboles and movie aphorisms, at which all in attendance would nod their heads up and down.

Vince, aspiring director from Buffalo, you're on: "And so I was sitting in the theater during 'Fight Club,' and I look around and suddenly I'm alone, and it's just me and the screen, and I was like 'Thank you, David Fincher. Thank you for giving this gift to me.' And that's what I want to give — a religious experi-

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ence."

It's the after-movie party that never ends.

There's chicken on sticks. New-age buffalo wings. Cubes of cheese. The kind of quality celery you find once a year in the supermarket. The Dreamworks lackeys float about, and it's hard to tell them apart. The second-rate stars of the movie mingle outside. I'm outta here and into the Westwood world.

I get the L.A. standard 45 minutes into my Westwood walking tour. At Tower Records, no less, while I'm on the can in the bathroom.

Somebody else enters. And then, the trademark long sniff. Then a short one. Long again, then short. And then, the trademark tiny groan. Just like the movies! Just like I envisioned hearing it!

As former DN Columnist Todd Munson used to say: Somebody's snortin' rails.

Her name is Amy Smart, an actress who takes her clothes off in the movie. She's been in a few movies, you know, and she does these, you know, press junkets all the time.

She, like the other stars, are refreshing, for they contain none of the catch-phrase language and they speak of no catch-phrase movies. They are on the inside looking out, expounding on the

horrors of waiting for a job in the movie business, about "their art." Self-absorption was never this appealing.

Amy is tall and rail thin (the other rail), and the inevitable question arrives about her nude scene.

"I mean, you do it," she says, her face naturally scrunching itself into a perpetual smirk. I guess that's glowing. People glow out here, even when they aren't happy.

"People take their clothes off when they're intimate," Amy goes on. "It's what they do."

I wondered how far she'd go. I thought of bringing up Maria Schneider and the butter scene in "Last Tango in Paris," but I found a more relevant example.

Amy was in "Varsity Blues" with Ali Larter, who was forever stamped as the "whipped cream girl" because she portrayed a high school girl who got naked and smeared whipped cream on her breasts and crotch, an entirely pointless and humiliating scene done for video sales and the expectant masturbation of males.

We have porn for that.

Would Amy have done it?

"Oh yeah," she says. "Of course."

And suddenly I felt, I don't know, sort of ashamed — for Amy, for Ali, for Retardo, for the \$15 million they spent on the movie, for the rails, for all of the junk that Vince said just to get one step closer to his dream, which very well might end up in a makeshift studio directing some girl to touch herself or smooch chocolate creme in her mouth.

And I love movies. "Because everybody remembers that," Amy says. "Ali is the whipped cream girl. Everybody will remember her as the whipped cream girl." "And who doesn't want that?"



David Jané/DN

*Samuel McKewon is a junior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*