

SKEETER



BITES

BY SKEETER SANDERS

Russell Henderson's decision last month to plead guilty for his role in the brutal lynching of Matthew Shepard was once again brought into the spotlight the debate on whether there is a need for laws to deal with violent crimes motivated by racial, religious, gender, or sexual-orientation bias.

Henderson, one of two men charged in the October slaying of the openly gay University of Wyoming student in Laramie, was sentenced to two consecutive life terms in prison — the most severe sentence that can be imposed short of the death penalty.

As a lifelong opponent of capital punishment, I'm perfectly comfortable with that sentence.

The fact that the 21-year-old Henderson and his 22-year-old co-defendant, James McKinney, were not charged with a hate crime has infuriated many queer activists, but it doesn't bother me in the slightest.

Considering the sentence that Henderson got, it would not have made any difference whether he was charged with a hate crime or not. The man will remain behind bars until the day he dies. No parole, no pardon. Period. End of story.

The same goes for John William King. In March, the self-avowed white supremacist was sentenced to execution by lethal

injection for the equally brutal lynching in Jasper, Texas of James Byrd, Jr. solely because Byrd was black.

I cannot, in good conscience, approve of King's death sentence. For every 20 cold-blooded killers like King on Death Row,

They were subsequently arrested, tried, and convicted. Their punishment? "Probation and 400 hours of volunteer work in a soup

That King and Henderson were brought to justice so swiftly and so severely speaks volumes about how far society's attitudes toward crimes of violence have changed in the last decade.

The fact that King wasn't charged with a hate crime made no difference. A predominantly white jury took less than three hours to convict King of the racially motivated crime — and less than two hours the following day to condemn him to die.

there is one real-life Richard Kimble who was wrongly sentenced to die for a crime he didn't commit.

Nevertheless, King, like Henderson, will remain behind bars until the day he dies. No parole, no pardon. Period. End of story.

Washington Post columnist William Raspberry made a salient point in questioning the need for hate-crimes laws. "What more might Wyoming have done to Henderson if it had convicted him not merely of murder but of homophobia-driven murder?" he wrote. "And what might...King's sentence have been if he'd also been convicted of a hate crime? Death-plus?"

Raspberry is black and grew up in Mississippi during the dark days of state-enforced racial segregation laws and unchecked racial terrorism against African-Americans, so he knows first hand the evil of violent crimes motivated by hatred.

He pointed out that even in the absence of hate-crimes laws in Wyoming and Texas, the sentences imposed upon Henderson and King are a far cry from what they would likely have received had their crimes taken place 15 years earlier.

In 1984, a gay man in the nation's capital was beaten, stomped, knifed, and urinated on by two teenagers who said the victim "made a pass at them."

kitchen," Raspberry wrote.

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With the public's hardened 'lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key' attitude — not to mention its overwhelming support for capital punishment of murderers — to enact hate-crimes laws now is a moot point. They won't make a damn bit of difference. They might even backfire by making it harder for prosecutors to obtain convictions.

All the hate-crimes laws in the world won't stop bigots from hating people because of who they are and certainly won't stop them from committing violent acts motivated by their hatred.

Only changing their attitudes — or otherwise resorting to violent self-defense if necessary — can do that.▼

Skeeter Sanders is an FM radio DJ who can be heard Saturday nights at 11:00 p.m. on "The Point" (WNCS 104.7 Montpelier; WSHX 95.7 St. Johnsbury; WRJT 103.1 White River Junction) and Sunday nights at 10:00 p.m. on WGDR 91.1 Plainfield. Both programs are cybercast on the Internet at www.pointfm.com and www.goddard.edu/wgdr respectively.

CROW'S



CAWS

BY CROW COHEN

Question authority. Stand on your own two feet. Think for yourself. You don't need to be submissive anymore. You know what's best for you. Be independent, self-sufficient, autonomous.

Admirable advice, especially for people like us who tend to align ourselves with that segment of society that defies convention in order to assert our right to live openly as GLBT folk.

But during the last few years, I discovered I ran into trouble with these messages whenever I faced one of life's many trials — what to do with my acting-out teenagers, how to respond to an irritating co-worker, what to tell my mother when she makes an unreasonable demand.

If the favorite motto of our second wave feminist sisters was "The personal is the political," then how I approach challenges that can tie my stomach in knots helps define my vision for a more peaceful world. I'd love to be able to report that when my daughters piss me off, I gently withdraw with loving detachment until we're both in a better place to work through the baggage we carry around from our family history. I'd love to expound on the mature strategies I devise when co-workers thwart me or the compassionate way I hold my own when 86-year-old Mom guilt-trips the hell out of me. (Notice I'm not even touching partner relationships with a 10-foot-pole.)

Like most human beings, I do

She Ain't Heavy...

not bring 'home all As on the big report card of life. I may have picked up the notion from my feminist sisters that the personal is the political, but unfortunately, I didn't pick up the tools of how to best get along with my relationships. Head-on collisions,

for me, and that's OK. It doesn't make me stupid or an ineffectual pushover.

As a matter of fact, that process of following someone else's direction when I feel lost, confused, frustrated, angry, or hurt often produces miraculous results. Number one, pride doesn't clog up the works as much as it used to. Number two, I feel much more connected to my community, something that tends to offset the isolating effects of pain; and number three, it's a great reminder that I'm not always in control when shit happens.

Now, throughout the years I've watched the women's community admirably nurture each other when catastrophe hits — fires, fatal diseases, fighting in the courts. But in smaller ways, I suspect that the great American worship of self-sufficiency is killing us. When we are hesitant to rely on our communities to guide us in our everyday ups and downs, then perhaps we need to take a look at ways to develop a common language around our core values and ethics. But that's another Crow's caws.

Let's just leave it at this. The next time your sister or brother deeply disappoints you, go ask someone you love and trust what to do about it instead of giving into obsessive ruminations of sweet revenge. If your buddy or healer or favorite aunt says, "Let it go," then do it. Or if she says, "Tell her you won't stand for it!" then do that. Whatever you do, remember you don't have to do it alone.▼

The older I get, the more amenable I am to the novel idea that maybe I don't always know what's best for me, and that's OK.

marathon group encounters to hammer out differences of opinion, a strong penchant for immediate gratification and horizontal hostility just don't cut it, no matter how much love and fervor we put behind them.

So how have I changed since the heyday of the women's movement? These days I readily ask for advice, and then actually take it. I assume that there are a few trusted folks in my life who have a clearer perspective on my chaos than I do, so I'm open to suggestions. Not always. Not necessarily right away; but the older I get, the more amenable I am to the novel idea that maybe I don't always know what's best

Walk to Raise Funds for PWAs

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shower," he says, "but after that...I don't know." Anyone who can provide him with such necessities or an official welcome in a town is encouraged to contact PWAC.

Bazzano should be easily recognizable along the road, as the Brattleboro Area AIDS Project has provided a number of bright yellow t-shirts with red ribbons. "They should go well with my orange sneakers," he says. Anyone who wants to walk with him for part of the journey is also welcome to do so. The Rainbow Cattle Company will have a map posted in the bar to track Bazzano's progress.

Bazzano's walk appears to be a state first. Dr. Edward Keenan of Essex Junction has walked from Massachusetts to Canada and performed several other impressive walks for various heart, cancer, and lung associations, but has never attempted a walk across the entire length of Vermont. Keenan, now 78, wishes Bazzano well on his journey and adds, "if you run across a funny-looking old man with a red backpack, that'll be me."

To offer assistance or for more information, contact PWAC at (800) 698-8792 or (802) 229-5754 or clip and mail in the pledge form on page 10.