



Execution of half brother leads woman into a protest

By Scott Sexton
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RALEIGH - Tina Walker hopped in a car Thursday to make her first visit to Central Prison since her half-brother, Steve McHone, was executed Nov. 11.

She almost turned around. The drive down Western Boulevard - two hours from her home in Winston-Salem - toward the gates of the prison caused her to relive her anguish.

"It was very, very emotional," she said. "When we hit Western, I wasn't sure I could do it."

Yet she did.

She climbed out of the car wearing comfortable running shoes and waded into a circus-like atmosphere of protest and civil disobedience.

The big top came to Raleigh in buses and vans, drawn more by the number, 1,000th execution, than the name of the condemned, Kenneth Lee Boyd.

It was a chance to spread the word, you see, an artificial spectacle set up by an arbitrary number. The world's media was coming. Polish national TV. Agence France Presse. Reuters. Radio feeds to the BBC World News Service.

To Walker, the number wasn't really the thing. Number 999 or Number 1,001, it didn't matter. The memory of McHone - Number 994 - made her get in the car.

Heinous acts

By any measure, Kenneth Lee Boyd's crime was monstrous, a barbaric act fueled by hatred and booze.

He killed his estranged wife, 36-year-old Julie Curry Boyd, and her father, Thomas Dillard Curry, 17 years ago in Rockingham County. During the shooting, her son was trapped under her body and managed to escape by wiggling under a bed.

Boyd called 911, told authorities what he had done, and then he reloaded to shoot some more.

If you believe in the death penalty and its applications - 61 percent of us in North Carolina do, according to a recent Elon University poll - then Boyd certainly qualified for his place on death row.

"Tonight, justice has been served for Mr. Kenneth Boyd," said Sheriff Sam Page of Rockingham County.

Walker doesn't see it that way.

In the previous few weeks, she had helped tend to McHone's final wishes. "Steve said he wanted to be cremated because he didn't want to be in a box any more," she said.

Walker has long since forgiven McHone for killing her father and her stepmother. She decided to return to Raleigh because she wants other victims to have the same chance to grant forgiveness and heal emotionally.

"I just couldn't go for (Elias) Syriani," she said, referring to the Nov. 18 execution of a Charlotte man convicted of killing his wife with a screwdriver. "It was just too soon."

Syriani was No. 997.

No more

When McHone was put to death by lethal injection, the crowd outside Central Prison was much smaller.

No temporary metal barricades were set up. Nobody took the trouble to build a wooden gallows and hangman's noose to protest. No national leaders from Amnesty International came down from Washington, nor did a gang of 16 lie down in the prison driveway to protest.

There were no arrests, nor were there foreign journalists smoking cigarettes and pacing out front.

Just a handful of homegrown dissenters holding candles in peaceful protest.

"That's what got me down here," Walker said. "The candles. I was sitting behind the plate-glass windows (in the prison visitors' center), and I saw those lights. It was inspiring to know that we weren't alone."

Walker also went to make sure that her voice was heard, even if it was muffled by the louder voices of hundreds of other protesters. She also said that she feels shortchanged because Gov. Mike Easley would not allow her to attend McHone's clemency hearing.

"I don't know what I would have said," she said. "I would have talked of love and forgiveness. I might have questioned his faith."

"He took my platform that day. He won't any more."

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