THE DAILY CLIPS

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By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Juan Melendez, Ray Krone and Ryan Matthews spent a combined 26 years on death row for murders they didn’t commit.

Krone, Melendez and Pauline Matthews — Ryan’s mother — are sharing their stories in Greenville this week. Melendez will speak at a 7 p.m. mass Sunday at the Newman Center, the Catholic ministry at East Carolina University. Krone and Williams sat for interviews Wednesday at The Daily Reflector’s office.

All three are appearing on behalf of a pair of anti-death penalty advocacy groups. Witness to Innocence, based in Philadelphia, and People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, headquartered in Carrboro.

Krone, communications director for Witness to Innocence, was convicted in 1992 of killing a female bartender in Phoenix, Ariz. Prose...
SPEAKER
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cutors tied Krone to the stabbing with a set of bite marks on the woman's chest, Krone said; an expert testified that the indentions matched his own crooked teeth, shaped by a childhood car crash.

Over the next three years, Krone became a regular in a prison law library, looking for a way to change his fate. In 1995, the Arizona Court of Appeals vacated his conviction, finding that prosecutors failed to share evidence with the defense before presenting it in court. A second trial yielded the same guilty verdict, despite evidence that the bite marks didn't come from Krone, he said. The judge in his retrial had enough questions to sentence him to life in prison.

"As bad as it was the first time, this was the worst because I still believed in the system," Krone said. "The truth did come out and they found me guilty." In 2001 came a break. A new Arizona law expanded convicts' access to DNA evidence. Improbably, clothing from the victim in Krone's case was still in police possession. Krone's attorneys had the clothes analyzed; saliva on it matched a man serving 10 years in prison for rape. In 2002, Krone was finally released. He was the 100th person freed from death row in the United States.

Matthews' son has a similar story. In 1999, 17-year-old Ryan and a friend were charged with a robbery and murder at a store in Jefferson Parish, La. An eyewitness claimed to have followed the killers from the scene, Matthews said. Ryan's car resembled one a witness saw leaving the store. The witness claimed to have seen Ryan and another boy leaving.

That story had holes, Matthews said Wednesday. Ryan was miles away from the store when the murder happened, she said. The shirt purportedly discarded by the murderers was too small for him, and no DNA pulled from it or a ski mask matched Ryan's. Further, the windows in Ryan's car were frozen shut, she added.

"There was no way he could have jumped through that window," Pauline Matthews said. Witnesses, experts and the previous owner of Ryan's car testified to that fact during the trial two years later.

Despite the lack of physical evidence, Ryan was convicted and sentenced to death, Matthews said. For five years, he lived on death row in Louisiana. In 2004, his break came: another inmate bragged about committing a murder around the same time as the one Ryan was convicted for. Ryan's attorneys had DNA from that crime analyzed and compared to some from the other man's previous crime. The samples matched; Ryan was freed.

Krone and Matthews are putting their pain to work for an end to capital punishment in America.

For Krone, arguing against the death penalty is nearly a full-time job. He does regular media appearances and has testified before Congress.

Matthews, whose son chooses not to discuss his time on death row, is a less frequent traveler but is no less passionate.

Both say flaws in the justice system — unaccountable prosecutors, incompetent public defenders, racially stacked juries — contributed to their heartaches. But fixing those problems won't make the death penalty itself any more acceptable, both said.

"If we can't make it perfect, and it's pretty much impossible for us to make anything perfect, then we can't have a punishment that we can't fix later on, that we can't be man enough, woman enough, adult enough, mature enough to say we know we make mistakes," Krone said.

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New York's Aquila Theatre Company to present two dramas in two days

The Daily Reflector

When the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series was launched more than 40 years ago, its goal was to bring national and international performers to Greenville.

Today, the series continues to bring top-notch performers from around the globe.

This week the New York-based Aquila Theatre Company will visit Pitt County to perform two plays, "The Life and Death of Julius Caesar" by William Shakespeare and "Catch 22" by Joseph Heller.

The company is comprised of British and American artists dedicated to classical drama and is one of the foremost producers of touring classical theater in the United States. Aquila visits more than 60 U.S. cities each year.

"Julius Caesar" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium and "Catch 22" will take the stage the following day, Thursday, at the same time and place.

"Julius Caesar"
Aquila Theatre Company's production of Shakespeare's "The Life and Death of Julius Caesar" follows the rise and fall of one of the world's most notorious leaders.

A Roman military and political leader of great power, Caesar played a critical role in transforming the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire through his conquests in Gaul, extending the Roman world all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. He also conducted the first Roman invasion of Britain in 55 B.C.

Shakespeare's play is set in the midst of this period's political upheaval.

Caesar's friend, Marcus Brutus, must make the difficult decision of whether to join the group of senators planning to assassinate the dictator on the Ides of March.

Aquila's production asks the audience to consider the price of democracy and freedom and the consequences that can befall a society when it is asked to defend its core beliefs.

This gripping political thriller explores the complexities of power as Caesar's assassination sees a nation descend into civil violence and instability. Taking place in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar sets up the conditions for Antony and Cleopatra.

After Caesar's triumphal parade celebrating the defeat of the Roman general Pompey, his confidants...
**“CATCH-22”** by Joseph Heller is a play adapted from Heller’s novel.

Cassius and Brutus, worry about his vaulted status. While Cassius’s fears are motivated by envy and ambition, Brutus fears a dictatorship of the people. He is drawn in by Cassius’s machinations and becomes part of the conspiracy to stab Caesar and kill him. Antony denounces the treachery at Caesar’s public funeral and joins forces with Caesar’s adopted son and appointed successor, Octavius Caesar, to defeat Cassius and Brutus, thus marking the decline of democracy and the rise of the Roman Empire.

**“Catch-22”**

“Catch-22” is a satirical and historical fictional play adapted from the novel of the same name by American author Joseph Heller.

First published in 1961, “Catch-22” is set during the latter stages of World War II and follows John Yossarian, a U.S. Army Air Forces B-25 bombardier.

Most events occur while the airmen of the Fighting 256th Squadron are based on the island of Pianosa, west of Italy.

Yossarian devises several strategies to avoid flying combat missions, but the military bureaucracy always finds a way to make him stay.

“Catch-22” is a general critique of bureaucratic operation and reasoning.

Within the play, “Catch-22” is a military rule, the self-contradictory circular logic which, for example, prevents anyone from avoiding combat missions.

Joseph Heller used his own experience as a B-25 bombardier in WWII to write “Catch-22.” He survived more than 60 missions as an airman during the war.

Heller began writing “Catch-22” in 1953, but it took him an additional eight years before he delivered the final work to his publisher.

When the novel was first published, it received mixed reviews. In the first year, it only sold 30,000 copies.

After it was released as a paperback in October 1962, the novel captured the interest of baby boomers who identified with the work’s anti-war sentiment.

Included in the Aquila production are photographs, movie clips and music from time period, seeking to provoke thought about the nature of war.
Materialism 101

Lately, thousands of Americans have been traveling to their children’s college or university for “parents’ weekend.” They wander leaf-strewn lawns and quadrangles with their sons and daughters, asking earnest questions about courses and sports and friends. Later, when they retired to the local Hilton or Sheraton or Holiday Inn, they might have noticed something ironic: It looks a lot like their kids’ dormitory. That’s because the dorms themselves are changing, to resemble hotels.

At elite private universities and even at some public ones, students have nicer facilities and services than any previous generation could have imagined. And that raises big questions about what we are teaching them, and why.

Consider George Washington University, where incoming students receive engraved chocolates under their pillows during freshman orientation. Or Ball State University in Ohio, which just opened a $36 million residence hall featuring mobile furniture, a digital music lab and a dining hall that takes online orders for take-out.


That’s hardly the kind of luxury that Princeton President Woodrow Wilson envisioned a century ago, when he commissioned a new set of residential buildings for the university. Wilson worried that too many students had moved off campus into “eating clubs,” which separated them according to interests, tastes and wealth. Better that they live together in monastery-like brick or stone dormitories, sealed off from the rest of the world.

“A university was conceived as a place where the community life and spirit were supreme,” wrote one Princeton architect in 1909. “It was a walled city against materialism and all of its works.”

NEW YORK

AFTER WORLD WAR I, HARVARD WOULD ERECT seven new dormitories south of its famous yard. Featuring elaborate outside details but humble interiors, the dorms created a literal and symbolic divide between students and the surrounding city.

At new women’s colleges, meanwhile, educators feared that off-campus boarding houses would lead innocent young women astray. So they took special care to construct solid but simple dormitories, which would place all students under college supervision — and also on equal economic footing.

“We have a chance to see what the human spirit can do when unhampered either by deprivation or by excess,” wrote the dean of Smith College in 1919, praising a new set of dormitories.

The biggest boom in dorm construction occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, sparked by massive state and federal spending. Despite some new architectural styles, most of these dormitories reflected the same ascetic spirit as their predecessors. Built in concrete or cinderblock, dorms weren’t supposed to be “nice.” They were functional, not fancy.

Fast-forward to the new $22 million dormitory at Tufts University, offering suites with two large singles off a sun-lit living room. Each suite has a dining room with a glass table and a kitchen with a dishwasher. “This is like going from AmeriSuites to the Ritz-Carlton,” one Tufts senior told The Boston Globe. Get it? The dorm is a hotel, and it just got way nicer.
And that's very bad news for anyone who cares about the future of the university. By providing really nice things for our kids, we're teaching them to expect such goodies as their due. We're forgetting the older collegiate ideal, which prized the life of the mind over the lure of materialism.

Only a segment of students can afford the new luxuries, of course, which only makes matters worse. More and more colleges now price their dorms at different rates, depending on how many bells and whistles are included. So you see rich kids in the fancier residence halls and poorer students in the older ones, which yields exactly the type of economic divide that Wilson and his generation wanted to avoid.

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How did we get here? As government aid has declined, colleges must chase the students with the most dollars. The best way to do that is by offering really cool stuff. I don't think any university president likes the idea of loading luxuries onto already privileged 18-year-olds. But competing schools are doing it; so what choice do we have?

During the Cold War, that kind of thinking was called "Mutually Assured Destruction." We didn't need nuclear warheads, really, but the other team was building them. Today, at universities, we've entered the era of Mutually Assured Consumption. And we're all impoverished by it.
NCSU entry struck from robot race

BY BRUCE SICELLOFF
STAFF WRITER

Lone Wolf, a blue sports car that learned to drive itself this year at N.C. State University, was eliminated Thursday from a $3.5 million Pentagon competition that will end Saturday in a robot race through urban traffic at an old military base in the Mojave Desert.

"We were pretty close, but we didn't quite make the finals," Grayson Randall of Cary, Lone Wolf's chief creator, said by telephone from Victorville, Calif. Randall heads Insight Racing, a team of students and engineers who designed the robot Lotus.

Eleven driverless cars were chosen Thursday for the finals of the DARPA Urban Challenge, part of a Pentagon push to design robot ground vehicles for war zones. The robot cars and sport utility vehicles will have six hours Saturday to complete a 60-mile urban course.

Randall's group took Lone Wolf to the former George Air

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ROBOT

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Force Base last week for six days of qualifying trials. Some cars crashed, froze or ran amok during tests of their ability to merge with traffic, handle road obstacles and navigate four-way stops. When the trials ended Wednesday, 16 of the 35 semifinalists had been disqualified.

Lone Wolf was one of 19 still in contention Thursday morning. DARPA officials had planned to name 20 finalists but, without explanation, trimmed the field to 11.

Randall said DARPA did not release scoring details or explain why Lone Wolf did not make the final cut. Among other semifinalists that fell short were teams, some with multimillion-dollar corporate backing, based at Georgia Tech, Caltech, Case Western Reserve and Princeton universities.

"Obviously, there were some criteria they were looking at. They're planning to have a lot of traffic on the course Saturday, so I don't know if it's the number of vehicles they felt they could manage on the course," Randall said.

And the finalists are ...

The finalists include teams from Stanford, MIT, Cornell, Virginia Tech and Carnegie Mellon.

"Vehicles competing in the Urban Challenge will have to think like human drivers and continually make split-second decisions to

avoid moving vehicles, including robotic vehicles without drivers, and operate safely on the course," Norman Whitaker, a DARPA official, said in a news release.

Lotus, the British carmaker, brought a few of its sports cars to Victorville this week to promote its role as one of Lone Wolf's sponsors. Randall's wife, Mary Ellen, said Insight Racing team members are sticking around for Saturday's race, and they'll have time today to indulge in some

pleasure driving.

"We're going to hang around," Mary Ellen Randall said, "and drive Lotuses."

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UNCG leader has emergency surgery

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO — The chancellor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is recovering from emergency surgery.

A university spokesman says Chancellor Pat Sullivan underwent surgery for a perforated ulcer at Duke University Hospital in Durham. She is expected to be out of work for about two weeks.

Sullivan, 67, has the most seniority of any chancellor in the 16-campus UNC system. She's been at UNC-Greensboro since 1995.

Steve Gilliam, a UNCG spokesman, says that Provost David Perrin will handle day-to-day operations at the university while Sullivan is absent.
Are we Colbert's punch line?

Will Rogers in '32, Pat Paulson in '68, and now Colbert -- dark-comic candidates tend to pop up in grim times.

Patt Morrison

November 1, 2007

Desperate times require desperate candidates. How do you gauge national desperation? Stephen Colbert is polling in double digits.

For you cable-free readers, comedian Colbert's "The Colbert Report" stars the real Colbert as the character Colbert in a deadpan send-up of the bumptious, righter-than-thou malarkey merchants of cable TV news.

Colbert (the character) announced he'd run for president in his home-state primary in South Carolina. A national poll by Rasmussen Reports and Fox News, the cable channel populated by the bully boys Colbert parodies, put him at 12% against Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani. More than a million Facebook members have signed on for Colbert.

The real candidates, some of whom poll below Colbert, are trying to go along with the joke without becoming the butt of it. Is this guy funny or frightening?

Film and fiction love putting unlikely characters into the Oval Office. Over the years, we've seen black men as president (James Earl Jones and Chris Rock), women (Geena Davis and Polly Bergen), a genial look-alike (Kevin Kline) and a late-night political comedian (Robin Williams). They all test democracy in our imaginations by placing unexpected figures in the job and checking to see whether the republic's elastic can keep its snap, and by inference, whether we can eventually accept actual different types in the White House: a woman, a black man, a Mormon, a man married three times (the last two are not the same candidate).

Send-up candidacies like Colbert's have their own long history. In 1879, in the New York Evening Post, Mark Twain nominated himself with a sardonic confessional: "I have pretty much made up my mind to run for president. What the country wants is a candidate who cannot be injured by investigation of his past history. ... If you know the worst about a candidate, to begin with, every attempt to spring things on him will be checkmated." Twain punctured plutocrats too well to have made any headway in the smoke-filled rooms of the Gilded Age. But he undoubtedly has more things named after him -- including an asteroid -- than the man who did become president, James Garfield.


Comedian Paulsen was a regular on the politically bold "Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour," a TV show that kept network censors fully employed until it was finally yanked off the air. He ran for president as the Vietnam War was rupturing the country. The nation saw a TV war overseas and wall-to-wall TV campaigning at home,
and Paulsen mocked by imitation. The man who produced Paulsen's campaign "special" so impressed real politicians that he wound up being hired for real political events, and then by the Nixon White House.

Will Rogers was already a beloved national figure, the common man with a lazy lariat and an ice-pick wit, when the Depression sucker-punched the country. In 1932, there were serious ructions in favor of a Rogers candidacy. When 20th Century Fox announced that he'd star in "If I Was President," The Times remarked archly on the "whispers that many people in these United States wouldn't mind seeing Will in some big political office." A Republican businessmen's group in Oregon ardently lobbied the state's Democrats to nominate Rogers. At the convention, Rogers got 22 votes on the second ballot -- almost as many as the governor of Maryland.

The humorist finally squelched the draft-Rogers movement in his newspaper column, without a hint of a smile: "When it was done as a joke it was all right, but when it's done seriously it's pathetic. There is no inducement that would make me foolish enough to ever run for political office."

Colbert is the comedian of this moment, crusading for "truthiness," whatever the facts. Colbert told fans to change the Wikipedia entry for African elephants to reflect Colbert's "truthy" belief that the elephant population had not declined but tripled in six months. They did. A Bush administration political appointee ordered Interior Department scientists to alter facts in reports on imperiled species. FEMA staged a fake news conference to congratulate itself on its performance in the California wildfires. Truthiness in action.

Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris, at East Carolina University in North Carolina, edited "Laughing Matters: Humor and American Politics in the Media Age." They concluded that political humor makes people more politically astute but also more cynical -- and they're studying now whether it makes them less inclined to vote.

"I don't necessarily go to bat saying the average American voter is well informed and all that razzmatazz, because they're not, clearly," said Baumgartner. But they have a certain "low information rationality," and whatever Colbert's numbers now, they know there's a difference between answering a pollster's question and actually voting.

These days, who truly has more influence -- a politician, or someone who plays one on TV? Deep in his darkly comic heart, Colbert knows the answer -- and I'm sure he hopes that we do too.

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