

Omaha could see some short-lived snow this weekend amid 'coldest weather of the season,' Midlands



Husker captain Kade Warner, son of NFL hall of famer, has always been a 'nut' — just ask his mom. Sports

Omaha World-Herald

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2020 • SUNRISE EDITION • REAL. FAIR. ACCURATE.

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Woman tells of her rape in Omaha at age 14 in '78

In new book, she writes of kidnapping after school, horror that followed and her long, difficult recovery

By Erin Davis
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A new book from a former Omaha woman examines the long, painful aftermath of a dysfunctional childhood and a violent crime that would cause her to question her faith, memories and the ability to forgive.

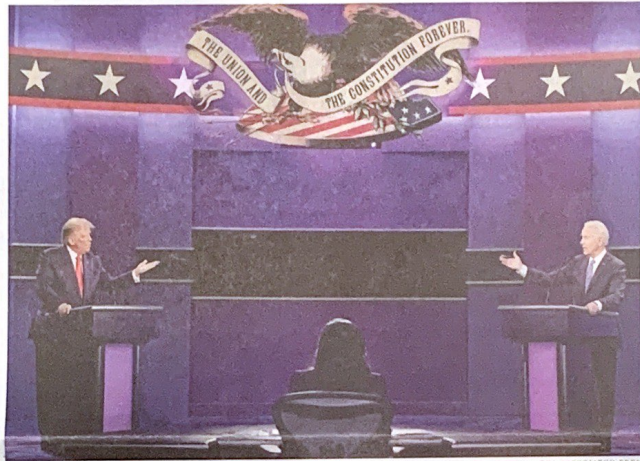
Four decades ago, 14-year-old Debra Harding, then Cackler, survived a kidnapping and rape that stunned Omaha. It was Nov. 22, 1978, the day before Thanksgiving. An ice storm was bearing down on Omaha, and Harding was ill prepared, with no hat or gloves. The jacket she wore had a broken zipper.

But there were more important matters at hand. It was picture day at Lewis and Clark Junior High. The teenager snuck into the school bathroom to touch up her feathered hair before smiling for the camera.

School let out early, and she accompanied a friend to the J.C. Penney at Crossroads Mall, where the friend bought tickets to a Kiss

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CONTRASTS ON PANDEMIC CLEAR IN FINAL DEBATE



President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden at Thursday's debate in Nashville, Tennessee. The moderator was NBC's Kristen Walker. Trump said the COVID-19 crisis is worst in Democratic states. Biden noted that red states are now suffering, but said, "They're all the United States."

'It will go away,' Trump maintains, as Biden warns of 'dark winter'; energy, other issues get substantive airings

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden fought over how to tame the raging coronavirus in Thursday's final 2020 debate, largely shelving the rancor that overshadowed their previous face-off in favor of a more substantive exchange that highlighted their vastly different approaches to the major domestic and foreign challenges facing the nation.

With less than two weeks until the election, Trump sought to portray himself as the same outsider he first pitched to voters four years ago, repeatedly saying he wasn't a politician. Biden argued that Trump was an incompetent leader of a country facing multiple crises and tried to connect what he saw as the president's failures to the everyday lives of Americans. The night in Nashville was cen-

DECISION 2020
U.S. officials say Russian hackers recently targeted state and local networks. Page 4A

tered on a battle over the president's handling of the pandemic, which has killed more than 225,000 Americans and cost millions of jobs. Trump declared that the virus will go away while Biden warned that the nation was heading toward "a dark winter." Polling suggests that it is the campaign's defining issue for voters, and Biden declared, "Anyone who is responsible for that many deaths should not remain as president of the United States of America."

Trump defended his management of the nation's most deadly health crisis in a century, dismissing Biden's warn-

ing that the nation had a dire stretch ahead due to spikes in infections. And he promised that a vaccine would be ready in weeks.

"It will go away," said Trump, sticking to his optimistic assessment of the pandemic. "We're rounding the corner. It's going away."

The president said the worst problems are in states with Democratic governors, a contention that is no longer broadly true as it once was.

Biden vowed that his administration would defer to scientists on battling the pandemic and said that Trump's divisive approach on suffering states hindered the nation's response.

"I don't look at this in the way he does — blue states and red states," Biden said. "They're all the United States. And look at all the states that

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REMOTE LEARNING

Teachers try to discern kids' well-being from a 'tiny square'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Christi Broderer had finally gotten her 10-year-old daughter settled on the hallway floor with a laptop and signed into a video class on Google Meet when the girl's 6-year-old brother leaped over the computer screen "in his birthday suit" to get a juice box.

To Broderer's surprise, a social worker from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families called her later that day; someone had reported an adult male exposing himself during the class. That was followed by a visit from a police detective sent by the school to do an in-person wellness check.

Broderer explained that her son has epilepsy and autism and sometimes takes his clothes off to feel more comfortable, and the inquiry ended there. But the experience left the mother in the city of Haverhill

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CORONAVIRUS CASES

	Infections	Deaths
Nebraska	61,285	587
Iowa	111,845	1,601
U.S.	8,404,524	223,000

*As of 8 p.m. Thursday

2nd District race
Bacon and Eastman unveil ads featuring their endorsements from across the aisle. Midlands

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UNO can expect own leader in '21

Carter says merger with UNMC was never intended; Gold would add duties as NU system's 'No. 2 man'

By Rick Ruggles
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has earned the right to its own leader by "knocking it out of the park" in recent years, the NU system's president said Thursday. NU President Ted Carter used the baseball lingo to describe en-

rollment gains, research grants, private support and rankings that show UNO has the quality and complexity to merit and require a full-time chancellor.

Carter's announcement that he intends to have a chancellor in place by mid-2021 goes a long way toward ending speculation that the NU Medical Center and

UNO might merge. That speculation arose when Dr. Jeffrey Gold, a heart surgeon, took over three years ago as not only the medical center's chancellor but also UNO's.

Carter announced Thursday that he would accelerate by a year the timeline to name a new chancellor for UNO. Carter, who oversees institutions in Omaha, Lincoln and Kearney, already

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REMODELED DINING ROOM

UNO: Carter calls Gold 'brilliant'; no argument from Omaha campus

Continued from Page 1

has hired a search firm for the process and has begun mulling over who should be on the search committee.

Gold will remain chancellor of the medical center, a job he has held for close to seven years. He will have a different second job when the new chancellor is named. Carter said Gold will also serve as the NU system's executive vice president and provost with the retirement of Susan Fritz, who has held that position for several years.

Carter said he envisions the system executive vice presidency under Gold to be less of a day-to-day management role and more of a strategy-setting job.

"He will be my No. 2," said Carter, who became president at the start of this year. Carter called Gold "brilliant," "exceptional" and "energetic." He also applauded Fritz's contributions and said NU "will continue to celebrate her" work before her retirement. Fritz has served in her role since 2012 and will step down on June 30.

She also had a stint as interim president and became the first woman to lead the NU system.

Gold said Thursday that the decision to hire a chancellor for UNO next year was Carter's idea but that he is "125% on board. Maybe you should say 200% on board. My message is that I'm completely on board."

UNO and UNMC have had the chancellor-sharing arrangement for about three years. Originally UNO was expected to run both institutions through June 2022.

NU has hired the firm AGB Search, which was the system's search firm that led to Carter's hiring at the start of this year. Carter hopes to have a new chancellor hired for UNO mid-way through next year.

Gold said that it would be "bittersweet" to step down from UNO's chancellorship but that he is "bumbled and excited" to become executive vice president of the system. He also will be able to focus more closely on planning and raising money for UNMC's proposed \$2.4 billion to \$2.8 billion NEET project, a disaster response center and revolutionary academic medical center.

Elliott Ostler, UNO Faculty Senate president, said Gold "has been fantastic" at UNO. Some initially wondered if former NU President Hank Bounds planned to merge UNMC and UNO with the appointment of Gold as leader of both.

"Within a very short time, we were sure that he (Gold) was looking out for our best interests," Ostler said. UNO lost none of its identity under Gold, Ostler said. "He took us where we were and moved us forward."

Among other things, Carter said UNO made gains through a 4.9% enrollment increase this fall to 15,892, selection of UNO this year as national headquarter for a Department of Homeland Security counterterrorism effort, supported by a \$36.5 million federal grant, consistently high rankings by Military Times as a good place for students with military backgrounds, private money that has fueled major construction at UNO, and effective handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Carter said merging UNO and UNMC was never his intention. If anything, he said, he wants to decentralize institutions so that each has more control over its destiny. Centralizing supply purchases and information technology makes sense for the NU system, he said, but melding campuses does not.

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"I've been kidnapped. Dad. The man needs \$10,000." It came out unexpectedly light, like I was asking for a chocolate bar."

Debora Harding, from her book

Book: 2003 meeting with rapist changed her course, not his

Continued from Page 1

concert. She trudged in the freezing sleet and wind to youth church choir practice at First United Methodist Church, only to be turned away by a note on the door. Practice was canceled because of the weather.

But before she could return to the warmth of her nearby school home near Elmwood Park, Harding's life was interrupted by an act of random terror and violence. She was kidnapped and raped.

"My first thought as he pulled up in front of me blocking my path, was that he had a question; perhaps needed directions, but then I saw the ski mask. And then I met his eyes," Harding writes in her book, "Dancing with the Octopus: A Memoir of a Crime."

The masked stranger was Charles Goodwin, a 17-year-old juvenile delinquent who had been released from the state youth center in Kearney just 10 days prior. That dreary day, Goodwin stole a van but realized that he had only two crumpled bills in his pocket and a near-empty gas tank.

He had driven to Lewis and Clark to surprise his cousin, a cheerleader there, but then remembered a movie he watched in which a banker's daughter was kidnapped for ransom.

He grabbed Harding and forced her to call her father after a pay phone.

"I've been kidnapped. Dad. The man needs \$10,000," Harding recalls in the book. "It came out unexpectedly light, like I was asking for a chocolate bar."

"Where are you?" Dad said, on the edge of getting impatient. "I've been worried — I've been on the phone, calling everyone I could think of."

"No, Dad, I need you to understand I'm standing in a phone booth with a man who has a knife at my throat and ..."

After the call, Goodwin raped her part of a terrifying, hours-long ordeal that included talk of God and threats to kill her.

Goodwin eventually dropped her near the Omaha Stockyards, leaving her alone with her hands tied and a burlap bag over her head as the temperature dropped to 20 degrees.

Realizing that no one was coming to her rescue, Harding scraped the bag against a wall so she could see again. She caught the attention of a woman in a nearby office trailer. The woman brought her inside and called police, who had been searching for her.

"I found out later that the kidnapping had been broadcast on the television news, that 85 percent of children who are abducted by strangers in violent sex crimes are killed within five hours, and that I had created the curve," Harding wrote.

In an interview with The World-Herald just days later, her father lamented that several people had seen the masked teenager with the girl and thought that it looked suspicious. But no one intervened.

In her research, Harding said she learned that every crime is "as unique as a fingerprint."

"It's usually just a series of things that have come together in a chaotic moment and it suddenly combusts into horrific violence," she said. "But if it had been 3 minutes before and I hadn't been walking across the parking lot when he happened to glance up, I would have been fine."

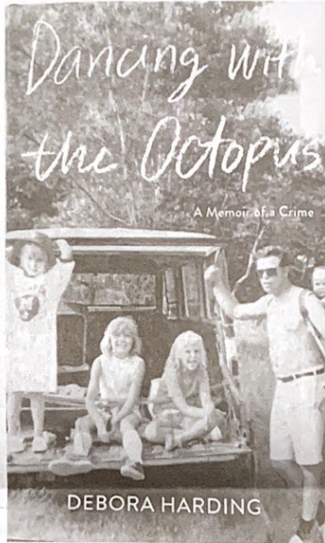
Goodwin was arrested about a week later after a friend tipped off police. He pleaded guilty to kidnapping and sexual assault and was sentenced to 12 to 16 years in prison.

But the process of recovering from the crime — and a childhood that was difficult long before it — was just beginning for Harding. Her mother was mentally ill, unpredictable and abusive, once whipping Harding's sisters with a belt because someone took a sip of her Coke.

Her father was a more loving



Debora Harding, then Cacklor, on Nov. 22, 1978, the day she was abducted and raped in central Omaha. It was also picture day for the 14-year-old at Lewis and Clark Junior High. At right is Harding, who lives in England, today.



Debora Harding's new book, "Dancing with the Octopus: A Memoir of a Crime."

and stable presence but was often absent because of work travel. He turned a blind eye to his wife's abuse.

Neither were equipped to help their daughter process the deep trauma of her attack and assault. The next day, Harding's family proceeded to Thanksgiving dinner with grandparents in Des Moines as if nothing had happened.

"You can choose to hole yourself up in this bedroom and cut yourself off from the world, or you can self-offer from the world, or you can start living," Harding recalls her mother telling her just days later.

She later questioned whether her own memories of the crime were accurate — was it really that bad?

"Dancing with the Octopus" — the title is a kind of family in-joke — is an often wrenching but clear-eyed look at the crime, Harding's life and the hard work of therapy and recovery. The bookworm, the Omaha bookstore, will host a virtual author talk with Harding on Friday at 6 p.m. Visit bookworm-omaha.com/evening-debora-harding for details.

The book has received good reviews and was chosen as an Amazon "Book of the Month" selection in the biography and memoir category in September.

The true crime genre has exploded in popularity again, thanks to podcasts and Netflix documentaries that often focus on serial killers and the grisly details of their crimes. But Harding wanted to tell

her own story.

She approached it as both a memoir and a work of journalism. Events are pieced together from her own memory, police reports, newspaper accounts, witness statements and journals, including attempts to reconstruct what happened from Goodwin's point of view.

"There's almost, like, a taboo against the victim telling the story, taking our power in that way, becoming the narrator," she said in an interview this week.

She didn't want to shy away from showing what she calls "the long tail of trauma," which included symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Everybody thinks so often that after the crime is done and hopefully justice is achieved, which is actually quite rare — everybody kind of sees a window, (thinks) you'll be beyond it in a few years, and it doesn't work like that," she said.

The book also touches on questions of justice and forgiveness, in relation to Goodwin's crimes and Harding's difficult family dynamics.

As an adult, Harding participated in a process called restorative justice that often has perpetrators and victims of crime sit down to discuss the effects of a crime and what justice or reconciliation might look like.

In 2003, she testified before the Nebraska Parole Board as if considered Goodwin's release from

prison for a different crime. After serving nine years for Harding's kidnapping, he had ended up behind bars again after robbing a Lincoln bank at gunpoint.

Before the hearing, in a spur-of-the-moment decision, she sat down with Goodwin, whose name she didn't even know for years. She didn't need to testify when he was convicted.

"If I am honest, I was almost disappointed to find him looking so cheerful and friendly, so clean, so averagely midwestern, so well-normal," Harding writes of seeing her abductor again after 23 years. He had earned a psychology degree and largely been considered a model prisoner.

Harding said going through the restorative justice process "turned the courtroom of my life."

"You can't underestimate the kind of existential questions that are left after a violent crime," she said. "They have real meaning, and also being able to actually understand the — human action behind that kind of violence is really important when you've been obliterated, and totally objectified and your identity's been stripped from you. Actually coming to understand how that came to be is incredibly helpful."

When she spoke with Goodwin, Harding tried to impress on him just how long victims feel the reverberations of violent crimes. In the book, she wrote that he conveyed that he knew that it wasn't enough to merely apologize.

But there was no swelling moment of catharsis, no neat and easy resolution. Goodwin told her that he had changed, but he was convicted again several years later for a sex extortion scheme.

Now 56 and living in England, Harding said she was spurred to write the book for reasons both personal and political.

She had emerged from a period of deep grief after her 14-year-old son Kaidan died suddenly in a bicycling accident.

And she was angered by the election of President Donald Trump and the 2018 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who was accused of sexual assault by Christine Blasey Ford when the two were teenagers, which he denied.

"Her memory was being interrogated by the nation," Harding said. "On a smaller scale, she could relate."

The book's release inadvertently coincided with the coronavirus pandemic, when many people are experiencing their own mental struggles and trying to figure out how to cope with uncertainty and a loss of control.

Harding's experiences taught her that "you can't underestimate the power of community, especially in children's lives," she said.

Even when her home life was turbulent, she was surrounded by caring neighbors, teachers and a church community.

"If you're struggling with mental health issues, everything is manageable," she said. "It's basically trying different things, learning new strategies and making sure that you're reaching out for support."

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OCTOBER 23, 2020 VOL. 156, EDITION 16

Omaha World-Herald
Omaha Daily Herald founded 1865
Omaha Daily World founded 1885
World-Herald 1889 (USPS 438-260)
Published daily except Sunday at the Omaha World-Herald Building, 1314 Douglas St., Omaha, NE 68102. Tel: 402-444-1000.
Copyright © 2020, Omaha World-Herald.
Periodical postage paid at Omaha, Neb., and at other mailing offices. Basic weekly home delivery subscription rate \$13.30. Single copy rates are \$2.00 daily and \$4.00 Sunday. Printer's marks and subscription rates in surrounding counties are \$41.88 (Sat.), \$10.16 (Sunday only), \$30.68 (Sat. and Sunday). For other rates, please contact us at 1-800-234-6942 or CustomerService@omh.com.
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Both the weekend and Sunday-only home delivery subscriptions include delivery on the following 2020 holidays: New Year's Day, Jan. 1; Independence Day, July 3; Thanksgiving Nov. 26 & 27; and Christmas, Dec. 25.
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