



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

LYNNE SULLIVAN

F36756

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: May 21, 2013

DATE OF DECISION: September 26, 2013

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Cesar Archilla, Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Shelia Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall

DECISION OF THE BOARD: After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, criminal record, institutional record, the inmate's testimony at the hearing, and the views of the public as expressed at the hearing or in writing, we conclude by unanimous vote that the inmate is a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is granted to a long-term residential program after six months in lower security at the Department of Correction. The remaining period of incarceration must be completed without disciplinary incident and in compliance with the Department of Correction's expectations for programs, activities, and employment.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On May 21, 2013, Lynne Sullivan appeared before the Massachusetts Parole Board for an initial hearing on the life sentence she is currently serving at MCI-Framingham. Ms. Sullivan received this sentence in Plymouth Superior Court on August 9, 1999, after a jury found her guilty of second-degree murder in the stabbing death of 38-year-old Chester Hall. The Massachusetts Appeals Court affirmed Ms. Sullivan's conviction in an unpublished opinion. *Commonwealth v. Sullivan*, 53 Mass. App. Ct. 1107 (2001), *rev. denied*, 435 Mass. 1110 (2002).

Lynne Sullivan, Chester Hall, and their friend, Timothy Vilks, were together in Ms. Sullivan's apartment in Brockton for several hours on the evening of June 18, 1998, drinking alcohol and smoking cocaine. Ms. Sullivan was 32 years old. During the evening, Ms. Sullivan

and Mr. Hall, who lived together and had known each other for 21 years, had a noisy argument concerning the directions to a sand pit where Mr. Hall had previously saved Ms. Sullivan's life. As time went on, the argument escalated in its intensity and became louder, but was not physical.

A short time later, Mr. Hall said that he was going to leave and went to get his keys and cigarettes. It was then that Ms. Sullivan armed herself with the knife that was used to cut the cocaine and threatened to stab Mr. Hall. After Mr. Vilk intervened in the situation, Ms. Sullivan lowered the knife and Mr. Hall walked away from Ms. Sullivan. Within seconds, however, Mr. Hall returned to where Ms. Sullivan was standing and, while pointing at his chest, stated, "If you're going to stab me, stab me right here." Ms. Sullivan then stabbed Mr. Hall in the chest.

Prior to Mr. Vilk calling 911, Ms. Sullivan asked Mr. Vilk to retrieve her first aid and sewing kits because she believed that she could sew up the victim's wound. She also requested that Mr. Vilk wash off the knife and inform the police that he had just arrived and did not know who had stabbed Mr. Hall. Mr. Vilk washed off the knife in the sink.

As he was being taken away by emergency personnel, Mr. Hall told a Brockton police officer that Ms. Sullivan was the person who had stabbed him. Mr. Hall later died from injuries resulting from a single stab wound to the chest that had pierced his heart.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MAY 21, 2013

Represented by Attorney Catherine Hinton at the hearing, Lynne Sullivan apologized for the murder of Chester Hall and said that "going to prison saved my life." She provided information about her background and the events related to the murder. Ms. Sullivan grew up in Massachusetts as one of two children. She described her childhood as "not very happy." Both of her parents were alcoholics and she had her first alcoholic drink at age five. She reported that, "I carried a knife since I was a kid; I grew up in some bad neighborhoods and I saw a lot of violence."

She dropped out of school in the tenth grade after being hospitalized for a month after taking valium. After leaving the hospital, she resided with a family friend in Tennessee and Florida where she continued to abuse drugs and alcohol, but maintained employment while attending nursing school. At age 17, she returned to Massachusetts, continued to abuse alcohol and cocaine, but worked steadily until she injured her wrist. After collecting workman's compensation, she received public assistance, noting "I allowed my drugs and alcohol use to make me be lazy." Concerning her alcoholism, Ms. Sullivan explained, "I was on a suicide mission with alcohol, I hated my life; I drank a half gallon or a gallon of vodka every day." She reported that, after paying her bills, she spent the rest of her money on drugs and alcohol. This lifestyle resulted in her daughter being placed in the custody of the Department of Social Services and eventually adopted. Ms. Sullivan told the Board that her longest period of sobriety before her incarceration was during her pregnancy.

Prior to being charged with the murder of Mr. Hall, Ms. Sullivan's criminal history was minimal. In 1986, she was convicted of operating under the influence of alcohol and operating to endanger and received one year of probation, which she successfully completed.

She was involved in several violent and unhealthy relationships. She said, "I was both victim and batterer; I would fight back." She described her relationship with the victim: "Chet put up with a lot from me, my drinking and verbal abuse; it was not physical very often; we never punched or threw blows; this was the first time I threatened him with a knife; it was a knife from his utility belt."

According to Ms. Sullivan, on the day that she stabbed Mr. Hall, she began drinking vodka with her coffee at 6:00 a.m. and then proceeded to smoke cocaine and drink beer and vodka throughout the day and into the evening. She acknowledged stabbing Mr. Hall, stating, "I killed my friend in a senseless drunken argument." She further admitted that she originally lied to the police and "had a hard time owning what I had done." She provided some additional details about the crime: "we were arguing over directions; we were extremely close to each other screaming back and forth; our hands were up and we were swatting each other's hands; the knife was on the table; I think it was used to cut up the cocaine; I took a couple of pokes in the air with the knife; he stepped back; Tim said 'put it down,' and I put my hand with the knife to my side; Chet came up to me and said, 'If you're going to stab me, stab me here;' I never felt threatened by Mr. Hall; I don't believe he would ever really hurt me; I was a stupid woman; I took away his life because of all the terrible choices I had made in my life."

Ms. Sullivan currently works as a cleaner in the Health Services Unit at MCI-Framingham where she receives positive reviews. She has received nine disciplinary reports during her incarceration, with the last being in 2005.

Ms. Sullivan has devoted considerable time since 2002 to advancing her education. She has completed the Law Clerk Program, obtained her GED, and has taken various computer courses. Most notably, she earned her Bachelor of Science degree, with honors, in Sociology from Boston University in 2009.

For rehabilitative programs, she has completed Anger Management, Reentry Workshop, the Women's Recovery Academy, Nonviolent Communication Skills, Healthy Relationships, Domestic Violence Reduction, Problem Solving Workshop, Negotiating Workshop, Setting Goals Workshop, and Moving Away from Violence Seminar. Ms. Sullivan currently participates in the Masters Class, attends 12 Step Recovery Program, Peer Support Group, and AA. In 2007, Ms. Sullivan submitted a proposal for a program called, "Listen, Learn, Change" to help inmates address peers on the common pitfalls of the prison environment. She began delivering the program in 2008 and it has become a regular program within the institution.

Ms. Sullivan's nieces Andrea Sullivan and Tiffany Sullivan, as well as her sister-in-law Doreen Sullivan and a friend, Joanne Hemenway, all testified in support of Ms. Sullivan's parole. They described Ms. Sullivan as a caring and supportive person who has worked hard to maintain a clean and sober life.

The victim's sister, Maureen Duncan, testified in opposition of parole, advising the Board of the impact of the loss of their brother on the family, particularly his two children, one of which attended the hearing. Ms. Duncan also read a letter from the victim's mother. Plymouth County Assistant District Attorney Matthew Libby spoke in opposition to parole.

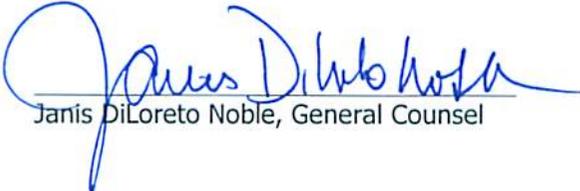
III. DECISION

Lynne Sullivan has served 15 years of her life sentence for the stabbing death of Chester Hall. She has used that time productively by maintaining employment and participating in important rehabilitative and educational programs, including obtaining a college degree and starting a program to help inmates succeed within the institution. Moreover, she has shown overall good conduct, receiving nine disciplinary reports, with the last being eight years ago for using obscene language. Finally, she has worked persistently to address the substance abuse issues that led to her chaotic lifestyle and the poor decision making on the night that she stabbed Mr. Hall. Ms. Sullivan has shown no tendency to repeat the violent act that caused Mr. Hall's death. The four goals of sentencing – punishment, deterrence, public protection, and rehabilitation – have been accomplished through 15 years of incarceration with substantial rehabilitative progress.

The standard applied in assessing candidates for parole is set out in 120 C.M.R. 300.04, which provides that "Parole Board Members shall only grant a parole permit if they are of the opinion that there is a reasonable probability that, if such offender is released, the offender will live and remain at liberty without violating the law and that release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." Applying that appropriately high standard, we find that Lynne Sullivan merits parole due to her successful rehabilitation.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Parole to long-term residential program after six months in lower security at the Department of Correction. The remaining period of incarceration must be completed without disciplinary incident and in compliance with the Department of Correction's expectations for programs, activities, and employment. Once paroled, the following conditions will apply: no drug use; no alcohol use; attend AA meetings at least three times per week; mental health counseling for adjustment and mental health issues; and no contact with victim's family.

I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above referenced hearing. Pursuant to G.L. c. 127, § 130, I further certify that all voting Board Members have reviewed the applicant's entire criminal record. This signature does not indicate authorship of the decision.


Janis DiLoreto Noble, General Counsel


Date