



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Executive Office of Public Safety*

**PAROLE BOARD**

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**RECORD OF DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF  
BRETT CHRISTIANSON**

**W63314**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Initial Hearing  
**DATE OF HEARING:** January 4, 2011  
**DATE OF DECISION:** August 25, 2011

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Cesar Archilla, John Bocon, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Ina Howard-Hogan, Roger Michel, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** Denied with a review in 5 years. The decision is unanimous.

Brett Christianson murdered Nordella Newson, age 85, on March 27, 1996. Ms. Newson was murdered in her apartment at 31 Burbank Street in the South End of Boston. Mr. Christianson lived previously in the apartment building, and had a casual acquaintance with Nordella Newson. He was 37 years old, and was drinking heavily and using drugs. Mr. Christianson, in an intoxicated state, returned to the Burbank Street apartment building for the purpose of stealing money from the elderly victim. Ms. Newsom refused to let Mr. Christianson into her apartment; he forced his way in. Ms. Newsom refused to give money to Mr. Christianson, and he killed her by beating, stabbing, and strangling her. Mr. Christianson looked through the apartment for money, and then set the apartment on fire before he left.

The victim's injuries were extensive. She was stabbed repeatedly in the chest; she had blunt force head trauma with a hematoma in the area of the right front skull; she had petechiae in both eyes as a result of strangulation. Her body had post-mortem burns and soot from the fire.

In his opening statement, Mr. Christianson offered an apology, omitted certain facts in describing his actions, and claimed that he set the fire in order to draw attention to the apartment so that the victim would receive help. In questioning Mr. Christianson, Board members focused on notable weaknesses in Mr. Christianson's testimony. It was noted that his apology was delivered in a monotone, which led a Board member to question whether the inmate "actually felt something about taking this woman's life." Board members took note of program involvement that is "not extensive or extraordinary." Mr. Christianson stated that in programming he has learned that his triggers for anger or criminal conduct "could be anything; music or smells are triggers; a song can set me off."

With respect to other criminal conduct, Mr. Christianson acknowledged that he was convicted of drug trafficking in Maine, and that he escaped from custody in Maine during that sentence. He claimed that he defaulted on cases in the Roxbury District Court because "no one gave me a next date" to appear in court. A Board member specifically challenged the inmate on that excuse, and noted that Mr. Christianson was making an untrue statement to the Board. A Board member described the reason stated for setting the fire as "preposterous," and described areas where Mr. Christianson minimized the extent of his actions in strangling and stabbing the victim. Under questioning about minimizing his conduct, Mr. Christianson finally admitted, apparently for the first time, that he had on many prior occasions taken money from the victim. This would explain why Ms. Newsom refused to open her apartment door when she saw Mr. Christianson in the hallway. It also clarified the motive; Mr. Christianson has at times in the past obscured the fact that he went to the apartment building with the specific plan to rob the victim. Mr. Christianson, after questioning, provided more information on the sequence of events: he hit the victim first, she put up a "whale of fight," she kept screaming so he strangled her and then stabbed her in order "to keep her quiet." He also finally admitted that he did not light the fire in order to get attention and help for the victim.

There were no supporters of parole at the hearing.

Mr. Christianson's request for parole is denied. He continues a pattern of deceit and minimization which signals his lack of rehabilitation. The Board anticipates that, due to Mr. Christianson's lack of rehabilitation, his parole release would result in a substance abuse relapse and further criminal activity. He would be likely to re-offend and his release is not compatible with the welfare of society. He is entitled to a review in five years.

*I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above referenced hearing.*

Josh Wall

Josh Wall, Chairman

August 25, 2011

Date