



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

**PAROLE BOARD**

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*Chairman*

**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**ROBERT SORENSON**

**W46536**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** **Review Hearing after Revocation**

**DATE OF HEARING:** **April 3, 2012**

**DATE OF DECISION:** **June 5, 2012**

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

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** Re-Paroled to approved home plan after one year in lower security in the custody of the Department of Correction. Mr. Sorenson must engage in a mental health evaluation to address adjustment issues within relationships and the community. He will be required to follow all recommendations stemming from the evaluation as well as all additional conditions of parole. The decision is by a vote of 4 to 3.

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

Robert Sorenson pled guilty to second degree murder on May 23, 1989 in Norfolk Superior Court, and was sentenced to life in prison. The victim was Mr. Sorenson's then girlfriend, Patricia Wolffe Bonito, who was 30 years old and the mother of two young children.

On Friday, June 17, 1988, at approximately 10:40 p.m., Mr. Sorenson, who was residing with Ms. Bonito and her children for the past two weeks, left for his overnight shift at a local bakery. Sometime during his shift he left to purchase a gram of crack cocaine from a seller in the Brockton area. Mr. Sorenson was addicted to drugs during that period of his life, and was not in treatment. He immediately began to smoke crack cocaine after he purchased it, and returned to work. He was unable to focus at work and at approximately 2:00 a.m. he called Ms. Bonito to tell her he was not feeling well and that he was returning to her home.

Upon his arrival, the children were asleep and Ms. Bonito was attempting to sleep but due to Mr. Sorenson's apparent impaired state of mind, they began arguing about his abuse of substances. Mr. Sorenson ultimately responded to the argument by going downstairs and smoking more crack cocaine. He then returned to the bedroom with a large kitchen knife and stabbed Ms. Bonito in the abdomen. Mr. Sorenson reported he was "wired out of my brain" at the time of the stabbing, and at one point thought Ms. Bonito was a ghost, because she responded "why" when he thought she was already dead. Mr. Sorenson continued to smoke cocaine after he stabbed her, then he fled the house.

At approximately 3:45 a.m., Mr. Sorenson called the Canton Police Department from a nearby gas station pay phone, and stated "I just murdered someone." When asked who, he replied, "Patty Wolfe. Please just get there before the kids get up and find her. I don't want them to find her like that." He identified himself at that time. Mr. Sorenson also stated that he had been smoking crack cocaine and that he tried to kill himself but he "didn't have the balls" to do it. He was arrested minutes later without incident. According to the Medical Examiner's report, Ms. Bonito died from a single stab wound.

In conjunction with his desire to continue his drug use over Ms. Bonito's objection, Mr. Sorenson was motivated that evening to kill Ms. Bonito due to his own control issues that were precipitated by an unfounded fear that she was interested in other men. There was a pattern of behavior exhibited by Mr. Sorenson during their relationship that he wanted to control Ms. Bonito and he wanted to maintain his own substance induced lifestyle. His abuse, in particular of crack cocaine, only fueled his distorted views and need to control Ms. Bonito by any means.

After his initial guilty plea, Mr. Sorenson filed three separate motions for a new trial (7/12/1990, 3/31/1992, 8/1/1996) arguing first that there was no factual basis for a second degree murder, second that his plea was not made voluntarily, and third that his sworn affidavit was made under duress while he was being examined for criminal responsibility. All motions and appeals were denied.

Mr. Sorenson received a positive parole vote from his second degree life sentence on 5/13/2009. This was his third appearance before the board. The board noted Mr. Sorenson's full acceptance of his crime, remorse for not only taking a life but also for the affects on her children and family, and his positive participation in institutional programming. The board also noted Mr. Sorenson's positive institutional behavior, commitment to rehabilitation, education and his comprehensive parole plan as additional supporting factors for his release. He was released from custody on 11/24/10 after completing the requirement of six months in lower security.

Mr. Sorenson was released to the home of his wife, Betty Sorenson, whom he married six years before, while he was incarcerated. Mr. Sorenson also had conditions of participating in and following recommendations of a mental health evaluation, continued substance abuse treatment, and additional standard conditions of parole.

## **II. PAROLE HISTORY**

Mr. Sorenson was released on 11/24/10 to his wife's home and began working in her antiques store located on her property. He obtained Mass Health and complied with his mental health evaluation and engaged in bi-weekly therapy. Mr. Sorenson also engaged in Alcoholics Anonymous, joined a home group and gained a sponsor. In terms of his work experience, he reportedly expanded the antique business into dealing art. His business, Spotlight Artistry, specialized in custom airbrushing and graphics. As a result of this expansion, Mr. Sorenson and

his wife took out a substantial loan, thus accruing a significant amount of debt. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sorenson stated however, that both businesses were successful and that such loans were a necessary investment.

Mr. Sorenson did not require any graduated sanctions while on parole. He attended more than the required AA meetings and received positive evaluations from his therapist, Heidi Stickland. By all accounts, Mr. Sorenson was doing well on parole, as indicated by his parole officer's status reports.

On 8/31/2011, Mr. Sorenson's parole officer observed him with an unidentified female on the back of his motorcycle. He was observed kissing this woman in a romantic fashion. Due to the nature of his offense, his parole officer investigated the incident. Mr. Sorenson was asked to provide a detailed account of his activities on 8/31/2011, to which he initially lied about the above encounter. When confronted with the parole officer's observations, Mr. Sorenson admitted that he had recently met the individual at an AA meeting and that although he was not having an affair, he did have several recent similar encounters with her. In light of the nature of his crime, and his initial false statements, which were cause for further investigation, his parole officer informed Mr. Sorenson that he would be taken into custody pending a further investigation. Mr. Sorenson returned to custody on 9/6/2011 without incident, and was reportedly very upset about having committed a "moral misstep" that would hurt his wife. He insisted that he loved his wife very much and explained that he would take all necessary steps to rectify his behavior.

Parole notified Ms. Sorenson and interviewed the individual in question, who was found to have a criminal record, which is in further violation of parole. This individual also provided the same testimony regarding the nature of their relationship and stated she was informed by him of his governing offense. Ms. Sorenson reported that she was willing to address the issues with Mr. Sorenson and insisted that she wanted him to return home.

As a result of his above conduct, Mr. Sorenson was found in violation of the following:  
Rule 1. Irresponsible Conduct by initially lying to his parole officer about his behavior.  
Rule 4. Association with a person known to be in violation of the law.

### **III. INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT**

Mr. Sorenson had previously completed numerous educational courses through Boston University, and occupational and rehabilitative programs while incarcerated. His programming was directly related to his criminal behavior, including but not exclusive to violence prevention programs and substance abuse programs. Mr. Sorenson also gained employment skills as a welder, participated in the NEADS training program (service dogs) and received awards for his outstanding achievement in the visual arts program and murals that he painted throughout the institution. Since his return to custody, Mr. Sorenson has engaged in all available programming, and he has had no disciplinary reports.

### **IV. DECISION**

Mr. Sorenson received a positive parole vote on 5/13/2009 with the condition of successful completion of six months in lower security. He completed all requirements and was released to his wife's home on 11/24/2010 where he immediately began working for her antiques business and expanded the business with selling his art work. He also immediately engaged in counseling and Alcoholics Anonymous. Mr. Sorenson found a sponsor and a home group who remained supportive throughout this incarceration. Based on his parole officer's

progress notes and the testimony of wife, two members of his Alcoholics Anonymous group (including his sponsor), his sister and his therapist, Heidi Strickland, Mr. Sorenson was adjusting well and making a positive contribution to society. He had many supporters attend his hearing, provide written testimony, and give oral testimony. All such individuals attested that Mr. Sorenson was committed to his sobriety and his employment, and that he had established many mutual positive relationships. Members of the Board interviewed his wife who testified that Mr. Sorenson, despite his transgression, was honest, caring, hard working and committed to not only their relationship but to the community at large. Other supporters also provided consistent witness accounts and experiences of Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Sorenson admits to having multiple encounters with a female member of his Alcoholics Anonymous group, which included flirtatious behavior and kissing. He admits to enjoying the attention from a young female after so many years of incarceration, and provided his own insights into the precipitants that led to such behavior and led to his attempts to hide the relationship from his wife and his parole officer. He presents as extremely remorseful for this "moral misstep", especially in relation to affects on his wife. There is no indication that Mr. Sorenson knew that this individual had a criminal record; however, he agrees that his behavior was in violation of his parole by virtue of irresponsible conduct. Mr. Sorenson otherwise was in compliance with his parole. He did not have any positive toxic screens or missed appointments; he did not violate the law or any additional conditions of his parole.

Mr. Sorenson has been in custody since 9/6/2011, after a minor parole violation. His institutional behavior has been without incident, and he continues to have a significant emotional and therapeutic support system to assist him with re-integration into the community. His wife has continued to maintain their home and businesses and has also agreed to participate in marriage counseling with Mr. Sorenson to address the dynamics that led to his indiscretion and that exist as a result of his indiscretion. Ms. Strickland testified that she would agree to continue to work with Mr. Sorenson both on an individual basis and as a marriage counselor.

After careful consideration of all the factors involved in making a parole decision, The Parole Board concluded that Mr. Sorenson shall be granted parole because he has demonstrated that he is not likely to re-offend and his release is compatible with the welfare of the community.

Mr. Sorenson will be required to continue his positive rehabilitation by transitioning through the correctional system to lower security. Prior to release, he will have completed one year in lower security to further enhance his re-entry back into society.

**Dissent:** Board members Michel, Dupre and Soto-Abe voted to deny Mr. Sorenson's parole, with a review in 2 ½ years, citing that Mr. Sorenson is in need of further rehabilitation under the supervision of the Department of Correction. In light of the underlying offense, his violation and concerns with his exploitation of females, such rehabilitation should focus on domestic relations.

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS:** Release to approved home plan after one year in lower security at the Department of Correction; no drug use; no alcohol use; AA or NA at least three times per week with sponsor; mental health evaluation with requirement to enter counseling as recommended from the evaluation including counseling addressing relationship issues; 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.*

  
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Timothy V. Dooling, General Counsel

6-5-12  
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Date