



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

STEVEN WOODWORTH
W52204

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **May 5, 2015**

DATE OF DECISION: **July 29, 2015**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Lee Gartenberg, Ina Howard-Hogan, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe.

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 written submissions to the Board, we conclude by unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review in three years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On March 19, 1992, in Bristol Superior Court, Steven Woodworth pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of Julie Harlow and was sentenced to life in prison.

On March 21, 1991, Steven Woodworth, age 26, murdered his 22-year-old girlfriend, Julie Harlow, by shooting her multiple times. Earlier in the day, Ms. Harlow had informed Woodworth that she was ending their relationship. Unwilling to accept the end of the relationship, Woodworth convinced Ms. Harlow to drive with him in his truck to discuss matters. Woodworth picked up Ms. Harlow at her home in Whitman around 9 pm and then drove around discussing their relationship. Woodworth could not convince Ms. Harlow to change her mind about ending their relationship so, as they were seated in the cab of his truck, he shot her numerous times using a .22 caliber pistol. After shooting Ms. Harlow, he drove around southeastern Massachusetts for hours with her body still next to him in the truck. He ended up

at his parent's house in Easton around 5:30 am, where he parked his truck in the driveway. He then drank some paint thinner and shot himself once in the chest, attempting to take his own life. Woodworth's father heard the gunshot and came outside to investigate. Upon seeing his son and the victim in the truck, he called the police. Ms. Harlow was pronounced dead at the scene and Woodworth was taken to a nearby hospital, where he recovered from his injuries.

Woodworth had no criminal history prior to the murder of Julie Harlow.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MAY 5, 2015

On May 5, 2015, Steven Woodworth, aged 50, appeared before the Massachusetts Parole Board for his third hearing, after being denied parole at his hearings in 2006 and 2011. Woodworth has served 24 years of his life sentence.

Woodworth represented himself at the hearing. He opened and closed the hearing with an apology and a statement of remorse. Throughout the hearing, he admitted that he still has issues and needs to target his anger and controlling behavior. He continued to describe the senselessness of his actions on the night he killed Ms. Harlow. He acknowledged his issues of abandonment, which led to low self-esteem, poor communication skills, and anger. The combination of these feelings resulted in his extremely controlling and manipulative behavior. Woodworth acknowledged that his treatment of the victim was not love, but a form of domestic violence.

Woodworth described the issues he addressed in rehabilitative programs. He said, "I had issues with low self-esteem, poor communication skills, exhibiting controlling behavior, excessive jealousy, and others." He said he explains to his peers that his crime was one of domestic violence, which manifested itself in the form of abusive behavior through anger and control. He described his relationships with the victim and prior girlfriends as being abusive and controlling. When asked to describe specific behaviors of control and manipulation involving Ms. Harlow, Woodworth stated, "I would always have to be with her or, if not, I always wanted to know where she was and who she was with; I would manipulate the time she spent with her friends; I was possessive and obsessive."

In his description of the crime, Woodworth said the victim had tried to break up with him before that night, but he manipulated her into staying with him by saying that he needed her help with depression. On the night of the murder, the victim told him over the phone that she could not stay with him anymore, but he insisted on seeing her one last time. He packed his gun in the truck and went to pick her up at her house. He picked her up at around 9:00 pm and drove to a quiet area behind a building not far from the victim's house. He said they argued about breaking up and said, "If I can't have you, nobody will." He then shot her to death. He drove around for hours with her body in the truck and said, "It was hard to believe what happened. I was trying to think of how to make things better, how to get out of it."

Woodworth talked about his upbringing and discussed how, at age eight or nine, his parents sat him down and told him that he was adopted. He admitted that he did not handle the news well and began to distance himself from others. He said, "I felt like the black sheep of the family and never wanted to talk to anyone about it. I felt abandoned and great resentment toward my birth mother." He said that he felt like he was treated differently than

his siblings and that his parents were not the nurturing type. He felt "unwanted and cast aside." Woodworth said his feelings of abandonment were reinforced when his 12-year-old older sister died of cystic fibrosis and then his other sister graduated high school, married, and moved away. His feelings of abandonment and rejection led to anger and a desire to control everything. He said that he began to abuse women right after high school. In each relationship prior to the one with the victim, he exhibited signs of domestic violence through his controlling and manipulative behavior. He became overly sensitive, extremely jealous, and more obsessive. He denied any physical violence against his prior girlfriends and there does not appear to be anything in the record to contradict his denial. However, he does admit to being emotionally abusive. He said that he lacked respect for women and did not give much thought to what they said or how they felt. Woodworth partly attributed his poor attitude towards women to his father. He said that his father had little respect for women and believed that "real men don't show emotions and they don't talk about feelings. I was taught that if a man showed his feelings, he was weak."

Woodworth told the Board that he was in complete denial for the first 15 years of his incarceration. It was not until 2006 (when he started to participate in rehabilitative programming) that he began to come to terms with his culpability. He said that the "tipping point" of measurable change in his thinking and attitude came in 2010 and 2011. He then began to understand that he could only control his own actions and his own behaviors. He described the strides that he has made in rehabilitation, but stated, "Rehab never ends. I know I still have issues, but it is an ongoing process." Although there are no specific domestic violence programs available in prison, Woodworth completed MensWork, many phases of Alternatives to Violence, and Family Violence Reduction. He has also gained better insight into the causation of his criminal behavior on the night of the murder. He was in denial for years and tried to blame the killing on depression and his (depression) medication. At this hearing, he admitted that the medication had nothing to do with the murder and that he was "just in denial about it."

Three family members spoke in support of Woodworth's parole request. A sister confirmed the dramatic effect that the death of the older sister had on him. The other supporters corroborated the description of Woodworth's father as having little respect for women and his sentiments that men were weak if they showed emotion.

Four of Julie Harlow's family members spoke in strong opposition to Woodworth's request for parole. Bristol County Assistant District Attorney Courtney Cahill told the Board that Woodworth already got his break when he was allowed to plead guilty to second degree murder, as the facts supported a first degree murder conviction based on extreme cruelty and atrocity.

In his closing statement (and after hearing from the victim's family), Woodworth said, "The severity of this crime hit a new high today. I put her through hell that night and she didn't deserve it. The family didn't deserve it." Finally, he spoke of his work in the Companion Program at MCI-Shirley and said that he works beside women all the time. He said that he has changed and described his disrespect for women long ago and the new respect he has for women now. "I know I need more work, but I do not think poorly of women, the way I used to."

III. DECISION

Steven Woodworth emotionally abused the women he dated. His manipulative and controlling behavior reached a pinnacle in March 1991, when he brutally shot and killed his girlfriend, Julie Harlow. He admitted that the murder was "premeditated and cold." Despite pleading guilty to the crime, Woodworth remained in denial for 15 years before he began to accept any responsibility. By his own admission, he did not make any significant change in his thinking until 2010-2011. He also admits that he still has issues to deal with. He stated that his target areas are anger and control and that there is still more work to be done.

Through the last five years of his incarceration, Woodworth has made positive strides in his rehabilitation. He has gained insight into the causative factors of his crime and continues to participate in programs. He is committed to self-improvement and motivated to help others in the Companion Program as a way to learn about himself. However, additional time is needed to ensure a more complete rehabilitation.

The standard we apply 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 here, it is the unanimous opinion of the Board that Steven Woodworth does not merit parole at this time because he is not rehabilitated. The review will be in three years, during which time Woodworth should continue on his positive rehabilitative path that includes self-improvement and positive adjustment.

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.


Michael J. Callahan, General Counsel

July 29, 2015
Date