

## **LIFE WITHOUT**

Dominic Cinelli will be to paroles what Willie Horton was to furloughs in Massachusetts.

The Parole Board has no fan in me but to be fair, no one, including them has the gift of foresight. Who can predict what any man or woman might do from day to day with any modicum of accuracy? They can go by statistics that show lifers have the highest percentage of success on parole and are therefore good candidates. They cannot however state unequivocally that a person will not re-offend in some fashion or another. Dominic Cinelli had no intention of killing anyone that night in Woburn. He was a career thief. That is why he was doing 3 life sentences. Up until that fateful night Dominic had never killed anyone.

Society in general has a negative opinion of prisoners. For the most part we are all judged by the worst of the worst and not on the merits of our own cases or achievements while in the system. When they talk about prisoners at all it is as though a new full word has been added to the American lexicon. The word I hear abused the most is "murderers/rapists". No matter what crime you may have been officially convicted of, this is how you are seen and judged. How any man acts in bad fashion is how we will all act if given a parole. If Dominic killed, so would we all. There are many men and women out there who did 2<sup>nd</sup> degree life sentences and got paroled. They live sterling lives and are role models for much of their communities. Some are ordained ministers while others are drug counselors and motivational speakers.

At this writing there is a moratorium on paroles. Anyone convicted of a crime of violence whether it is second degree or number

sentences has about a zero percent chance of getting any kind of parole. Anyone who thinks differently because they happen to be “**program compliant**” or that they work like a sled dog for the man, are all seriously delusional.

Life means life. The only difference between the first and second degree is one word; Eligible. While currently the law states that those doing second degree need to be seen by a parole board, it does not dictate that this parole board must indeed give a parole. It only means you are eligible to speak your piece and show that you are a different person now than you were at the time of your conviction.

Second Degree means potentially that you will die in prison. I have often wondered over my many years of imprisonment if being free then was as important as being true to yourself in any given moment. My answer was always yes. I know people outside the walls and razor wire fences that are more in prison than I have ever been. Prison then becomes a state of being. I am not by any means suggesting a defeatist position or attitude. I merely state that so long as one is behind the walls for life that he or she makes the prison a place of starting. That is, a place whereby one can be in tune with what is most important. Self-respect and moral standards of self-excellence. For those who have no God and believe in nothing spiritual, take time to believe in yourself. Do not allow the politics of the day to alter the way you go through this life.

So, what do we do now? If there is no end but death in a cage, how should we act? Should we shine the man's floor and make him look good at inspections? Should we slave's continue to pick the cotton for less and less bad food per day? If we can not do anything about the present parole moratorium then we should give serious consideration to how we plan on spending what remains of our years in here.

Someone suggested that a new parole board might be better for us. Huh? A new parole board will not make the same “mistakes” as this one. They will be even more stingy with paroles for anyone, least of all lifers.

Years ago there was hope for us. Then, politicians discovered what easy game we were in advancing their careers. They came up with cute metaphors like; “Three strikes and you’re out”! I am still waiting for some to say; “First and Ten” Once, we had programs that meant something like educational opportunities. We had goals to strive for. If you did good you were rewarded. If you were bad then you would be punished. We knew the rules. Today you obey the rules and they change the game in the middle of it all. The term of “political football” still applies to us. When the legislature meets and someone files a bill stating that “**LIFE MEANS LIFE**” there will be no one standing up to commit political suicide by saying they believe we should get parole.

I have written extensively on suicides in Massachusetts prisons. We are four times the national average in suicide rates. Why is that? The weather? The water we drink? No! We are part of a prison system without hope. NO matter how good a person you are or try to be, there will be no rewards at the end of the day.

What we needed most has been diminished with this moratorium. What we needed most may never be seen again. Hope is fleeting. Hope is fading. Hope for far too many will be spelled Rope. How I hope that I am wrong.

*Joe Labriola*