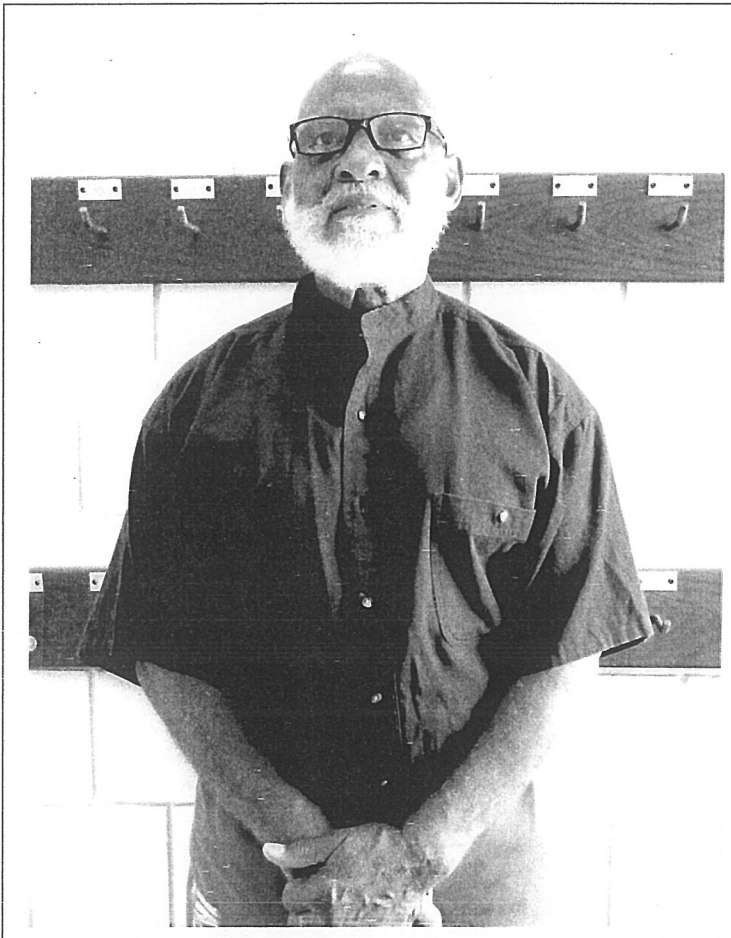


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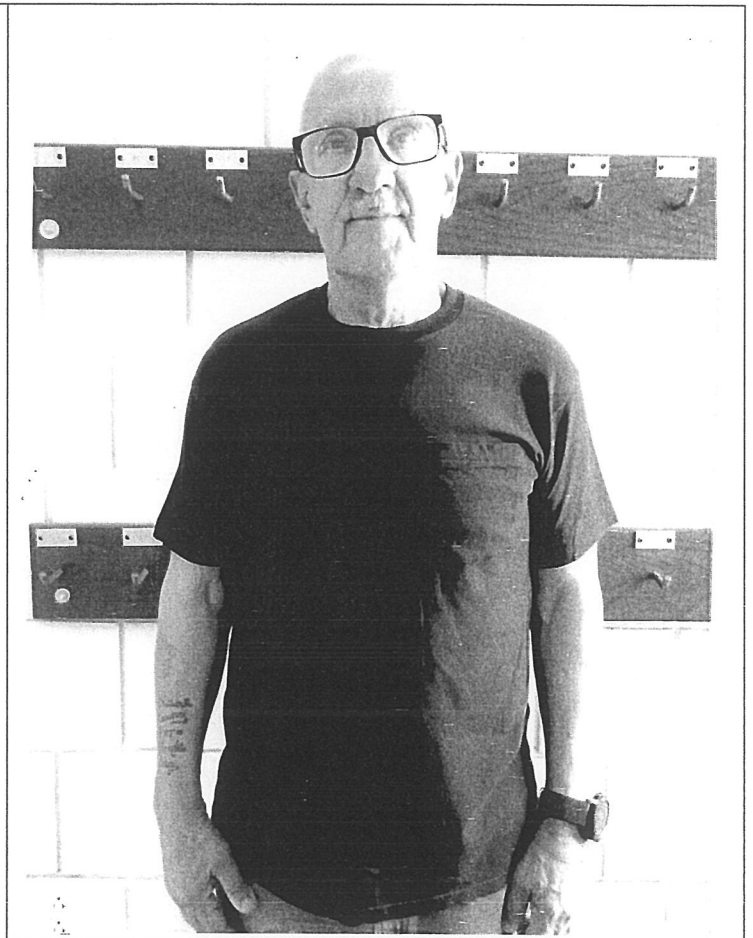
"Creative Alternatives in Criminal Justice"

SPECIAL EDITION

**SHOULD THESE TWO MEN
AND SEVERAL OTHERS LIKE THEM
BE GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE?**



**Lewis Dickerson is 75 years old
he has spent 48 years in state prison**



**Daniel Ferreira is 76 years old
he has spent 50 years in state prison**

Long ago these men proved that they pose no threat whatsoever to public safety, yet today, they remain condemned to die behind prison walls

A number of these 64 men also participated in the now defunct furlough program.

At 3:00 am on December 29, 1987 Lewis Dickerson was jolted awake by members of a state Department of Correction tactical team. At the time Dickerson was an inmate trustee assigned to the minimum security Northeastern Correctional Center located in Concord.

At just about the same time inmate Daniel Ferreira and about a dozen other trustees at the Northeastern Correctional Center were also being handcuffed, shackled, and placed on Department of Correction transportation busses. By the time daylight showed, a total of 64 Massachusetts state prisoners serving life without the possibility of parole were on their way to the newly opened Old Colony Correctional Center, a high security facility located in Bridgewater.

None of the 64 prisoners who were sent to higher security had violated any rules, none had committed any illegal acts and none had violated the trust that had been placed in them years ago. In fact, all were amongst the most rehabilitated prisoners in the entire state Department of Correction.

As these 64 men would later learn from sympathetic correctional staff, their removal from

minimum security facilities resulted in a shift in correctional policy that was primarily based on political considerations.

Politics and Public Perception

The transfer of the 64 life term prisoners had been ordered because the then Governor of Massachusetts Michael Dukakis who was running for the office of president against George H.W. Bush didn't want to continue to appear to be "soft on crime".

Their plight became the first in a series of knee jerk reactions by forces who were more interested in appearing to be "tougher than the other guy" when dealing with criminal justice related issues, in particular, the treatment of prisoners, rather than in the old long standing policy of redemption and rehabilitation.

48 years in state prison

In 1975 Lewis Dickerson was arrested for an armed robbery in which a store clerk was shot and killed. During that robbery Dickerson had two accomplices who escaped arrest. It is believed that one of those two men shot and killed the store clerk. Dickerson received a life without the possibility of parole sentence for his part in the robbery.

To this day Dickerson has never claimed that he was an angel. However, he does say that he never killed anyone.

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Once he arrived at the Massachusetts state prison in Walpole, Dickerson quickly came to the conclusion that he would take advantage of whatever opportunity available to rehabilitate himself.

Back in the 1970's Massachusetts had a reputation of being in the forefront of prison rehabilitation programming. In those days the state correctional system operated under the Executive Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, unlike today's state prison system which operates under the Office of Public Safety and Security.

Subsequently transferred to the medium security state prison in Norfolk, Dickerson established himself as a model inmate. He earned a trustee position that allowed him to work outside prison walls on a daily basis. In 1983 he was again transferred to even lower minimum security, this time to the Northeastern Correctional Center in Concord, known to Massachusetts prisoners as the "Concord Farm". He would remain there for over four years.

While at minimum security, Dickerson worked on a building renovation crew. The renovation crew traveled around the state rehabilitating state and country owned buildings. One particular job that lasted many months was the complete renovation of the Brighton District Court. A job for which Dickerson won high praise from court officials. Another successful job in Boston involved the renovation of a building to be used as a shelter for battered women.

During this period Dickerson decided that he wanted to do more to help people. He signed up for the newly established Concord Achievement Rehabilitation Volunteer Experience (CARVE) program at the Northeastern Correctional Center. The CARVE program overseen by correctional program coordinator Peter Doyle, employed inmates to work at various community hospitals assisting hospital staff and patients alike. For several years, Dickerson also worked on a daily

basis at the Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham.

50 years in state prison

Like Lewis Dickerson, Daniel Ferreira also experienced an abundance of legal issues as a young person and by 1973 Ferreira found himself on his way to Walpole state prison with a life without parole sentence for murder.

Eventually, and only after an extended period of reflection, was Ferreira able to transfer to lower security. By the early 1980's he had achieved "trusty" status and was transferred to minimum security at the Northeast Correctional Center.

Divine Intervention may have saved a child

On one memorable occasion while outside prison boundaries, Ferreira who was working on a grounds crew assigned to mow the grass around the Acton-Boxboro Regional High School spotted what appeared to be a very small child in distress emerging from a wooded area. Quickly dismounting the tractor he approached the child and calmly asked her if she was OK. She was not Ok. in fact she had wandered away from a nearby nursery. Immediately recognizing the situation, Ferreira quickly called for the assistance of Correctional Officer Don Vasconcellos the crew boss. Officer Vasconcellos, along with both the child and Ferreira in tow brought the child to a nearby nursery to determine if she was one of their children. She was. God only knows what tragic fate might have awaited that poor little girl if it wasn't for the decisive action of prisoner Daniel Ferreira and Correctional Officer Don Vasconcellos.

Reestablishing Faith

It is not too uncommon for some prisoners, particularly those serving lengthy sentences to say that while incarcerated they have seen the light, and have found Jesus. According to an abundance of correctional officials and prisoners alike, when it
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came to "seeing the light" and "finding Jesus" Ferreira is the real deal.

In 1978 Ferreira enrolled in the Bethel Bible Institute where he graduated with his Evangelist Credentials and Ministerial License. In 1980 he enrolled in the Berean School of the Bible and earned his Diploma of Ministerial Studies. Even after his return to higher security in 1987 Ferreira continued with his religious studies enrolling in the Calvary Christian College & Seminary where he graduated with both a Bachelor of Biblical Studies and a Masters in Biblical Studies. Eventually, in 1994 he would achieve his Doctor of Biblical Studies from the PMI Center for Biblical Studies.

Deterring teenagers from bad choices

In addition to his extensive biblical studies, Ferreira also availed himself of the rehabilitative opportunities offered by participation in the Speaking Engagement Program offered at the Northeast Correctional Institution.

As a member of that worthwhile program, Ferreira was able to travel to eastern Massachusetts schools, including Acton-Boxboro Regional High School, Concord – Carlisle High School, Concord Academy and Lincoln – Sudbury Regional High School. When speaking to teenagers at those schools Ferreira delivered a potent drug-abuse-prevention message that was based on his personal life experiences. By this time, he had become so dedicated to helping keep others from making bad choices in life that during the three years he participated in the furlough program, he used his furlough time to speak to as many teenagers as he could in a number of Massachusetts schools. Hundreds of Massachusetts teens benefited from listening to his story.

Transformation

Ferreira's transformation from a rouge criminal to

a deeply religious and remorseful prisoner is nothing short of remarkable. Today, Daniel Ferreira is a completely changed person.

Justice tempered with mercy

The men highlighted here, as well as the others removed from minimum security on December 29, 1987 who remain incarcerated today long ago took complete responsibility for the crimes that they committed. All are deeply remorseful, in fact, it can be safely stated that they represent the most remorseful of the state's 5,800 adult prisoners. Yet they remain confined in medium security state correctional facilities awaiting death.

Many of the original 64 prisoners discussed here have passed away. A few have been granted medical parole due to extremely serious medical conditions. One, Ramadan Shabazz was granted a commutation of his life without parole sentence by former Governor Charles Baker. No doubt, Governor Baker took into consideration Shabazz's long positive track record while he was at minimum security.

The continued incarceration of the few remaining former trustees is costing state tax payers in excess of \$133,000 per year, per inmate. That's a lot of money to spend locking up those who pose no threat whatsoever to public safety.

The possibilities may exist for a shifting of political winds

Massachusetts Governor Maura Healy's Office has sent out signals that the Governor may possibly consider reinvigorating the underused commutation and pardon process. The Governor has already, early in her first term, pardoned several well deserving individuals. Should this supposition prove to be the case, the Governor might consider beginning that process by taking a good hard look at those life term prisoners who have already proven themselves. If the Governor is con't.

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serious about correctional reform she might also consider reinstating the ability for first degree life term prisoners who demonstrate serious signs of rehabilitation and remorse, the opportunity to move down to lower security facilities. Like those highlighted in this article, there are many other Massachusetts prisoners, who given the chance, will also become contributing, productive members of our communities.

The rehabilitated Massachusetts state prisoners noted above have spent decade upon decade in prison. Their extended period of contrition and remorse begs the question: **Do these men deserve a second chance? We believe that they do.**

If the Massachusetts justice system is to be a well balanced system, it must include a degree of **"justice tempered with mercy"**

Justice-Today would like to thank the Lifers' Group at the Massachusetts state prison in Norfolk who assisted us in identifying many of the 64 life term prisoners who were removed from minimum security in 1987. The identification process proved to be a daunting task that could not have been accomplished without their help. Anyone interested in contacting the Lifers' Group can write to the Chairman, Gordon Haas at P.O. Box 43, Norfolk, MA 02056



Submissions

If you are an accomplished writer or are affiliated with a group or organization that is interested in criminal justice reform and wish to submit an article for possible publication in a Justice-Today news letter, we are interested in hearing from you.

We are very interested in sharing diverse points of view on the issues surrounding the American criminal justice system. When identifying potential areas of concern, it is always helpful to present possible solutions to those problems.

Please remember that Justice - Today is an "Alternatives in Criminal Justice" publication.

Thank you for your support.

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To: