

Convicted murderer and 'unique individual' granted day parole

Supporters ask for lifer's release

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Forgiven.
That's the blessing that inspires Glenn Flett.

He's guilty of stealing and killing, but turned his life around by helping police and promoting public safety.

Flett, a convicted murderer, is describes as one of the most unique individuals in Canada's criminal justice history.

A B.C. Supreme Court judge described Flett as a "unique" individual with "tremendous strength of character" and compared Flett's unselfish life of service to that of the late Chuck Cadman.

"I have never come across someone like you who has given so much to turn their life around," said Justice Caryer.

And one of B.C.'s top cops asked the National Parole Board (NPB) on Wednesday to give freedom to the prisoner.

The lifer has earned respect from the country's unlikeliest supporters.

His rise to glory and fall from grace was he subject of much discussion.

An eclectic group of people met at Mountain Institution at 9 am where the wind swirled against exposed granite rocks and leaf-stripped trees on the hillside.

Inside the National Parole boardroom, Flett respectfully took off his cap and spoke quietly about his mistakes in a circle where three members of the National Parole Board questioned him.

With bags under his eyes, Flett's voice was barely audible as he choked back his emotions.

Flett's parole officer argued against his release.

He hasn't taken a substance abuse

program and he was caught drinking alcohol at a minimum security prison before his transfer to Mountain, said parole officer Alana Stickland.

PCMP psychologist Matt Logan and UBC law professor Michael Jackson, meanwhile, spoke on Flett's behalf.

Flett said he has been drug-free since last August (2005), goes to 12-step meetings four times a week to stay clean and vowed he'll never smoke pot again. He's been free of alcohol since last December.

First, some background.

Flett is a lifer. He and another man killed Theodore Van Sluytman, 39, a Hudson's Bay manager and father of four, almost 30 years ago during a bungled robbery in Toronto in 1978.

The face of the father of four is etched permanently in Flett's memory. That horrendous moment triggered a lifetime of remorse for the once-caustic criminal.

"If I could bring Mr. Van Sluytman back to life again, I would die right now and take his place, but I can't bring him back," Flett told The Abbotsford News.

"So, I decided to find a way to respect his life by doing what I can to be a better person."

He experienced a spiritual transformation when he turned his life to God and became a Christian in 1982 at Kent Institution.

He said he decided to make his life count by giving selflessly back to the community.

"I was a creepy bastard, but I thank God that He's forgiven me," he said.

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Flett founded inmate support program

God's forgiveness, Flett said, inspired him to grow in faith and courage and to live a life that Christ taught - doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

When Flett was paroled 13 years ago, he wholeheartedly threw himself into helping people.

To show how sorry he was for his past, Flett and his wife Sherry in 1992 co-founded the non-profit volunteer-based program called Long term Inmates Now in the Community (LINC), based in Abbotsford.

It is the only peer-support program of its kind in Canada.

The goal of LINC is to help cons break free of their crime cycle and reintegrate into the community.

Flett spent 100 hours working in and out of jail encouraging cons to get on the right side of the law.

It was harrowing.

He said he worked up to 100 hours a week and spent \$80,000 out of his own pocket to help people.

Flett's life of compassion and kindness started to unravel a few years ago as one by one, some of his friends died violent deaths.

It started after he assisted Daryl Shanoss' move from the segregation unit at Kent Institution into the regular population.

Shanoss was killed by inmates a month later during the Kent riot in 2003.

"I know that wasn't my fault, but I still felt very badly about my part in having him released to his death."

Another inmate Ami Simard was transferred to the Prairie region against Flett's advise and he was murdered within a week.

The most horrific death was yet to come.

Flett supported the release of murderer Eric Fish. Two days later, Fish killed an elderly man in Vernon during a home invasion in 2004.

That was the beginning of Flett's emotional and moral breakdown.

He stopped reading The Bible and morning prayer and meditation, he said, pouring himself into working more and more at LINC.

Flett was driven by despair.

His sorrow led to sleepless nights and depression.

Taking anti-depressants, he also started smoking marijuana to relieve stress.

Flett was arrested in Merritt on April 12, 2005 after reports that he was driving erratically on the Coquihalla Highway.

Police found a loaded restricted firearm, 20 mg of marijuana and needles in the vehicle.

Flett admitted he had taken drugs and his parole was revoked.

Ending up in the slammer once again, Flett experienced great shame after letting down his wife and daughter.

UBC professor Michael Jackson said Flett literally fell apart in the period before his arrest.

He pleaded guilty to possession of a loaded restricted firearm. Four other charges were stayed.

Dr. Peggy Koopman, one of Canada's most experienced forensic psychologists, gave her written opinion to the parole board noting that Flett had an emotional breakdown.

She said Flett had given back to society "too much, too soon and for too long" through the LINC program.

He ignored his own emotional needs, because of his deep remorse for his crime and empathy for others, Koopman wrote.

Flett stood up against the subculture in prison and he suffered for it.

And, Koopman advised Flett not to return to his former work doing one-to-one counselling with hardcore criminals.

he was also advised to forgive himself and to get past the guilt of his crime.

Flett told the parole board that he takes responsibility for his failures.

He said he is eating well, exercising and running regularly and said he wants to be a good father and a good husband.

His future was in the hands of the parole board.

The three panel members decided not to grant Flett full parole, but agreed to give him day parole.

He must live in a supervised private home placement (not his own house) and participate in a substance abuse program.

His progress is to be reviewed in six months.

Flett said he wants to devote his time to his family, especially his daughter, and to work with victims of crime and help youth.

He has a lot of community's support.

Flett received the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV) "Volunteer of the Year" award in 1996.

And, a decade later, he said he's happy to get another chance to volunteer his services to the community again, but he's going to strive for balance.

"I hadn't expected the stress to get to me...I have to know when to say yes and when to say no."

He's saying "yes" to what he believes will have a positive impact.

Two weeks ago, Flett spoke to families of victims of homicide at an international prison conference.

"That's where my heart is—to help victims and to make our streets safer."