

Jens Soering 179212
Brunswick Corr. Ctr.
1147 Planters Rd.
Lawrenceville VA 23868

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Helen F. Fahey, Chairperson
Virginia Parole Board
6900 Atmore Dr.
Richmond VA 23225

Dear Mrs. Fahey,

Thank you very much for considering my case and discussing it in detail yesterday with Deacon Thomas Elliott, Rev. Richard Busch and Rev. Walter Westbrook. They told me that you had asked them what, precisely, I was contrite about; and they suggested that I write you a response. That is what I hope to do below. Because I have not had time to write and revise a draft of this letter, I probably will not express myself as felicitously as I would prefer. But perhaps a certain measure of spontaneity will make up for my lack of preparation.

I have also been told that, during the parole hearing yesterday, you expressed the belief that I am guilty of the crime of which I was convicted. Since my guilt or innocence has a direct bearing on the subject of this letter -- what I am contrite about -- I will have to spend a little time discussing this. But before I do so, I would like to explain that, from my perspective, the great spiritual turning point in my life's journey was the realization that my innocence was not nearly as clear-cut nor as important as I had thought. What changed me, I believe, is that I accepted my responsibility for the deaths of Derek and Nancy Haysom and the suffering I inflicted on their children, my own family and -- as odd as this may sound -- even Elizabeth Haysom. Once I stopped seeing myself as a victim (first of Elizabeth, then of the criminal justice system), I was able to do something constructive with my life: writing books.

So, in a certain sense, you and I are perhaps not as far apart on the question of guilt as it may appear at first. Certainly it is true that you believe I was at the crime scene and committed the murders myself, whereas I know this is not so. But you and I do agree that I

am responsible for those deaths, and for all the suffering of innocent others that followed.

Why do I say that I am responsible, even though I was not physically present at the crime scene (and, indeed, was not part of any planning -- if there was any)? Because I could have and should have prevented the murders of Derek and Nancy Haysom.

I have recounted the following events numerous times: at my trial, in my first book, The Way of the Prisoner, and in many interviews (including both my 2003 and 2006 parole interviews). But perhaps it will help clarify matters if I do so again now.

Two to two-and-a-half months before Derek and Nancy Haysom were murdered, Elizabeth and I spent a weekend at her parents' house while they were out of town. We spent most of our time doing what teenagers usually do when there is a bed and no adult supervision. In the course of this weekend, Elizabeth showed me a stack of nude black-and-white photographs of herself, which were kept in an envelope in a drawer in the living room. She told me that her mother had taken these pictures, and she indicated that her mother had -- at the very least -- forced her to take baths together. She also indicated that her father had refused to stop this.

What I remember most of this conversation and the photos themselves was Elizabeth's reluctance to speak -- which struck me as odd, since she was the one who initiated the "conversation." In fact, she said very little at all -- yet clearly wanted me to see the pictures. And the other thing I remember is the incredibly sad expression on her face in the photographs -- all the more appalling because I loved her.

But she did not want to talk about the pictures. So back into the envelope they went. I do not think we ever really talked about this again. To me, the whole subject was terribly embarrassing, and I did not want to push Elizabeth to talk about something she did not want to discuss. It was easier to let the whole matter drop and go back upstairs and have sex -- which is why we had come to stay there at her parents' house that weekend anyway.

In later years -- after I began practicing Centering Prayer, in 2000 -- I gradually came to understand that this incident was the greatest failure of my life, and the direct antecedent of the murders,

and ultimately the reason why I am in prison today. Elizabeth did not kill her parents "because" they -- or at least her mother -- sexually abused her. In my opinion, the immediate cause of the murders was that she had stolen her mother's jewelry on the weekend before the murders; and in the confrontation about this theft the following weekend, she killed them. (Elizabeth testified at my trial that she had stolen her mother's jewelry the weekend before the murders to finance her drug addiction.) But immediate causes do not always tell the whole story. Many junkies steal from their parents without killing them. In Elizabeth's case, such an incident led to murder because of the long-standing rage inside her over the sexual abuse. This, anyhow, is what I believe.

And I also believe that I could have prevented all of this. In fact, I am the only person who could have prevented it.

Both prosecution and defense in my case agree that Elizabeth was (and presumably still is) a borderline schizophrenic (a mental illness that has since been renamed "borderline personality disorder"). Elizabeth herself testified at my trial that she was using drugs since her early teens, throughout our relationship, and specifically also on the night of the murders. Regardless of what the law says in this country, certainly I say -- and the laws of my country would say -- that Elizabeth was not fully responsible for her actions throughout this time period. She was a young person -- only 19 -- locked into an awful, frightening, abusive situation -- a situation she adjusted to (if that is the word) through mental illness/delusions and drug abuse.

I, on the other hand, was neither mentally ill nor a drug user. I may have been young -- 18 years old -- but I was a psychology major! And, most importantly, I was the one person to whom Elizabeth had turned for help about the biggest, darkest secret in her life.

And I let her down. I turned away, just as so many others presumably had. Worst of all, we went upstairs and had sex! One could fairly say that I used and abused her sexually; I just did not take photographs of her. From her point of view, this must have been absolutely devastating. She had come to me for help, and all I wanted was sex -- in her mind, perhaps just like her parents. It makes me sick just to think about it! I am so terribly, terribly sorry for what I did, and did not do on that night ... words fail me. This is what I am contrite about, ultimately.

Imagine what would have happened if I had done the right thing! Imagine if I had insisted that Elizabeth set up an appointment at a counselor's office at the University of Virginia (where we were both students). Imagine if I had taken her to her appointment, and continued to go with her to future appointments. Imagine if I had supported and helped her. Imagine if I had been my brother's (or, in this case, my sister's) keeper!

There is no doubt in my mind that, two to two-and-a-half months later, there would not have been a horrific double murder in Lynchburg. Derek and Nancy Haysom would still be alive. Veryan, Howard, Richard, Julian and Fiona -- their other children, Elizabeth's half-brothers and half-sister -- would not have suffered through a terrible loss. My father's and mother's marriage might have stayed intact -- they divorced in the early 1990s, due to the stress I had brought into their lives. And my mother might well be alive today -- she drank herself to death in 1997 mostly because of me, dying alone in a small apartment in Bremen, Germany, lying in her own vomit, surrounded by alcohol bottles ... because of me. I am responsible for all of that. I could have stopped it all, if I had just had the common decency, the little bit of real love that it would have taken to persuade my girlfriend to go see a counselor about those nasty photographs that she did not want to discuss with me. Such an obvious thing to do -- and I did not do it.

There is one more victim on the long list of people whose lives I have destroyed who is not on the list above: Elizabeth herself. Her life is ruined, and it need not have been. She could have had a normal (more-or-less) life! Many people survive sexual abuse and drug addiction and become productive citizens. Instead, she has been rotting away in prison, still not getting any psychiatric help ... the same psychiatric help she did not get in 1985, because of my failure. It is easy to despise her because she did such an awful thing to her parents; but she is a human being too.

Of course my regret does not do anyone any good now; I know that. My insight into my own guilt will not bring Derek and Nancy back to life, nor will it heal the pain that their other five children must still be feeling. It will not bring my mother back, either.

I did try to help the one person whom I could conceivably perhaps still help a little: Elizabeth. In The Way of the Prisoner, I discuss much of the above -- and the role that Centering Prayer played in helping me to see and understand all of this -- and I concluded the book with an appeal to parole and deport Elizabeth to her native country of Canada. I sent a letter to the then-governor of Virginia -- and to you, too, I believe; I still have a copy of that letter, and of course it is reproduced in The Way of the Prisoner.

Of course Elizabeth is not the primary victim in this case, nor the most important one; I know that. Everyone else's suffering pales beside Derek and Nancy Haysom's. But I do long for some kind of healing, some kind of reconciliation, some lessening of pain... I hurt so many people! The very first person I hurt -- by failing to help her -- was Elizabeth -- and that failure then led to all the other evil that followed. I cannot do anything else but try to start somewhere, and to try to help by the one means left to me: writing.

Speaking of writing -- my second, third and recently-completed (but not yet published) fourth books are all efforts to try to do some good. I am quite sure that you will not like my second, third and fourth books, Mrs. Fahey -- and I do not blame you for that. I hope you will not blame me for them either! From my perspective, I am trying to help other totally screwed up people -- my fellow prisoners -- just as I failed to help another totally screwed up person so long ago -- Elizabeth. I do not want to be in a position of looking back again and recognizing that I failed to be my brother's or my sister's keeper, and that disaster resulted from my failure. I want to know that at least, nowadays, I am trying to help -- not turning aside and focusing on my own pleasure.

And, yes, of course I know that nothing I write now can make up for what I failed to do in 1985.

A couple of concluding comments. First of all, I would like to stress the role that Centering Prayer played in my coming to understand and accept responsibility for the deaths of Derek and Nancy Haysom. Centering Prayer is really an ingenious thing -- which no doubt explains why all major religions know some form of this spiritual discipline. Essentially, it comes down to sitting down, closing one's

eyes, calming one's mind with the use of a simple prayer-word (or mantra), and observing the thoughts and emotions that arise into the interior silence. If one sticks with it -- and it is, in fact, quite tough -- all the traumas of one's life eventually emerge. This is a very painful process, believe me, and it can take a long time. But if one stays with it, and lets the Holy Spirit do its healing work, then it is possible to face one's past, for instance ... and accept it for what it is ... and to let go one's attachment to it, the emotional clinging. This is what helped me face my guilt, and what helped me let go of my victim mentality. Did Elizabeth manipulate me? Sure she did. Did the criminal justice system fail me? Sure it did. But before Elizabeth manipulated me, and before the courts convicted me of a crime I did not commit -- before all of that, I failed to be my sister's keeper. I acted like a cold-hearted swine, and thereby caused the deaths of two people, and the godawful suffering of at least seven others. I am to blame first.

Try Centering Prayer some time. It works. That is why I lead a Centering Prayer group in this prison; one of the people who spoke to you yesterday, Rev. Walter Westbrook, is my sponsor for that activity. This is another way that I try to be my brothers' keeper in here, in prison.

The other concluding comment I want to make is that the subject of sexual abuse was not discussed at my trial -- another wonderful idea of my trial lawyer's, a gentleman who was subsequently disbarred. However, sexual abuse was discussed at Elizabeth Haysom's 1987 sentencing hearing, the transcript of which is available. I am not inventing the details of what I described above. The nude photos were found, and they were placed (in a sealed envelope) in the court files. Nancy Haysom's best friend, a lady by the name of Annie Massie, testified in court that Nancy Haysom had shown her the photos of Elizabeth, nude, and described them as art. So I am not lying and inventing things here; please check the sentencing hearing transcript (a two-day affair) if you wish.

Finally, Mrs. Fahey, I would like to urge you to read one article in the folder that was presented to you (or perhaps Mr. Coulton) at the parole hearing(s): "Trial and Error?" by Ian Zack, from the Charlottesville Daily Progress (January 21, 1996). The article is not

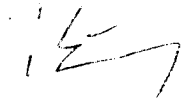
very long, but it is the very best summary of all the evidence -- including that discovered by Gail Marshall after my trial (about the sock prints). I am sure that much of this information is not contained in the file you have. And I would like to point out that, on the very day that you conducted the parole hearing on my case, the Colorado court dropped charges against John Karr, the man who had confessed to the murder of JonBenet Ramsey. The sad fact is that there are idiots like John Karr and me -- except that he was fortunate enough to have DNA evidence that exonerated him.

But, again, from my perspective, it is not so terribly important that I was not in fact at the crime scene when the murders occurred. Those murders occurred only because I was a selfish, unloving, stupid young man in 1985. I really do not feel these last 20 years of incarceration have been undeserved, and I certainly no longer feel like a victim. I deserved punishment -- and, believe me, I have been punished.

What I ask for now is the opportunity to leave prison and help others in your world -- not in the U.S., but in Germany. They have prisons there, too, so there is plenty of work that I can do to help others recover from the kind of mistake I made. Very few people want to do prison ministry work -- I do! And in my country, they even pay you a (modest) salary to do it; that is all I require. If you ever hear from me again, it will only be because I have started writing books about Centering Prayer in German.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jens Soering', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jens Soering