



J. HANLEY
WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

January 20, 2022

Mr. Craig Findley, Chairman
Illinois Prisoner Review Board
319 E. Madison Street, Suite A
Springfield, IL 62701

RE: Protest Letter in Release of - C-83534 – CURTIS BROWNELL
Inmate # C83534
Crime(s): Murder (100-300 yrs.); Aggravated Kidnapping (30-90 yrs.); Rape (30-90 yrs.); Rape (50-150 yrs.); Aggravated Kidnapping (50-150 yrs.); Armed Robbery (50-150 yrs.); Armed Violence (50-150 yrs.); Attempted Murder (50-150 yrs.) CS
Sent. Date(s):10-11-78; 10-18-78

Dear Members of the Parole Board:

The Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office adamantly opposes the parole of inmate Curtis Brownell. While it has been nearly 42 years since Brownell abducted [REDACTED] at gun point, raped her, and then tried to kill her and the child growing inside her by running them over with his car, the people of Winnebago County have forgotten neither Curtis Brownell nor his predation of and violence against women. The attack on [REDACTED] was not his first crime against a female, but it certainly should be his last.

On January 31, 1978, around 9:30 p.m., [REDACTED] was washing clothes in a laundromat at the Rural Oaks Shopping Center in Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois. From inside the laundromat, she watched as Brownell drove past the laundromat twice and then park near her car. Brownell came in and inquired about a load of towels he said his wife had left there earlier. [REDACTED] said she knew nothing about them. When Brownell turned to walk out, [REDACTED] turned to put money in another dryer. Suddenly [REDACTED] was struck on the back of the head with a hard object and pushed to the ground, her purse taken from her. When she looked up, the Brownell was standing over her with a gun. He pulled her up, put the gun in her side, and told her they were leaving and if she screamed he would kill her. Brownell forced [REDACTED] to his car and grabbed her around the neck, pulled her to his chest, and drove away. With a gun to her head, Brownell interrogated [REDACTED] about her age, whether she had a checking account, whether she was married, and whether she had a savings account. He told her that he had a .45 magnum automatic gun and, if she didn't tell him about her accounts he would blow her head right out of the window. [REDACTED] told him she had \$1,000 in the savings account. Pleading with Brownell not to hurt her, [REDACTED] told him she

was seven months pregnant. Brownell knocked [REDACTED] glasses off her face and he refused to let her put them back on so that she could not see where he was taking her.

When Brownell stopped the car on an isolated country road, he told [REDACTED] that he wanted to make love to her. He said that if she permitted him to do so, he would take her back to the laundromat when they finished. If she refused, he said he would kill her. Brownell said, "take your choice." [REDACTED] complied with his demand and when he finished, after climaxing in her, Brownell took the gun, put it to her head, and told her to get out of the car. When [REDACTED] begged Brownell to take her back to the laundromat, he struck her in the head with the butt of his gun two to three times, which knocked her to the ground. In fear of her life and the life of her unborn child, [REDACTED] pretended to be unconsciousness. Brownell then viciously kicked the defenseless woman several times. Brownell then got back into the car, backed it up, and drove at straight at [REDACTED]. When wheels rolled over her body, [REDACTED] screamed. Fortunately, deep snow prevented they weight of the vehicle from breaking [REDACTED] bones. When Brownell backed up the car again, [REDACTED] got up and ran across the snow-covered road, climbed over a mountain of snow, and ran into a field. [REDACTED] continued to run and jump fences in the cold and dark of night until she found a home that gave her help. (See attached written statement of [REDACTED] and preliminary hearing testimony on direct examination.)

Brownell became a suspect when he was identified as the man stalking yet another young woman the very next day. When asked about his whereabouts on January 31, 1978, Brownell stated that he had been to Burger King where he had two double burgers, a coke, and French fries, which came to \$2.10. Brownell stated further that he gave them Burger King coupons amounting to \$1.70 and, therefore, only had to pay 40 cents. At the scene of the rape and attempted murder of [REDACTED] law enforcement discovered a Burger King receipt detailing exactly the transaction Brownell described. After [REDACTED] identified Brownell in a line-up, he confessed to his crimes.

The defendant provided investigators with a written statement regarding the abduction and rape of [REDACTED]. In that statement the defendant indicated:

I went home to get the gun because I intended on getting a girl and I thought the gun would come in handy. I saw this girl in the laundromat and I circled the parking lot and looked in... I walked in and walked past her and I did notice that she was pregnant; I walked right back in and I took out the toy gun. She had her back toward me and I stuck the gun in her back. She got scared and screamed a little and I took my hand and hit her on top of the head... I was holding the gun to her back and I walked her out to my car... At the scene I said, "Do you know what I want?" And she said money. I told her no, that I wanted to make love to her. She started crying.... and said that she didn't want to hurt her baby... Then I unzipped my pants and took my penis out and got on top of her. She wasn't willing but she didn't fight either.... I knew then that I had to kill her. We both got out of the car and I hit her and she fell to the ground. I thought she was unconscious and I hit her in the stomach... I got back in the car. I backed up a little bit to see where she was and then I drove forward and ran over her. I backed up again and I saw her running up the snow bank, I made a U-turn and left... I went home had some soup and talked to my wife and watched TV and then went to bed." (See attached statement of Curtis Brownell.)

Upon his arrest for the abduction, rape, and attempted murder of [REDACTED], Brownell was identified as the perpetrator of multiple other crimes against women. Ultimately, Brownell confessed that in September of 1976, he had picked up a hitch-hiker, Louise Betts, and murdered her in Boone County, Illinois.

I picked her up and asked her where she was going. She then lit up a cigarette and I didn't want to try anything because she might burn me with it. I then drove down to Prairie St. and at the end of the old Coke Plant I pulled out my jackknife. I held it to her throat. I thought she was going to jump out of the car but she didn't. I then pulled her to me and I put my arm around her and I held the knife to her throat all the way out to the scene. She said what do you want? I told her, "What do you think...?" The place where we stopped had cornfields on both sides of the road... I put the knife away when we stopped... I told her to take off her clothes and she laid down on her coat, she didn't say anything. I pulled my pants down and we had intercourse. I then got up and pulled my pants up and I told her to turn over, she seemed afraid then. When she turned over I put my arm around her neck and strangled her, we struggled and she got up and ran. I chased her and grabbed her by the hair, I hit her to the ground, I got on her back, she was on her stomach I put my arm around her neck again and choked her again. I thought it was taking a long time for her to die, she kept fighting for it seemed like ten minutes." (See attached statement of Curtis Brownell.)

Brownell murdered Louise and left her body lifeless in that cornfield. She wasn't discovered until April of 1978.

[REDACTED], the step-sister of [REDACTED] Curtis Brownell's wife, recounted yet another incident of Brownell's depraved acts against young women. [REDACTED] reported that between August and October of 1977, shortly after Curtis Brownell and her sister [REDACTED] had moved into her building, she awoke one night to find a man's hands around her throat. [REDACTED] Brownell's own wife, later told [REDACTED] that Brownell confessed to choking [REDACTED]. In addition, [REDACTED] also reported that Brownell forced one of her friends into his car at gun point. Finally, [REDACTED] reported that their 3 year old daughter disclosed that Brownell, her own father, on multiple occasions removed her panties and fondled her vagina. (See attached report.)

In yet another statement, Brownell admitted to abducting a third female. In that statement, made April 2, 1978, he states,

I picked up a girl on Harlem Rd. about a quarter mile West of North Second St. This was my night out, I like to go out and pick up a girl and rape her.... After I turned north I put a knife to her throat, it was a kitchen knife. She opened the door, and I sped up to about 60 mph. before I knew it she was out of the car and the wind blew the door shut... I drove North to 173 and saw the ambulance come in. I figured it was her... The next day I called the hospital and asked if they had a girl there from a hit and run, but they wanted to know her name and I didn't know so I hung up. (See attached statement of Curtis Brownell.)

During that same interview Brownell also confessed to placing obscene phone calls to family friend [REDACTED] (See attached statement of [REDACTED].) Curtis Brownell very obviously is a man who views women as nothing more than the objects of his depraved and violent fantasies. His persistent patterns of behavior culminated in his cold, calculated, and brutal abduction, rape, and murder of Louise Betts. Thereafter, but for the grace of God, [REDACTED] survived Brownell's abduction, rape, and attempted murder. The man, if you can call him that, is a hunter, a predator, who used his "nights out" to prey upon the women of this community.

Brownell knows how to deceive evaluators. From May 3, 1977, through December 1, 1977, he received mental health treatment at Janet Wattles Mental Health Center in Rockford, Illinois. At the culmination of that treatment, psychiatrist Carl J. Wacker, came to the obviously false conclusion that Brownell's sexual deviation – i.e. making obscene phone calls – was resolved and that his passive-aggressive personality disorder was much improved. In hindsight, Dr. Wacker unquestionably underestimated the extent of Brownell's "deviation" and the degree to which, if any, he was capable of improving.

Subsequent and contemporaneous psychological evaluations paint a more accurate picture of Curtis Brownell. An evaluation conducted on June 9, 1978, concluded that Brownell is *unable* to relate normally to women, which causes him to resort to various forms of aberrant sexual activity wherein sex and violence are indistinguishable.

In a psychiatric evaluation prepared by Dr. Graybill on June 15, 1978, it was noted that Brownell himself described a lengthy history of aberrant sexual behavior involving obscene phone calls, deviant masturbatory practices, and sexual molestation of his daughter. Dr. Graybill concluded:

He (Brownell) is extremely oppositional in his relationships with everyone, and he gives the impression of not really identifying with the human race. Thought content seems to center upon his fantasies of violent sex and in his description of events, he appears to have felt compelled to do what he did. He is not remorseful or contrite about what he has done and one gets the definite impression that he would repeat the act if similar circumstances were repeated. This man harbors an extreme amount of generalized hostility that he will act out if he is not being observed.

In his presentence investigation report, the Brownell reported that he served in the United States Air Force from August 16, 1972 to November 23, 1973. According to the Rapid City, South Dakota Police Department in November of 1973, Brownell was a strong suspect in an investigation regarding obscene and threatening phone calls made in that community prior to the defendant's discharge from the Air Force. Brownell explained to presentence investigators that although he wouldn't admit or deny the allegations, he was aware of being the subject of that investigation.

During Brownell's incarceration in the Boone County Jail for the murder of Louise Betts, prior to being transferred to Illinois Department of Corrections, he escaped. Brownell's escape from custody occurred on the evening of October 31, 1978. Brownell managed to escape custody by threatening a jailer on duty with an alleged knife made out of a ping pong paddle. Brownell was at large for a short time before he was apprehended in a local cemetery by officers of the Belvidere Police Department.

Even if 42 years imprisonment could begin to atone for the cold, inhuman brutality of his crimes, Curtis Brownell remains a predator and a threat to women and girls everywhere. The very prospect of his release terrifies even his fellow inmates, who inform us that to this day Brownell brags about his crimes and talks about what further depraved acts of violence against women he might commit if released. (See attached letter of Andrew Moritz.)

That the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic could somehow justify Curtis Brownell's early release from incarceration is preposterous. Such a circumstance has nothing to do with justice for [REDACTED] and Louise Betts, nothing to do with the seriousness of Brownell's violent and heinous crimes, and nothing to do with his prospects for rehabilitation, which his statements to his fellow inmates demonstrate are utterly nil. Justice for [REDACTED] and Louise Betts, and the safety of women everywhere, demands that Curtis Brownell never be released from prison. For this and for all of the above-stated reasons, I adamantly object to his early release.

Sincerely,



J. Hanley
Winnebago County State's Attorney

Sincerely,



Tricia Smith
Boone County State's Attorney

JH/rb

Attachments:

Protest letters from [REDACTED]
Protest letter from Deborah Brown (sister of murder victim Louise Betts)
Statement [REDACTED]
Preliminary Hearing Direct Examination of [REDACTED] (2-9-78)
Statement Jean Frana
April 2, 1978 Abduction Rape of [REDACTED]
April 2, 1978 Abduction white female
April 3, 1978 Abduction murder of Louise Betts
April 19, 1977 Obscene calls to Jean Frana
Police Report dated April 1, 1978 re statement of [REDACTED] (sister-in-law of Curtis Brownell)
Psychological Evaluation June 9, 1978, Roger M. Mick, PhD.
Neurological Examination June 9, 1978, Dr. C.H. Hamann
Psychological Evaluation Dr. J.G. Graybill, June 15, 1978
Psychological evaluation, July 18, 1978, Dr. C.H. Hamann
Letter from Rapid City, S.D., Gary Schumacher
Letter from cellmate Andrew Moritz dated 1/22/2021