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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: July 27, 2018
Re: Marty Don Spears
Double murderer parole denied

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Marty Don Spears, age 56, was denied parole during a July 24, 2018 hearing held at San Quentin State Prison. Prosecutor Elizabeth DeJong and members of the victims' family appeared at the hearing to successfully argue against Spears's release.

In 1979, Spears orchestrated a violent two-day crime spree with three other co-defendants that culminated in the brutal murders of good Samaritans Philip and Kathy Ranzo and the rape of Kathy Ranzo. After being caught, convicted and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, Spears successfully appealed to the California Supreme Court who modified his punishment to consecutive life sentences and allowed him the chance to be paroled.

Recently, California State Senate Bill 260 was passed and signed by Governor Brown. It modified the parole rules for killers who were under 25 at the time they committed a murder and made it easier for them to be released from prison. These new rules were applied to Spears because he was 17 years old when he committed the crimes.

On January 4, 2017, Spears was granted parole by the Board. An appeal by the victims' family, State Senator Cathleen Galgiani and representatives of the District Attorney's office was made asking Governor Brown to overturn the parole decision. On May 5, 2017, the Governor reversed the Board's decision, rescinding any grant of parole. Under the same easier parole rules, Spears was able to almost immediately apply for another hearing which was scheduled for July 24 of this year.

Members of the victims' family including Sandy Ranzo Howell, Mike Naranjo, and Mark Ranzo, along with prosecutor Elizabeth DeJong and Gene Cervantes of the group Citizens Against Homicide, all traveled to Marin County to be present at the hearing held in San Quentin prison.

Parole Board Commissioner Arthur Anderson acted as chairperson during the four-hour hearing.

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Spears was asked about the September 24, 2017 death of his cellmate. When questioned by prison authorities, Spears had given two conflicting versions about his cellmate's condition after coming back from yard time. Initially, Spears told investigators that he returned to his cell and found his cellmate in his (Spears's) bottom bunk. He went into great detail about how much it disturbed him that his cellmate would be using his space, how he nudged the dead body with no response and then tried to help by giving the cellmate CPR. Yet when questioned further, Spears changed his story claiming that when he returned from yard time he found his dead cellmate on the toilet, so he moved the body to the bottom bunk to administer CPR. During last week's parole hearing, Spears denied giving conflicting accounts at the time, saying the prison investigators were mistaken.

When Commissioner Anderson asked Spears about his responsibility for the murders of Philip and Kathy Ranzo and the rape of Kathy Ranzo, Spears told a different story to the Board that contradicted what he told a prison psychologist in 2015 during a Risk Assessment interview. Confronted with these contradictions, Spears repeatedly claimed they were mistakes made by the psychologist.

In support of his parole plans, Spears had submitted a letter to the Board showing he had a job offer from the father of a former cellmate. When the Commissioner asked for more specifics, Spears was evasive and even denied knowing that his former cellmate was sentenced to prison for the same crime (murder).

Sandy Ranzo Howell spoke for the victims' family telling the Board and the inmate that "no matter what, you will always be Philip and Kathy Ranzo's murderer and Kathy's rapist."

In her statement, Prosecutor De Jong argued that Spears had lied to the Board, showing a severe lack of insight into what caused him to commit such a horrific crime and indicated he represented a higher risk of danger to the community if he were to be released.

The Parole Board agreed and found Spears unsuitable for parole, denying him another hearing for five years. Commissioner Anderson stated on the record that he believed Spears's remorse was superficial; that Spears was the leader and blatantly lied to the parole panel trying to mislead and manipulate them. In denying parole, Commissioner Anderson concluded "It is a sad state of affairs when an inmate comes to a parole hearing after 39 years and cannot tell the truth."

This is the 22nd parole hearing that members of the Ranzo family have attended to argue against release for any of the four co-defendants. Unfortunately, based on the changes in California law regarding parole, Spears can once again seek to advance his hearing when he feels he has made "progress" and ask to calendar a new parole hearing, much sooner than five years.

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