

Governor Rick Snyder
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

August 3, 2016

Dear Governor Snyder,

As a former Michigan Women's Commissioner appointed by Governor John Engler and a Bloomfield Hills City Commissioner who has served twice as Mayor during 12 years on the Commission, I beseech you to commute the life sentence of Nancy Seaman, convicted of 1st degree murder for killing her husband with a hatchet in 2004, a crime for which she has already served 12 years in the Huron Valley Correctional Facility.

Nancy's trial judge, Retired Judge Jack McDonald, wrote a letter to you in 2013 stating the following:

"Had the jury been able to hear(Battered Women Syndrome) testimony, they would have had a better understanding of Mrs. Nancy Seaman's actions both before she killed her husband and afterwards..they probably could have returned a verdict no greater than 2nd degree murder with a very strong possibility of a verdict of not guilty because of self-defense."

Judge McDonald explained that the 1995 Supreme Court Ruling (People v. Crystal) prevented him and the jury from hearing the full testimony of Lenore E. Walker, Ed.D., a licensed psychologist and foremost expert on Battered Women's Syndrome, a testimony which could have made a drastic difference in how the jury perceived the defendant and its relevancy in sentencing her.

In a 2005 letter, Dr. Walker stated:

"It is my professional opinion that the results of those psychological tests would have been of assistance to the jury in supporting Ms. Seaman's claims that she was a battered woman in fear for her life at the time she killed Mr. Seaman...Had I been permitted, I would have testified that in my professional opinion, Ms. Seaman was a battered woman in her relationship with her husband and that she had a reasonable perception of imminent danger to herself at the time she killed him."

I am enclosing all referenced documents, so you can read them in their entirety.

Although Judge McDonald and two other judges have fought to change Nancy's sentence, they have been unsuccessful. You, along with the Parole Board, have also received previous letters from her family, friends and acquaintances, urging all of you to see the great injustice which occurred when Battered Woman's Syndrome expert testimony was not allowed at her trial.

Nancy Seaman realizes she was a poor witness in her own defense. Suffering from such great trauma, personal shame and unbearable public humiliation, she could barely lift her head to

speak. Masterful at hiding her husband's bursts of abuse from her own parents for over 30 years, and from her children their entire lives, she could not defend herself.

While there were good times in her marriage, beatings would flare with the slightest provocation, and Nancy learned to endure this volatility for the sake of family and appearances, until that fateful morning in May 2004 when her husband attacked her in their garage, just as she was about to leave home to teach her elementary school class in Farmington Hills. He was in a rage, having discovered she had purchased a condo and intended to leave him. As he lunged toward her, she grabbed a hatchet and struck him in the forehead, a blow which killed him instantly. Because Nancy, a card-carrying Craftsman and expert in the use of tools, had purchased a hatchet just days before the conflict, the prosecutor insisted it was a case of premeditated murder.

Nancy's subsequent understanding of her uncharacteristically violent crime began when she joined a domestic violence study group conducted by Nels Thompson, a Limited Licensed Psychologist hired by the Department of Corrections. Mr. Thompson had several sessions with her, and reported the following:

Mrs. Seaman had not been in treatment for domestic violence before that time and she was shocked at the things she learned in the group. She is very intelligent and was well able to apply the dynamics of domestic violence that she heard about in the group to her own experience in her marriage. It is without question in my mind that she suffered physical abuse at the hand of her husband and she learned the typical coping skills of abused women; to make sure that no one would know or guess that she was being abused. She learned to clean up messes, make excuses and appear calm during turmoil. In my professional opinion, violence is not natural to Mrs. Seaman's personality structure...

He continued:

I recommend clemency for Mrs. Seaman in the full knowledge that she would be a productive citizen and would pose no threat of violence in the community.

Governor Snyder, Nancy Seaman should not die in prison. She is too good a person, thoroughly remorseful, caring and ethical. While in prison, she has worked in the library, helped other inmates, and prayed constantly that God will see her through this deep chasm of tears. She has not seen her two sons in 12 years, or set eyes on her first granddaughter, now six years old, because she cannot bear to have them see her in prison. What has given her the courage to keep living is Judge McDonald's effort to have her sentence reduced to 2nd degree, which is the proper sentence for one involved in self-defense, if not outright acquittal, and others like Carol Jacobsen, Director of the Michigan Women's Justice & Clemency Project who have rallied to help her.

Through our correspondence, Nancy has become like a sister to me. I empathize with her miserable situation every day, hopeful she will not lose faith. My wise friend, Fr. Jay Samonie, believed there are no accidents in life. "Everything happens for a reason," he said. Perhaps Nancy is there because she has the ability to bring light to the great injustice of that 1995 court ruling, and other inadequate laws which do not mitigate the sentences of women

who defend themselves, allowing her, and others like her, to remain unjustly incarcerated for much longer than they should be.

In the surreal moment Nancy was able to extricate herself from beneath her husband to see his lifeless body on the garage floor, she thought incredulously, “That’s me there...not him,” so accustomed was she to being the one crumpled on the ground. It was incomprehensible to her that it was his body lying there and not hers. Today, she realizes she was a victim for all those years, living a lie—a life of total deception, which was a complete contradiction to the values instilled by her Italian-Catholic upbringing.

It is encouraging that California’s legislature recently overturned a similar law relating to Battered Women Syndrome, and it may be that our legislature will ultimately do the same in the days or years to come, but you, Governor Snyder, have the power now to correct an unjust sentence where Nancy Seaman is concerned with the stroke of your pen.

It is my sincere hope that your eyes will actually read this letter and that you will search your heart and soul to use your power to correct a great injustice. Nancy Seaman deserves to live the remainder of her life in freedom and tranquility.

Sincerely,

Pat Hardy (Mrs. Thomas)

cc: Michigan Department of Corrections
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