



NYS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS & COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

BOARD OF PAROLE

In the matter of

JOHN RUZAS



DIN #75C0385

INTERVIEW TYPE: SPECIAL CONSIDERATION/DE NOVO

LOCATION: FISHKILL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
(Via Videoconference)
97 Central Avenue
Albany, New York

DATE: November 7, 2017

DECISION DATE: November 8, 2017

BEFORE: COMMISSIONER DRAKE
COMMISSIONER CRANGLE
COMMISSIONER DAVIS

AT FACILITY: ROBERT HART, SORC
JACQUELINE ARROYO, PA

JOHN RUZAS, Inmate

REPORTED BY: Brynn C. Reynolds, Hearing Reporter

1 BY COMMISSIONER CRANGLE:

2 Q. Hello, sir. Can you state your name for the
3 record?

4 A. Just one second, please.

5 Q. Sure.

6 A. Would you say something, please.

7 Q. Yep, can you hear me okay?

8 A. Yeah, I can hear you okay.

9 Q. Do you need to move up?

10 A. Yeah. I can hear you.

11 Q. Can you?

12 A. Very clearly. I'm good.

13 Q. You're comfortable?

14 A. Yes, I am.

15 Q. Let me just make it point to you before we
16 start. If at any time during this interview you can't
17 hear, you need a break, can you do that. If you need a
18 glass of water, ask for some water, I think there is a
19 sink in there.

20 A. This young lady will get me a glass of water
21 (indicating).

22 Q. We're going to start on the record. Can you
23 state your name for the record?

24 A. My name is John Ruzas.

25 Q. Mr. Ruzas, I'm Commissioner Crangle. With me

1 is Commissioner Drake and Commissioner Davis.

2 COMMISSIONER DRAKE: Good morning.

3 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Good morning, sir.

4 THE INMATE: Drake and Davis, right?

5 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: And Crangle.

6 THE INMATE: And Crangle.

7 BY COMMISSIONER CRANGLE:

8 Q. I don't believe I've ever interviewed you
9 before and I know these 2 haven't either for sure because
10 they just got appointed this summer. Okay?

11 A. Okay, fine.

12 Q. I've been on since 2008, I believe. But I went
13 through the file and I'm pretty sure I didn't interview
14 you. Okay?

15 A. Looks like a hell of a file.

16 Q. You've built up quite the file here, there's
17 actually two-folders here.

18 A. 13 parole boards will do that.

19 Q. Exactly. So just for the record, everything we
20 discuss is on the record, we have a great stenographer
21 here on this side of the camera.

22 For the record, you're in for a murder second,
23 two counts criminal possession of a weapon in the second
24 degree, two counts robbery in the first degree, criminal
25 possession of weapon in the second degree and conspiracy

1 in the second degree. When you add it all up it's 25 to
2 life, right?

3 A. Yes it is, that's correct.

4 Q. And this interview is considered as a special
5 consideration case, De Novo, court ordered, and for the
6 record we do not have any community opposition in our
7 possession. Okay?

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. Outside community opposition. Do you
10 understand that?

11 A. Other than the victim's family?

12 Q. The family, yes, and we'll get into that. But
13 just off the top of the record, we don't have anything.

14 A. No community opposition, okay.

15 Q. Got it?

16 A. Well, I hear you, finally after X number -- 13
17 parole boards, that's the first time anybody ever said
18 that, I appreciate that.

19 Q. Well, it's a court order, it's written, and so
20 I wanted to make it crystal clear for the record. Now,
21 John, you are how old?

22 A. 74, I'll be 75 in January.

23 Q. And number of years in is how many?

24 A. 43.

25 Q. And if you were to be released, home is where

1 to you? Whereabouts in New York?

2 A. With my wife in Montauk, Long Island.

3 Q. And I got to tell you, I was very impressed
4 with what you provided to the board, to myself and to
5 Commissioner Davis and Commissioner Drake. The parole
6 packet that you and your, I would say your team of
7 attorneys, they did a great job. Very organized, and
8 we're going to review it as we discuss today but even
9 beyond that. Okay?

10 You have some fantastic family members that
11 have sat down either in front of a computer or just with a
12 piece of paper and pen and have written some really nice
13 letters on your behalf. Okay? And you should be proud of
14 that. Do you understand that?

15 A. I'm extremely --

16 Q. Friends and family.

17 A. I appreciate it, especially of the legal team
18 that supported me throughout this whole situation. The
19 law students were phenomenal, I really commend the
20 professor who appointed these law students, because they
21 have really been a blessing, I'm a very fortunate man in
22 that sense.

23 Q. I just wanted to point that out from the get
24 go. Very impressive. But again, as you're sitting there
25 43 years in, you have people again I want to stress,

1 writing multiple letters about your life, about what
2 they're willing to provide you, giving insight about you
3 that, you know, obviously that we don't know. And that
4 you don't have time to share but they can share some
5 things. Okay? Like, just to give you an example, this
6 guy here, [REDACTED]?

7 A. Yeah, [REDACTED].

8 Q. Huh?

9 A. That's [REDACTED], I nicknamed him.

10 Q. How old is he?

11 A. [REDACTED] would probably be middle 40s.

12 Q. Okay, well, you know he wrote -- he sat down
13 and with wrote a nice letter here. He didn't type it out,
14 just simple old fashioned way, not in front of a computer,
15 got a pen and piece of paper and wrote away about you.
16 Talked about your wife and how he's an old friend of yours
17 and he calls you Jackie, right?

18 A. That's my name. I've been Jackie since -- I
19 don't know if you're familiar with it, but my name is John
20 and in Irish families Jackie was a nickname for John.

21 Q. Sure. My uncle, I had an uncle that was John,
22 and people called him Jackie.

23 A. There you go. And Crangle's an Irish name,
24 right?

25 Q. Crangle's an Irish name, that's for sure.

1 A. So we got a good date today.

2 Q. So going back to your family, your wife of --
3 was it 28 years?

4 A. We've been together 30, but we're married 28
5 years, yes.

6 Q. And she's now retired. She wrote a beautiful
7 letter, we appreciate that. She works I see part-time now
8 from April to October at a resort, right?

9 A. She's at [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
10 [REDACTED], she manages the pool in the [REDACTED]. She
11 manages that.

12 Q. Okay, good. And over the years how long have
13 you been at Fishkill?

14 A. I've been at Fishkill since the day before my
15 birthday. January 29th, 2015 I got here.

16 Q. Where were you before that?

17 A. Greenhaven.

18 Q. For how long?

19 A. I got there in 2004, so from 2004 to '15, I got
20 almost 11 years.

21 Q. So would your family be able to visit you
22 there?

23 A. Yeah, sure.

24 Q. How long of a drive would it take her?

25 A. From Montauk to Greenhaven?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Approximately 4 hours.

3 Q. Wow. That's quite the hike.

4 A. Listen, I went to Greenhaven because [REDACTED]
5 got stuck in a snowstorm in Attica, we had a trailer
6 visit, and it snowed in Attica, anyway, took us 23 hours
7 to drive home from Attica. At the time we was living in
8 South Beach, it took us 23 hours to get home.

9 Q. Wow, quite the drive, holy cow. Well, I'm
10 bringing that up, if you're wondering where I'm going with
11 this, you're very lucky. The fact that she's not only
12 written but she's visiting you all the time, 28 years,
13 that's important to have support out there, so if released
14 that's good to know that you have a solid residence,
15 right?

16 A. Absolutely.

17 Q. And then along with your wife you have a lot of
18 stepkids, right?

19 A. I have about 4 children and 11 grandchildren.

20 Q. And we have letters of support from your
21 stepkids I saw, and along with your stepkids I note that
22 even your step -- your stepkids' husbands have written,
23 right?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. One was a retired, 12 years in as a police

1 officer?

2 A. [REDACTED], he's the second oldest. [REDACTED] is the
3 oldest. She's a special education teacher [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 Q. What's her name?

6 A. [REDACTED] And [REDACTED], the ex-retired police
7 officer is the second, he's 47 now, [REDACTED] and then
8 [REDACTED] is next, and then it's [REDACTED] who's the youngest
9 and she's 39.

10 Q. Okay, so your stepson is a police officer?

11 A. Retired.

12 Q. Was a police officer?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. I misspoke. I thought it was the husband of
15 [REDACTED], I'm sorry.

16 A. No, [REDACTED] husband is a [REDACTED] in the
17 [REDACTED] Fire Department. He's not a police officer, he's
18 a fireman.

19 Q. So your stepson wrote, so I want you to know we
20 reviewed that as well. Okay?

21 A. Thank you.

22 Q. And I know -- [REDACTED], she has a few kids
23 herself, right?

24 A. She's got [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]
25 is gonna be 14 this January 30th, on my birthday. We

1 share birthdays, me and [REDACTED]. I would really like it if
2 I could talk to [REDACTED]. He's gonna be 14 as I said, but
3 he has [REDACTED], he's [REDACTED]
4 [REDACTED].

5 Q. Very smart though, I read in the file, very
6 smart.

7 A. Oh, he's amazing, I talk to him and I think I'm
8 talking to a college professor.

9 Q. That's unbelievable.

10 A. His social skills, at one time he didn't have
11 too much social skills, but his social skills are coming
12 around slowly but surely. Slow process, but the kid is
13 just amazing, he's so adaptable, flexible, he deals with
14 his problems like -- that goes to [REDACTED] mother being
15 nurturing, and [REDACTED], naturally the kid is phenomenal.

16 Q. I'm bringing up the family because throughout
17 these years you did have a lot of visits, and I know it
18 was noted, I read somewhere through here that because, you
19 know, that [REDACTED] was busy with the kids that she didn't
20 visit you as much but she's still there for support, and
21 the kids are calling you or you're calling the kids and
22 it's the grandkids, and you know a lot about their life
23 and they ask questions and you give them support, so I'm
24 glad to hear that.

25 In terms of your preparation for the outside,

1 you're all set in terms of the [REDACTED], Social
2 Security, right?

3 A. I got [REDACTED], too.

4 Q. Yeah, [REDACTED]. So that's also good,
5 because you understand that the support 43 years in, John,
6 things have changed out there.

7 A. Absolutely.

8 Q. And things are almost, I would say, too fast.
9 Okay? I can't keep up. [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED] You gotta
11 keep it slow. It's important for you to communicate with
12 the parole officer on a regular basis and go to these
13 agencies that your team of lawyers and support people have
14 lined you up with, right?

15 A. Absolutely.

16 Q. So I'm not concerned about the fact that you
17 ought to go find a job, let's just face it. You're gonna
18 be 74, right?

19 A. 5.

20 Q. 75, so that's not our focus, here. We just
21 want you to live outside the prison campus, in the
22 community, successful with your family, report to parole
23 when need be, follow all the rules. Stay out of trouble.

24 A. Crime free.

25 Q. Now, health-wise, [REDACTED]

1

2 A. Yes, sir, I did.

3 Q. You walk with the cane and at times you've been
4 in a wheelchair?

5 A. Well, when I went to the -- at the time when I
6 was outside, some areas don't want you to come into their
7 environment with a cane, and they put me in a wheelchair
8 because they take the cane and I'm not too stable so they
9 put me in a wheelchair.

10 Q. Okay. So you're gonna need assistance on the
11 medical end outside with the doctor and everything to keep
12 up with your health, correct?

13 A. Absolutely, but not physically. Physically I
14 can do that on my own.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. The wonderful thing about the body, [REDACTED]
17 [REDACTED], you can recover. Not to the point where you were
18 before, but I can see today I'm much more mobile than I
19 was 2 years ago, if you can believe that. I couldn't
20 walk, they put me in the hospital when I got here because
21 I couldn't walk the walkway out here, so they put me in
22 the hospital, but I can do that now. I exercise, I do my
23 stretches every day religiously, and I'm much more mobile
24 than I was before. And I still have -- my speech is bad,
25 so my --

1 Q. A little slower?

2 A. Slower, [REDACTED], I don't know,

3 [REDACTED] And [REDACTED], I have [REDACTED] and

4 [REDACTED] but that's even better now than it was

5 2000 years ago. Everything's a very slow process and of

6 course age has something to do with it, I'm not gonna

7 revitalize myself now as I would 20, 30 years ago, but I'm

8 doing all right.

9 Q. Okay, good. And I also want to note, too,

10 speaking of various agencies that are willing to help you,

11 the executive director of [REDACTED]?

12 A. [REDACTED], yes.

13 Q. [REDACTED], yes, [REDACTED].

14 A. I'm so proud of [REDACTED]. I was with him years

15 ago, at Skidmore College together and he's gone on to

16 attain the position he has, and --

17 Q. He's done well for himself, there's no doubt,

18 good for him.

19 A. I'm just so proud of that kid. To me I call

20 him a kid, everyone is to me, but I'm just proud of [REDACTED];

21 he's a wonderful kid, too. I'm just happy, I'm just happy

22 his life has turned in a way that's so positive and so

23 uplifting for other inmates, I mean, guys that you see --

24 listen, if [REDACTED] did it, I can do it, that kind of

25 attitude. He's a good example of what a convict should do

1 while he's in prison.

2 Q. Okay, well I just wanted to let you know we
3 have that and it's nice that, again, a solid support for
4 you to connect with on the outside. Also, I appreciate
5 this updated letter that you provided to the board. You
6 wrote it yourself, handwritten about your accomplishments
7 and about the offense, it's right here, okay?

8 (Indicating). Do you see it here?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. The fact that you're a man of 74 years old over
11 the past 43 years with shame, guilt and sadness for your
12 criminal actions. That's the letter. Do you recall
13 writing it?

14 A. Yes, I recognize the words.

15 Q. So we appreciate you doing that, and we'll
16 consider that as well. And I personally like when, just
17 for the record, I personally like when inmates write
18 themselves to the board, you know, in their own
19 handwriting rather than have someone else type it, it's
20 more personal. It comes from the heart, so I appreciate
21 that.

22 So, you've been in, again, all these years, you
23 have accomplished a real lot, and I want to commend you
24 for that. All right? Just some of the things, you've
25 done the number one thing that I truly give credit for

1 inmates to do, is the education end. You got the high
2 school diploma.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. I know you did it years ago, but you did it, so
5 good for you that you got the education. We receive
6 lifers all the time that come before the board and they
7 don't bother doing it, so congratulations on getting your
8 high school diploma. I know you've gone beyond the high
9 school diploma, but you had to get that first and you went
10 on to get -- you've taken writing courses at Skidmore,
11 right?

12 A. Yes, I did.

13 Q. And I know you're a writer as well, but you
14 went and took courses, signed up for courses as
15 Skidmore College, that's a very good college so good for
16 you.

17 A. Yes, I did.

18 Q. You have obviously taken the DOCCS programs,
19 the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], ART, and you've taught classes yourself,
20 correct?

21 A. Yes, I have.

22 Q. What also jumps out at me, too, is this --
23 where is it here, Vietnam Vets of America in 2002, now,
24 what is that? I'm not familiar with that.

25 A. It's imported by the Vietnam veterans and the

1 [REDACTED] that would come in weekly in Attica,
2 when I was in Attica years ago. I believe it was a
3 six-month program; I'm not positive, though. I think it
4 was six months, I seem to recall that's the length of
5 time, but a program is only as good as the people that
6 participate, and we had a good lively group of guys that
7 were there and serious about their recovery and their
8 addictions, so it was a good program.

9 Q. Okay, good. Did you serve anywhere growing up
10 in the army or anything?

11 A. No, [REDACTED] because at the time when they
12 called me for induction I went to Fort Hamilton in
13 Brooklyn, [REDACTED]
14 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]
15 [REDACTED]
16 [REDACTED]
17 [REDACTED] and that's the closest I ever got to
18 induction was Fort Hamilton that one time, and it's been
19 years.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But I've never served, unfortunately.

22 Q. Okay. Then I see -- just want to point this
23 out, you have a nice certificate here from the top 50
24 winners of National Prison Writing Contest, John Jackie
25 Ruzas, dated February, 2015 I got here.

1 A. Yes, sir, I've been fortunate over the years to
2 be awarded in different contests and my writing was used
3 from -- the first time I was awarded a win was in 1982, I
4 won a first prize award and the pen, I don't know if
5 you're familiar with PEN.

6 Q. Pen pal?

7 A. No, no, not pen pal.

8 Q. The what?

9 A. PEN, P-E-N, stands for poets, essays and
10 novelists.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. It's a literary organization from New York, and
13 after the Attica situation, they started up a writing
14 program.

15 Q. Okay, that's great. I hear a lot of noise, are
16 you having trouble over there?

17 A. Anyway, it's a program nationwide so I was
18 privileged to win that first time award, and I've been
19 writing ever since instead of -- in a sense of self-worth,
20 I guess you could say.

21 Q. Okay, because there was a -- the commissioner
22 just showed it to me, I thought I saw a letter here, the
23 PEN Prison Writing Program.

24 A. Yes, that's it.

25 Q. And there's a letter here, actually, from the

1 professor at Purchase College?

2 A. Oh, all right.

3 Q. [REDACTED] --

4 A. [REDACTED].

5 Q. [REDACTED], yes, Commissioner Drake just pointed
6 it out to me because I couldn't find it in this huge
7 packet. I saw that --

8 A. Thank you.

9 Q. -- when I was looking at it earlier. Good for
10 you, that goes along with the certificate that proves how
11 well you do. Okay?

12 A. I do fairly well, I've submitted entries to PEN
13 five times and five times I got, if I didn't get first or
14 second I've always gotten an honorable mention at least,
15 so I'm fortunate in the sense that my writing ability is
16 recognized and awarded, it just makes me feel good. And
17 my wife, and my mom, my mother, when she was alive, it
18 gave her a sense of, you know, not good because my mother
19 never felt good after I did what I did, but at least it
20 helped see that her son was not just a cop killer, he had
21 other things to offer.

22 Q. I wanted to note, too, just to show you on the
23 record, [REDACTED], the professor, said, "Mr. Ruzas founded
24 and facilitated a creative writing workshop in prison. A
25 generous man."

1 A. Yes, I did that now years ago. I had a place
2 to water your gardens, it's like a garden and you water it
3 and you do it with a pen, that's how you water your
4 gardens, it's a place to water your gardens.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. And I put that program together. But that's --
7 I think that was in the middle '80s I think, it's quite a
8 while ago, but it was a successful program and we had a
9 good turnout and it was well run and it was a good
10 program. I enjoyed that program.

11 Q. Now, you mentioned your mom, right?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Your mom obviously has passed away, what age
14 was she when she died?

15 A. My mother was 69.

16 Q. And I know you wrote, somewhere I read that --
17 maybe it was, like, one of your -- I mean, it was one of
18 the previous reports or maybe it's one of your articles
19 you've read or wrote or something. You wrote that you
20 felt bad that your mom died alone, right?

21 A. I felt bad that my mom came because she never
22 left the house after I did what I did. This woman who was
23 born and raised in the neighborhood, everybody knew my
24 mom, and -- but after I did what I did, the crime, after I
25 took [REDACTED] life, she just locked herself up in

1 the house, she didn't -- the house fell into disrepair.
2 The lawn was never mowed or anything, she put her head
3 down on the table and my cousin found her with her head on
4 the table and she just died of a broken heart. I caused
5 -- I did that. So, yeah, she was a wonderful woman and a
6 great mother.

7 Q. John, why don't you just give us a little bit
8 of -- give us a little bit of an insight into your
9 childhood in terms of, you know, we gotta talk about how
10 did you end up where you are today? You know, state
11 prison, you didn't just wake up one day and find yourself
12 in state prison. It started in your family life, you
13 know, your mom and dad, were your mom and dad split or
14 were you together with your mom and dad?

15 A. I lived in a family where there was very little
16 parental love between a husband and a wife. Not parental
17 love because my mom loved me and I'm sure my father did as
18 well, but he just had a heart wrench -- my father was a
19 cold man. He was the opposite of my mother, my mother was
20 very gregarious and very loving and she would show you
21 that love. My father was a little bit more stony I guess
22 you could say.

23 Q. Were you close to him?

24 A. No, my father and I were never really close, we
25 just lived in the same house, he was my father, he was an

1 excellent provider, he was -- there was always food, there
2 was always clothes.

3 Q. What did he do for a living?

4 A. My father was a union carpenter. Most jobs
5 that he went on, he was well known, he was a Shock Stewart
6 (phonetic) on most of the jobs. That's what my father did
7 for a living, he was a union carpenter and an excellent
8 provider.

9 Q. Were you going to school on a regular basis or
10 were you kinda messing around in and out of school, were
11 you drugging? I'm trying to get some -- give me the
12 lifestyle. Was your dad home or drinking and was there
13 stress at home?

14 A. There you go, there was a lot of stress. Let
15 me give you -- and it's unfortunate because we can't sit
16 down and just relax and talk, we've only got minutes here
17 and to really recount my early childhood is kinda
18 difficult in this circumstance, but I'll do my best. I
19 was born and raised in a Catholic family, both my mom and
20 father were church-going Catholics, both of them. They
21 went to separate churches but they were serious about
22 their religion.

23 I had an older sister and from early on in my
24 life, my mother or father, I'm not gonna say never got
25 along but it was like I said, not too much love displayed,

1 they would argue starting early on since I was, I mean, I
2 was a young kid and they would be arguing and the
3 arguments would not get physical to the point where it was
4 anybody got hurt, but they would escalate -- just the
5 names and the language and the volume of their voices, and
6 the language could hear the language called the cops come
7 to my house to take my father out, sometimes just to calm
8 the situation down. That's the kind of environment I grew
9 up in. And I remember when they would -- it started when
10 I was younger I would go into the corner of my bedroom and
11 just keep the pillow on my head so I didn't hear the
12 screaming and the yelling.

13 Q. And the yelling was between who?

14 A. My mom and dad.

15 Q. Was he drunk?

16 A. No, it's just a personality I guess, and I have
17 to say that my mom drank, too. The both of them, my mom
18 drank beer, she liked her can of beer, my father was a
19 watermaker drinker, he would drink a shot and a beer but
20 not fall down drunk, I never saw my father fall down
21 drunk. He drank every day, later on he got me in the
22 union and we would work on different jobs together and
23 every day after the job we'd stop at the gin mill and have
24 a watermaker every day. So he's not drunk but he had that
25 -- that was an addiction, I thought I had learned a lot

1 about addiction over the years, I made it my business, why
2 I feel not only my early life and the trauma and the
3 stress that I dealt with as a kid but later on as I got
4 older I understood what addiction does to the brain and
5 how it remolds and attacks the brain and forces the brain
6 to react upon stimuli, being heroin in my case, to the
7 point where nothing else matters but your fix of heroin.
8 So that's the environment that I grew up in.

9 Q. On your end it escalated as you got older,
10 obviously, I mean --

11 A. Absolutely.

12 Q. It went from you having a nice drink with your
13 dad on a regular basis, to you mentioned the word heroin,
14 right?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. You got into the heroin at around 18 or what?

17 A. 17.

18 Q. And then was there a gap where you ended up
19 going to California?

20 A. Yeah, that's very good, yeah, I went to
21 California.

22 Q. I did the reading here.

23 A. I appreciate that very much because that's when
24 I was caught up , I was messed up, I was a junky, my
25 heroin had become who I was at that time. And I went -- a

1 friend of mine came back from the army and he's back in
2 the neighborhood and he's like what am I doing here, I
3 mean he was all over Europe, he was an MP in Germany.
4 Anyway, he said I'm going to California, and that's when I
5 decided I'm going to California. That's when I just
6 decided I'm going to get away from this environment, so we
7 got in the car and drove to California and I was out there
8 for 7 months.

9 Q. Were you a cook there or something? What were
10 you doing?

11 A. I worked in -- well, when I first got there I
12 got a job in the college which is right across the street
13 from the boulevard, and then I met a -- actually, it was
14 only me, but we met a guy from the Bronx whose wife didn't
15 like California, she packed up and moved with the kids
16 back to the Bronx and he was stuck with a five-room
17 apartment so he asked us if we wanted to -- he didn't have
18 no place to stay, we had just gotten to California so he
19 asked us if we would like to share the apartment which we
20 did, he wound up being an dispatcher and estimator for
21 California Mayflower Van Lines, moving vans, and got me a
22 job. I used to go and shape up and work on trucks
23 whenever they needed. So it was a good experience, but
24 the major thing was I was away from heroin for that whole
25 amount of time.

1 Q. But what made John come back to New York State?

2 A. Very good question, I'm gonna tell you. What
3 triggers are, you know, what triggers are in a dophine's
4 (phonetic) life, triggers are those things that tell a
5 brain, hey, it would be nice to crawl back into the womb,
6 it would be nice to feel that blissful feeling that you
7 get from a bag of heroin, and that's what happened. On
8 Western Boulevard in California where there was a diner
9 and one day I went into the diner and I saw -- it had to
10 be a dophine (phonetic), and he was nodding, he had a cup
11 of coffee or something, I don't know if it was soup or
12 something, but he was nodding, and the brain started
13 (indicating), and it worked on me for -- I would say
14 probably 2 days because I know they owed me I think a
15 couple of days pay, County Van Lines owed me, so what
16 happened was [REDACTED] used to give me his car when he wasn't
17 working he would let me drive his car because they had
18 given him a car to do estimations, so if he didn't have a
19 job to go estimate he would let me take the car and I
20 would pick him up at night from work.

21 Well, this day I took the car and I went down
22 to Hollywood and I went to the movies, Arcade Pantages, I
23 remember it like it was yesterday, Arcade Pantages was
24 showing Breakfast at Tiffany's, the movie, with [REDACTED]
25 [REDACTED] she played [REDACTED] she was a prostitute,

1 a high paid prostitute, but anyway to make a long story
2 short, the movie star's up in New York, they show you
3 New York dead as a dawn, dead people start coming out of
4 the Subway and the cars start beep, beep, beeping, I got
5 so home sick, so alone with the triggers I was getting
6 from this dophine (phonetic) and this movie I was sitting
7 in front of enjoying, I went and got the couple of days'
8 pay and went back to New York, that night I was on a plane
9 back to New York and right to the connection's house.

10 Q. Wow. And then the rest is history, so to
11 speak?

12 A. The rest is history. Where would I be today if
13 I just stayed in California and I didn't give into that
14 trigger, if I didn't -- you know, the brain is a
15 phenomenal piece of machinery. It tends to do things that
16 -- it gives supervalue to heroin, it places interests like
17 your life, your family, your job, your health, nothing
18 else matters but that drug.

19 Q. So what age were you when you came back from
20 California to New York, 18?

21 A. I was probably just turning 18 when I came
22 back.

23 Q. Okay. So, all right, well I'm glad you, you
24 know, that gives us some good insight, explanation, how
25 your life was when you were younger. I'm going to take a

1 break for a moment and pass it, see if my colleagues have
2 any questions because we got a lot of information to go
3 through.

4 BY COMMISSIONER DRAKE:

5 Q. Mr. Ruzas, good morning. Am I pronouncing that
6 right?

7 A. Yes, that's good pronunciation.

8 Q. Mr. Ruzas, I really do appreciate your insight
9 and your knowledge, you've done a lot of work when it
10 comes to addiction, and that story was quite compelling
11 and I believe everything that you said was right on the
12 money in terms of how addiction does affect the body
13 physiologically and those triggers and what it can do.

14 I would like to ask a question, though, because
15 it stated in the documents that your sobriety began in
16 2001 which leads me to believe that you continued even
17 while incarcerated, engaging in drugs.

18 A. You want me to answer that?

19 Q. Yes.

20 A. Is that a question?

21 Q. Well, it is a statement, I guess, and I would
22 like to know why you continued and at what point was it
23 your -- was your rock bottom, I guess?

24 A. Okay. 2001 you said, did you say 2001 -- my
25 sobriety started from 2001.

1 Q. Yes, sir, that's what it says here in the
2 documents.

3 A. That's probably -- I would say clinically true.
4 I had up to that time I came away in 1975.

5 Q. Yes?

6 A. 1975 (inaudible).

7 Q. Mr. Ruzas, can you stop one second? I
8 apologize, but part of what you said we didn't hear
9 because it seems as if the audio is going out on that end.

10 A. Okay, I'll wait until you correct it. Do you
11 want me to talk into this?

12 Q. We can hear you, it's just that it's --

13 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: Hold on, where's the
14 microphone?

15 (Whereupon, an off-the-record discussion was
16 held.)

17 Q. I'm sorry, Mr. Ruzas. You can continue, sir.

18 A. I think I said I was -- from the time that I
19 was incarcerated until 2001 I had -- I was in a number of
20 different facilities and every facility there's different
21 environments you go into. Your programs change, your job
22 changes, the people you're associated with change, and the
23 facilities -- everything changes about the facility, and
24 in particular I guess there's, as you know, there's drugs
25 in just about every facility you go to.

1 Q. Yes, sir.

2 A. And at that time again the triggers are
3 triggers that don't just trigger you in California, they
4 trigger you wherever you go where drugs are involved.
5 Now, you could be an alcoholic, I speak for myself, you
6 could be clean for weeks on end or months on end, but
7 somebody gets a visit or you heard some COs, I don't know
8 -- anyway, you find out that there's some junk in the
9 facility, you're driven to go and get that sense of bliss.
10 And that had happened a number of times over the years and
11 2001, I gotta be honest, I gotta improve my wife's problem
12 in my life how she has taken me by the hand but in a lot
13 of respects she's just a mother and a woman, a nurturer, I
14 mean, an absolute nurturer. She would constantly bring me
15 back to what the situation is and what my life has been
16 and how we got -- how you got to turn it around, and it's
17 the responsibility of the family where she introduced me
18 to her children, which is not something that any mother
19 does, she felt comfortable doing that, so I couldn't
20 continue playing into the triggers, giving into the
21 triggers, walking out of my housing area to go in another
22 block which is a place to go and satisfy this trigger,
23 climb back into the womb, that's what I think of it as,
24 that's what the heroin does for you, you feel so
25 comfortable, so blissful, you feel like you're returning

1 to the womb, and eventually the programs that I involved
2 myself in like [REDACTED] naturally, and [REDACTED], I did [REDACTED] a
3 little later on, but in particular [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] at the
4 time, I eventually got to the point where heroin was not
5 -- I didn't play into the triggers, I kept it in my mind,
6 that especially what [REDACTED] has sacrificed and what she's
7 done for me, I couldn't continue this pattern of allowing
8 myself to give into these triggers.

9 At the time, and I'll be perfectly honest with
10 you, I didn't understand what the brain was doing. I
11 didn't understand the intricacies of the brain's mechanism
12 and how addiction takes control of your -- the processes
13 in your frontal cortex of your brain in the front, I
14 didn't understand none of that. But got to learn of it
15 and understand it and that helped me turn my life around
16 and become the person that I like today as opposed to the
17 person that I didn't like in the past.

18 Q. I appreciate that. Mr. Ruzas?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. During that time you were in prison, and it
21 might seem like an obvious question or a silly question,
22 but what were those outside triggers, those external
23 triggers? We know about the physiological triggers, but
24 what were the external triggers that kept you, while in
25 prison, to continue entering the womb as you say?

1 A. When you say external you mean outside my body?

2 Q. Yes, sir, your environment.

3 A. My environment?

4 Q. Yeah, anything that outside of the
5 physiological addiction and what it does to you, what were
6 you dealing with, I guess, in the environment --

7 A. Mental.

8 Q. -- that affected you mentally to continue to go
9 and get the drugs? Because we're looking at 1975 to 2001
10 that there was this activity of drug use, and I'm just
11 curious as to what those things were.

12 A. Well, it's not physicality of it, but the
13 mental. The mental, the mental is what drives you to do
14 the actions that you do, to associate with who you
15 associate with, so mentally your mind tells you how good
16 it feels if it only had a bang of junk and that's where it
17 comes from, that's where your brain -- you're not in
18 control -- your brain is in control of you, you're not in
19 control of your brain, your brain controls you. I'm not
20 looking for excuses, but that's just a scientific fact for
21 crying out loud, your brain tells you how good you were
22 feeling and you want to forget that your mom died with a
23 dog at her feet and you caused it, you want to forget that
24 your mom died of a broken heart and you caused that, too,
25 and you took a man's life away from six children and you

1 caused that too, well, the way to forget that is a bang of
2 junk, and it's mental. It's got to do with the
3 physicality, the messages that your brain sends you.
4 That's the best answer I can give you.

5 Q. And I appreciate that answer, I really do
6 appreciate that answer. And I just want to piggyback on
7 some of these outstanding letters that
8 Commissioner Crangle pointed out to you, to us this
9 morning during your interview. I understand you helped
10 write a couple of plays, is that correct?

11 A. Yes, I did, I was fortunate enough to be
12 involved at Literature Volunteers years ago back in '16 in
13 Attica, too, but Attica was a volunteer program, this
14 program was a prison program where you actually got paid
15 for it, Attica's program was volunteer like I said. But
16 in Sing Sing I wrote a play called "Welcome Aboard," we
17 had a big group of literacy inmates in Sing Sing, it was
18 like, about 85 guys, we had a daytime session, morning
19 session, and an afternoon session, different people. We
20 had the symposium in the gym and I wrote the play "Welcome
21 Aboard" just to give members of the group a chance to
22 express themselves and feel, you know, get out the words,
23 what it does for an individual who can't read or write,
24 and that's what the play was about. And I don't know if
25 you're familiar with [REDACTED] the cookie guy, [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED] at that time was the national spokesperson for -- and
2 he found what we're going to do and he came to Sing Sing
3 for the truckload of [REDACTED] cookies, we were eating
4 [REDACTED] cookies, it was a good play. And after that
5 --

6 Q. And I'm sure therapeutically it helped those
7 inmates to come out and motivate them.

8 A. Absolutely.

9 Q. And that's what I hope you're doing, sir?

10 A. I'm gonna tell you this: It was one of the
11 best programs, you know, it was one of the best programs
12 not only for them but for me as well because I felt such a
13 voice, you guys be able to write a letter home, so --
14 there's a lot of noise, what is that? Is there a lot of
15 paper, is somebody moving something? All right, okay.

16 Q. We'll make sure we stop it, thank you.

17 A. Thank you. They have -- that program itself
18 was just an inspiring program. I used to have, like I
19 said, I used to leave off every day I would say all right
20 fellas, what we gonna do? And they would turn around and
21 say we're going to accentuate the positive and eliminate
22 the negative, and that's how we ended it every day, and
23 you watch them and little by little that's just what they
24 were doing, accentuating the positive and eliminating the
25 negative, and that helped me to consider, Jackie, you got

1 to do the same thing you tell these guys every day, you
2 got to eliminate the negative. And that was also a lesson
3 that I just -- one time we had a visit, my mom came to
4 visit me, and this guy, [REDACTED] (phonetic), he was in my
5 class and his mom came with [REDACTED] (phonetic) and she
6 came over and thanked me for teaching her son how to write
7 a letter home, and my mother would say -- I just felt
8 good, it was a good program, it was a wonderful program
9 and I got good results personally from being a part of
10 that.

11 Q. And I'm sure your mother was proud to be able
12 to see that, Mr. Ruzas.

13 A. Yeah, she was. She was.

14 Q. I'm going to ask Commissioner Davis if he has
15 any other questions and reserve the opportunity to come
16 back to you, okay?

17 A. Okay, I'll drink to that.

18 Q. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Thank you,
20 Commissioner Drake. Good morning Mr. Ruzas.

21 THE INMATE: Hello, Commissioner Drake, you're
22 a colorful guy, that's a nice tie.

23 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Thank you, thank you.
24 It's commissioner Davis, by the way, I appreciate it.
25 You know, I've listened carefully and you provided

1 some great insight in terms of your behavioral
2 challenges over the years, I just want to sort of go
3 through some things with you, is that okay?

4 THE INMATE: Certainly, absolutely.

5 BY COMMISSIONER DAVIS:

6 Q. Very well. I've listened to you, I've listened
7 carefully, and you've indicated at one point, and I quote,
8 "The wonderful thing about the body is that you can
9 recover." Do you remember that statement?

10 A. Yes, sir, that's true.

11 Q. And I cannot agree more with you but I also
12 want to add that the mind, the mind as well, certainly
13 someone who's experienced [REDACTED], there's a thing called
14 brain plasticity and you've demonstrated that, I mean,
15 you're coherent, you're thoughtful in your interview and I
16 just want to be mindful that you have the capacity to
17 change your body, your mind, and your behavior.

18 A. I have done that. I mean, I understand the
19 mind's plasticity and how you can -- addiction attacks
20 that and remolds it to what it wants it to be, what it
21 wants you to do at the expense of other things in your
22 life like your family, your work and everything else.

23 Q. Very well. You've also indicated that the
24 frontal cortex, and as you know, that impairs our
25 decision-making skills, and so you've indicated that

1 that's been impacted in the past. So what have you done
2 moving forward, Mr. Ruzas, is that you can ensure that
3 your decision-making skills will remain in tact?

4 A. Well, like you said, the brain can heal itself,
5 and with the drug use, I would say now it's probably been
6 19 or 20 years I haven't touched heroin or had any
7 addiction at all, so my problem has hopefully panned
8 itself to hopefully the point where it will never be -- I
9 mean, you got to consider heroin was at one time just
10 simply part of who I was but it's not in my life no more
11 so it's not who I am today. And what I've done it to keep
12 that consciousness, that air of where I was and where it
13 got me and how it allowed me to devastate my family and
14 [REDACTED], I mean I could never make up for what
15 I've caused [REDACTED]. I mean, I've lived with it
16 for a long time, I love the mind, I had that feeling that
17 I owed [REDACTED], I will always have that feeling
18 that I owe [REDACTED] and I've tried to -- I don't
19 know if the word is atonement but I've tried to atone for
20 what I've done, with other inmates and the programs I've
21 done and tried to give back, and I know I'll never satisfy
22 [REDACTED] but I just would like to know that I
23 have thought about what I've done over all these years. I
24 don't know if that answers your question at all.

25 Q. It has, it's given me more insight into your

1 process of what has occurred.

2 I also want to indicate to you that there is a
3 study, I don't know if you're aware of it, it's called the
4 adverse childhood experiences, otherwise known as ACES,
5 and what ACES has done, it correlates a strong
6 relationship between adverse childhood experiences and how
7 adults become exposed to [REDACTED] and also
8 engaging in elicit behavioral challenges.

9 So I want to really talk about that, because as
10 I listened to you earlier and reviewed your folder, I
11 noticed that you began to also use alcohol at the age of
12 13 followed by marijuana at the age of 15, so I know with
13 having grown up in your childhood, witnessing the
14 emotional abuse from your mother, [REDACTED]
15 [REDACTED], that places you at high risk with being
16 impacted by those ACES scores.

17 So I want to hear from you, what was it like
18 for you, growing up in that environment, how do you
19 believe that impacted your decision-making skills during
20 your adolescence and your young adulthood?

21 A. I don't know if -- how I express
22 decision-making skills at that age, at my early
23 adolescence I would say -- I know I started, like I said,
24 I started drinking -- I always, you know, if there was my
25 father -- I'll tell you this, I'll give you an example.

1 The summertime, my father always, every weekend he would
2 get a keg of beer, and I had a tree in my yard, a cherry
3 tree, and it had a perfect shape that would allow a keg of
4 beer to go right up in the top, right in the middle of
5 those branches. And he would have that every weekend, he
6 would put it there so I would come out and just grab a,
7 you know, a beer, and go out in the backside and play ball
8 or whatever.

9 I always had exposure to, and I never thought
10 nothing of it because my father was drinking, my mom liked
11 her beer, so to me it was just a natural thing to do and
12 no one said Jackie, don't do that, they didn't say don't
13 do it. It was just part of -- it was like, it was like
14 fish on Friday. I'm a Catholic so they don't do it no
15 more but years ago they ate fish every Friday. Well,
16 that's the same thing with me, it was so natural, a thing
17 you did, put a keg of beer in the tree and drank a beer
18 and they didn't -- it just escalated.

19 And then marijuana came into the neighborhood
20 basically, and I might have done that before, but
21 eventually my peer group, the guys I hung around with, one
22 guy would say hey, I remember specifically how I really
23 began smoking marijuana was in high school because I had
24 [REDACTED], I went into Manhattan Aviation Trades High School
25 and at the time it wasn't in the Long Island City, there's

1 a new one in Long Island City but at the time Manhattan
2 Aviation Trades was in Manhattan on 23rd and Lexington on
3 63rd -- 64th street. One was an academic building, and
4 around the corner was the shop building around the
5 corner.

6 But I told parole, a Spanish guy from the West
7 Side over in the Hell's Kitchen area and he smoked weed,
8 and one day me and him were smoking a joint and it's
9 crazy, I hate to drop names here, but [REDACTED], he was
10 in my class.

11 Q. Would that be some sort of peer pressure,
12 Mr. Ruzas?

13 A. They didn't pressure me, it was just, nobody
14 said here, smoke this joint, I smoked it on my own. Of
15 course, you know, they were, you know, [REDACTED] had brought it
16 and I wanted to try it and I tried it and I liked where my
17 mind went at the time, it was like, kinda like, I think I
18 became...

19 Q. So I'm hearing that you liked that experience
20 but you also mentioned earlier that you've experienced as
21 a young adult trauma and stress. Would that fit in that
22 space there that you talk about?

23 A. In the smoking?

24 Q. Yeah, you mentioned earlier that you
25 experienced trauma and stress as a kid and as a young

1 adult. Would it fit into what you're describing now?

2 A. Would it fit into that?

3 Q. Yeah, how did you cope with that trauma and
4 stress? Oftentimes when children don't have skills to
5 manage stress levels, oftentimes it shows up in their
6 behavior or [REDACTED], I'm just wondering if
7 that applies to you.

8 A. Yeah, I don't know if I ever thought of anything
9 but like I said, taking a pillow and scrounging into the
10 corner and keeping it over my head so I don't hear the
11 violence that's going on in the parlor or the kitchen,
12 that's how I would deal with it at that time at that age,
13 seven, eight, nine years old, that's how I dealt with it.

14 Q. Very well.

15 A. But there wasn't even beer, I didn't drink beer
16 at seven, eight, nine years old, that's how I dealt with
17 it, I just got used to it and tried to deal with it as
18 best I could and then later on as I got older I would not
19 be sitting on the floor, I would be able to get up and
20 step between my mother and father and I would physically
21 tell my dad, get out of here, get out of here, my mother
22 would go to the phone and call the cops in the house and
23 that's how I would deal with that basically.

24 Q. And how old were you at that time, Mr. Ruzas?

25 A. Well, I was in my teens when I would step in

1 between them, I would say I guess 13, 14, something like
2 that, I got a little older, a little bigger.

3 Q. And that seems to be around the time you began
4 to experience with the alcohol.

5 So when you mentioned that you began to curl up
6 in the fetal position sort of and hold a pillow to your
7 head it sort of correlates with the time you began your
8 onset [REDACTED] with the alcohol. And so as
9 mentioned earlier, oftentimes when children who are
10 exposed to traumas, they don't have the skill sets to
11 manage those emotions and oftentimes [REDACTED]
12 [REDACTED] occurs.

13 So what time trying to get here is to further
14 your insight into your pattern of addiction. I think you
15 have incredible insight in terms of how addiction impacts
16 the physiology of the body, but I want you to really
17 explore further in terms of the mental health, the
18 behavioral health and how that facilitates your addiction
19 further.

20 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: But thank you, thank you
21 for your insight, thank you for your interview. I
22 have no further questions.

23 THE WITNESS: Can I say something.

24 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Sure.

25 THE INMATE: Do you think what you just

1 expressed I can address that to continuous
2 involvement in the event that I'm released?

3 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Absolutely, absolutely. I
4 think what's more important whether you're in the
5 facility or in the community is that your innate
6 motivation has to be present to want to do it, and my
7 impression is that it's there. So absolutely,
8 whether in the facility or in the community, you can
9 engage in that piece. Okay?

10 THE INMATE: And that would be to like

11

12 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: And perhaps individual
13 counseling as well.

14 THE INMATE: Yeah, I like the counselor guys, I
15 like to give up what I've gone through and my
16 experiences, I get very good attention from inmates
17 when I start telling them all the things I've gone
18 through.

19 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Very good.

20 THE INMATE: So I say wow, wow, things you
21 don't think about that you got to hear from somebody
22 else.

23 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Absolutely. And because
24 of your age and your unique medical needs, you know,
25 oftentimes you can find a program to have the

1 interconnection of primary care and behavioral health
2 which supports those sort of needs.

3 But I have no further questions, Mr. Ruzas.

4 Thank you.

5 THE INMATE: Thank you.

6 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: We're going to hop back
7 over to Commissioner Drake for a moment, she has
8 another question.

9 BY COMMISSIONER DRAKE:

10 Q. I have a couple questions quickly. Can you
11 explain the transition from marijuana to heroin for you?

12 A. Well, I'm trying to think of the time period,
13 the time period -- let me say, there's not a -- only an
14 actual transition, because I've smoked marijuana my whole
15 life, it's not a question that I gave up the marijuana and
16 transitioned into heroin because if I like to smoke
17 marijuana or with the heroin, so I mean it's not -- it
18 wasn't important that I had both but I would do both if I
19 had them.

20 Q. I see.

21 A. And I wouldn't go out of my way to cop some
22 reefah if I had junk, but I would go out of my way to cop
23 some junk if I had reefah.

24 Q. I understand, yes, sir. Just a couple of quick
25 questions, now, when your stepson decided to become a

1 police officer, what was your thoughts?

2 A. That's a good question, really. I was -- you
3 gotta understand, I know you're intelligent, my wife was
4 not in favor of her son becoming a police officer, and I
5 wasn't even in favor of it, but [REDACTED] was a very -- he's
6 an intelligent kid, well, he's not a kid, he's, like, 47
7 years old now, but at the time -- and you can't tell
8 somebody at that age what to do. You can instruct them
9 and advise them but he's got to make his own decision in
10 life and that's what he did.

11 Naturally my feeling and [REDACTED] especially
12 was compounded by the fact that what I did, and what
13 happened in my situation, and what happened to [REDACTED]
14 [REDACTED], so it was -- it wasn't that it was hard, but I was
15 somewhat reluctant to have him pursue that career although
16 I supported him because like I said, that's his decision.
17 Well, I'm gonna tell you everything that I know and give
18 you all the advice I can to help you do your job, but you
19 still got to do your job, you committed yourself, this is
20 your responsibility now.

21 So basically I -- to be honest I was happy --
22 he had a car accident, that's what happened and that's why
23 he retired, he hurt his back, the car flipped over, anyway
24 the kid went through some traumatic physical disability

25 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

2 Q. Oh, really?

3 A. [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED] -- [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED], [REDACTED], today's a captain pilot, he pilots the
7 ferry. [REDACTED] also knows about marine life, he's got
8 licenses up the gazoo and he's expert on water, he knows
9 everything about -- anyway, he pilots to the [REDACTED]
10 ferry and the ferry [REDACTED] he runs
11 that ferry. That's what he does. I'm happy he left for
12 the police force.

13 Q. One last question, Mr. Ruzas. Your daughter,
14 [REDACTED]?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Now, this is very similar to your life to a
17 certain degree, not necessarily the abuse from her
18 parents, but from her husband as she writes here, and she
19 also talks about how she began to self-medicate as well.
20 When you start, when you learned that she was dealing with
21 abuse in her lifetime, how did you handle that and how did
22 you assist her?

23 A. Well, it was very traumatic as far as I'm --
24 you know, because I know a lot about addictions, I'm very
25 well versed in addiction and what it causes and does to

1 you, and this is a young girl, [REDACTED], I want to say a very
2 intelligent girl and very capable like her mother. [REDACTED]
3 and [REDACTED], both didn't -- the apple didn't fall too far
4 from the tree, she had the same -- maybe not as much as
5 [REDACTED] but they're very competent in what they do. And

6 [REDACTED] was -- [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 Q. That's right.

16 A. All the facts in the world they can't change
17 the fact that you do this every day, you're addicted,
18 simple as that. [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED], and

20 I would write to her and explain what addiction does and
21 how it grabs hold of your mind and you become that which
22 you don't want to be but you have no control not to be.

23 And I would talk to her on the phone and -- see, the phone
24 is very cold and impersonal communication and they cut you
25 off or you only get a half hour and the clip goes off

1 right in the middle of a very important conversation and
2 it goes off. So, you know, it was rough. But that's how
3 I did it, through letters and flue phone conversations and
4 that's how. [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7 Q. Thank you so much, Mr. Ruzas. I want to also
8 just highlight a letter from [REDACTED] (phonetic),
9 Esquire, and he writes very passionately about his
10 rehabilitation and his support of you and how it would
11 benefit the community. I found it very compelling and I
12 would like to, you know, just extend my thanks and the
13 board's thanks for these letters, but this one for me, I
14 believe particularly just really highlighted passionately
15 his viewpoints in terms of rehabilitation in your effect
16 on him.

17 COMMISSIONER DRAKE: That would be the end of
18 my questions, Mr. Ruzas, I surely appreciate you
19 taking your time to explain fully and answer my
20 questions. Thank you very much.

21 THE INMATE: I appreciate your questioning.

22 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: Okay, sir. Again, we're
23 going to look through all the other letters, too.
24 You have several letters that -- even from previous
25 board appearances, I'm pulling letters from years

1 ago. It gives us good insight into, again, about
2 your life, all right? But you have letters here from
3 I believe was it your -- is it [REDACTED] --

4 A. [REDACTED].

5 Q. [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. This is a recent one, October 29, 2017, he
8 wrote it as well. He became acquainted with you back in
9 the early 1980s?

10 A. Yeah, he was in Sing Sing with me. I would
11 like to say something regarding that.

12 Q. Okay, go ahead.

13 A. You see [REDACTED] (phonetic), and [REDACTED],
14 along with [REDACTED], what they've done with their lives,
15 they not only lived crime free but they've managed to
16 become successful attorneys and a very substantial member
17 of the community, and you know, people on the outside
18 don't know what convicts -- some convicts, not all
19 convicts, don't get me wrong, but there are some convicts
20 that elevate themselves by the system, they take advantage
21 of the system and they do good for themselves and that's a
22 good example.

23 Q. Listen, I'm a huge advocate of inmates getting
24 out there and going above and beyond, and it all starts,
25 if you caught me, what did I pick out, what you

1 accomplished, number one? High school diploma.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. I mean, it all begins there. These guys that
4 have written on your behalf, I mean, not everybody has to
5 become an attorney or a doctor or anything but let's just
6 face it, these guys really have done a lot and now are
7 coming back and writing for you. So that shows a lot.
8 And they're giving back. So that's terrific. So John, we
9 got to go back in time again and I got to get some insight
10 to October 24th, 1974. Okay?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. The instant offense, all right, we know the
13 bottom line is you shot the officer, okay, but I want to
14 know what led up to that in terms of -- you're on parole,
15 okay, from New York City, right?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. You're with some other guys, right?

18 A. Mhm.

19 Q. And you had to drive probably 2 hundred miles
20 to get to Syracuse, correct?

21 A. At least, yeah.

22 Q. So you're on parole, you're not supposed to
23 leave the area, you're on parole for what, a robbery?

24 A. I was on parole at the time for two robbery
25 threes at that time, I was on parole, I was out 22 months,

1 I had another about a month-and-a-half to go before I was
2 off.

3 Q. So what was going on with your mind? I mean,
4 you were -- the guy that you were helping out, you were
5 unemployed at the time, right?

6 A. Exactly, right.

7 Q. You had to go back to New York to sign an
8 unemployment sheet by 4:00 in the afternoon, true?

9 A. Exactly, right. You did a good reading on
10 that, 4:00 in the afternoon.

11 Q. I travel the state, so I'm just trying to
12 think, how was John getting in the vehicle with these
13 guys, going all the way to Syracuse from New York City, I
14 don't know how your mind -- don't you have some
15 butterflies in your stomach thinking I gotta -- I'm gonna
16 stick up a jewelry store --

17 A. I don't mean to cut you off but just consider
18 it, when a man is in search of something that's going to
19 set his mind right or he feels is going to set his mind
20 right, or his body's going to feel comfortable and secure
21 and warm and blissful as I said before, you go to the
22 womb, whether or not it's Syracuse it's just a hop, skip
23 and a jump, you go to the planet Venus to go and get what
24 you want. So the mileage -- you wouldn't even consider
25 oh, I'm out of my jurisdiction, or oh, I'm going to go and

1 take somebody's money, that has nothing to do with -- your
2 mind doesn't even consider the consequences when you're
3 about to do what you need to do at that time.

4 Q. All right, I appreciate that. So basically it
5 was worth -- you were so desperate in terms of getting
6 that high and getting the cash that you were willing to go
7 that far to get it, that's the bottom line?

8 A. Well, it is a little more than just the high.
9 I had responsibilities, I had commitments. As far as --
10 my rent was due, I owed some money to a guy in my
11 neighborhood, I owed him 12 hundred, I had bought a car
12 and I had -- it was a beautiful 1962 green Eldorado
13 convertible but there was a tear in the roof, in the
14 convertible top it had a tear, and I wanted to put a new
15 top on it.

16 Anyway, to make a long story short I owed some
17 money in the street so I wanted to live my life without
18 shakes, vomiting, nausea, I wanted to sleep at night and I
19 wanted to pay my bills, that's what got me on the thruway
20 to go to Syracuse.

21 Q. So once you got done with the jewelry store and
22 you got what you got, right?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. And you guys got back in the car and went on
25 the 90 and still today you really don't know why the

1 officer pulled you over, right?

2 A. Well, there was no indication, no evidence was
3 given and I don't know, I wasn't driving.

4 Q. You were in the back seat?

5 A. I was maybe -- I don't know. I'm only
6 considering the possibility that maybe [REDACTED]
7 arrested or pulled us over because maybe Donovan was
8 slightly over the speed limit or maybe there was a
9 taillight out or something, I don't know.

10 Q. It doesn't matter, the bottom line is you got
11 pulled over, you're in the back seat and once you guys --
12 he pulls you over and he asks for the ID, you guys are
13 both outside you and Donovan?

14 A. No, no, I was in the back seat, Donovan was in
15 the driver's seat when he was asking for the ID, he wasn't
16 outside the car.

17 Q. You guys weren't outside the car yet?

18 A. No, they got outside the car, well, Donovan got
19 outside the car when [REDACTED] told him to step out
20 after I looked -- Donovan didn't have a license, he had
21 somebody else's license that was in his wallet, and
22 [REDACTED] discovering that he told Donovan to exit
23 the car and that's when Donovan got out.

24 Q. Okay, that's when he physically got out?

25 A. Exactly. I was still in the back seat at the

1 time.

2 Q. And what you ended up having was your union
3 card on you, right?

4 A. I had my unemployment card in the jacket pocket
5 and I had my union card, my union card out to present
6 because [REDACTED] came to open up the back door and
7 said --

8 Q. Hey buster?

9 A. I don't want to -- well, that's what he said.
10 I said my name is John and I came with the ID card, but he
11 didn't take it.

12 Q. He reached for the jacket?

13 A. Exactly.

14 Q. And oddly, you had -- he found some handcuffs
15 and the badge in the jacket?

16 A. Bags, handcuffs and unemployment book in the
17 jacket pocket, yes.

18 Q. John, why did you have handcuffs and a badge in
19 there? You're on parole, what do you need handcuffs for?

20 A. The handcuffs were just for the, for the, for
21 the, (inaudible).

22 Q. What? I didn't hear you.

23 A. They were necessary for the jewelry store
24 victims.

25 Q. Oh, the robbery?

1 A. The robbery, exactly.

2 Q. Did you use them?

3 A. If anybody came in that's what I would do. No,
4 I didn't -- I put the handcuffs, I had two sets of
5 handcuffs and I used one set on the door when I placed
6 them in the bathroom, I put the one set of the handcuffs
7 on the door from the door handle to a pipe that was next
8 to -- right next to reach. So I shut the door with that
9 one pair of handcuffs and I had the pair that I didn't use
10 in there, in my pocket, that's the ones that was in my
11 jacket.

12 Q. Okay. So once you realized that he's grabbing
13 the jacket and he had no interest in, you know, the card
14 that you had, there was a tussle between you and the
15 jacket?

16 A. That's what happened, I got out of the car and
17 said this ain't ID, give me, and I grabbed my jacket and
18 we started tugging and I dropped the ID card on the floor
19 as we tugged back and forth.

20 Q. And you're obviously out of the car by then,
21 right?

22 A. That's when I got out of the car, correct.

23 Q. And then your 25 -- that type of gun that you
24 had, 25 millimeter?

25 A. 25 automatic, yeah.

1 Q. That was in your back pocket?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Now, you got that gun from where?

4 A. The co-defendant that was in the robbery with
5 me, he had given it to me back in Manhattan because I tell
6 ya, my first robberies when I was on parole was with a
7 imitation pistol.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. So when they told me, they asked me if I wanted
10 to step out on this one, I went to 42nd Street to get
11 another imitation pistol and I bought the badge at that
12 time. But they stopped selling imitation pistols, I don't
13 know if it was a city ordinance but I couldn't purchase
14 one, that's how I wound up with -- the co-defendant came
15 in with 25 automatic.

16 Q. Okay. So what was the badge for? I mean, you
17 had the handcuffs, but why do you need the badge? What
18 were you going to do with that?

19 A. What badge?

20 Q. You had handcuffs and a badge.

21 A. The badge?

22 Q. The badge, what could you do with a badge?

23 A. Nothing, really. I guess it just goes one
24 thing, you know, you got the -- if you got a pair of
25 handcuffs, you got a badge to go with it, I mean, it's --

1 you don't need it, I didn't need it. I just bought the
2 badge when I couldn't buy the gun, I couldn't buy the
3 pistol, I don't know if you ever went to 42nd Street but
4 they used to have different badges from all over the
5 country, different police-type badges and I said oh, that
6 would go good and I bought one of the badges. I didn't
7 use it at all for any reason but that's how I had it.

8 Q. So were you scared, the fact that he was going
9 to notice the badge and the handcuffs, that they were
10 going to fall out of the jacket and you were going to --
11 he was gonna wonder why do you have a badge and handcuffs,
12 is that the first thing?

13 A. Absolutely. I didn't want him to discover that
14 I had that.

15 Q. Again, I know you can't -- we know you can't
16 change it, but your reaction to pull the gun out and point
17 it to the officer, I mean, nothing positive is gonna
18 happen at that moment.

19 A. Absolutely not.

20 Q. Nothing. And am I correct on this: Is that
21 the first time you ever physically pulled a trigger? You
22 never shot a gun before in your life?

23 A. Never shot a gun before. I'm not -- aside from
24 Coney Island or something, knocking down, you know,
25 objects with a stuffed animal, but outside of that I never

1 shot.

2 Q. You never shot a firearm before?

3 A. Never shot a firearm, never.

4 Q. Okay. And the officer was shot where in the
5 body?

6 A. It deflected his rib and his heart and lodged
7 in the lung.

8 Q. And when you said -- I can't quote you verbatim
9 but something to the point of Trooper, I don't want to do
10 this, or what did you say to him?

11 A. When we were tugging back and forth on the
12 jacket, he saw the pistol in my hand he dropped the jacket
13 and started back stepping, and as he back stepped he
14 started going for his gun and I told him, Trooper, please
15 don't do it.

16 Q. But you had the gun out didn't you already?

17 A. I had the gun, I had the gun in my hand at that
18 time, that's why he saw it and he dropped the jacket and
19 had a shocked look on his face and started backing up.
20 That's how it happened.

21 Q. But it's only natural for him to pull his gun
22 out because you got a gun out, right?

23 A. Well, I don't know, I guess it would be natural
24 to a police officer who's on the job 16 years, he don't
25 know that I'm not gonna shoot him. I had no intentions of

1 hitting him, but he don't know that, he just sees a gun,
2 you know, in my hand, so instead of just -- you gotta, to
3 me, Commissioner Crangle, he said we had been exposed to
4 [REDACTED] for a good 15 minutes already.

5 Q. Was it that long?

6 A. Well, through the whole process he had gone
7 back to his car and checked on Donovan's car and saw that
8 it wasn't stolen, it was registered to his wife, so a good
9 ten minutes had gone by and we had done nothing but comply
10 with everything he asked for, so I would imagine he didn't
11 -- we didn't feel -- he didn't feel threatened, I would
12 say, at that particular time.

13 So, but he still -- now all the sudden he's
14 faced with a gun in my hand so that turns into a different
15 dynamic now. He doesn't know I don't want to shoot him,
16 but he goes for his pistol.

17 Q. When you're in the car sitting there for the
18 ten minutes or whatever while he's checking the license,
19 right?

20 A. I'm saying I suppose altogether it was about
21 ten minutes, out of the car the whole time period I would
22 say was ten minutes.

23 Q. But you're in the back seat while he's checking
24 the license, right?

25 A. I'm in the back seat.

1 Q. John, why didn't you take the gun out and put
2 it underneath the seat or something?

3 A. Don't you think I've asked myself that a number
4 of times over the past 43 years, why didn't I throw it out
5 the window, why didn't I...well, this may sound crazy and
6 it might seem like I'm full of shit but the point was I
7 had a gun that was not mine, [REDACTED] (phonetic) gave it
8 to me, I'm responsible for that gun, I don't want to throw
9 it away, that's number one. Number two, I can't stick it
10 under the front seat because this is Donovan's car, he had
11 nothing to do with the robbery, if that gun gets found
12 under his car, he's responsible for it. So I'm gonna take
13 --

14 Q. You're gonna take it?

15 A. I'm gonna take my cost because I'm responsible
16 for it. I'm not gonna throw it away on him and I'm not
17 gonna throw it out the window. I know it's crazy but
18 that's just how I -- I borrow something, I pay it back,
19 it's yours I'm gonna give it back to you, I'm not gonna
20 throw it away. And I had a perfect reason to do it and I
21 would have told him this is crazy and threw it away, but I
22 didn't do that.

23 Q. After you shot once and the officer ran across
24 the thruway on the other side, you noticed your
25 co-defendant, Donovan, right?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. He runs and then starts the car and you were
3 able to jump in, right?

4 A. Yeah, my reflexes were still there at that
5 time, I grabbed the back of the four-door Cadillac and I
6 just grabbed the back door and jumped in.

7 Q. And I bring this up because as you're looking
8 back, I know the officer got a couple of shots and one of
9 them shot and hit the windows and the engine block,
10 correct? So you're thinking the officer's still alive and
11 --

12 A. I didn't know he was dead.

13 Q. And the worst case scenario, you're thinking
14 okay, if anything, I might get in trouble for shooting at
15 an officer, not killing an officer. That's what you're
16 saying, right? As you're driving off?

17 A. I thank you for the words you just put in my
18 mouth, but you're right, that's just about what I was
19 thinking. I didn't have no idea that he was dead. Go
20 ahead.

21 Q. Okay. But I'm trying to visualize it, how did
22 you not see, when you pointed the gun at him and shot him,
23 the bullet hit his chest, right? The ribcage. How did
24 you not see him, like, flinch? Do you follow me?

25 A. Well, I ask you to follow me. When I pulled

1 that trigger, I didn't stand there and look to see if it
2 hit him. I pulled it and pulled to my right immediately,
3 my reflex was that good at that time, at that time I boom
4 bang and I was done, took the windows out from where I was
5 just standing (indicating).

6 Q. So even though the whole thing took about 15,
7 20 minutes, the shooting incident happened so fast?

8 A. That was like the blink of an eye.

9 Q. Okay. Now, you end up getting in the car, you
10 guys do quite the driving, I know you guys end up at a bar
11 and then, you know, in a cab, finally you guys get caught
12 at a roadblock?

13 A. Right.

14 Q. Now, looking back, you've had, you know, you've
15 written stuff about this, you have written statements, we
16 have documentation here from the family.

17 John, they're hurting. They're still hurting,
18 okay, from October 24th, 1974 to November 7th, 2017 at
19 what time, almost 11:00 we're at. So it's hard, okay?
20 There's no doubt, you know, this is a tough, tough case.
21 And you've come a long, long way. All right? We got to
22 balance everything out, but just like you have family and
23 awesome support, [REDACTED] has family and awesome
24 support.

25 A. Absolutely.

1 Q. What are your feelings on that?

2 A. Well, Commissioner Crangle --

3 Q. And I know you expressed them already but today
4 what do you have to say, anything new?

5 A. I can't change the fact of what happened and I
6 can't change the amount of time [REDACTED] -- and
7 I know his wife has passed away a couple years ago, so
8 just the children now, and there were six of them, so
9 that's six times each one of them feeling the same way, so
10 that compounds the sadness, the sorrow that I caused, and
11 I can't do anything about that, I can't change it. It's a
12 fact that I wish wasn't, but 43 years later I can't turn
13 that fact into fiction.

14 And I'm -- I'm of an age where I don't know how
15 long I got left, but I know I'll never forget or minimize
16 the hurt I caused [REDACTED] and I'm aware that the
17 children have this animosity for 43 years, I wish there
18 was something I could do about it but there's nothing I
19 can change, nothing I can do.

20 Q. Let me ask you this: Now, because of the court
21 order, this is a little unique with the victim impact. We
22 were under the standing that the -- at least your
23 attorneys got a copy of the victim impact statements from
24 the family, we're talking the family here. Were you given
25 -- did the attorneys share the statements with you?

1 A. No.

2 Q. So just your attorneys got the copies, not you?

3 A. I'll say this: Yesterday I had a visit from
4 Steve Zeidman (phonetic) who's one of the attorneys, and
5 what happened, I guess human error, he just left the file
6 that he was supposed to come and give to me so I could
7 review it to see the file that they submitted, that he
8 stopped in the attorney general's office in Poughkeepsie
9 and gave them a copy and I was -- he was supposed to give
10 me a copy of that file, but he left it in the car and I
11 never got the file so I don't know, I'm sure there were
12 impact statements there, but I never read them, I never
13 reviewed it.

14 Q. Are you saying the file that your attorneys
15 provided us, all the parole packets statements and
16 everything?

17 A. I think that's what he left in the car.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I was gonna get a copy of that, he was gonna
20 tell -- when he left the visit yesterday he told the CO
21 what the situation was and he was gonna try and leave it
22 somewhere, and I would get it today in legal mail because
23 when you get legal mail they call you the next day and
24 that would have been this morning, but nobody called me
25 this morning for legal mail, so I never saw the file.

1 Q. Well, as you can tell, we have everything,
2 okay, we've gone through --

3 A. I see what you got in front of you, that looks
4 like everything to me.

5 Q. But your attorneys were provided, which was
6 court ordered for you to -- for them at least to have the
7 victim impact statements, okay, which again is unusual,
8 okay? The family wasn't, and rightfully so, not happy
9 about it. It's confidential normally, other than having a
10 rescission hearing, and this isn't a rescission hearing.
11 Okay?

12 A. But they redact the names of the person, don't
13 they?

14 Q. Yes, they redact the addresses but normally, or
15 all the time, it's -- victim impact is normally only given
16 at a rescission hearing, not at a typical interview. So
17 the bottom line, sir, is that the families are still
18 grieving, as you know, and you're -- the actions by you
19 that day, we know you can't take back, but when you pulled
20 the trigger and that bullet was lodged into that officer's
21 body that caused his death, really just exploded into not
22 just the wife's life but the daughter's and the son's and
23 their kid's life. Everything changed, okay, just a huge
24 change. Just like it changed with your mother, just an
25 example, she couldn't leave her house, you said, she died

1 lonely, you said she died I believe with her dog, right?

2 A. Right.

3 Q. I'm just using that as an example, just little
4 things, and these little things add up and you are still
5 hurting from that, true or false? You have a lot of guilt
6 there with the fact that your mom died alone?

7 A. I have a lot of guilt about everything that
8 happened.

9 Q. There's a lot of things you don't even realize
10 how the families are hurting and reasons why they're
11 hurting.

12 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: Commissioner Davis wants
13 to jump in for a second.

14 BY COMMISSIONER DAVIS:

15 Q. Mr. Ruzas?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. I know you mentioned that you were prepared to
18 receive the victim impact statement, but your attorney
19 left it in his vehicle, is that correct?

20 A. I don't know if that was what was in that file
21 but the file that I was supposed to get was left in his
22 car, whether or not the impact statement was in there, I
23 don't know. I don't know what the file fully consisted
24 of, I don't know.

25 Q. Very well. So my question is, can you imagine

1 what may have been written in a victim impact statement?

2 And if so, what would you think would be in that
3 statement?

4 A. Well, I would imagine that they would recount
5 what has happened in their life and what they lost over
6 the many years it has been, that's what would be indicated
7 as well as what the whole family dynamic was victim to,
8 it's not just the one, like I said the six children,
9 that's six different outputs.

10 So it's considerable and it's something that
11 goes on every two years, they live it over and over it's
12 something that never changes, and I don't have no control
13 of that either, I don't cause me to come here every two
14 years but want to live this every two years I guess,
15 whatever happens happens, but I have...

16 Q. Very well. I know you also mentioned earlier
17 that as a child you've experienced traumas and stress.

18 A. Absolutely.

19 Q. Do you believe that [REDACTED]
20 could have perhaps experienced the same trauma and stress
21 related to their experience?

22 A. Absolutely. I mean, I can't think of anything
23 -- maybe I could think of if I gave time to it, but the
24 fact that a family member, a father was taken away from
25 his family who just had breakfast with him two hours ago

1 and two hours later he's not coming back no more, I don't
2 know what that would do to a young child's mind.

3 Q. And, Mr. Ruzas, just hypothetically thinking,
4 how might trauma and stress present itself for a child?

5 A. Well, the way it did for me was I guess, you
6 know, you're not comfortable with yourself I guess is the
7 best way to -- you don't feel confident in the world
8 because mothers or fathers that come to school maybe to
9 pick their sons up but you see them out in the park
10 playing together and you don't experience that, so it's --
11 I guess it's debilitating for a young mind, a young
12 person.

13 Q. And in evidence there is support that trauma
14 does change the brain, and so I'm hearing you that you say
15 a traumatic experience such as the loss of a parent can
16 change who you are essentially, is that correct?

17 A. I would say it has something to do with what
18 happens to you in life and how your choices and your
19 decisions are made, I would believe that to be true.

20 Q. Very well, sir, thank you. I have no other
21 questions.

22 COMMISSIONER DAVIS: Commissioner Crangle?

23 BY COMMISSIONER CRANGLE:

24 Q. John, we're going to take a five minute break,
25 all right?

1 A. All right.

2 Q. Just give me five minutes.

3 (Whereupon, a short recess was taken at 11:05
4 a.m.)

5 (Whereupon, a decision was made to continue the
6 interview at a later time.)

7 (Whereupon, the interview resumed at 1:01 p.m.)

8 COMMISSIONER CRANGLE: John, we're back on the
9 record, we had a little bit of a break here to get
10 the documentation sent over and I see behind you that
11 packet is there. Right?

12 THE INMATE: I got it here (indicating).

13 BY COMMISSIONER CRANGLE:

14 Q. Were you able to review it?

15 A. Do you see the packet?

16 Q. Yeah, I see it under your hand there.

17 A. It's over here (indicating).

18 Q. Yeah, you touched it with your right hand.

19 A. Okay, we're on the same page.

20 Q. So you have that nice packet there that your
21 attorney, for some reason forgot to take it out of his car
22 physically and walk it to you yesterday in the Fishkill
23 Correctional Facility. So now you have it?

24 A. I got a question.

25 Q. Go ahead.

1 A. My question is, I thought I was entitled to
2 review opposition letters redacted, not the names and
3 addresses, just what they had to say, the contents of
4 them, I thought I was entitled to review that.

5 Q. There are none. You mean the community
6 opposition?

7 A. Any opposition that you're going to consider, I
8 thought that's what we were talking about.

9 Q. The opposition that was taken out was from the
10 community, that's not from the family.

11 A. All right.

12 Q. What I said, what I brought up was what only we
13 can consider, and what the Court clearly stated on the
14 record in the court order, was that we can only consider
15 the family's opposition and the letters from the family,
16 they did a combination of letters and a, what do you call
17 it, the transcript. Sorry, I lost my train of thought.
18 Okay?

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. Now, your attorney's read through that, I don't
21 know what your attorney's told you. That's between --
22 that's attorney/client privilege, so I don't know what on
23 your end of things what was said between you and your
24 attorneys. All right? We turned over that information to
25 your attorneys.

1 A. Can I ask a question, now?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. The reason why I'm asking has to do with a
4 packet that I just got the other day from [REDACTED]
5 (phonetic), senior counsel here, with the parole status
6 report I think it was, the form that has official
7 statements, judge, District Attorney, defense counsel, you
8 know?

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. And what he gave me the other day, it had
11 judge, DAs, defense counsel note. My question was the
12 fact that I had this discussion with Tina Stanford a
13 couple of boards ago and I objected to the fact that for
14 the first parole appearance, might have even been seven
15 parole appearances, the official statement was no, no,
16 there was no --

17 Q. I read that transcript, I know what you're
18 gonna say. The judge that wrote -- I know you're saying
19 -- it's not the sentencing judge.

20 A. That's what I'm talking about. Sorry, I don't
21 want to talk at the same time. You talk first, I'll go
22 second.

23 Q. It says judge yes, I see it says it's checked
24 yes. There's a letter here from the judge dated 2007 and
25 it says the judge -- it's not the judge that sentenced

1 you. Okay? And we're gonna, just like the commissioner
2 -- or Chairwoman Stanford said in that transcript, I read
3 it, give the weight that it's due.

4 John, he didn't -- that judge didn't sentence
5 you. So how do you think, how much weight are we gonna
6 give to a judge that didn't sentence you?

7 A. Well, can I go now? My question is, since it's
8 not appropriate, it's not -- it doesn't fall in line with
9 the statute, the parole board's own statute as to being
10 the sentencing judge, why has it been excluded out of my
11 record 'cause it has nothing from nobody. This judge
12 wasn't even in office at the time this happened and my
13 sentencing judge passed away in 2004. So I know he --

14 Q. Okay, I understand that.

15 A. So why do we have this judge say I'm not gonna
16 consider, but it shouldn't even be in the file or even the
17 possibility, well, Joe Crangle might not consider it, but
18 the next parole officer might consider it, I don't know if
19 it was discarded and not in the file --

20 Q. That wasn't in the -- the community opposition
21 was in regards to, from what my understanding was
22 regarding to the troopers and, like, the PDA, the Union,
23 and you know, the general public.

24 A. Right.

25 Q. Your attorneys would have to fight regarding

1 the judge and the DA letters. It's a little more unique,
2 okay?

3 A. I just ask you how could it be an official, not
4 a statement but an official statement and it doesn't
5 comply with your own rules and regulations? That's my
6 question.

7 Q. When did you get that --

8 A. I just got it the other day.

9 Q. Why do you bring it up now, though, why didn't
10 you bring it up earlier?

11 A. We're talking about letters and what I was
12 entitled to see, the entire package, but you didn't
13 mention the judges and the DAs, I know it's an official
14 statement but you didn't mention that so I had to bring it
15 up to put the on the record that the fact is, in my
16 opinion, that that doesn't belong on the record. I
17 understand everyone's entitled to their own opinion. It
18 can't be considered, the official statement, that gives it
19 a lot more strength than just a statement. When you say
20 official statement that's a little bit more than just a
21 statement.

22 Q. You understand the DA has a right to write his
23 statement, that was the 2007 statement.

24 A. But he wasn't the DA at the time, either.

25 Q. They represent the state of New York, though,

1 the people of the state. You've been through it before,
2 I'm familiar with the conversation you had --

3 A. I tell you, Commissioner Crangle, listen, I
4 don't want to nitpick on the situation. However, I've had
5 the DA at the time was not the DA, he wasn't even -- he
6 was a lawyer at the time, truthfully, but his name was
7 [REDACTED] (phonetic) I bet you that letter says [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED] (phonetic), and we had an antagonistic and hostile
9 relationship through the mail because of something that I
10 filed and he didn't like what I was filing and then
11 everything was above and overboard, and I know [REDACTED]
12 (phonetic) is penal philosophy, no doubt, and I take your
13 word for it that it's not gonna be considered, I just ask
14 why can't that be excluded? That's what I'm...

15 Q. And guess what? You've come far with the
16 attorneys you have, talk to them about it. I'm going to
17 give you the answer that Chairwoman Stanford gave you a
18 few years back, give it the weight that it deserves.
19 That's what I said. The judge that sentenced you is dead.
20 The judge's letter that's in here today from ten years
21 ago, the letter is not the sentencing judge. So how much
22 is that going to be considered? I think the three of us
23 were professionals and we know how much to consider that.
24 Okay? So we're going to move on, all right? Because
25 again, I think we've been -- you've had a lengthy

1 interview and for the record I would say that this has
2 been the longest interview you've had in the 13
3 interviews, wouldn't you say?

4 A. No doubt about it, no doubt about it.

5 Q. No doubt about it?

6 A. None at all.

7 Q. Right?

8 A. I just said, no doubt about it.

9 Q. I want -- I think it's worth even to say it
10 again for the record.

11 A. This has been the longest interview I've ever
12 had in my parole history, this is the 13th parole board
13 and this is the longest interview I've had in 13
14 appearances, okay?

15 Q. All right. And even though you have had an
16 unbelievable report here from the Lincoln Square Legal
17 Services, you know, you probably have it in the packet
18 here.

19 A. A possible job.

20 Q. The summary of clinical findings, [REDACTED]
21 (phonetic), okay, you're familiar with this? Dated
22 November 4th?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. That's a great summary, it's more than a
25 summary it's very, very good. Your COMPAS is in the file,

1 it's -- this report from [REDACTED] deeper than the
2 COMPAS. But the COMPAS, through DOCCS, is in the file,
3 and as you know you score low on everything, so that's
4 positive.

5 Low for felony violence, all categories are
6 low. Your case plan, that's the quarterly report in the
7 file, it's been updated.

8 Let's see here, you know, which isn't
9 surprising, your goal is to continue to reach with your
10 family, friends and your writing, which we talked about
11 this morning with you.

12 So John, I'm glad that we were able to give you
13 that packet there, so you have a right to have it. You
14 explained yourself well, you've given us a lot to think
15 about, I want you now to have your chance -- is there
16 anything you feel we missed, anything you want to say on
17 your own behalf that you feel you haven't covered with us?
18 You have the last word here.

19 A. I've had a number of last words and basically,
20 Commissioner, it's over when somebody says I'm not the
21 same man I used to be but in my situation, it is
22 absolutely fact, I'm not the same man I was 43 years ago.
23 Aside from that, I would ask the commissioners to consider
24 I've been sentenced to 25 to life and not with the
25 recommendation that I not make parole. So I ask you to

1 consider that that's also in my sentencing minutes.

2 Along with that, I would ask you to consider
3 that I have never told one lie from the day I got
4 arrested. When I found out that that [REDACTED] had
5 six kids, that was the end of the ball game for me,
6 everything was over, I never disrespected the man's family
7 by telling a lie, and I've never jeopardized my own
8 character by telling lies. Everything has been the truth
9 out of my mouth and wherever that leads, I have to live
10 with it.

11 Just as I've told you, this is a tragedy that
12 brought father and husband away from his family, and I'll
13 live it through till the day I die. I can't bring him
14 back, I wish I could, but I've done everything possible
15 that I could do from a prison setting, to make -- atone
16 for the tragedy that I've caused, and I put myself in your
17 hands and I respect and appreciate the hearing that was
18 conducted, and the demeanor of the 3 of you commissioners
19 was insightful and very comfortably expressed. So I
20 appreciate that, too. Other than that, I got -- I just go
21 back to my cell, have a cup of coffee and wait a couple of
22 days for the decision.

23 Q. Well, I appreciate that, sir. Like I said
24 earlier, it's a very tough decision all the way around.

25 A. You're under a lot of pressure, I understand

1 that.

2 Q. It's not easy for us by no means, it's -- what
3 happened here is horrific, it's just terrible, but you've
4 come a long way, there's no doubt about it. You brought
5 up the sentencing minutes, you know, I know the judge's
6 deceased as we discussed a few minutes ago, you know, he
7 did have some harsh words for you as you know, at
8 sentencing.

9 A. I don't remember harsh words except for --

10 Q. Well, I would say somewhat harsh words in terms
11 of, you know --

12 A. I can repeat it, I know those words by heart.
13 I have no doubt that this haunted them from day one, and
14 it will haunt them for the rest of their lives, I know he
15 said that.

16 Q. Well, on Page 5 where it says "Mr. Ruzas must
17 rate among the most violent, most vicious, and most
18 heinous acts that one human being could perpetuate and
19 perform upon another." I mean, that's pretty harsh.

20 A. It's the truth, it's a fact, I don't think
21 that's harsh, I think he was just stating the fact. I
22 agree with that.

23 Q. But in my opinion, I'm just giving you my
24 opinion, I wouldn't like those words if someone described
25 it to me, I would consider it pretty harsh.

1 A. If you committed the crime, you have to accept
2 those words. If you did the crime, and I did the crime, I
3 never denied it, I accepted that because I did the crime.
4 I call for those kinds of words, I don't look at it any
5 other way.

6 Q. All right.

7 A. I just take those words as parallel with the
8 words that I say show that he's recognized my humanity and
9 my conscience, that I did have a conscience, that I did
10 have remorse. What he said, that I have no doubt that
11 this will continue to haunt you for the rest of your life,
12 that was such a prophetic statement.

13 Q. The guilt?

14 A. Yeah, that was a good man, that's why I
15 continuously complain about that other letter being in the
16 file because I know Judge Fortaine (phonetic) was a good
17 man and he did not write a letter, a harsh letter.

18 Q. I understand.

19 A. It's not an angle, I'm just trying to protect
20 the integrity of that judge, that judge was just a good
21 man is the only way I can explain it, he was a fair man,
22 he had a death penalty trial and he was very fair to the
23 victim and to myself, and I realize that, I just want to
24 express that.

25 Q. All right, sir. It was a good day for you, in

1 terms of fairness, I believe, and again, give us a few
2 days and we'll have an answer for you, okay?

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. Have a good cup of coffee.

5 A. I just got Pace's Choice, I'm going home for a
6 cup of that now.

7 Q. All right, take it easy.

8 (Whereupon, the proceeding was concluded at 1:22 p.m.)

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1 (After due deliberation by the Parole Board Panel, the
2 following Decision was rendered:)

3 D E C I S I O N
4

5 Open date: 12/18/2017 (Commissioner Crangle dissents)
6

7 After extensive and thorough review of the record,
8 consideration of all statutory factors as outlined by
9 the laws that govern the Board of Parole and sincere
10 deliberation, you are being granted an open date. The
11 1974 fatal shooting of [REDACTED]
12 resulted in your being sentenced to 25 to life, and to
13 date you have served approximately 44 years. Due to
14 your actions, the [REDACTED] has suffered and will
15 continue to be devastated by the loss of their loved
16 one for many years to come, and rightfully so. By
17 your own account and through the letters of support
18 provided by your wife and children, you and your
19 family have not been devoid of loss, regret, and
20 remorse. Many have suffered and total solace will
21 never be attained. It is to be recognized that your
22 COMPAS Risk Assessment indicates low scores in all
23 areas, signifying an unlikelihood to have criminogenic
24 needs. We have considered your age at 74 and current
25 health status, which also mitigates the risk for

1 violence and reoffending. The panel finds most
2 compelling your rehabilitative efforts through
3 educational achievements for yourself as well as
4 assisting others, volunteerism, writing achievements,
5 and a wealth of letters of support from former inmates
6 who have successfully transitioned to the community
7 and vouched for your character as a result of many
8 years of friendship and firsthand knowledge of your
9 rehabilitation and commitment to helping others.
10 Furthermore, the level of insight into your criminal
11 behaviors, drug addiction, acknowledged responsibility
12 for your crime, remorse for [REDACTED], and
13 need to make amends over your term of incarceration
14 was apparent to the majority of the panel, which leads
15 us to believe that your release is not incompatible
16 with public safety and welfare and that you would live
17 and remain at liberty without violating the law.

18
19 Conditions:

20 I will seek, obtain and maintain employment and/or an
21 academic/vocational program.

22 I will [REDACTED], as directed
23 by the parole officer.

24 I will [REDACTED]
25 [REDACTED], as directed by the parole officer.

1 I will not consume alcoholic beverages.

2 I will not frequent any establishment where alcohol is
3 sold or served as its main business without the
4 permission of the parole officer.

5 I will abide by a curfew established by the parole
6 officer.

7 I will participate in anti-aggression/anti-violence
8 counseling, as directed by the parole officer.

9 I will [REDACTED]
10 [REDACTED].

11 Geographic restrictions per parole officer.

12 (Commissioner Davis concurs; Commissioner Crangle dissents:

13 Dissent attached below)

14

15 DISSENT BY COMMISSIONER CRANGLE:

16 It is the determination of this parole board member to
17 write a dissent in regards to the release of John
18 Ruzas who shot and killed New York State Trooper
19 [REDACTED] while he was on parole. Mr. Ruzas's
20 release not only undermines respect for the law, but
21 also undermines respect for this fallen officer's life
22 and the entire [REDACTED] family. It is unfortunate that
23 due to the court ordered De Novo from Dutchess County,
24 [REDACTED] family's personal statements made to
25 the board of parole had to be shared with the inmate's

1 legal team. The [REDACTED] family has consistently shown
2 throughout the years that they are indeed still
3 grieving.

4 To grant his release does deprecate the seriousness of
5 his crime and undermine respect for the law.

6 (HEARING CONCLUDED)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Brynn C. Reynolds, do hereby certify that I attended the foregoing proceedings in the matter of JOHN RUZAS and took stenographic notes of the same, and that the foregoing is a true and correct transcription of same and the whole thereof.

Dated: November 14, 2017

Brynn C. Reynolds
Brynn C. Reynolds
Court Reporter