

Monica Ann Jahner, 151946

Parole eligible since 1989

Paroled April 17, 2007

A Supreme Court declaration that Jahner's life sentence is in fact parolable has made no practical difference in how the parole board treats her.

Monica Ann Jahner was only 22 years old, but she had already spent years helping her father run his two drapery shops — one in Detroit and one in Howell — when she was arrested for conspiring to murder her step-mother. On Jan. 18, 1977, Roy Catlett attacked Sandra Jahner in her Livingston County home. He hit and choked Mrs. Jahner, leaving her unconscious, but did not succeed in killing her. Catlett, who had been out of prison only a month and had a heavy heroin habit to feed, had been arrested for an unrelated armed robbery when evidence was found linking him to the Jahner assault.



Monica Jahner and her mother

In exchange for a plea to felonious assault, which netted him a sentence of 2 2/3 - 4 years, Catlett testified that Monica Jahner had paid him \$5,000 to kill her stepmother. Jahner maintains that it was her father who wanted Sandra Jahner dead and that her only role had been to convey money at her father's direction. Jahner's father moved to the Bahamas and has never been charged.

Jahner was convicted of conspiracy to murder and assault with intent to commit murder. Her convic-

tions were reversed on appeal but she was convicted again at a retrial. Jahner, who has no prior criminal record, adult or juvenile, was free on bond without incident for 11 months before her first trial and 14 months before her second trial.

Jahner received a 10-20 year term for the assault, which she completed in January 1993. The law required the court to impose a life sentence for the conspiracy conviction. Jahner and three other prisoners, also convicted of conspiracy to murder, petitioned the Michigan Supreme Court to determine whether their life sentences, although mandatory, were nonetheless parolable. In 1989, the Court held that unlike convictions for first-degree murder, those for conspiracy are subject to the 10-year parole provisions of the Lifer Law. Noting that the victim was not killed in any of the cases, the Court declined to eliminate the parole board's opportunity to exercise discretion. Two of the defendants were paroled in 1995; both had served about 20 years. Like Jahner, the fourth defendant, Ricky L. Jones, who has now served 23 years, is still incarcerated.

Jahner has compiled an impressive record in prison and is well regarded by administrators and staff. She earned her bachelor's degree and a paralegal certificate, completed two years of psychotherapy in the early 1990s and received a perfect termination report from the Assaultive Offender Program in 2002. She was active in coordinating prisoner projects that served others — a visitation program for prisoners and their children, a books on tape program for the learning disabled and a videotape series addressed to juvenile offenders.

In 1991, Warden Carol Howes wrote a letter on Jahner's behalf to the parole board chair that concluded:

Further incarceration of Ms. Jahner would serve no meaningful purpose other than to punish. She has already involved herself in every institutional program available to her. She

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works well with the administration and does not appear to be any threat to the public. Her continued incarceration is a significant burden to taxpayers. The longer her incarceration the more difficult it will be for her to begin a new life on the outside.

Jahner was considered by the full board that year. Although two members indicated they could approve release at 18 years, the board has never chosen to exercise the discretion the Supreme Court accorded it. When she was paroled in 2007, she was 53 years old and had served 28 years.