

Gregory Lawrence, 154469

Robert Schraw, 154468

Parole eligible since 1988

Reluctant participants in a robbery gone bad, these co-defendants were already in custody when the ring-leader killed a police officer

Gregory Lawrence and Robert Schraw were both barely 20 when they got involved in a Lansing bank robbery that led to the murder of a police officer. The two young men from Kokomo, Indiana, were traveling in a rented motor home with Lawrence's older sister Melony, her two-year-old son, and her 29-year-old boyfriend David Bellah when Bellah conceived the robbery plan. The idea was to kidnap Lansing bank manager James Spoelma and his wife Connie from their home, drive them to the bank and force Spoelma to open the vault. Lawrence and Schraw repeatedly told Bellah they wanted nothing to do with his scheme and hoped he would change his mind. He did not.

On June 16, 1977, the group went to the Spoelma residence in the motor home. Bellah forced his way inside, holding the couple at gunpoint. The others drove the motor home and the Spoelmas' stolen car back to the campground where they were staying so they could leave Melony and her toddler behind. Lawrence and Schraw talked to Melony about not wanting to be involved in the crime. She told them they "couldn't just leave Dave," so they returned to the manager's home "to try and talk Dave out of it."

Bellah had no intention of aborting his plan. They all drove to the bank in the Spoelmas' car. Once there, Bellah ordered Lawrence and Schraw to wait in the parking lot with Mrs. Spoelma as hostage while he and Mr. Spoelma went inside. Bellah had given Schraw a gun, but Schraw took the clip out of it. Inside the bank, an employee tripped an alarm.

Police converged on the scene.

Lawrence and Schraw discussed surrendering, but feared they would be shot. They decided to drive away, but agreed they would not resist if they were stopped. Both were immediately arrested. They were in custody and cooperating with police when Bellah tried to escape in another car with four bank employees. When an officer approached the car, shots were fired and the hostages struggled for Bellah's gun. The officer was killed. Bellah was convicted of first-degree murder and is serving the mandatory sentence of life without parole.

The jury acquitted Lawrence and Schraw of murder. It convicted them of conspiracy to commit armed robbery and two counts of kidnapping. The pre-sentence investigator said he did not perceive either Lawrence or Schraw to be dangerous. Lawrence had no prior criminal record, juvenile or adult. Schraw had only one offense — attempted theft of gasoline — for which he was placed on juvenile probation. The investigator recommended that they receive sentences reflecting their passive involvement in the crimes.

The judge sentenced them each to 20-30 years for the conspiracy and to two parolable life terms for the kidnappings, all to run concurrently. They became eligible for parole on the conspiracy count in 1988, after serving 10 years and nine months. They "maxed out" on their conspiracy sentences in 1996. Under current sentencing guidelines, their recommended minimum sentences would be between 11¼ and 18¼ years for the conspiracy to rob and between 9 and 15 years for the kidnapping counts.

Gregory Lawrence

Lawrence was the second of seven children born and raised in Kokomo, Indiana. As a result of two divorces, a protracted custody battle and neglect, Lawrence was shuffled among relatives, various fos

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ter homes, and an orphanage. He dropped out of school in the 11th grade to go to work. Early in 1977, a break-up with his fiancée sent Lawrence into severe depression. He began to drink heavily, quit his job and moved in with Melony and Bellah.

The psychologist who interviewed and tested Lawrence prior to his trial said he had "few psychological resources" and was "vulnerable . . . to manipulation by others." Lawrence himself said, "I wanted to talk Dave out of it, but couldn't say anything . . . I was scared . . . I didn't know what to do."

As early as 1983, a staff member at the Michigan Reformatory who prepared Lawrence's initial Lifer Review noted that Lawrence had "matured greatly" from the passive, easily-led young man who arrived in prison in 1978. His work reports had gone from fair to excellent. He had earned a GED and an associate's degree.

Seven officers and work supervisors who observed Lawrence daily consistently praised his progress and performance. All recommended a reduction in custody and favorable consideration for parole. Although unusual for a lifer who had served just seven years, in 1984 Lawrence was transferred to Camp Pellston where he remained for 13 months, working at various private businesses in the community. He was transferred again after receiving an out-of-place ticket in September 1985 for leaving the unfenced camp temporarily to rendezvous in the woods with his then-wife .

In succeeding years, Lawrence held increasingly responsible jobs, mainly in the prison industries garment factory. He is also working on a bachelor's degree from Indiana University. His current supervisor, who has known Lawrence for 20 years, says of him:

Greg is knowledgeable, well-disciplined, ma-

ture, self-confident and trustworthy . . . I believe he has done everything possible to prove he is ready for society . . . I have spoken with other civilian employees about Greg's character and they . . . believe if there is one prisoner who would make it in society, without problems, it would be Greg Lawrence.

At Lawrence's initial parole hearing in 1985, the interviewing board member wrote that she was "leaning favorably [toward parole] at 10 years." In 1988, another board member made a favorable recommendation but the majority had no interest. Lawrence was interviewed again in 1994 and 1999, and turned down for parole each time. In March 2004, the board did not even meet with Lawrence. It simply reviewed his file and sent him another "no interest" notice.



Gregory Lawrence

Robert Schraw

Robert "Rick" Schraw was raised by his mother and step-father with four other children in a working class family. He dropped out of school in 10th grade "because all my friends were dropping out," and took a job as a dishwasher. He then joined the Marine Corps but received a medical discharge after a year. He became engaged to be married, was expecting a baby, and got a job at Universal Steel in Kokomo.

Schraw said he was "in a daze" on the trip to Lansing, but kept telling Lawrence and his sister that

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he didn't want to be involved in any bank robbery. A subsequent psychological assessment of him said, "[he] experiences himself as weak and childlike... His desire for acceptance and his fear of being seen as passive and unmasculine went into his decision to go along [with Bellah's plan]."



Robert Schraw and his father

In prison, Schraw lived in the honor block at the Michigan Reformatory for four years while working in the laundry, where he progressed to foreman. In 1983, his supervisor wrote:

[Schraw is] steady, dependable and trustworthy. Has made a considerable change in his outlook on life. If anyone deserves a break, I would have to say Rick Schraw not only deserves it, but has earned it.

The following year Schraw earned his GED and enrolled in college classes for the 1984 summer term. The staff member who wrote his initial lifer report concluded:

I am of the opinion that, when Mr. Schraw is released, he will become a positive, productive member of society. We urge Mr. Schraw to continue his positive adjustment and behavior if he is to be released.

Thereafter, Schraw always held a job. When he worked in the garment factory for 10 years, he received regular promotions. His supervisor praised his honesty, his work ethic and leadership.

In 1984, the interviewing parole board member indicated that she thought Schraw's was "a good ten year case." After Schraw's second board interview in 1987, the interviewing member recommended writing the judge, the first step to a public hearing. Schraw got two other votes, but the majority of the board was not willing to proceed. Four years later, the same board member wrote:

I supported writing Judge last time, and feel he is even a better case now. Set for Exec ASAP.

In 1992, the board began processing Schraw for a public hearing. In the meantime, the old board was replaced. Schraw was interviewed again and some new members also expressed interest in proceeding. However, in June 1993 he received a five-year continuance. Schraw was interviewed again in May 1998 and 2003. Although the board took nearly a year to decide each time, the result was the same.

Both Lawrence and Schraw have strong support from family members who are ready to assist them in adjusting to the free world. Their next scheduled reviews are in 2008 for Schraw and 2009 for Lawrence, when they will have spent more than 32 years in prison.