

Jose Daniel Mares, 135943
Parole eligible since 1982

Convicted at 18 of a murder he committed while drinking, Mares did so well in prison the parole board considered releasing him after 13 years. But Mares got drunk and briefly walked away from a prison camp in 1985 and the board has never shown interest again.

Jose Mares is the fourth of nine children born to a migrant family in Texas. Mares' father, an alcoholic, came and went. In his teen years, Mares began drinking excessively and often could not remember later what he had done while drunk. Even so, his only encounter with police was for one speeding ticket, until his conviction of second-degree murder at the age of 18.

At the time of his arrest, Mares worked the night shift at a tool and die company and attended high school in the mornings.

Mares started drinking early in the morning on Oct. 28, 1972. That night, he and his cousin, Domingo Ramirez, went to a bar in Holland where they met 80-year old Jessie Smith, who was also drinking heavily. The teens agreed to give Smith a ride home to drop off six-packs for his Sunday drinking.

Instead of returning to the bar as planned, Mares and Ramirez took Smith into the country to steal his money. After the larceny, they headed back into town, but the car slid into a ditch. Ramirez hitched a ride to get a wrecker. While he was gone, Smith got out of the car and insisted on walking home. Mares tried to stop him, but Smith would not return to the car. When Mares pushed Smith into a ditch to avoid being hit by an oncoming car, Smith started screaming and yelling. Mares panicked and struck Smith several times with a tree branch to

quiet him. Mares claimed no intent to kill, but Smith died from the blows.

The pre-sentence investigator wrote that Mares should finish high school and learn a trade to prepare for his return to the community. The judge imposed a parolable life sentence, recommending a pre-parole hearing at the end of seven years.

When Mares arrived at prison he tested "borderline defective" in intelligence with a fourth-grade overall level of academic achievement. He was judged to be immature and poorly socialized; he admitted to chronic alcoholism.



Jose Mares

In spite of this bleak assessment, Mares completed his GED in 1976, an associate's degree in arts and sciences in 1979, and earned 96 credits towards a bachelor's degree in community service. He also worked at a variety of prison jobs and developed several marketable skills.

A lifer review report in 1983 stated that Mares was "making great strides" in preparing himself to return to society. In 1984, a work supervisor wrote:

I was able to see him slowly shine and stand out from the crowd. I believe he has experienced 'rehabilitation' far beyond the expectations of Corrections.

MDOC staff consistently characterize him as responsible, mature, sincere and hardworking.

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In September 1984, when he was 30 years old, Mares was moved to Camp Lehman at the request of the parole board. This was often done as a step toward release. He worked on a camp crew and received excellent reports. At that time, alcohol was available in the camp and eventually Mares gave in to drinking. One day in June 1985, already intoxicated, he went into the woods to pick up alcohol left there for the prisoners and got lost. He was gone until the next day when he came out of the woods and turned himself in to state police in Houghton Lake.

The parole board saw Mares again in November 1985, five months after the walk-away. Following the interview, board member Thomas Patten wrote:

Had chance, blew it – no interest now.

Since then, Mares has continued to work steadily and further his education. Teachers competed to hire him as a bi-lingual tutor. For several years he was a line foreman for prison industries where his supervisor wrote that he was a competent and conscientious worker. He has had no incidents of substance abuse since 1988. Mares has maintained contact with family members and has support in the religious community outside prison. He married Sara Harris in 1999.

The parole board saw Mares again in 1993 and 1998 and issued a “no interest” notice each time. In the summer of 2003, the parole board reviewed Mares’ file. Then, without even an interview, it continued him for another five years. His next scheduled review is in 2008, when he will be 54.