

# Faces behind the Figures

Are we safer because they're behind bars?



**Estevan Gonzales, No. 175601**

*Crime: Second-degree murder*

*Sentence: 12 – 30 years*

*First Possible Release: September 1993*

*Paroled: June 2004*

*Parole Revoked: March 2005*

*Re-Paroled: Aug. 9, 2007*

*Paroled to a strange city with practically no resources, Estevan Gonzales became homeless, living in a shelter at night and walking the streets by day. This made it hard for him to report on time and to attend outpatient substance abuse treatment. When he became so overwhelmed that he left to join his family in Ohio, the parole board returned him to prison for 18 months, then continued him for an additional year. He was re-paroled on Aug. 9, 2007.*

When Estevan Gonzales was paroled in June 2004 after serving 21 years for second-degree murder, approval for the transfer of his parole supervision to Toledo, Ohio, where he had family, had not yet come through. He was placed in Detroit with an acquaintance but lost this housing when it was discovered that a probationer on electronic monitoring also lived there.

Gonzales' parole agent said she was not able to help him find another place to live or provide him with a loan. His family paid for a motel room for him for a couple of weeks until they could no longer afford it.

Describing his situation, Gonzales wrote:

*What needs to be understood is that I just did 21 years and was on parole here in Michigan without NO FAMILY, NO JOB, NO PLACE TO LIVE, NO MONEY OR ANY HELP FROM MY PAROLE OFFICER. My family had to come from Toledo to take me to ALL MY APPOINTMENTS.*

After testing positive for marijuana, Gonzales was placed in a residential treatment program for 30 days. He hoped that by the time he completed the program the interstate transfer would be approved so he could go to live with his sister. That did not happen and he was homeless again. He stayed in shelters at night and walked the streets between 8 am and 6 pm. He was also required to complete outpatient substance abuse programming.

In October 2004, Gonzales was late for a scheduled meeting with his parole agent. By the time he got there, she had already left the office. Gonzales signed in but, fearing he would be returned to prison for missing his appointment, left for Toledo to stay with his family. Ironically, his transfer to Ohio had just been approved, but he left the state without learning of it. Gonzales was appre-



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ended in March 2005 and turned over to the parole board for failure to report, failure to complete outpatient substance abuse treatment and leaving the state without permission.

Although the administrative law examiner who presided over Gonzales' parole revocation hearing recommended re-parole to Toledo, in April 2005 the Board returned him to prison for 18 months. It said the violations showed he couldn't be managed in the community. In 2006, the board continued Gonzales for an additional year, stating:

*P [prisoner] failed community supervision and resumed drug use. Minimized his actions and offered excuses for his parole failure. . .*

Gonzales had gone to prison in 1983, at age 24. Although he had no prior criminal record, he did have a serious drinking problem. Convicted of the beating death of an acquaintance, Gonzales said he had been drinking heavily and didn't recall any details of the fatal assault. He was sentenced to 12 to 30 years.

Gonzales did not adjust well to prison and had numerous misconduct citations. The parole board continued him seven times, including three 24-month continuances, requiring him to serve almost twice his minimum sentence.

Ultimately, through programming and his work as a tutor, Gonzales says he learned to deal with uncomfortable situations, control his temper and improve his communication skills. An instructor said of him: *He is very knowledgeable, articulate and studious. He has a serious demeanor and a great desire to learn and to help others.* By 2004, his conduct had improved markedly, he scored favorably on the parole guidelines, and the board granted his release.

After being returned to prison, Gonzales wrote:

*I know if I had been paroled to Ohio to my family...I would not be here today, or if I would have had a little help from someone here in Michigan with transportation and a real place to stay, I could have made it until I could have been transferred to Ohio. I was so scared out there I really did not know what to do. I had no one to turn to but my family, so I went home to them.*

After serving almost 2<sup>1/2</sup> years for technical violations of his parole, In August 2007 Gonzales was re-paroled, this time to live with his family in Ohio.