

THE LETTER SEASON 2, Episode 4:Life Sentences

Amy Donaldson: The man who killed 24-year-old Buddy Booth didn't know him. He didn't know he had a wife and two young daughters.

And that man had no idea that shooting the delivery driver who just happened upon the scene of a murder on the morning of March 5th 1982 would rob Buddy Booth's family of the most stable thing in their lives.

Buddy's widow Carla was just 23 and now solely responsible for the survival of their little family.

Baby Dana would not have any memories of Buddy, though she looked just like him. But 4-year-old Norma she'd been the center of her dad's life. So she really felt the absence of her father.

Carla: She always wondered where her dad was, why he wasn't coming home and it took me a long time before I even said anything to her.

Amy Donaldson: Adrift in grief and uncertainty, Carla didn't have a job and she couldn't bring herself to return to the apartment where she and Buddy hoped to build a life.

She and the girls spent the first week or so with Buddy's family, then they moved in with her mom and step dad for a couple of months. Carla was focused on survival there was no time for grieving or money for counseling. She could barely cope with what was happening. How could she explain what was going on to a 4-year-old?

Carla: And my parents would say, "Carla, you really need to take her to the grave site and let her see her dad." And I said she's not ready. She's not ready.

Amy Donaldson: But about a year after Buddy's death, the questions were getting harder not to answer and Norma was getting older. So it felt like it was time. Carla decided the best way to explain Buddy's absence was to take Norma to the cemetery where her father was buried.

Carla: Finally, around her when she was about, almost five, I decided to take her there.

Amy Donaldson: They walked up to his headstone, and Carla told Norma, this is where your dad lives now.

Norma: And she kept looking around, kept looking around, like, you know, looking for him is what she was doing. And I sat by the graves for a little bit. And she wouldn't sit down. She just kept looking, waiting for him to come.

Amy Donaldson: Norma was distressed, confused. So Carla decided it was time to leave. She took her daughter by the hand and began leading her to their car. Norma didn't want to go. She tried to tug her hand free.

Carla: And she goes Mama, wait, Mama, wait, I want to see my dad. And I told her that her dad lives here. And he you know, he, he's in the ground.

Amy Donaldson: Carla pointed at the stone that marked Buddy's grave.

Carla: And that broke her heart. And she just cried and cried. And I knew then she wasn't ready for it and I feel like I had made a mistake taking her there.

Amy Donaldson: Maybe Norma remembered the times her parents lived apart when they were fighting. Maybe in her five-year old mind, she thought her mom was just keeping her away from her dad again. Either way she blamed her mother for the pain she felt the loss she didn't understand.

Carla: She was angry with me for a while thinking I took her away from her dad again.

Amy Donaldson: But the full impact of losing her dad at such a young age, wouldn't become clear to Norma or Carla until many years later. Michael Moore's decision to kill Buddy not only left his children without a father, it set in motion other decisions that triggered an avalanche of compounding trauma.

Carla Booth wanted her husband's killer to be executed for his crimes. Instead he was given two life sentences in prison. But what the families of the murdered men were about to realize is that a life sentence doesn't necessarily mean life behind bars.

And almost exactly one year after a jury saved Michael Moore from the firing squad, he was going to make another plea for mercy. But this time, he would make a case before a parole board.

Michael Moore: I don't know what I can do, I wish we could go back and redo it, I would never put myself in a position that would ever done what I've done.

Amy Donaldson: As Michael Moore tried to persuade a new group of strangers that he deserved early release. He also pursued an appeal of his conviction. So, the Utah Board of Pardons and Parole had some tough questions for him. And he was prepared to answer them all. What really led to the murders? Did he have any remorse for gunning down two young fathers? And did he understand the damage he'd caused?

Amy Donaldson: From KSL Podcasts, I'm Amy Donaldson and this is The Letter season 2: Ripple Effect, episode 4: Life Sentences

DeAnn: I remember the day I woke up after the funeral. That was when it really hit me to wake up in the morning and the first thing you notice is your heart is racing. And you think, did I dream that? Or is it real, and then reality would hit and I didn't want to get out of bed.

Amy Donaldson: After Jordan Rasmussen was killed his wife DeAnn found herself living a life she'd never even imagined widowed at 30 with three small children. The grief eclipsed everything.

DeAnn: I just remember, life just seems so empty. I thought I just don't want to go on living. What's there to live for? But then I'd think of David Lisa and Chad and I thought I have to be here for them.

Amy Donaldson: What was hardest, especially those first few years?

DeAnn: The first of everything was hard. The first Christmas, the first birthdays, the first anniversary of the murder. All of that was hard.

DeAnn: I just knew that time would heal this open wound that was in my heart and I just so badly wanted time to go by fast because my heart was broken. It wasn't just emotionally, it was a physical pain. I literally felt my heart was broken.

Amy Donaldson: She couldn't seem to find even a moment's relief from the ache. And then, one day, it happened. She was out running errands and happened to be driving past the mall where she'd purchased a dress for her husband's funeral a few months earlier. She pulled up to a stoplight, and it hit her.

DeAnn: And I remember distinctly thinking, I didn't think about Jordan from the Cottonwood Mall to here. And that was a major milestone. Probably four minutes had gone by and I had actually thought about something else besides my pain and my broken heart.

Amy Donaldson: Her family worried about her being alone. In the days after Jordan's funeral, her brothers told her that she should take time to grieve but she should also think about rebuilding her life.

DeAnn: And they said, DeAnn, you do what you need to do. You take the time to mourn. you mourn Jordan, to your fullest. But these children need a dad. Don't mourn your whole life. When the time is right, you need to find someone and remarry.

Amy Donaldson: The suggestion seemed absurd at first. But eventually, DeAnn realized she did need to try if for no other reason than for her children.

So about four months after Jordan was killed she agreed to go on a dinner date. It was with a man who knew Jordan, so he understood the situation.

DeAnn can no longer remember where they went or what they ate, just the feeling of sickness she felt in her stomach she couldn't shake it.

DeAnn: It was awful. I mean, we had fun. But the whole time I felt like I was being untrue.

Amy Donaldson: You're being disloyal, you're cheating.

DeAnn: Disloyal! I'm cheating!

Amy Donaldson: She maintained a friendly facade until with relief, they pulled into the driveway of the home she'd shared with Jordan.

DeAnne: After the date, he dropped me off at the door and said goodbye. And I remember leaning against the door and just breaking down. And go, I can't do this. This is just not right.

Amy Donaldson: Maybe it was too soon. Maybe it was just the wrong man. But DeAnn was also working hard to make herself whole for her children. They were her primary focus, even on her darkest days.

DeAnne: I went to counseling, I figured if I was able to put myself back together that I would be a better mother. And so that's what I did. I worked on me to try to help them better.

Amy Donaldson: She didn't want to parent them from a place of sadness or rage but the heaviness of loss hung over every moment.

DeAnn: Sometimes I would get angry if the kids did something, got an award at school, or did something that the parents should be there. I would just be angry that they couldn't have their Dad there. It was hard not feeling sorry for them and so you just wanted to give 'em things.

Amy Donaldson: DeAnn assumed her children were struggling with grief too but she wasn't sure how to talk about it. So they didn't.

DeAnn: They just kind of kept it in. I think I failed them. I probably should have brought it out.

Amy Donaldson: Jordan's sisters could see the toll it was taking on the kids. Especially his oldest son David who was 8 years old when his father died.

Diane: I think my heart broke for David the most because they were so close.

Amy Donaldson: Jordan's younger sister Diane said the aunts tried to fill in the void left by her brother's death, but it was an emptiness too vast and they felt it in so many small moments. Like David's favorite shirt, a soccer jersey.

Diane: It was yellow and reversible black. And I think it's number seven. And he would only wear that. As soon as it got washed, put it back on.

Amy Donaldson: He'd insist on wearing it everywhere to school, to play, even to church.

Diane: Jordan was the only one that could talk him into, like, wearing a Sunday shirt to church, not his jersey.

Amy Donaldson: That jersey became a symbol of what was lost, an emblem of absence.

Diane: That was, that was kind of, it was kind of painful to see him in that little jersey knowing that his dad wasn't there to convince him to take it off.

Amy Donaldson: Jordan's youngest son Chad wasn't even 2 when his father was killed. But not remembering him or the trauma of his murder didn't mean Chad could escape the pain of growing up with grief. Eventually, he'd have his own struggle with what it meant to miss someone he'd never known.

And then there was Jordan's little girl 5-year-old Lisa. She was old enough to miss her dad, but not quite old enough to grasp death. She was the one who was worried about giving her dad a cold if she looked into his casket. Her Aunt Diane remembers the family trying to explain death to her by putting a glove on her tiny hand. The adults who loved her told her that the glove represented the human body. Her hand, they told her as they pulled the glove over her fingers, represented the soul. And when the glove or the body died it separated from the soul. They pulled the glove off her hand, and then in an effort to ease the pain they anticipated she'd feel they reminded her she would see her dad again in the afterlife.

Diane: Your daddy's gonna be gone for a long, long time. It'll be a long time until you see him and she says, well, not very long, because he will come home for Christmas. Because he loves Christmas. And I remember thinking, No, it'll be longer than Christmas. You know and you can't explain the hereafter to a five or six year old.

Amy Donaldson: And nine months later, as they gathered for their first Christmas eve without Jordan, Lisa would make it clear to the adults in her life that some lessons could only be learned by living them.

Diane: That December, DeAnn was saying, you gotta go to bed. You know, Santa can't come until you go to sleep. She said, I don't care about Santa. I'm waiting for Daddy to come back. Those words ring clear. He'll be back, he'll come home for Christmas. Because he loves Christmas. And I'm sure he was there.

Amy Donaldson: As the months passed, DeAnn's friends kept trying to set her up. Just before Michael Moore's murder trial, they introduced her to a man named Tom Kilgore. He was

divorced and had five children of his own. She agreed to a date. This time, it was a completely different experience.

[Music]

Amy Donaldson: Not only did they have an instant connection, he seemed to understand how to care for a woman, who was mourning and loving another man and maybe always would.

DeAnn: He was willing to not be threatened by me grieving my husband, my first husband. And he was loving and supportive.

Amy Donaldson: Just 9 months after Jordan's murder they got married. Some worried they were rushing into things.

DeAnn: I remember having a phone conversation with my mom. And she said, DeAnn, I don't think you're doing the right thing. This is too soon. You just need to take more time. And I said, Mom, I did right the first time. You need to trust me. I think I know my heart.

Amy Donaldson: But all three of Jordan's sisters supported DeAnn's new marriage. They loved Tom and they wanted their sister-in-law to have support, wanted their niece and nephews to have a dad. Jordan's older sister Leslie says her deepest concern was for her brother's children.

Leslie: David, little Lisa, and little Chad that was where my pain was. More than everything I went through, physically, emotionally, was then looking at them.

Amy Donaldson: Leslie knew there was no choice but to go on living to find a way to heal but how? You can't just forget your brother's murder.

Leslie: All I can equate it to was being at the beach. And you're standing there, and you're looking at the seashells, and all of a sudden a wave just comes and just knocks you down. And that was what happened constantly. You'd be thinking you were okay. And then boom, there'd be a wave that would just knock you down. And it went on forever. Just when you think, Okay, I'm dealing with this, I've got to take care of my kids, my family, And then all of a sudden, boom, the wave comes. Sometimes there's tsunamis.

Amy Donaldson: She couldn't let grief sweep her away. She had a life, responsibilities, five children of her own. But unlike waves made of water, swells of grief aren't confined to a beach.

One night Leslie was standing in the doorway of an elementary school when one of those waves blindsided her. As the PTA president, it was her responsibility to welcome parents to a meeting where they'd discuss fundraising and book fairs.

Then without warning, the heaviness she now always carried in her chest exploded into hot shame. She forced herself to smile, to shake hands, to say simple, familiar words.

These were people she knew, people she liked. They greeted her warmly but all she could hear were the words of a killer.

Reporter Jack Ford: Moore said that's when he decided this guy is such a jerk that he no longer deserves to live.

Leslie: I was supposed to be conducting a PTA meeting. but that Jordan Rasmussen was such a jerk he didn't deserve to live still stayed in my mind. You read something in the newspaper and you totally give validation to it. It's just like, oh well Jordan Rasmussen was such a jerk he didn't deserve to live. Well that's too bad for those Rasmussens. That's too bad.

Amy Donaldson: The thing that kept gnawing at her was Michael Moore's lack of remorse, his refusal to apologize for what he'd stolen from them and he blamed Jordan. Those lies, they haunted her. The echo in her head felt maddening. So she slipped into the school's office and dialed a familiar number.

Leslie: I called my mom and I said, I am supposed to conduct a PTA meeting tonight. I cannot do this. And she said, Well, I understand. But kind of like at some point, we just can't keep hiding.

Amy Donaldson: Her mother offered her sympathy, comfort and then, a little advice it didn't matter what other people thought of Jordan.

Leslie: We know, Heavenly Father knows. And that is all that matters. You hold your head up high. You were blessed to have one of the most golden boys in the world as your brother, and you go on, and hold that head up and enjoy celebrating the goodness of him and his life. And so I did that night.

Amy Donaldson: Her mother's counsel got her through that meeting. But Leslie couldn't seem to exorcise Michael's accusations from her mind. Nothing mitigated the painful legacy of the killer's lies. How could she heal, how could she find peace, when Michael Moore would not accept responsibility for what he had done?

Leslie: It would have been such a different scenario if Jordan had of been killed in a car accident. Believe me that is entirely different than what this family experienced.

Amy Donaldson: It wasn't just that she lost her brother, it was how he was killed and how Michael planned to dispose of his body until Buddy Booth showed up.

Leslie: from the horror of the whole murder, the chains, the sinking of the body and the like. It was just horrifying. And I think you just step back and just think I, I just don't want to deal with any of this.

Amy Donaldson: So she clung to the only life raft the criminal justice system could offer Jordan's murderer would never be free.

Leslie: The judge made a decision, and the jury made a decision and so, you realize it's out of your hands. We knew that he'd be there for a long time. And we wanted that.

Amy Donaldson: But that life raft would turn out to be unreliable Because Michael Moore was getting ready to ask the parole board for a second chance. After just a year in prison and while the families were unaware of this hearing, Michael made a case for leniency. What could he possibly say that would justify such mercy? What's changed in his life, in him? And would he acknowledge the waves of destruction and pain that were still crashing through the lives of those who loved Jordan Rasmussen and Buddy Booth?

That's after the break.

Board Chair: This is the time set for an original hearing before the board of pardons and parole in the matter of Michael Patrick Moore assigned prison number 15995. That's you, Mr Moore?

Michael Moore: I am he.

Amy Donaldson: The idea of a double murderer having a parole hearing just a year after arriving at the Utah State Prison seems absurd. But it happened and until recently, it happened in almost every Utah case. That's because the state uses what's called indeterminate sentencing. In other words, while a judge can send you to prison, it's actually the state's Board of Pardons and Parole that decides how long you spend behind bars.

Board Chair: Mr. Moore, you are serving a sentence or murder in the first degree, a capital felony two counts, both having a life sentence imposed.

Amy Donaldson: In this 1983 hearing, Michael sat alone at a wooden table in a large rectangular room and facing him, sitting on a slightly raised platform were the five members of the Utah Board of Pardons and Parole.

Board Chair: What I'd like to do now is turn to you and allow you the opportunity to make any comments and expressions that you feel appropriate.

Amy Donaldson: These hearings are recorded, so we get to hear Michael's voice for the first time. And he responded by trying to explain what led him to kill two men in March of 1982.

Michael Moore: I don't know what I can say at this point outside of to express my deepest remorse for what happened. I knew Jordan, I knew his family, I knew his son. What happened up there was not premeditated, it was a spontaneous thing. I was under a great deal of stress and pressure. And I feel for that every day. I feel for the families in the wrong I've done, I would hope that there's some way I can make that up to society. I don't know what I can do, I wish we

could go back and redo it, I would never put myself in a position. I would never have done what I've done.

Amy Donaldson: Here's what sticks out to me about his opening statement: Michael says he wants to express his deepest remorse for what happened to Jordan, but he doesn't acknowledge that he was the one who killed him. And he doesn't actually say he's sorry. He doesn't even mention Buddy Booth. He's still, for the most part, trying to justify or mitigate what he did. He is trying to simultaneously cast himself as a victim in this tragedy, while appearing to take responsibility for it.

But Michael wasn't alone in making his case for early release. His parents, former boss, and girlfriend sat on wooden chairs in the audience behind him.

After Michael finished his statement, the board gave them the opportunity to speak on his behalf. Michael's parents Edward and Roseann Moore begged for leniency for their only son. His mother was so emotional, she could barely speak. It's difficult to understand her brief but desperate plea.

Board Member: Mrs. Moore?

Rosanne Moore: Might not be able to say much. He's my only son, he's all I've got.

Amy Donaldson: He's all I've got she said.

Rosanne Moore: I just hope I don't die before he gets out of here.

Amy Donaldson: I just hope I don't die before he gets out. And when she made her way back to her chair, Edward Moore took up his son's cause. He'd done this before, begged for mercy on his son's behalf, when he asked a jury to spare his life a year earlier. He read from prepared notes.

Ed Moore: Mike's never hurt anybody. I can't find a soul that doesn't like Mike. But for this one transgression, except for it he's lived an exemplary life and fine, so I'm proud of him. I love him. I always told him to tell the truth. And that truth that I told him to tell was his undoing by the confession. He didn't flee or run away or anything even down there he called the authorities. Told them what happened. He needed help. And in all the transcripts you can find you'll find all the detectives speak highly of Mike. He has been very workable and that he was ideal to get along with.

Amy Donaldson: Edward said his son must have been under tremendous pressure. He never meant to kill anyone. That's why he confessed.

Edward Moore: Michael Michael's not a criminal. But I understand the gravity of the situation. Michael must have been brainwashed. You're under tremendous mental strain to do something

like that. I just can't understand it. I didn't even know he could shoot a gun. We don't have guns in our house.

Amy Donaldson: And then Michael's father, a life-long Catholic, extended his plea beyond the bounds of the law and the purview of the Board.

Edward Moore: We are all being judged by a higher board of pardons than this, and I'm sure the man upstairs will say let there be peace and goodness that follows. We humbly beseech the family that you grant a Mike favorable rehearing that will offer him hope instead of despair so that justice and compassion can be an instrument of your learned judgment. thank you for letting us talk.

Board member: Thank you very much, those notes are helpful.

Amy Donaldson: Also there to speak on Michael's behalf was the man who first gave him a job at Log Haven Stanley Sprouse. He was emotional as he talked about the young man he hired as a teen.

Stan Sprouse: Michael has worked for me since he is 16 years old. I never saw the side of Michael, what happened in all the years that we worked together. I always called him son and he always called me dad. I'm like an adoptive father. I've never had a finer employee.

Amy Donaldson: Stan sold Log Haven in 1979, but Michael stayed on through the transition to the new owners,. Stan recommended they promote Michael to manager. But by the time the murders happened in March of 1982, Stan was no longer involved in day to day operations. And when he learned what happened. He was as baffled as everyone else.

Stan Sprouse: Michael is a smart young man. Well educated, well mannered, honest, religious in his own way. I think Michael, never planned this in any way, shape or form. It was a crime of passion.

Amy Donaldson: The board which had already reviewed the court records listened silently to the testimony. When Michael's supporters/they finished, he stood up again, to tell the board he understood the gravity of what he'd done.

Michael Moore: And it's something I live with every night. I sleep with it. I wake up, I wake up shaking, and I can't even understand it myself.

Amy Donaldson: But he also felt like he deserved another chance at freedom. He felt like he could do some good in the world. In fact, he already had.

Michael Moore: Being within this institution, I've tried to be a benefit to society, repair whatever small ways I can. I've tried to be an asset in some way, make up for what I've done.

Amy Donaldson: Michael said he counseled incoming inmates, helped staff members, and taught French to other prisoners.

He honestly seemed to believe that what he'd done in prison in the last year showed that he was worthy of early release.

Michael Moore: I've never hurt anybody in my life. I've worked with my staff. I've worked in stressful situations and violence situations. I've never struck an employee, I've never hurt anybody, have never physically been in fights. So far that I was very scared and a great deal of stress and pressure.

Amy Donaldson: Stress and pressure that had been Michael's defense at trial. That he was so emotionally distressed by the upheaval at Log Haven that he killed two men. Even a year after his conviction, Michael Moore couldn't let go of the outrageous claims he had made on the stand mainly, that he thought his life was in danger.

Michael pressed his case to the Board of Pardons. He presented them with a book he had written in his first year behind bars. In it, he detailed his belief that the restaurant's new owners were affiliated with a criminal mob. And that his questions about financial issues made him a target.

We were not able to obtain the book referenced here, but we know it detailed what Michael already told police in his confession. He said the restaurant was a front for a network of criminal activity, including importing drugs shipped to the U.S. through furniture orders.

Board members said they'd read the book but they weren't persuaded that any of it was true. There was no evidence. It was too absurd to think that police looked into the murders and overlooked such extensive criminal behavior.

But this is where the hearing took a turn away from straightforward testimony. The Board started asking questions of both Michael and his small but loyal band of supporters.

Board Member: The question that I have is this, Mike. Are you still convinced that someone may have been trying to kill you at that time?

Michael Moore: I am convinced that that was the aura that pervaded it. Whether or not there was any substance to it, I can't say. I don't know.

Amy Donaldson: He didn't answer the question with a yes or a no. He said he was convinced that an aura pervaded the corporation.

The Board member asked Stan Sprouse, the original owner of Log Haven, if he could substantiate any part of what Michael still asserted.

Board Member: Mr. Sprouse, is it? Are you able to verify in any way some of the allegations that Mike has made regarding these new owners of the Log Haven.

Stan Spouse: No, I wasn't well, that well acquainted with them. I stayed on for six months after I sold the restaurants and trained Michael as manager and I felt all the confidence in the world that he'd make a great, great manager for Log Haven. I knew of no, no malice, or any hard feelings between the offices, what whatsoever until it was all over with. And then, of course, that's how I found out about it.

Amy Donaldson: The Board members were concerned about why Michael went to such great lengths to cover up his crime when he contended he took responsibility from the start.

Board Member: You altered the scene substantially. And I guess I'm confused about why you did that.

Michael Moore: The reason might seem to be an initial cover up, I had just shot what I consider to be the mob's accountant. And I was afraid of what would happen to me at that point. And that's why the crime scene was altered. It was never even a thought to cover it up. My jacket was out in the open like close around, the holster was sitting, my ammunition was there. And I called the police and I waited.

Amy Donaldson: But what he didn't say is that he spent time shoveling bloody snow into the sump, then tossed the gun down the hole, and dragged both bodies into the van and then drove it into the road before calling police.

Michael Moore: I was tired. I hadn't slept or eaten in a week, I'd under a great deal of stress. And I just gone through a horrifying experience. I was heartbroken. I just wanted to be left alone.

Board Member: I'm also concerned about what your investment was.

Amy Donaldson: The board seemed stunned that he'd kill over a job why not just walk away?

Michael Moore: I was wrong. I became too attached to a position, to what a place meant to me, I'd worked there too long, built too much of it by hand.

Amy Donaldson: Edward Moore jumped in with his perspective on what was going on with his son that morning.

Edward Moore: The very important thing you brought up. Mike was in love with that place. That was his girlfriend. He hadn't taken a vacation for three or four years, took off one weekend and went to San Francisco. He came back and find someone else with his restaurant. He was in love with that, that was his woman. He was in love with that's hard to believe.

Amy Donaldson: And when it came to killing Buddy Booth. Edward Moore blamed his son's paranoia. He said when he learned that Michael believed the mob was going to send someone to kill him these so-called 'hatchet-boys' that it began to make terrible, tragic sense.

Edward Moore: This explained to me in my mind, when he saw the van, he thought they were coming, the hatchet boys, but I wanted to bring that point up.

Amy Donaldson: But board members made it clear, they didn't believe Michael's story about the mob or that fear explained his violent choices.

Amy Donaldson: They noted that his book which he penned in prison began with a letter from the county attorney saying that the accusations against the new owners of Log Haven were unfounded.

Board Member: The record is clear, Mike, that from your perception from reading your book, that in your mind, you may have been perceiving things as you have portrayed. And that may have very much contributed to your motivation, your paranoia at the time and your ultimate action.

In reviewing the statements as taken from a number of individuals in the record, it is not substantiated at all.

Amy Donaldson: The board was ready to make a decision. But Michael wasn't finished. He wasn't ready to concede the fact that what drove him to kill two men wasn't true. He spent another seven minutes discussing his theories.

Michael Moore: I might say that even though you feel that my work is not substantiated. There were many people within the corporate office with whom I worked. They were never questioned on the stand to put this into the record for what reasons I don't know. I wish I did.

Amy Donaldson: Remember, Michael's own defense attorneys decided not to pursue his allegations that the restaurant's owners were affiliated with a criminal mob, or that someone was going to hurt or kill him. The only thing that mattered to them was that Michael believed the delusions when he pulled the trigger.

Whatever his fears, the chairman said it was his violent response that brought him to prison and subsequently, this hearing.

Board member: The unfortunate thing, regardless of your motivation.

Michael More: I realize that.

Board member: And the end result is two people lost their lives at your hand. And that's the point that this board must get to.

Amy Donaldson: The fact that he was still clinging to this elaborate web of lies as a way to explain or justify what he'd done, indicates just how deeply-held those delusions were. The Board took a recess to discuss the case.

Their decision after the break.

[Music]

Amy Donaldson: When the Parole Board members filed back into the hearing room, they delivered swift, severe disappointment to Michael Moore. There would be no parole at least not yet. Instead, they'd summon him to another hearing in 10 years. And then, the chairman offered him advice on how he might spend the next decade of his life.

The board member advised Michael to maintain a good convict record, just as he had over the past year in prison. And encouraged him to use the time to come to terms with the crime he committed.

But Michael couldn't hide his disappointment

Michael Moore: It is my desire to accept your decision. Very hard. And yet, it does stifle one's initiative, to excel, to recover, to recover in a way that relieves you a burden of risk and further one can return to society. How can I best do that, with that amount of time?

Amy Donaldson: He seemed to be searching for a playbook or a promise. If he did certain things, could he be assured of release?

Board Member: I don't want to overstate this to you.

Amy Donaldson: I don't want to overstate this to you, the board member said, but you certainly can impact the amount of time you serve.

She explained that once they feel an inmate has paid their debt to society, it's really a question of what an inmate has done with their time behind bars.

Board Member: Give back a little bit.

Amy Donaldson: Give back a little, she said.

Board member: And there's no reason why you can't try to be as happy as you can.

Michael Moore: I appreciate that.

Amy Donaldson: But he couldn't let it go. Maybe what he'd done was so terrible, there was no hope for him. If there was nothing he could do to earn freedom, why should he try to be a good person? Why even try to change?

Michael Moore: It seems to me that the gravity of the offense is so severe, that very little I can do in here can alter the outcome.

Amy Donaldson: He said he was sorry and that he'd tried to make up for the damage he'd done but spending his life in prison wasn't going to change what happened. And he got the impression that there wasn't anything he could do in prison that would win him a second chance.

Amy Donaldson: He begged for a lifeline, something more specific than be good and hope for the best.

Michael Moore: What can we anticipate after that if I maintain my present course? Can you give me some ray of hope is what I'm asking.

Amy Donaldson: A ray of hope. Well, one board member said the guideline for a life sentence was generally about 15 years. But even that was too ambiguous for Michael.

Michael Moore: Should I anticipate a 5 year rehearing when I return in 10?

Amy Donaldson: The board member refused to offer him anything other than advice.

Board member: Mike, I won't commit to that.

Michael Moore: I'm just asking for comment judgment.

Board Member: I think it would be best for you at that time to for now it's time to prepare for that rehearing. Looking forward that is, as a goal.

Michael Moore: I can appreciate that.

Board Member: K, good luck.

Amy Donaldson: And with that, Michael said goodbye to his family and went back to the life he was trying to build behind bars.

All of this happened without the knowledge or participation of the families of his victims, who were in a way, serving their own life sentence, adapting to their new reality, barred from ever seeing their loved ones again.

There was no appeal process for them, no hope of early release. Those who loved Jordan Rasmussen and Buddy Booth had to find a way to live with the void, the ghosts, the waves of grief.

They tried to rebuild, to move on, to forget about the man who'd shattered their lives but it was impossible.

Because, In a decade, Michael Moore would once again sit before the parole board and ask for freedom.

But this time, Jordan's family would have something to say about it.

DeAnn: I just could not see any way possible that he should ever be out of prison

Leslie: This man should never ever see the light of day, if these little children are going to be without their father forever. He should not be able to be entitled to go on and live a glorious life. It's just not justice.

Amy Donaldson: That's next time on The Letter.