

# Parole board again denies Van Houten

By Ann Griffith  
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CHINO — Leslie Van Houten, the “brightest” of the Manson Family murderers, was called a danger to society and again denied parole in a hearing Thursday at California Institution for Women.

The 50-year-old Van Houten was convicted of murder for the Aug. 10, 1969, death of Rosemary LaBianca under orders of cult leader Charles Manson.

She held down LaBianca, owner of a dress shop, while another Manson follower stabbed her.

It was the Monrovia High School graduate’s single act of violence 28 years ago, a fact that she emphasized during tearful testimony to the three-man Board of Prison Terms.

“I would say that my violence potential is very little,” Van Houten told the board. She has a job at a fabrics store waiting for her if she is ever released from prison. “Certainly I’ll be the first to admit that this was a cruel and callous crime. ... That’s one thing that I cannot change.”

An earlier death sentence was converted to life in prison.

Van Houten did not go along the day before in 1969 when fellow Manson followers entered the home of movie actress Sharon Tate and killed the performer, coffee heiress Abigail Folger, and three others. Van Houten was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder for her knowledge of the infamous slayings.

“Manson stated he was going to have to start the revolution, and we were going to be the ones to do the work,” Van Houten said.



Van Houten

Van Houten rejected the help of an attorney and represented herself Thursday. She greeted the parole board with a polite smile.

In the end, the board’s decision was most swayed by the cruelty of the crimes and a psychological report that showed improvement but did not urge release, commissioners told her.

“She submits to authority, whether it’s good authority or bad authority. She flourished under Manson and she flourished here,” prosecutor Steven Kay said. “I think she’s a model prisoner.”

Kay was on the original district attorney’s team that prosecuted the Manson Family.

“This was not some lost soul who didn’t know what she was doing,” he said. “She is probably the brightest one in the family. She weighed for two days whether or not she could kill.”

Van Houten has gone more than two decades without a discipline complaint, and Kay said there may come a day when he doesn’t argue against her parole.

“Some time she will get paroled,” Kay said after the hearing.

Kay argued Thursday for a two-year term before Van Houten would get another hearing, though the board reduced that to one year. He could have asked for three, but praised Van Houten as “headed in the right direction, clearly” with her therapy and work counseling addicts in the prison’s Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups.

In 1969, the 20-year-old hippie joined the Manson Family and started on a spree of crimes. In one year she was arrested for car theft, using a stolen credit card, and, finally, murder.

Van Houten squealed with surprise and thanked the board for giving the one-year wait before her next parole hearing. To her, it was a sign she may be moving closer to release.

“She came in there with the idea of a three-year term,” said prison spokesman Lt. Bob Sebald. “She was as happy as a lark with one year. It’s a sign of hope.”

Her appearance was the 12th before the board. The hearing lasted for more than an hour in a wood-paneled room at the prison near

Chino.

While none of the victims’ family members attended the hearing to argue against her release, opposing World Wide Web computer sites took up the issue of her freedom.

And dozens of letters were sent to state officials asking for Van Houten’s release.

A different point of view — a letter from Alice LaBianca, the ex-wife of Leno LaBianca, a grocery store owner who was killed the same night is posted on one Web site. It was read at the hearing.

“Leslie Van Houten chose her own path,” LaBianca’s letter read. “She chose to follow the instructions of Charles Manson. She chose drug-crazed killers as her family and she became one of them. But what about my family? When do we get our parole? When does Leno get his parole?”

Charles Manson was denied parole in 1997.

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