



Critical Points of Intervention in Preventing the Pathway to Criminality

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What is a Criminal Pathway?


- A person's trajectory into continuing criminality over their lifespan
- The route a person takes to enter the justice system
- A causal path that links early life to later adult criminality



In preparing for this presentation, I examined some of my juvenile case histories and capital mitigation studies to identify critical points along the pathway where one of my youth progressed further into the system or, conversely, a point where an intervention might have prevented further penetration into the system. We will be talking about these life histories later.



When we look at the various characteristics that have been empirically related to the development of a criminal career, we can find a number of factors that have remained consistent over many years.



From my own experience, I have developed the following theoretical framework that I use when developing social histories or capital mitigation studies. Characteristics that are in bold are the ones that have been most significantly linked to my research with Louisiana children.

Factors to Examine Related to Criminal Development

Social

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Urban / Rural

Health

- Birth
- Injury
- Illness
- Disability
- *Mental Health*
- Substance Use/Abuse

Education

- *School Attendance*
- *School Performance*
- *Truancy*
- *Grade Attainment*
- *Mental Retardation*
- *Learning Disabilities*

Family

- Structure
- Living Arrangements
- *Child Maltreatment*
- *Violence*
- Poverty

Economic

- Income
- Employment
- Illegal Gain

Neighborhood

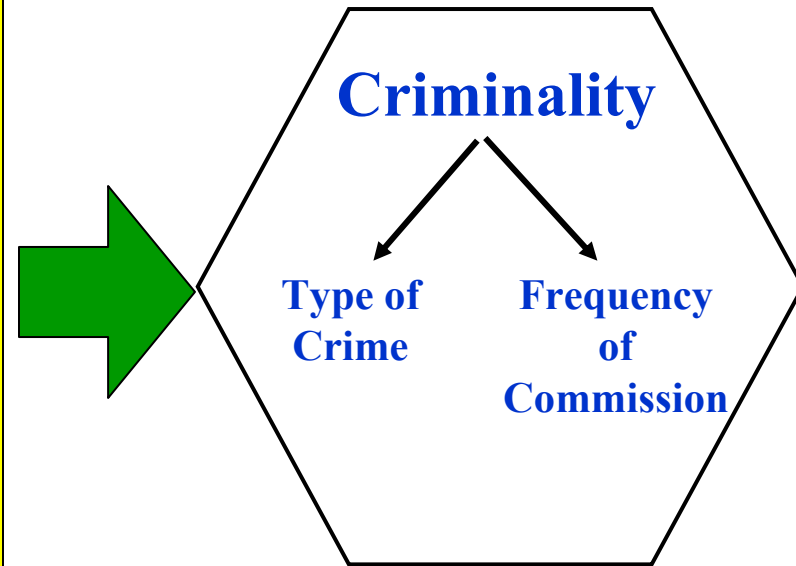
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Availability of Guns
- *Crime, Violence*

Criminological

- Number of Priors
- *Family History*
- *Age First Contact*
- Detention/Incarceration

Loss

- Death Due to Violent Crime
- Incarceration
- *Institutionalization*
- Absent Biological Parent






Significant Relationships

- School attendance and/or success
- Family history of crime behavior
- Child abuse/neglect/rejection
- Witnessing violence
- Mental disability
- Early delinquent behavior



Other Theoretical Frameworks: Social Development Theory (Hawkins & Catalano)

Developed a theory based upon the interaction of risk factors a child has in his environment with protective factors that buffer the affects of exposure to risk.



Risk factors are found across community, family, individual, peer and school domains. They include:

Risk Factors (Catalano & Hawkins)

Community Domain

- Availability of drugs
- Availability of firearms
- Community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, firearms and crime
- Media portrayals of violence
- Transitions and mobility
- Low neighborhood attachment and community organization
- Extreme economic deprivation

Family Domain

- Family history of the problem behavior
- Family management problems
- Family conflict
- Favorable parental attitudes and involvement in problem behavior

School Domain

- Early and persistent antisocial behavior
- Academic failure beginning in elementary school
- Lack of commitment to school

Individual / Peer Domain

- Rebelliousness
- Friends who engage in the problem behavior
- Favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior
- Early initiation of the problem behavior
- Constitutional factors

Protective factors include elements that link to a particular risk...

Parental supervision
mediate effects of → Media Violence

Social programs, parental
employment, school support
mediate effects of → Economic Deprivation

Parent training, mentoring,
school support mediate
effects of → Child Abuse/Neglect



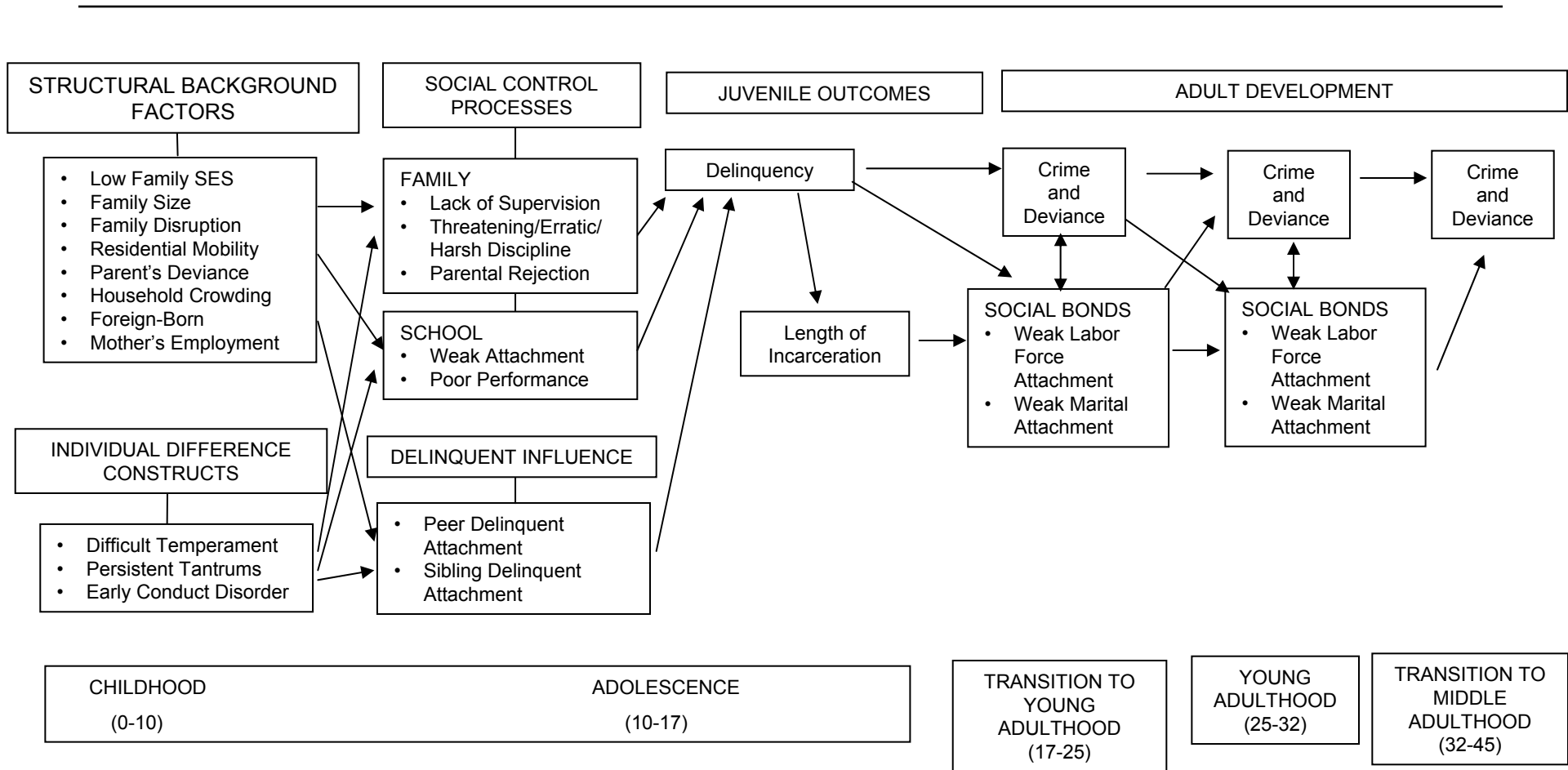
Sociogenic Model – Sampson & Laub


Uses a life course framework. Explains crime and deviance by stability and change over the life course.

Life Course – pathway through the age differentiation life span


(Elder, 1985, p. 17)

Dynamic Theoretical Model of Crime, Deviance, and Informal Social Control






The Sampson and Laub model looks at decision processes and course of events that give shape to a person's “turning points” in life.



Sampson and Laub's work and their re-analysis of the Glueck Studies reveal a significant link between early childhood and later adult experiences, but they maintain that turning points or critical points can be modified or changed through intervention.



Prevention Approaches That Have Been Found to be Effective:


1. Pre-marital Counseling
2. Prenatal & Infancy Programs
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Parent Training
5. Family Therapy
6. After-school Recreation
7. Mentoring with Contingent Reinforcement
8. Youth Employment with Education
9. Organizational Change in Schools
10. Classroom Organization, Management, and Instructional Strategies
11. School Behavior Management Strategies
12. Classroom Curricula for Social Competence Promotion
13. Community & School Policies
14. Community Mobilization
15. Community Policing

Diffusion Consortium Project, Social Development Research Group, University of Washington



Two major points of Sampson and Laub:

1. Childhood and adolescent delinquency can be explained by informal family and school controls – in other words, the youth's family and school experience can mediate progression into criminality.




2. Criminality over the life course can be explained by informal social bonds to family and employment regardless of childhood experiences.

Conceptual Conflict:

- We know that early deviant behavior is a “predictor” of continuing criminality.
- We also know that all children who behave in deviant manner do not become criminals.
- We know that the majority of people in prison were deviant as children.

So something must intervene in the lives of some children who are deviant at a young age.



Sampson and Laub maintain that it is the informal social controls that influence the pathway.

For example:

Social Control Influences on Developmental Phase

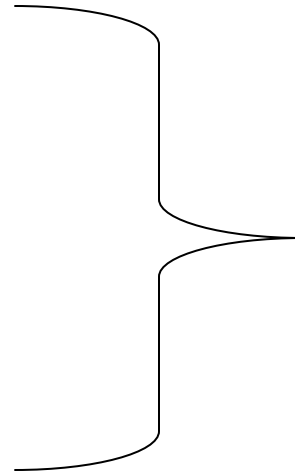
Family

School

Peers

Juvenile justice

system



Childhood and
adolescence

Social Control Influences on Developmental Phase

Higher education
Vocational training
Work
Marriage
Adult justice system

Young adulthood

Social Control Influences on Developmental Phase

Work

Marriage


Parenthood

Community investment

Criminal justice system



Middle adulthood



Social controls and social institutions mediate a person's pathway. There is not a direct link from the influence to the deviant behavior, as shown in the following diagram.

Social Controls

Mediating Influences

Behavior

Family disruption

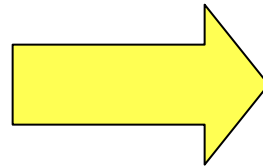
Parental criminality

Household
crowding

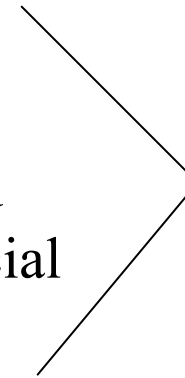
Family size

Residential mobility


Mother's
employment



Degree of
Family and
School Social
Control




Delinquent or
Non Delinquent
Behavior




So, family socialization, school attachment, and influence of siblings and friends play a major role in the life course.

Changes that strengthen social bonds to society
lessen criminality

Changes that weaken social bonds to society
increase criminality



Research consistently shows that we can intervene in the lives of children and youth on a pathway to crime.



Based on what we have discussed so far, what interventions do you think would be most effective to successfully intervene at a critical point in a child or youth's life?

Critical Point

Intervention

School failure → Keep in school

Family
disruption

Child
abuse/neglect

Family programming

Employment

Parent training

Mentoring

School programs

Keep child/youth bonded to social institutions.

Robby Life History: "Too Little Too Late"

12 / 1976 - 1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Birth - Age 4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

- Born premature
- Mother: low educational attainment
- Father absent
- Large family
- Poverty
- Poor and deteriorating neighborhood

K	1	1	2	2	3	4	6
Nicholson Elem.	La Belle Aire & Park Forest Elementary	Park Forest & Clinton Elementary	Clinton Elementary	Clinton & Delmont Elementary	Delmont Elementary	Prescott Middle <i>(social promotion)</i>	
32 absences	29 absences	34 absences	43 absences	6 absences	25 absences	78 absences	103 absences

- Assessment**
- Mild mental retardation (IQ- 65)
 - Severe deficit in visual motor area

Mother says sibling hit him and he would not respond; she tried to teach him to hit back

Unable to read

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Future
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	

Criminal trespassing, entry/remaining after forbidden, returning to property without authority

EBR Detention Center

Christian Acres

Joy Home for Boys

Reynolds Institute

EBR Detention Center

Towering Pines

Baton Rouge Marine Institute

EBR Detention Center

Committed two murders with two other males

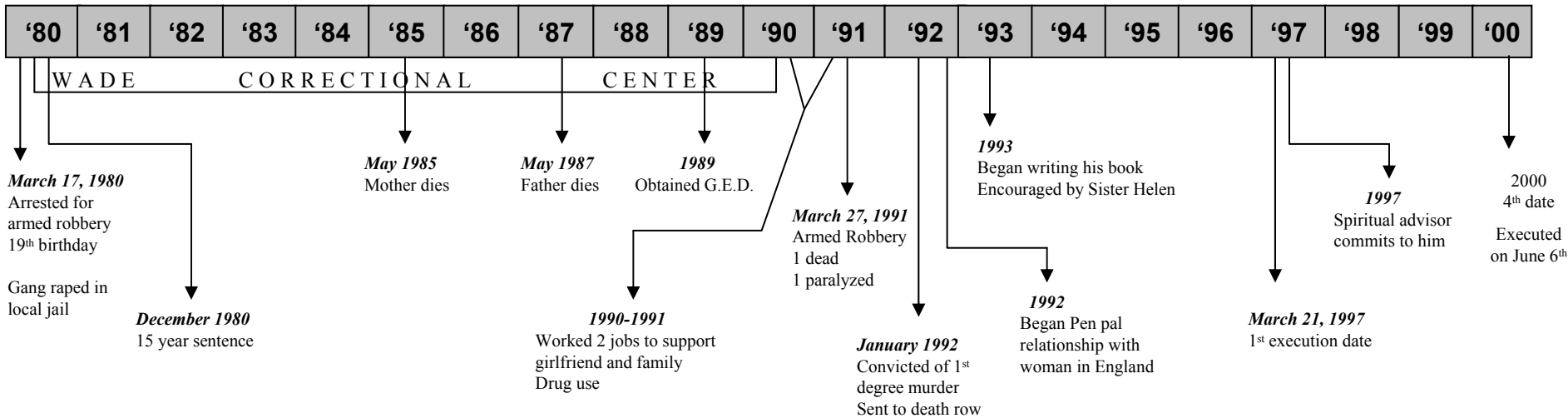
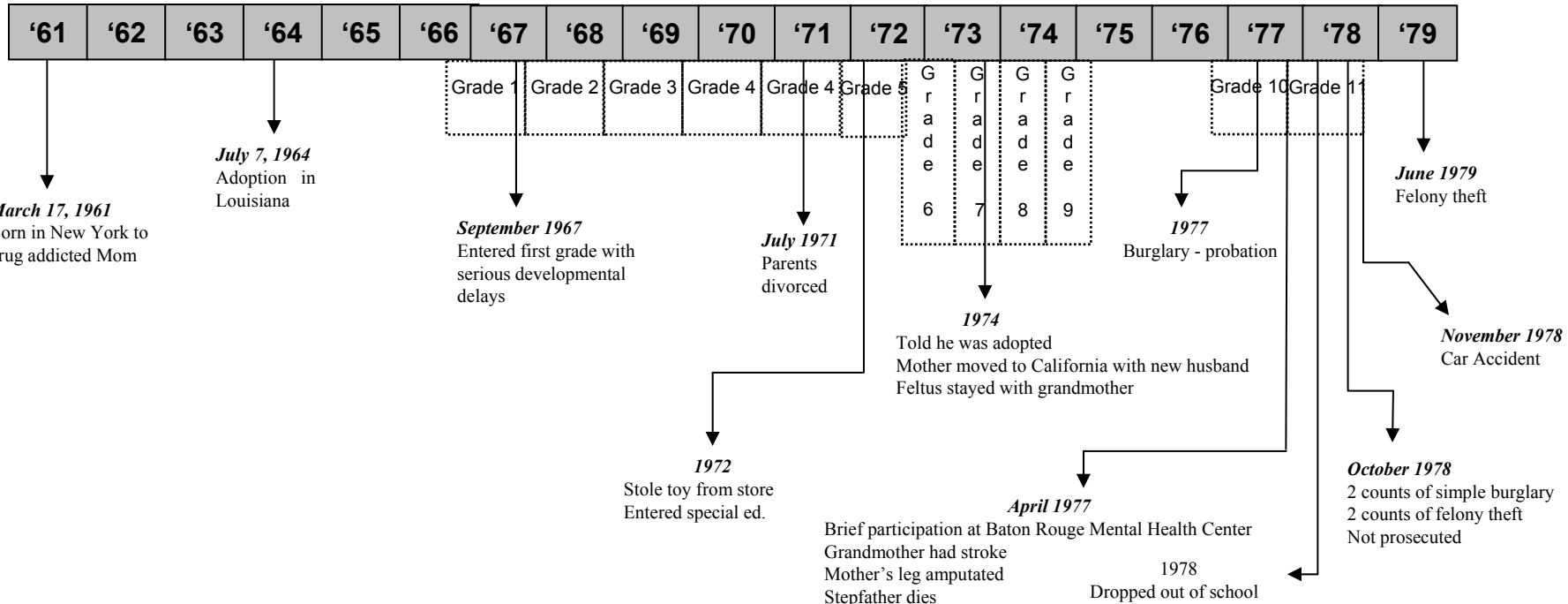
EBR Parish Prison

Sentence for first degree murder: **Life in prison**

Louisiana State Penitentiary

Eight placements in two years – notes usually read “not able to adjust”

Feltus Taylor Timeline



Feltus' Pathway into Crime

Excerpts from Sister Helen Prejean's introduction to Waiting to Die (Unpublished manuscript of Feltus Taylor, Jr.)

“I liked him when I met him. I couldn't help but like him. Feltus Taylor is soft-spoken and sincere and there is a little boy affection in him.....His crime was horrific. In a restaurant during an attempted robbery, he shot and killed Donna Ponsano and pumped several bullets into Keith Clark... He's sorry for what he did...

By the time these words make their way into readers' hands, Feltus Taylor will have been killed by the State of Louisiana, and most people will say *Good Riddance*.

But there is a difference. Feltus wanted to do something redemptive for the world. He knew that the human life that he took could never be replaced, but he somehow wanted to give life to the world.

And so he has told the story of his life – how he started out as a child and what happened to him along the way – and his terrible mistakes. Once he said to me with great earnestness: ‘Maybe the young people reading my story will learn from my mistakes. Maybe I can help them choose a different way’.

At heart, I see the main theme of the Feltus' life as a struggle to make connections with people, to belong to the human family. It was, I believe, this sense of disconnectedness from people that triggered the desperate act of violence.

He tells his story well. He doesn't whine or offer excuses. He writes honestly and with a disarming simplicity. **His story –his legacy to the world-makes us think of other desperate young people like him who we know and to whom we must reach out before they, too, explode in violence.**

(Excerpts from personal communication to Cecile Guin, May 18, 2000)

March 5, 1993

Well, as I sit here in this cold and ugly cell, **I'm trying to think about how my life took such a bad turn for the worse.** I get so tired of crying, but I can't help it when I think about all the people who have tried to help me, and how I repaid them by getting into this mess! I live at Louisiana State Penitentiary, on Death Row. Today is March 5, 1993, and a man named Robert Sawyer is to be executed by lethal injection. He is the first man to be put to death here at Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola) in three years.

They say that dying by lethal injection is better than by the electric chair. I would think so too, considering how badly the electric chair burns you, and the smell it created from the burning flesh.

They've moved Robert Sawyer from Death Row to Camp F, the Death House, by now. From my cell, I can see the front gate, and all kinds of news people. They swarm out there like carrion eaters waiting on certain death, as they stand with their cameras, waiting for an interview with the Warden.

I'm tired, but can't sleep, as I wait to see what will happen to Robert. It all seems so surreal to me now, but at times, the reality is so tangible that I can feel it in the air I breathe. I'm scared to death, as is everyone here on Death Row. Everything is ominously quiet, and I wonder what everyone else is thinking? Probably the same things as me. Will they get a chance to do this to me also? My stomach is in knots, and my head hurts just from thinking about this tonight!

At 12:01 a.m., they will begin to put Robert to death. I really didn't know him that good. I had occasion to meet him, and talk to him once or twice in church, though. He seems to be very sorry for what they say he is to die for!

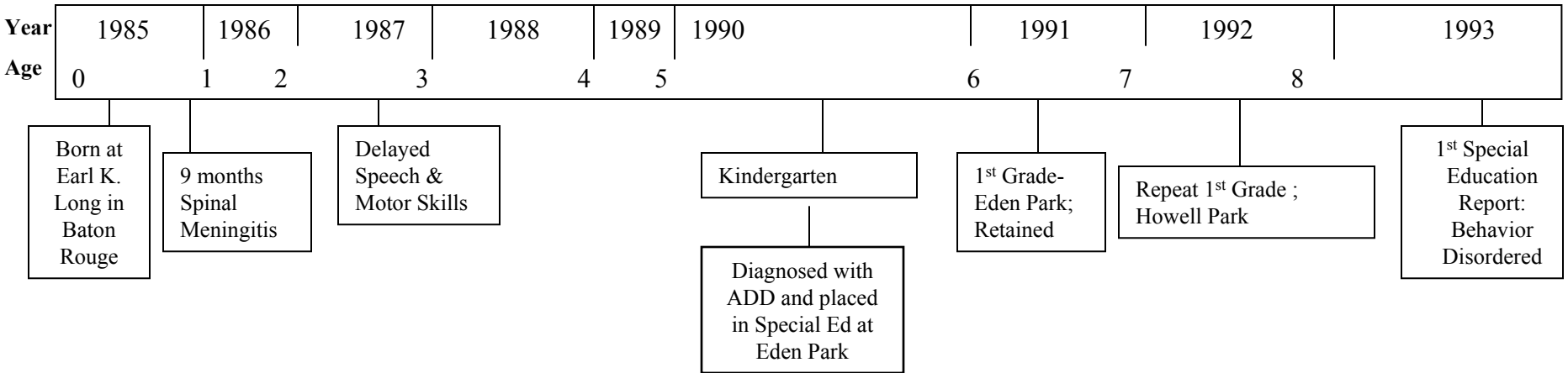
The iron door at the front of the tier just closed, and it made me jump. I think everyone's a little jumpy tonight. The guard is making his rounds to make sure that we are all still here, and that no one has killed himself.

All of this is running through my mind now, and I can see that everyone outside is leaving so they must have carried out the execution as planned! I can't help but wonder if they'll be outside like that when my time comes, if it comes?

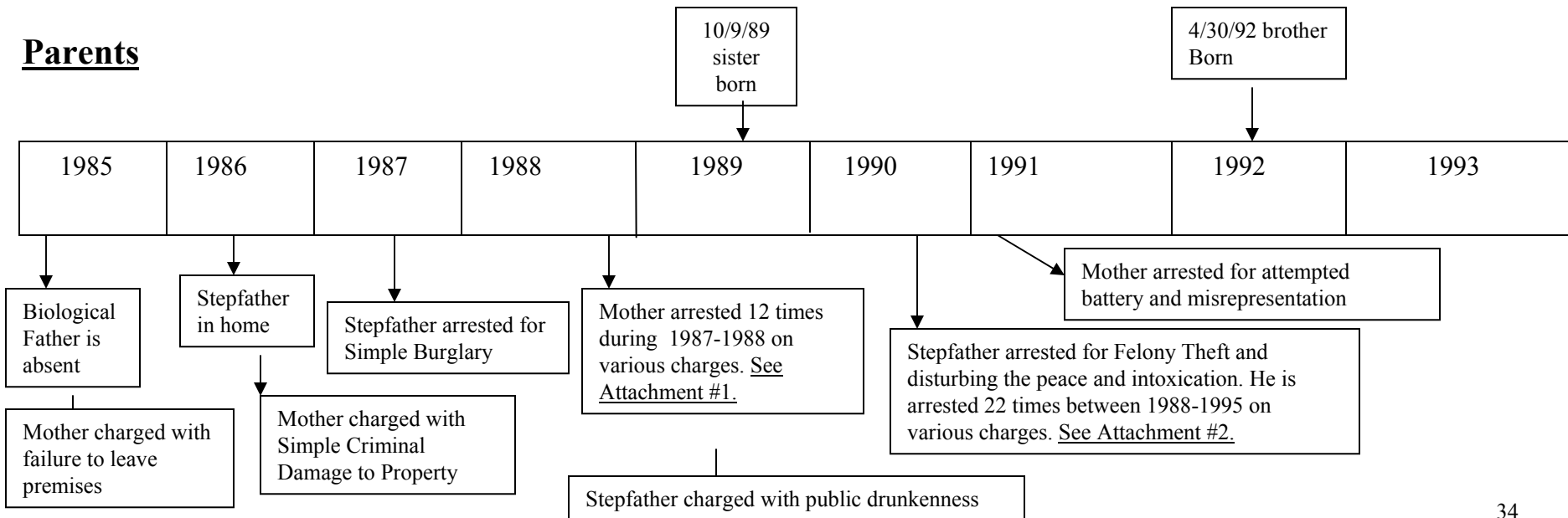
-Feltus Taylor, Jr. *Waiting to Die* (unpublished manuscript)

Timeline – S.C.

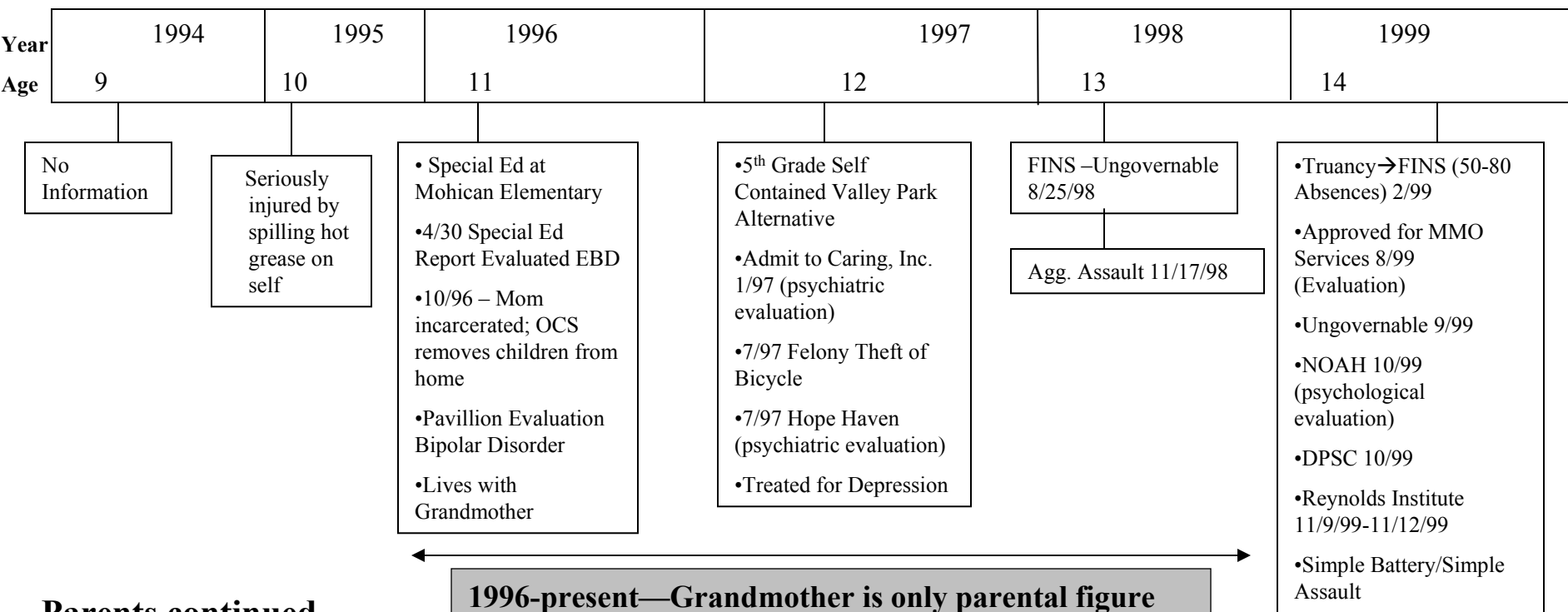
S.C.



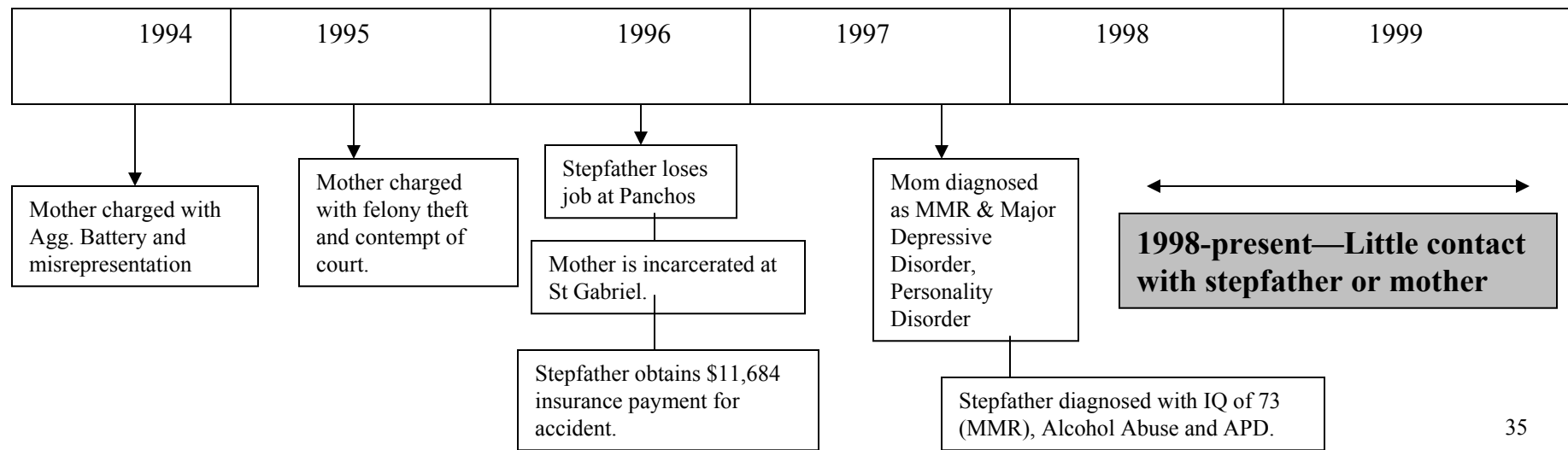
Parents



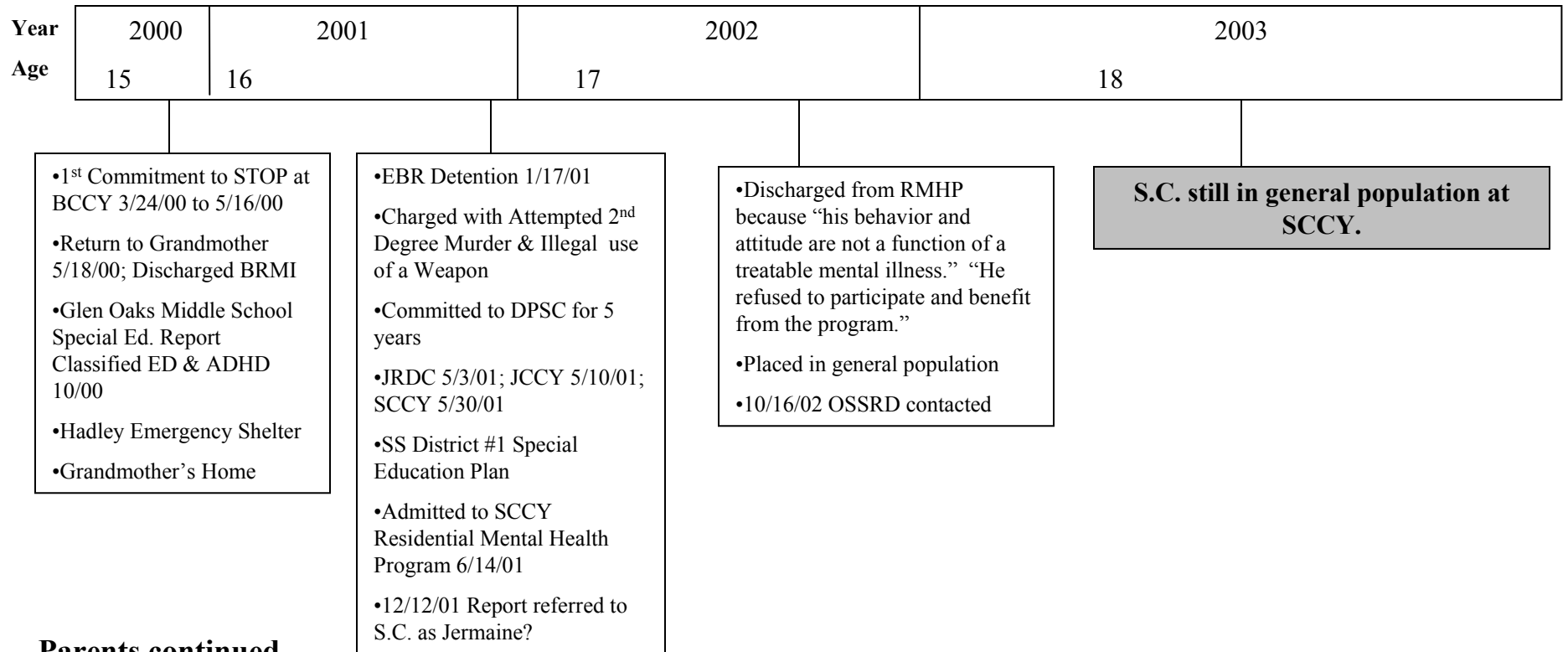
S.C. continued



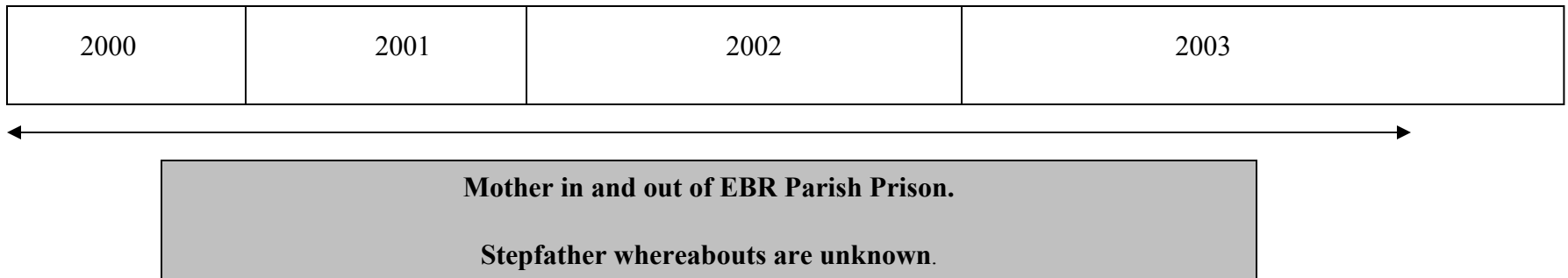
Parents continued



S.C. continued



Parents continued



Interrupting the Pathway

- Early identification
- Responsivity to the problem
- Family, community, school collaboration
- Timely intervention
- Evaluation of effort
- Accountability by school system to monitor change
- School personnel who never give up and demand intervention
- Communities that keep children in the community and out of secure care
- Public officials who support schools
- Legislators who ensure policy and law that support early protection of children
- Statewide leadership that is pro-active and determined to deal with the problems of children in Louisiana

2nd Letter from Robby

Dear Cecile,

I'm sorry for the delay, I had a few things I had to take care of. I was surprised that you respond so soon. I would like to send my respect to the staff members. Inform them of my greetings. I was so happy that you and the members of the program use my life story to help the youth.

Mrs. Cecile you know more about my life more than anybody. If you have analys my life you can see that my mother an farther, didn't pay attion, attention to me. I'm sorry for the mis Spelled word in the above sentence. I never told anyone this. But the attention that I didn't receive from my mother and farther. I went out in the street looking for that attention. And the reason why I did that, is because I thought my parents was going to ask me why I'm doing the things I was doing. But they never ask me that. So I got deeper and deeper in trouble. My point is this, talk to the parents of the youth in your program to pay attention to they kids. Because if they don't they kids will go other places looking for that attention.

Mrs. Cecile I'm incarcerated physically, but I'm not incarcerated mentally. I can help the youth and explore the world from in this prison. And that's what I want to do I'm not going to let my incarceration stop me from help somebody are enjoy life. Let the youth know that they can make a living, with the money they earn. But they can make a change in sombody life with the education they have. Talk to them about sharing they education.

In your letter you ask me did I have any support from my famliy and with legal help. The answer to that no. I don't know if my parents are dead or living. I haven't had one visit while I been in this prison. I was hoping you can come see me sometime. I will appreciate it if you do. I will try to contact Nelson because I also need some legal help with my case.


I hope you stay in contact with me I enjoy reading your letter. You are vere conversationalists and when you speak, you speak with eloquence.

I wish you would have been the one there for me, when I needed your talent. The talent to guide young people down the path of life. You are so concerned about the youths, we need more people like you so careing. I know there are a lot of young man and woman would not be in the prisons if there was more people like you around. Also, your staff members, to.

I will stay in contact.

Sincerely,

Robby



Feltus often wondered why he seemed unable to be a part of the community in which he lived – why no one reached out to him when he was young:


During the course of time with Feltus, we were able to locate his birth mother and half-siblings. His mother was in a federal prison in New York. They were able to talk on the phone and they also communicated by mail.

Feltus' half siblings came to visit him on death row.

His mother got out of prison and never contacted him again. His siblings made promises to write and visit, but they never did.

Feltus was prepared to die in May of 1998. He received a stay and went into a major depression. He had been prepared to die.

In his book, Feltus writes about this dark time in his life and his confusion over the love and support that he had developed over his 10 years on death row.



“I started to wonder, Where was Charles (spiritual advisor) when I was out on the streets? As a matter of fact, where were all of the people I now know and have come to love and care for, when I was on the outside?”

I mean, these people stuck by me through thick and thin. I didn't know anybody like them when I was growing up. Where I grew up, most of them were single parent homes with the mother trying to be the father, mother and breadwinner. With all of this work going on, the time a mother has for her child is limited. Where is the father? Maybe he ran out because he couldn't handle his job. But that doesn't do anything for the little boy who, at the time, doesn't know why his father left. Sometimes, that boy may even feel like *he* is the reason his father left home. Then he will start to feel unloved and uncared for.

Like I did.

And now I had people who stuck around, no matter what. *If I had known them then, I wouldn't be here now, I thought. Why now, and not then?* I decided to ask God about it when I met Him face to face. I had prayed about it, but I was confused, ever still. I didn't really know how to die this way.

But God knows what's best for me, I said to myself. If it is my time, I want death to come to me as my friend and not fear it at all. I believe God can and will help me with part of it.

As matter of fact, I know He will.



A Letter from Feltus...

“Cecile, I’m so blessed to have you and others in my corner, to support me and to just be a friend to me. So many guys don’t have that support system, and I thank God for that. My life won’t be a total waste, because I’m doing something to help the young people to stop and think about their life and the way they really want to go. And that within itself is something very, very good. And I love to write and I want to be a writer. I feel that God blessed me with a gift that I didn’t even know I had. And if I had been out on the streets now I wouldn’t have even tried nine times out of ten. It’s funny how things work out. But, I feel some good can always come from something bad. It’s up to that person not to give up. And you all really have helped me to see that, and I thank you, Cecile for seeing something in me that was good...”

May 30, 1999