

HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

Inmate Kenneth Armstead Makes Bid for Executive Clemency

There often comes to the attention of the public cases which would seriously reflect the insensitivity of the Criminal Justice System. In spite of the fact that it is called the most progressive and advanced in the world, it suffers from the many flaws of any man-made system. Often times the letter of the law overlooks its spirit, and many unfortunate individuals are caught up in its complexity and myriad of "red-tape" and bureaucracy, while a system, as large as the one in question, overlooks the isolated individual's needs and best interests.

I would like to call to your attention the case of one such individual, who has been overlooked and lost in a system of files, numbers and classification. His name is Kenneth Armstead. Born in New York City, Mr. Armstead grew up as many other children in the inner-cities. Although coming from a close-knit, religious family, he, like so many others with similar backgrounds, succumbed to the "ways of the streets," and to the pressure of his peers. At the age of 16, he was involved in an incident, which accidentally took a life. Although his involvement was minimal, the law makes no distinction between the actual perpetrator, and those present, or having knowledge of such a crime.

At the age of 17, Kenneth Armstead was sentenced to a 15-to-life sentence, and thrust into a world of torment and despair. He refused to succumb to the criminal element around him, nor did he become part of the prison life of idleness, deceit and indecency. He immediately involved himself in meaningful programs and constructive activities, designed toward edifying his character.

Shortly after Mr. Armstead's arrival at the Auburn Correctional Facility on February 28, 1972, he enrolled in evening courses to prepare himself for earning his high school diploma. In the daytime he pursued the trade of auto-refinishing and painting. In 1973 he was appointed Inmate Instructor in the Industrial Auto Body Shop, and for two years he worked under the supervision of the foreman while instructing other inmates in this trade.

In 1974 Mr. Armstead received his high school diploma, and shortly thereafter enrolled in night college courses offered from Cayuga County Community College. He also took instruction in the facility's Fork Lift Class and successfully completed this phase of vocational training.

Realizing the importance of taking advantage of the idle time which accompanies incarceration, Mr. Armstead enrolled in a course called Guide to Better Living, which was offered in the Auburn facility. After the completion of this course and receiving its certificate of completion, he enrolled in its post-graduate course. After completing the latter, he became an instructor in the course.

In 1975 Mr. Armstead enrolled in the Legal Research Course, completing it and receiving certification as Legal Researcher. Also in that year he was nominated for the U.S. Jaycees "Outstanding Young Men of America," and received a certificate and honorary mention in the 1978 edition of the "Outstanding Young Men . . ." book.

Mr. Armstead has been a long-time member of the NAACP which has branches in most of the correctional facilities of New York State. When he joined the organization, he served on the following committees: Life Membership Committee, Membership Committee, the Fund Raising Committee, and the Community Coordinating Committee. During the time that he served on these committees, many worthwhile projects were originated and developed by him, such as the Inner-City Library, and Support for the Civil Disabilities Bill. He also worked with establishing half-way houses, thus assuring inmates from various communities a means by which they could re-enter society and make a gradual adjustment from institutional life to the free world.

In 1975, Mr. Armstead served as the third vice-president of the NAACP, and then moved up to first vice-president. In 1976, he became the president of the Inner-City Branch of the NAACP in the Auburn facility. It was at this time that he served as a strong motivating force in the establishment of the Auburn Hospitality House, in which he appointed an inmates' advisory committee to discuss the function of the house.

Mr. Armstead was often called upon by other inmate groups for the planning of many of the facility's events. In 1976 he was an initial member of the Coordinating Committee to schedule special events during 1976. Mr. Armstead also coordinated the forming of the NAACP and Jaycees Joint Legislative Seminars, which discussed law reform and took steps to introduce many new bills to the Legislature.

Mr. Armstead earned the trust of Auburn prison officials to the extent that he was cleared by security to frequent the area known as the Wall Street Gate for the purpose of filling up the garage vehicles with gas.

During the summer of 1977, Mr. Armstead was transferred from the Auburn Facility to the Green Haven Correctional Facility. At this time he introduced the course, Guide to Better Living, to the Green Haven staff and population, which met with much approval. The class started in January of 1978, and, by June of 1978, he had graduated 44 men from the course. Mr. Armstead also involved himself in teaching a course called "Organizational Communications" for the Green Haven NAACP Branch. He has worked on the Inmates Grievance Resolution Committee as a clerk, and is presently working for the Educational Department as

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Administrative Clerk, where he coordinates special events such as graduations and other events.

Mr. Armstead is also on the Creative Communications Committee, as well as on a project called "Sesame Street," which will provide a play area for children when they visit the facility.

In September of 1978 Mr. Armstead became the president of the NAACP in Green Haven. He is also on the Board of Advisors for East Harlem House, which is an agency that aids offenders to re-enter society.

While at the Green Haven Correctional Facility, Mr. Armstead has made many proposals which proved his concern for the people around him. He has proposed a Vocal Talent Club, which would try and utilize the abundance of talent in the facility, obtaining outside attention for them, and, hopefully, providing them with a future livelihood. In addition, he has proposed a Creative Writing Program and a Drivers' Educational Program.

FUTURE GOALS

Mr. Armstead would like to continue his education. He expresses the desire to attend City University and earn his bachelor degree in business law. He would also like to work at the trade of auto refinishing and painting. Paradoxically, he can operate heavy machinery and is equally proficient at office work.

OUTSIDE PROGRAMS

Mr. Armstead would like to work with the various community groups that he has been in contact with throughout his incarceration: NAACP, East Harlem House, and local community groups.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Having realized the importance of man's understanding the complexities of life, and having established a personal relationship with his Creator, Mr. Armstead has developed very deep religious convictions. He is an avid reader of religious literature, and scriptures, and plans to live a life of moderation and sobriety. He fully realizes now that lack of religious conviction in one's life creates a tremendous void; one which he has now filled by his communion with God.

FAMILY

Mr. Armstead plans to rejoin family ties and reside in Brooklyn, NY. His father is pastor of a large church in Queens, NY, and he has sisters who reside in Brooklyn and Queens, all of whom have provided moral support throughout the years of his confinement.

CONCLUSION

To repeat: Mr. Armstead, as a 17-year-old youth, was sentenced to a term of 15 years to life after pleading guilty to his crime. By the standards of society, this crime has been considered serious; but, for a young man locked up for eight years clearly exhibiting a desire to change, to aid those around him, and to take advantage of this experience, no matter how dreary and lonely. . . It is the studied, moral opinion of those who know him best that he poses excellent candidacy for consideration by the NY State Board of Clemency. It is earnestly prayed that this board may provide Kenneth Armstead with the relief and opportunity necessary to his plans for taking his place in society as an exceptional and valuable member.

This year Mr. Armstead will petition the Governor of the State of New York for Executive Clemency. He will need your support by writing to:

Governor of the State of New York
State Capitol Building
Albany, New York

Executive Clemency Bureau
New York State Division of Parole
Executive Department
1450 Western Avenue
Albany, New York

Re: Kenneth Armstead
71B0116
Green Haven Correctional Facility
Stormville, New York

Your prayers and support will greatly aid him in working toward giving him a chance at becoming a valuable member in the mainstream of society.

FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES OF KENNETH ARMSTEAD