

March 17, 1998

Janet H. Keels, Coordinator
Office of Executive Clemency
1309 Winewood Blvd.
Tallahassee, Fla. 32300-2450

Dear Ms. Keels:

Re: Gerald Denono (aka Tony Angelo)

My first meeting with Gerald Denono came more than 18 years ago while working on a story for The Arizona Republic in Phoenix. At the time, Denono was being held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in San Diego and I was interested in another inmate at the facility, John Harvey Adamson, who had been convicted in the bombing murder of Arizona Republic reporter Don Bolles.

It was an important story for the newspaper, and Denono's help in that story proved invaluable. It also is a fact that his later cooperation with Arizona state authorities, including Attorney General Bob Corbin and Chief Prosecutor William Schafer, now a superior court judge, in the prosecution of Adamson a second time in the Bolles murder after a court overturned his guilty verdict also proved to be very invaluable. I'm sure a check with state officials would show that Denono was an important part of their case. Among those who have written letters in support of clemency for Denono has been Bob Corbin.

During the course of my inquiry into the Adamson story, I talked with Denono on numerous occasions, including a six-hour, face-to-face meeting in a locked reception area at the San Diego Correctional Center. I found him to be candid, courteous and cooperative. Nothing he told me during that lengthy interview and numerous follow-up conversations we had later about the story - or anything else - proved to be false.

His candid and truthful approach to our relationship included admissions to me of his background and lengthy criminal record, which were important factors in determining his credibility. The interviews were without condition and he agreed that nothing would be off the record or off-limits, including his rather extensive criminal history. I believe Arizona authorities would confirm that the same can be said for his truthfulness with them and to the validity of the information he later provided prosecutors in what was a very high-profile and important case for the state. Without hesitation, I can say to you that Denono never lied to me and if his testimony for the state had been less than truthful, I'm sure they would have dropped him as a witness. And, of course, they did not.

During the numerous contacts with Denono in those early days, I also came to know him as something more than just a source on a story. As a reporter who had spent much of his career working on La Cosa Nostra and other crime-related stories, I was interested in knowing how he got into a life of crime and why, how the organization worked and how those at both the top and the bottom of the chain of command operated, what crimes had he participated in and how did they work within the syndicate operation, how his involvement had affected his life and that of his family, and where he was headed once he got out of prison. That curiosity resulted in dozens of conversations, probably hundreds, and also led me to his family, including his wife, Gloria, and his mother, Giselle. Eventually, I wrote a three-part series for The Arizona Republic specifically on Denono and his life.

During those extensive conversations, I discovered another side to Denono, about which I wrote and about which I marveled. He was a man who deserved to be in prison for his crimes, even he acknowledged that, but that took nothing away from the fact that he cared deeply about his wife, about his family and, I believe, about himself. That in itself was a major difference from the man who had come into prison some years earlier. I discovered, without surprise, that that concern and care was mutual, and much in evidence during a Thanksgiving dinner I attended one year at his wife's home in the San Diego area.

At that dinner party, which lasted several hours, his mother had flown in from New Jersey to help cook the meal. His uncle Nick, cousin Carl and niece Carolyn also were there and between each course - and there were several - Denono called from prison to talk with one of his family members.

He counseled and cajoled them, making each one laugh and cry. Eventually, he asked to talk with me and I have considered myself part of the family since.

He also cared about his painting - masterpieces of art and skill and patience that he learned to cultivate and master in prison. They are on a variety of subjects and styles, and have dazzled many a warden. He has taught art to other inmates and, I believe, could earn a rather successful living if he chose to make them available for sale outside the prison. I have three of them hanging in my home today, both of which were painted after conversations we had about things of interest to me.

There is no doubt, of course, that Denono deserved to go to prison. His crimes warranted the punishment. But even a cursory check of the record shows he has been a model prisoner. A U.S. Bureau of Prisons report said he was "polite and cooperative" with an "exemplary relationship" with the staff, that he worked as an assistant cook and commissary clerk, that he was a member of the suicide watch team and volunteered as the barber for his housing unit. The BOP report also said he completed courses in typing, computers, art, Spanish and Italian reading and writing, and that he had completed a drug education program. The report said that during Denono's "entire incarceration, he has maintained a clear-conduct record."

The record is also clear that over the past 23 years, he has cooperated with federal and state authorities in numerous investigations and court cases, many of which would never have been adjudicated without his help. That cooperation includes a high-profile case in West Palm Beach, Fla. A check with the prosecutor in that case, Jack Scarola, now in private practice, might be helpful to determine Denono's critical role.

That his help in several important federal cases has been valuable goes unchallenged. When he appeared in 1993 at a Nevada Pardons Board hearing, he was guarded by 10 federal agents. Wayne Wickizer, the former FBI agent who arrested Denono some years earlier, has gone to bat for him on several occasions - citing his role as a cooperating witness in several cases in several letters recommending his pardon. In that regard, former FBI agent William Roemer, who headed the bureau's organized crime strike in Chicago and was the FBI's highest decorated agent ever, said in a letter to the Florida

Office of Executive Clemency that he "strongly recommended that every consideration be given him in regard to his parole."

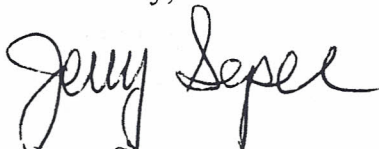
I believe Denono has made every effort to rehabilitate himself and those around him through his art work and, of course, by example. I know of no blemish on his record since his incarceration and I believe I am keenly aware of his hopeful plans for the future, once released.

Denono and I have discussed on numerous occasions what he did and why, and what he wants to do and why. I have no doubt he now regrets his crimes and has remorse that they occurred. But I believe the time has come to end this prolonged and continued punishment, which appears to be excessive compared with others convicted in similar crimes. What further does the system expect to extract from this man? As I understand it, Denono's recommended guidelines are 162 months, or 13.5 years. He currently has served 23 years.

I have spent most of my professional career as a newspaper reporter, except for a brief period as a police officer in the Los Angeles area, and currently work for The Washington Times in Washington, D.C., where I cover the Justice Department, Attorney General Janet Reno, the FBI, the DEA and other federal agencies. I have the highest regard for law enforcement personnel and count them among most of my friends. In the course of my career, I have talked with hundreds of major and minor criminals and I believe they all deserve to be punished. But I believe that Denono has been and it is time for him to be released.

Denono is not a man for whom I would have written this letter 15 years ago, of that there is no question. And while I know what he was, what he did and loathe the life he willfully chose, I believe, more importantly, I know what he has become. I would trust Denono with my life.

Sincerely,


Jerry Seper