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'He's reborn now,' mother says as son freed after 14 years behind bars

Evidence withheld in '94 murder case points to another as the culprit

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Two mothers sat on hard wooden benches Monday in a Dallas County courtroom, waiting for a hearing that would bring joy to one and anguish to



RICHARD
MILES

withheld before his murder and attempted murder trial in August 1995. Dallas police never told prosecutors or the defense

another.

It was the day Richard Miles was freed from prison after a prisoner advocacy group discovered that evidence had been

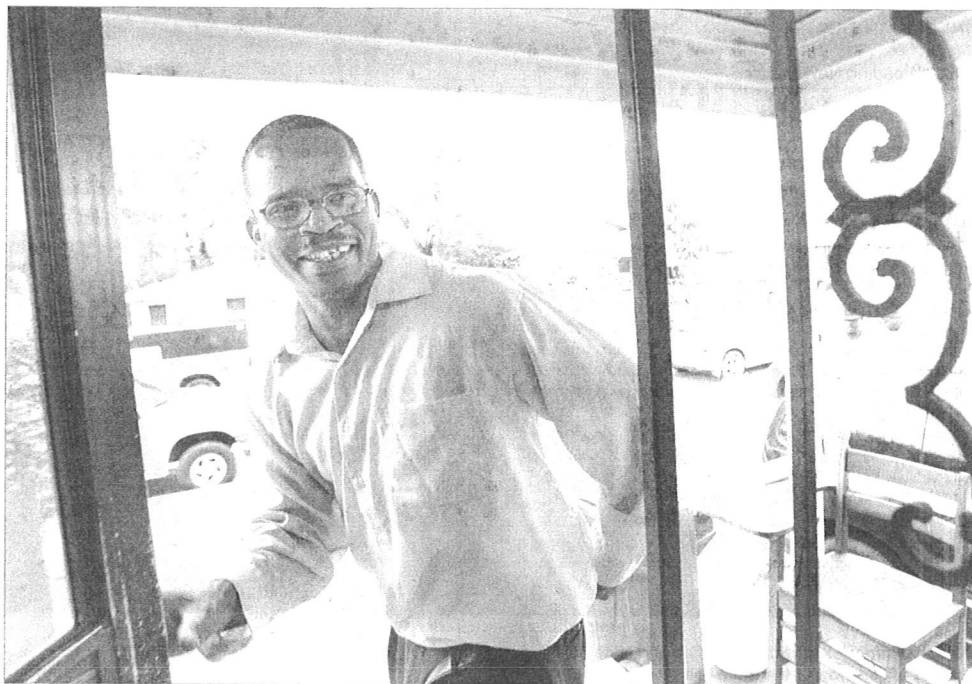
that an anonymous caller implicated another man in the shootings.

Miles' mother could barely contain her excitement.

"It's a great day," said Thelma Lloyd, who smiled brightly after ceremoniously cutting the jail ID bracelet off Miles' wrist. He had spent 14 years behind bars. "He's reborn now."

"To me, this is the beginning of my life. I had to pursue my innocence, not just for me but for my family."

Richard Miles



JIM MAHONEY/Staff Photographer

Richard Miles smiles at his mother as he steps out on the front porch of her Dallas home, a free man for the first time in 14 years. The mother of the man Miles was accused of killing said Monday that she was "devastated" by his release.

Inmate freed after 14 years

Continued from Page 1A

The mother of the murdered man could barely contain her tears. Ruby Williams cried in a courthouse hallway after the hearing as she clutched an 8-by-10 photo of her son in his red high school graduation robes.

"I'm devastated," Williams said. "Just when I'm comfortable to deal with this, it's an open wound."

Her son, Deandre S. Williams, was shot and killed near the Bachman Lake area in 1994. Another man, Robert Ray Johnson, was permanently disabled in the same shooting.

Williams said an eyewitness and gun residue on Miles' hands prove his guilt.

But Miles, 34, who was on probation for drug possession when he was arrested, was tested for gunpowder residue after he was handcuffed — and the levels were low, according to court records.

Several witnesses said Miles was not the gunman after he was picked up by police about 20 minutes after the shootings and returned to the crime scene. Witnesses said the shooter held the gun in his right hand and wore shorts. Miles is left-handed and wore pants.

And then there was the piece of evidence that jurors never heard about: Three months before the trial, a wom-

an phoned police to say her former boyfriend had admitted the crime to her and showed her the 9 mm pistol he said he had fired. That call was noted on a memo found in police files years later.

Tom D'Amore, the original prosecutor in the case, said he recalls the case but not in detail. He said Monday that he never had information about that phone call.

The caller identified the man, but *The Dallas Morning News* is not naming him because he has not been charged with a crime.

Note didn't surface

"Unfortunately, I never had any knowledge of the note. If I had it, I would have investigated it to see if it's valid or not," said D'Amore, who did not attend the hearing but spoke with the Williams family at the courthouse. "I feel sorry for the family of the victim that they have to deal with this again."

Billy Hooker, the Dallas police detective who retired before the case went to trial in August 1995, testified then that there were no other suspects. But he had retired before the anonymous phone call was received in May of that year. He could not be reached for comment.

State District Judge Andy Chatham said he will recommend that the Texas Court of

Criminal Appeals grant Miles a new trial. The Dallas County district attorney's office has agreed to dismiss the original two charges against Miles but could seek to try him again.

The DA's office said that it will continue to investigate the case but that the new information makes it question Miles' guilt. Prosecutors are also trying to determine whether charges can be brought against anyone else.

Chatham told Miles as he stood before the judge's bench that he could not guarantee anything, but it appeared that his convictions would be overturned by the Court of Criminal Appeals. Chatham released Miles on his own recognizance, meaning Miles did not have to pay bail.

Chatham's proclamation that Miles was free to go was greeted with "amen" and "thank God" from those watching. One woman called out, "Anybody need a tissue?"

If Miles is exonerated, he would be the second man District Attorney Craig Watkins has agreed was wrongly convicted in cases that did not involve DNA evidence. In Dallas County, 20 men have been freed because of DNA evidence.

Jim McCloskey, president of Centurion Ministries, which worked to free Miles, said he has no doubt about Miles' innocence.

"It doesn't get any better than this. Not only does an innocent man get freed today, but we're doing it with the DA's office," McCloskey said. "That is true, pure justice. This is gold. This is precious."

Miles said his release was a new beginning for him and his family. He said that in prison he worried more about the stigma on his parents for having a son convicted of murder than what it meant for him.

"To me, this is the beginning of my life," he said. "I had to pursue my innocence, not just for me but for my family."

No bologna, please

Miles said the one thing he knew he would not do with his newfound freedom was eat a bologna sandwich — a staple behind bars.

Miles and his family were estranged before his arrest for murder at age 19. He ran away from home before finishing high school because he felt "overwhelmed" by his minister father and choir director mother.

The family grew close again while Miles was in prison, he said. His parents supported his fight to be released. He called his mother "my queen."

Miles' father, William Lloyd, died in May, but Miles said his father knew he would probably be released from prison.