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GRISSOM WALKS FREE

Retrial ordered, judge dismisses charges; He's released after nine years in prison

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WENDY TORELLO/Times Herald/WENDY TORELLO/TIMES HER

By Liz Shepard
Times Herald

James Grissom took a moment and looked around before getting into a car outside the St. Clair County jail Monday afternoon.

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The 54-year-old former Port Huron man saw no fences surrounding him and wore no shackles outside for the first time in nearly 10 years.

Grissom smiled as he walked with his lawyer and the lead investigator in his appeal, pointing to the sky as he exited the jail lobby.

Just a few hours earlier, Circuit Judge Cynthia Lane dismissed charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct that Grissom was convicted of in 2003.

"It's about time; I didn't think it would be this long," Grissom said about his release.

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James Grissom smiles as he thinks about how it feels to be a free man Monday afternoon. James Grissom walked out of the St. Clair County jail after charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct Grissom was convicted of in 2003 were dismissed by Circuit Judge Cynthia Lane. / WENDY TORELLO/TIMES HERALD

Timeline of events

May 12, 2001: Sara Ylen tells her husband upon returning home from the Meijer in Fort Gratiot she was attacked. She does not tell him she was raped.

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Sara Ylen identified Grissom as the man who attacked and raped her in the Fort Gratiot Meijer parking lot in 2001. The Times Herald normally does not identify victims of sexual assault. Ylen was identified after she asked the newspaper to tell her story in 2003.

Grissom said he is innocent of the crime.

"It was crazy because I knew it was false," he said of hearing the allegations against him nearly a decade ago. "I had never seen this girl before in my life."

The dismissal of the case came at the request of the prosecutor's office following the Michigan Supreme Court granting Grissom a new trial. The new trial was granted after officials learned Ylen had reported a number of other sexual assaults that authorities were unable to verify.

St. Clair County Prosecutor Mike Wendling requested the dismissal instead of a new trial, citing the length of time since the alleged incident and new evidence that has been discovered as recently as a week ago.

Wendling said not retrying a case that occurred so long ago isn't unusual, but he added the Supreme Court rarely grants a new trial for someone who has been convicted.

The decision not to retry the case does not mean the prosecutor's office assessed if Grissom is innocent or guilty, but weighed only the likelihood of a conviction, he said.

Wendling said the decision of guilt or innocence is up to a jury.

At the time of Grissom's conviction, he was sentenced to 15 to 35 years in prison. His earliest release date was in 2018. At the time Ylen said he attacked her, he was on probation for a prior criminal sexual conduct conviction.

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