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By ALFONSO A. NARVAEZ Special to The New York Times

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ELIZABETH, N.J., Nov. 5 — More than a decade after he was sentenced to life in prison plus 50 years for his conviction on charges of kidnapping, rape and sodomy, a 44-year-old man was set free today in an emotional court scene.

The man, Nathaniel Walker of Elizabeth, who had been brought here to the Union County Courthouse in leg irons and handcuffs from Trenton State Prison, was freed after a brief legal proceeding and walked into the arms of his mother, brothers and friends a free man.

"It seems like a dream," Mr. Walker said as he left the courtroom surrounded by his family. "There were times when I felt I would never get out. Now, I just want to go home and make a new life. I want to forget all this and put it in the past."

As the judge dismissed the charges, the

spectators in the courtroom broke into applause followed by embraces and tears among the 20 supporters of Mr. Walker.

The turn of events came about largely through the efforts of a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, James McCloskey, who helped uncover evidence that proved that Mr. Walker could not have committed the crime.

Held for Crime 'He Did Not Commit'

"It appears that despite the procedural safeguards of the criminal justice system and meticulous appellate review, an innocent man has been incarcerated for a crime that he did not commit," said Judge Alfred M. Wolin as he dismissed the charges.

"The strength and perhaps the virtue of the criminal justice system is to recognize that beyond the role of convicting the guilty and acquitting the innocent is the continuing obligation to see that justice is accom-

plished, and that goal endures even beyond the final appeal."

The evidence presented to the court today was the result of laboratory tests done this year on slides of vaginal fluids taken from the victim at Elizabeth General Hospital immediately after the attack.

The test results showed that the woman's attacker had B antigens, molecules on the surface of the red blood cells that indicate blood type. Both the woman and Mr. Walker have only A antigens.

The case began at about midnight Oct. 19, 1974, when the woman was accosted by a man after she had parked her car near her home here. He forced her to drive to a parking lot in a housing project in Newark, where she was attacked.

Four months later, the woman picked Mr.

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Man Is Freed From Prison As Innocent

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Walker out of a police lineup. Despite testimony from employees at the Phelps Dodge plant in Elizabeth where he worked that he had punched out at 11:31 P.M. and was driven home about 20 minutes later, Mr. Walker was found guilty by a jury.

In June 1976 he was sentenced to life in prison on the kidnapping conviction, plus an additional 30 years on the rape charge and another 20 years on the sodomy charge. The sentences were to run consecutively.

Two years later, the conviction was overturned on appeal and Mr. Walker was freed on bail. When the New Jersey Supreme Court reinstated the conviction in 1979, Mr. Walker fled to Los Angeles, where he found work as a superintendent of a housing complex. Three years later, he was arrested and returned to New Jersey to resume his sentence.

"He was an innocent man on the run," said Mr. McCloskey, who is currently president of Centurion Ministries Inc., a nonprofit organization supported by church groups and private donations that works to gain the release of people who are imprisoned for crimes they did not commit.

He had been a divinity student at Princeton Theological Seminary when he began prison chaplaincy and discovered inmates who he said he believed were innocent of the crimes for which they were serving time. He founded the organization in 1983.

Investigation Begins in 1985

He said he began the investigation of Mr. Walker's case in July 1985, when he became convinced, after reading a transcript of the trial and through many interviews with the inmate, that he was innocent.

Mr. McCloskey said that the woman, who was not identified in



The New York Times/Chester Higgins Jr.

Nathaniel Walker with his mother, Irene, and his lawyer, Paul J. Castellero, at court in Elizabeth, N.J.

court proceedings today, had told the police that her assailant was in his mid-20's and did not wear glasses, among a number of specific characteristics.

Mr. McCloskey said what made him suspicious was that Mr. Walker has worn thick-lensed glasses from the time he was 16. He was 33 years old at the time of the attack. He did not match other physical descriptions either.

He was assisted by a Hoboken lawyer, Paul J. Castellero, who obtained

copies of police files in the case and questioned the prosecutor as to whether laboratory tests had ever been done on the fluid specimens taken at the time of the attack. Once the slides were found, they were analyzed and the discrepancies were discovered.

With the new evidence in hand, the prosecution and the defense petitioned the court for a reopening of the case.

The judge dismissed the charges and allowed Mr. Walker to credit his

time in prison against a stolen-car conviction. Outside the courthouse, in response to a question, Mr. Walker said he planned no legal action against his original lawyer.

Instead of using the case to be cynical about the judicial system, Judge Wolin said, "Occasions such as these serve as its finest hour."