

Innocent man freed after 39 years

By Ernest Alexander
Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - Imagine that you are convicted of a crime you didn't commit.

Despite pleas of innocence, you face racially biased testimony and a jury not composed of your peers. You are found guilty and sent to jail. Your freedom stripped and your dignity lost. What do you do? How do you cope with the reality that is now your life?

This was the reality for Walter Lomax, after serving nearly four decades in prison for a crime that he, as well as family, says he didn't commit.

Lomax, now 59, was released on Dec. 14 after being accused, tried and convicted for the killing of Robert Brewer, a 56-year-old convenience store manager, on Dec. 2, 1967. Over the next 39 years, Lomax faced countless struggles and hardships and had to live with the fact that this was not only affecting him, but his family as well.

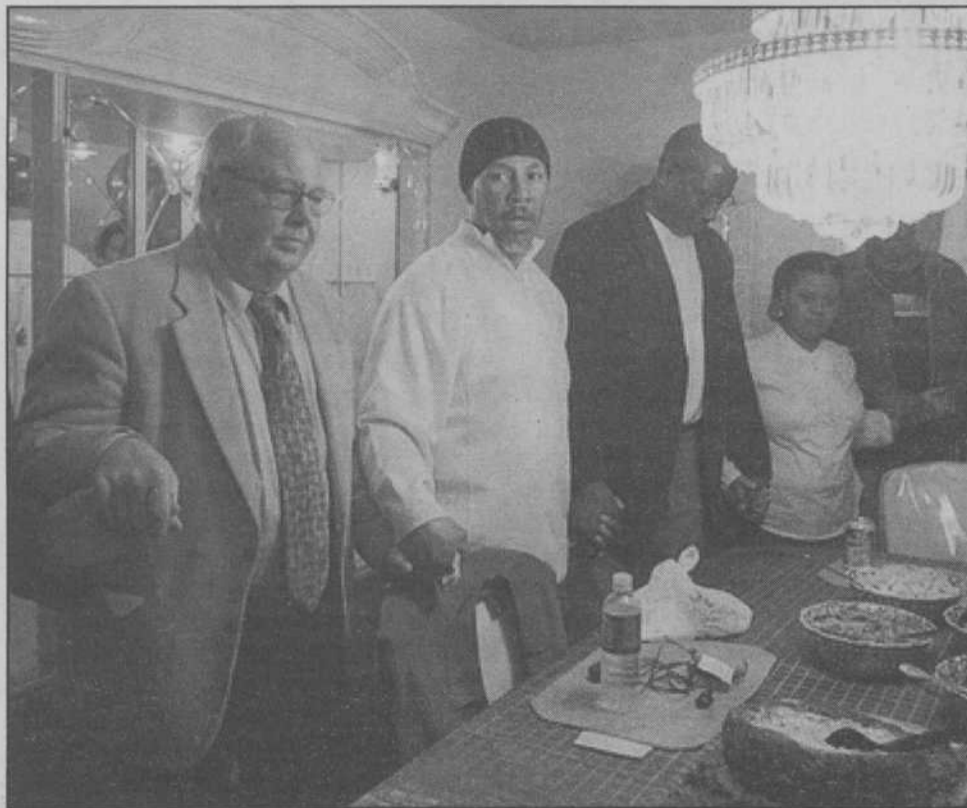
"My position has always been taking the stigma off my family," said Lomax. "They [his family] knew that I didn't do it, but they had to live with it all these years. So even if I was released, I would continue to struggle."

After years of claiming innocence and four recommendations for parole, Lomax's case was finally reopened when Circuit Judge Gale E. Rasin saw the evident racial discrimination that took place during the original trial. "In the interest of justice," Judge Rasin reopened Lomax's case and ultimately overturned his life prison term and re-sentenced him to time served.

Upon entering prison, Lomax faced many difficulties that made the transition from life as a free man to one of an institutionalized one hard. "The first ten years were somewhat difficult because I was angry and bitter about it. After that I just realized that I had to struggle to get out," said Lomax.

Lomax, having dropped out of high school earlier in his life, faced many hardships. Having a lack of basic reading and writing skills back then, he reflects on the events that had transpired in his life and the changes that could have been made during the trial.

"When I went into prison, I was basically functionally



Jim McCloskey (left) of Centurion Ministries and Michael Austin hold hands with Walter Lomax as Lomax says a prayer. Lomax served 39 years in prison on wrongful conviction.

illiterate... which is primarily responsible for me not being able to participate in the trial," said Lomax.

Prior to his ordeal, Lomax had faith in the criminal justice system and believed that justice would come to him because he was innocent of the crime, but the outcome would be much different.

"I thought that, okay you [I] didn't do it, and they would find it out or they would find out who did it," said Lomax.

During Lomax's trial, an all-White jury found him guilty after five White 'eye witnesses' identified him as the shooter. Despite claims of innocence and physical constrictions that would have made it impossible for him to commit the robbery and murder, he was found guilty.

Two weeks prior to the robbery and murder of Brewer, Lomax received severe injuries sustained by an assault while he was escorting his two younger sisters to a party.

The resulting effect was that Lomax had to wear a long thick cast on his wrist and arm due to a stab wound he received from the beating, a fact that all five eye witnesses failed to note when they fingered Lomax as the killer.

During the time of the murder, Lomax, who said he had no idea where the store was then or now, was at his sister's house recovering from the injuries, and he recalls the seriousness of his physical state at that time.

"Because of the severity of the injuries, I mean the

hand injury in and of itself was severe, but my knees were scraped and busted and my ribs were severely cracked. I was in pretty bad

shape. I was physically incapable of coming out."

Upon hearing Lomax's story and realizing the inconsistencies that lie beneath the

surface of his trial, Steve Delaney and Jim McCloskey of Centurion Ministries, a New Jersey nonprofit organization geared at helping people they feel are wrongly convicted gain their freedom, got involved. Dubbed the "dream team" by Lomax and family, Delaney and McCloskey along with Lomax's lawyers Larry Nathan and Booth Ripkey went to work fighting hard to free Lomax from an unjust conviction.

One of the reasons that Lomax's release took much longer than expected was his firm stance on his innocence in the crime and that he would never accept any responsibility for the crime, a fact he stressed to Centurion to relay as they were putting together the details of his release.

Overcoming many of the adversities in his path, Lomax learned to read and write while he was in prison. He also wrote a book and received an AA degree from

Essex Community College in criminal justice and business administration, as well as credits from Morgan State University, Towson University and various community colleges while incarcerated. His spotless prison record also afforded him the privilege to be let out on work release from 1988 to 1993 and see his family.

Now a free man, Lomax is looking past the drama, lies and court trials and looking to spend time with his family and live as an ordinary man. Spending time with his grandkids and great-grandkids and seeing many of the faces he hasn't seen in years, Lomax just revels in the fact that he is home with loved ones.

He said, "The reality is that I am so elated to be with my family, to have my freedom which is very important to me as well as for my family because they had to suffer this over the years."

Ernest Alexander writes for Afro Newspapers.

Your Horoscope Says... Jan. 11- Jan. 17

ARIES

Someone may try to push your buttons this week. Don't let it get on your nerves. You have the power to focus your attention on positive thoughts and ideas. They will prove much more worthwhile in the long run than a short-term blow-out with an unequal adversary.

Soul Affirmation: When I am clear about who I am, the world becomes clearer.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 45, 50

TAURUS

Conclusions can be reached, but don't jump to them. Things are working out in your best interest. Ignore any negative attitudes and stay focused on your goals and plans. You are winning!

Soul Affirmation: My hunches pay all week this week.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 11, 13

GEMINI

This is a perfect week for some fun. You know how to have fun and it's calling you out to play. Say what you need and the rest will follow in perfect order. Enjoy!

Soul Affirmation: The search for fun occupies my time.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 19, 33

CANCER

You may receive some news that troubles you, but recognize what you can and can't do about the situation. As powerful as you are, you are still not required to do everything for everyone. Do what feels most loving.

Soul Affirmation: I smile and trust in the powers beyond myself.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 29, 43

LEO

Your leadership skills are shining this week, so get out there and glimmer with good vibrations. Others are looking to you for guidance and as a path to follow. Let your journey through the week provide a good model.

Soul Affirmation: I let worry fly away.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 16, 39

VIRGO

You are brilliant this week as you gather materials and resources together for an important project. There's a good probability for wonderful news late in the afternoon. Ride the vibes and be gentle with your own feelings.

Soul Affirmation: There are plenty of fish in the sea waiting for me.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 42, 50

LIBRA

A date or meeting that is unexpectedly cancelled may make someone very unhappy. Recognize that all things work for good, and that a better solution is being provided in the space between what you think you want and what you are getting.

Soul Affirmation: This week silence speaks loudest and truest.

Lucky Numbers: 20, 40, 41

SCORPIO

Serenity is yours as you realize you can get what you need. It's coming and you deserve it! Take a few quiet moments this week to listen to your inner voice. It will give you a powerful hint about what activities you should be pursuing right now.

Soul Affirmation: I let positive emotions carry me through the week.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 17, 21

SAGITTARIUS

In all of the hustle and bustle of the week this week, take some time to observe the Now. There's a great deal to be thankful for. A great idea could come to you when you are out with friends.

Soul Affirmation: I celebrate with those around me.

Lucky Numbers: 39, 51, 52

CAPRICORN

Relax the grip you have on your attitudes this week, and just go with the flow. Ease up in full knowledge that goodness is being perfectly fulfilled. Let go of any feelings of insecurity or loss and bless the perfect moment.

Soul Affirmation: I quiet all confusion.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 5, 24

AQUARIUS

Exhilaration is high and your mental abilities are amazing. Use your intuition to brainstorm your way to a highly creative idea that could change the way you make your living.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for the chance to give.

Lucky Numbers: 23, 46, 49

PISCES

What you say and what you do are in harmony this week. The importance of your idea(s) comes through very clearly to others. They can see that you walk what you talk. Communicate your ideas through your values.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for the goodness in people.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 11, 18