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Nashville man leaves prison after spending nearly two decades behind bars for 2005 murder

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He was convicted of murder nearly two decades ago, but now Thomas Clardy is walking out of prison as he waits on his appeal.



By: [Levi Ismail](#)

Posted at 6:34 PM, Oct 20, 2023 and last updated 5:16 PM, Oct 23, 2023

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WTVF) — He was convicted of murder nearly two decades ago, but now Thomas Clardy is walking out of prison as he waits on his appeal.

Only NewsChannel 5 cameras were there as Clardy left Riverbend Maximum Security with his attorneys from the Tennessee Innocence Project.

Clardy didn't say much, but he didn't have to.

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His smile spoke volumes standing next to his son who was only 6 years old the last time they saw one another. A moment that even the people speaking on their behalf left them without words.

Watch this emotional moment in the player above.

“I was speechless. This is a day that Thomas has been asking for for a very long time,” said Jessica Van Dyke of the Tennessee Innocence Project.

Back in 2005, a group of men opened fire and killed Kirk Clouatre outside a body shop in Madison. Kirk’s wife Melissa and his brother Kent were also shot.

Eventually, Kent gave Metro Nashville Police a description of one of the shooters that they believed matched Clardy. It would turn out to be the only evidence linking Clardy to the crime, but it was enough to sentence him to life in prison — until now.

Clardy has been working with the Tennessee Innocence Project for the last nine years and attorneys for Bass, Berry & Simms for the last four years.

“This took incredible work, by so many people. First and foremost, Thomas. Thomas had trust and belief in his case. That’s the most important thing,” Van Dyke said.

Their efforts helped to convince federal district Judge Aleta Trauger to overturn Clardy’s conviction.

Attorneys argued that Clardy was denied effective assistance of counsel at his original trial in

violation of his constitutional rights. Judge Trauger agreed that Clardy’s original lawyer could have done more to present expert testimony on the “limitations of eyewitness identifications.”

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“No physical evidence has ever tied Clardy to the crime scene, nor has any other witness placed him there. Evidence collected before the trial, but not tested until later, connected different, unrelated suspects to the scene. Clardy has steadfastly maintained his innocence for nearly two decades,” said Van Dyke.

The case now goes to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit where they could uphold the judge’s ruling before sending it to the Nashville District Attorney’s Office.

There they could decide whether to retry the case or not. If the appeals courts rule against the judge, then it’s back to prison for Clardy.

It could take as many as six months to a year before he finds out, but for now, Van Dyke says it’s about making up for lost time.

“This is an incredible day for us. Any day that someone like Thomas walks out of prison is a good day,” Van Dyke said.

Clardy will now wear an ankle monitor while he waits on a decision by the appeals courts.

We also heard from the Clouatre family who called this “a hard day.”

It’s Kent Clouatre’s eyewitness testimony that’s now under scrutiny, but he says he’s certain who shot his brother.

“It’s hard. I watched him shoot my brother eight times in the chest. He’s a bad man,” Kent said.

We also heard from Melissa Clouatre who didn’t say much but was audibly shaken over the phone by the news that Clardy was released.

Kent says he’s prepared to make his case again if it ever reaches trial.

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