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Levon 'Bo' Jones released from death row

BY TITAN BARKSDALE, Staff Writer

KENANSVILLE - District Attorney Dewey Hudson dismissed all criminal charges today against Levon "Bo" Junior Jones, who spent 15 years on North Carolina's death row for a murder he has always said he didn't commit.

In 1993, Jones was convicted by a Duplin County jury of first-degree murder in the shooting death of Leamon Grady, a local bootlegger. The jury also convicted him of robbery with a dangerous weapon and conspiracy.

In 2006, a federal judge said Jones' trial attorneys did not properly represent him and ordered a new trial. It was set to begin this month, but Jones learned this week he would be a free man.

Jones, wearing a white dress shirt and black pants, walked out of Duplin County Jail this afternoon with a wide smile and outstretched arms. He was greeted by family, who stood in line to hug him — one by one.

Jones said little to reporters, pushing his way past cameras to see some family members he hasn't seen in years and younger relatives he has only heard about in letters and conversations.

When reporters asked how it felt to be free, Jones said simply: "Good, good. I'm just fine."

Jones appeared pleasant, but his responses were curt. He wanted to get away from the jail as soon as possible.

"I'm ready to go," Jones said. "I've been here too long."

Though Jones maintains his innocence, Hudson said during a news conference in a Duplin County courtroom that he has his doubts. He said Jones' release was triggered by the state's star witness recanting her trial testimony recently. Unable to use that testimony, there is insufficient evidence for a retrial, according to Hudson.

Hudson, who prosecuted the murder case against Jones in the same courtroom, was clear: He doesn't believe that Jones is innocent. But he says he won't bring new charges against Jones.

The state's star witness and Jones' former lover, Lovely Lorden, said in an affidavit filed in April that much of her testimony was not true. She said a detective coached her on what to say at Jones' trial and that of co-defendant Larry Lamb. She collected \$4,000 from the governor's office as a reward for offering the clues that led to arrests.

Hudson believes she is lying in the affidavit.

"It was a close case, but I still feel he received a fair trial," Hudson said. "It's obvious she hasn't told the truth. I believe she told the truth at trial."

Jones' attorneys rebutted Hudson's claims, saying Jones is completely innocent. Relatives didn't appear concerned about Hudson's insistence that Jones was involved in Grady's murder. They were just happy to see him.



With his great-niece Tatyana McCormick and great-nephew Christian McCormick in hand, Levon "Bo" Jones walks out of the Duplin County Jail a free man after spending 13 years on death row, charged with robbing and shooting Leamon Grady in February 1997.

Staff Photo by Shawn Rocco

"I can touch him. I can touch him," yelled Lillie Sanders, Jones' aunt.

Jones climbed into a van and waved to onlookers before leaving. He was on his way to lunch at a local restaurant.

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