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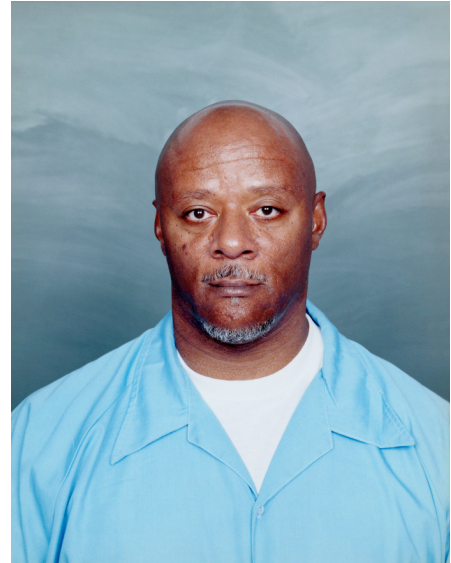
FREEDOM FOR TYRONE HOOD

BY NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

Tyrone Hood, photographed at Menard Correctional Center, in Illinois, on July 17, 2014.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFAN RUIZ

On Monday, Patrick Quinn, the outgoing governor of Illinois, skipped his successor's inauguration ceremony. In explaining Quinn's absence, his spokesman said that the governor would be "finishing up his work." Yesterday, around noon, in one of his final acts in office, Quinn, who holds a law degree from Northwestern University, granted forty-three clemency petitions, including one commuting a murder sentence for Tyrone Hood. "While it has been rare for Governor Quinn to commute a sentence, the governor was compelled to act after learning details of this case," Katie Hickey, a spokesperson for Quinn, told me. Hood, who was twenty-nine when he was arrested, had been in prison for nearly twenty-two years.



I wrote about Hood (<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/04/crime-fiction>) for the magazine last August. In 1996, Hood received a seventy-five-year sentence for the armed robbery and murder of Marshall Morgan, Jr., a talented college basketball player from Chicago. At the time, Rosemary Higgins, a prosecutor, described Hood as a "heartless killer." He was convicted on the basis of physical evidence—fingerprints discovered on loose beer bottles in the car in which Morgan's body was found—and eyewitness testimonies.

Even after his conviction, Hood maintained his innocence, and over time the evidence increasingly supported his claim. Multiple witnesses recanted; they alleged that certain Chicago detectives, who have been accused of soliciting dubious confessions in other cases, had coerced them into giving their statements. Hood's attorneys also learned that Morgan's father, Marshall Morgan, Sr., had set up a life-insurance policy for his son just months before his death. He had also taken out life insurance on his fiancée, in 1995, a few months before she was murdered. In 2001, Morgan, Sr., confessed to killing a girlfriend. In each case, the corpse was discovered in a car.

Attorneys from the Exoneration Project, a pro-bono program at the University of Chicago Law School, picked up Hood's case. They claimed that the murders displayed a "clear modus operandi: Morgan, Sr. has killed close friends and loved ones for financial gain by shooting them ... and leaving their partially or fully nude bodies in and around abandoned cars." (They also theorized that Morgan, Sr., who worked as a janitor at a high school two blocks from Hood's house, had thrown loose bottles from a neighborhood trash can into Morgan, Jr.'s car to confuse police.) Though there was good reason to suspect Morgan, Sr., in the death of his son, Hood remained incarcerated for the murder.

Following the publication of my article, Hood's attorneys, Gayle Horn and Karl Leonard, filed updated briefings with the court, which included new information that was contained in the piece about Morgan, Sr.'s alleged insurance fraud. Horn and Leonard also met with senior members of the Cook County state's attorney's office, who promised to reinvestigate Hood's case, even as they refused to vacate the charges against him. ("This is an extremely complex case that has been the subject of a long-term reinvestigation by the Cook County State's Attorney's Conviction Integrity Unit," Sally Daly, a spokeswoman for the office, told me in an e-mail yesterday afternoon.)

In late November, with their options increasingly limited, Horn and Leonard issued a plea for Quinn to take executive action on Hood's "extraordinary" case. They sent a spiral binder to Quinn's office that contained, among other documents, copies of witness recantations and Morgan, Sr.'s suspect insurance policies. They set up a Web site, hosted by the Exoneration Project, to draw attention to Hood's case, sought signatories for his petition for clemency, and promoted their online campaign with the Twitter hashtag #SendHoodHome.

Last Friday, in an interview with a Chicago radio station, Quinn said, "Folks will find out on Monday some very major matters that will affect the system of justice—that will straighten out things that weren't done right." He and his legal team spent the weekend reviewing petitions. On Saturday, Renee Ferguson, a former investigative journalist with NBC, who, in 1995, was the first to report on Morgan, Sr.'s murderous past and insurance dealings, sent a text message to Quinn, which she shared with me. "Your courage, ethics, and heart probably don't make you a great politician but they do make you a good and clear-eyed public servant ... Just know that pardoning Hood is the right thing to do and fits with your social justice legacy and all you have dedicated your life to."

Yesterday, shortly after 1 P.M., I received a call from Barbara Santek. Santek started corresponding with Hood from her native Australia in 2000. Soon after, she moved to the United States, one thing led to another, and she fell in love with Hood. Santek was calling to tell me that Quinn's office had released the names of forty-three people who had received some form of clemency. Hood's sentence had been commuted. (Daly, the Cook County state's attorney's office spokeswoman, wrote, "We were surprised by today's

commutation by the former Governor, but there is a post-conviction petition pending in this case and it remains the subject of review by this office.” Hood’s record will continue to reflect a murder conviction. His name will only be cleared if the state’s attorney’s office finds insufficient evidence to uphold the conviction and dismisses the charges.)

Santek didn’t say much that I could decipher for the first few minutes, amid laughter and tears of elation. We hung up, both in search of further information—above all, when Hood would be free to depart from the prison grounds, and under what, if any, restrictions. (This morning, Tom Shaer, the director of communications for the Illinois Department of Corrections, told me that Hood will be on parole for three years.) Two hours later, Santek and I spoke again. “It’s beginning to hit home,” she said. “You know, you have a certain frame of mind, like you plan for him to be there all the time. But this is, like, over.”

Years ago, she told me, Hood sent her an old denim jacket and asked her to keep it for him. On Sunday night, hopeful that Quinn was thinking of his case when he spoke of straightening out “things that weren’t done right,” Hood asked Santek about the jacket. He was going to have to start assembling a new wardrobe. “He told me, ‘I’m going to need that jacket,’” Santek said. “And I’m thinking, ‘No, you won’t. No one wears denim jackets anymore.’”



Nicholas Schmidle joined *The New Yorker* as a staff writer in 2012.
