

## Prosecutor, son hail pardon of ex-cop

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Ailing, remorseful former Detroit sergeant nabbed in **drug** case to be freed after 20 years.

By Paul EganThe Detroit News

Detroit Firefighter James C. Harris will never forget the day in 1992 he drove his father, a former Detroit police sergeant, to the federal courthouse in **Flint** for the final day of his trial in a criminal cocaine conspiracy.

He drove home alone after a **jury** convicted his dad and U.S. marshals took him into custody.

News this week that President Bush granted clemency to his father, James Russell "Jimmie" Harris, and commuted the remainder of his 30-year prison sentence, is "the best Thanksgiving present ever," the son said Tuesday.

The elder Harris, 62, legally blind and sick with diabetes and hypertension, is to be released Dec. 22 — more than 10 years ahead of schedule — from the Butner Federal Correctional Complex in North Carolina. He is one of 14 people who received pardons from President Bush this week.

Snared in a high-profile **FBI sting** operation that also netted relatives of then-Mayor Coleman A. Young, Harris has no political influence but earned his clemency through his remorse and help he gave to law enforcement after he went to prison, those involved with his case said.

'He's changed for the better'

"I think it's great," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Lynn Helland, who prosecuted Harris twice after the first trial ended in a hung **jury** .

"He had helped out as much as he can ... central of which was a video he made to dissuade other cops from turning bad."

Even to a prosecutor, "the sentence he got, quite frankly, was an extraordinarily long sentence," Helland said.

Harris also gave federal agents information several years ago about a 1985 Detroit killing that remains unsolved — the **drug**-related drive-by shooting in northwest Detroit of 13-year-old Damion Lucas, said James B. Craven III, a Durham, N.C., attorney who since 2000 has spearheaded Harris' bid for clemency.

"I didn't know him 15 years ago, and if I had, I don't think I would have liked him," Craven said of Harris.

"He's grown up and changed for the better," he said. "I really came to love the guy."

Craven said he spoke by telephone to Harris on Tuesday morning and "he's very, very happy."

### **FBI** catches officers on tape

The **FBI** arrested Harris in 1991 along with Cathy Volsan Curry, the late Mayor Young's niece; Willie Volsan, Curry's father; and several other Detroit police officers and civilians.

Federal agents posing as **drug** lords seeking police protection paid tens of thousands of dollars to Harris and Volsan, evidence showed.

Charges against Curry were later dropped, though Volsan and others were convicted.

The **FBI** secretly shot videotape of Detroit police officers, some in uniform, unloading fake cocaine shipments from a plane at Detroit City Airport and placing the packages in cars they believed belonged to **drug** lords.

Officers sealed the airport perimeter when fake **drug** shipments arrived to protect the dealers from getting robbed and gave **FBI** agents who were posing as **drug** dealers a police radio to help them avoid detection, evidence showed.

Harris and Volsan were secretly recorded being entertained by the fake dealers on a luxury yacht in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. — the same yacht the **FBI** used to catch corrupt members of the U.S. Congress and Senate when they posed as Arab businessmen in the Abscam investigation.

Former Detroit **drug** kingpin Richard "White Boy Rick" Wershe Jr., already convicted at the time of the investigation, reportedly helped federal agents by vouching for the **FBI** agents posing as **drug** lords.

### Harris wins supporters

Craven said a training video featuring Harris — in which he implores recruits not to make the same mistakes he did — has been shown to thousands of rookie **FBI** agents and other officers over the years.

Harris' pitch for clemency included supportive letters from the **FBI** agents who investigated his case, who are now retired; Former Detroit U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy, now a federal judge; Former Detroit U.S. Attorney Craig Morford, now a top official in the U.S. Justice Department; Helland; Alan Gershel, the former head of the U.S. Attorney Office's criminal division in Detroit, and U.S. District Judge George Caram Steeh, Craven said.

Son happy to care for dad

Though many have a cynical view of presidential grants of clemency, "it's refreshing how nonpolitical they can be," said Craven, who specializes in such cases.

"Politicians don't like to stick their necks out for cops convicted in public corruption cases and sent to prison," Craven said. "Dirty cops just aren't that popular."

For James C. Harris, who was 21 when his dad went behind bars, "words can't even describe" the elation that news of his father's release brought.

"I'll **get** to carve him a turkey as an adult," said Harris' only child, who will take care of his dad after his release.

"Some days you **get** low. You want to give up. I can honestly say I never did."

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