Larry Youngblood was convicted in 1985 of child molestation, sexual assault, and kidnapping. He was sentenced to ten years and six months in prison. In October 1983, a ten year old boy was abducted from a carnival in Pima County, Arizona, and molested and sodomized repeatedly for over an hour by a middle aged man. The victim was taken to a hospital, where the staff collected semen samples from his rectum as well as the clothing he was wearing at the time of the assault.

Based on the boy's description of the assailant as a man with one disfigured eye, Youngblood was charged with the crime. He maintained his innocence at trial, but the jury convicted him, based largely on the eyewitness identification of the victim. No serological tests were conducted before trial, as the police improperly stored the evidence and it had degraded. Expert witnesses at trial stated that, had the evidence been stored correctly, test results might have demonstrated conclusively Youngblood's innocence.

Larry Youngblood appealed his conviction, claiming the destruction of potentially exculpatory evidence violated his due process rights, and the Arizona Court of Appeals set aside his conviction. He was released from prison, three years into his sentence, but in 1988, the Supreme Court reversed the lower court's ruling, and his conviction was reinstated (Arizona v. Youngblood, 488 U.S. 51). Youngblood remained free as the case made its way through the Arizona appellate court system a second time, but returned to prison in 1993, when the Arizona Supreme Court reinstated his conviction.

In 1998, Youngblood was released on parole, but was sent back to prison in 1999 for failing to register his new address, as required by Arizona sex offender laws. In 2000, upon request from his attorneys, the police department tested the degraded evidence using new, sophisticated DNA technology. Those results exonerated Youngblood, and he was released from prison in August 2000. The district attorney's office dismissed the charges against Larry Youngblood that year.

Shortly thereafter, the DNA profile from the evidence was entered into the national convicted offender databases. In early 2001, officials got a hit, matching the profile of Walter Cruise, who is blind in one eye and currently serving time in Texas on unrelated charges. In August 2002, Cruise was convicted of the crime and sentenced to twenty-four years in prison.

ABOUT THE REGISTRY

The National Registry of Exonerations is a project of the Newkirk Center for Science & Society at University of California Irvine, the University of Michigan Law School and Michigan State University College of Law. It was founded in 2012 in conjunction with the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law. The Registry provides detailed information about every known exoneration in the United States since 1989—cases in which a person was wrongly convicted of a crime and later cleared of all the charges based on new evidence of innocence.

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We welcome new information from any source about exonersations already on our list and about cases not in the Registry that might be exonerations.

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