

Ted Bradford in front of the Yakima County jail where he spent six months between his arrest and sentencing; he subsequently spent more than nine years in prison before a judge overturned his guilty conviction last September

At the Innocence Project Northwest, a professor and her law students work to exonerate the wrongly accused

# Finding

Guilty.

THAT LABEL HAS FOLLOWED Ted Bradford for 10 years. It was given to him in 1996 when a Yakima County jury said he was responsible for a brutal rape in Yakima, Washington. It followed him to prisons in Walla Walla, Shelton, Aberdeen and Spokane, where he served nine years and two months behind bars for the crime. And it clung to him after he was released from prison in 2005.

He was a rapist. He was a felon. He was guilty.

It wasn't until last September 12 and 13 that Bradford had an opportunity to shake that label, when the Washington State Court of Appeals ordered a new hearing. On those days, Bradford, 33, arrived at Yakima County Superior Court—an outdated, 40-year-old, three-story building downtown—for a chance to clear his name. While a custody battle waged in a courtroom next door and drivers paid parking tickets at a window downstairs, Bradford, his attorneys—Jacqueline McMurtrie, a law professor at the University of Washington and director of the Innocence Project Northwest, and Felix Luna, a partner at Heller Ehrman in Seattle working on the case pro bono—and a county deputy prosecutor convened in Judge Robert Hackett's courtroom to argue whether or not the judge should deliver a ruling that would establish, according to McMurtrie and Luna, the first postconviction DNA exoneration in Washington state. More simply, it was up to McMurtrie and Luna to prove to Judge Hackett something Bradford had asserted for a decade: He was innocent.

Bradford's mom, siblings, aunts, uncles—even his ex-wife (the mother of his two children)—filled the first two rows of the courtroom to show support. On both days, Bradford arrived early to court, dressed in clean blue jeans and a colored shirt, and sporting a neatly shaved black goatee and buzz haircut. The courtroom environment was staid: a bookcase stretching the length of one wall; two court reporters clicking away on computers; Judge Hackett, a

innocence

By Todd Matthews

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