

## Innocent Defendant Pled Guilty In Return for Nothing

**Most innocent defendants who plead guilty get a sentence much lower than the maximum.** But not always. The exoneration of [Edward McInnis](#) in North Carolina in 2015 stands out as a case where **his guilty plea gained him nothing.**

In 1988, police said McInnis, 27, whose reading level was about that of a fourth grader, confessed to the rape and robbery of an 81-year-old woman in Laurinburg, North Carolina.

Facing a maximum prison term of life in prison plus 40 years, McInnis pled guilty in Scotland County Superior Court to first-degree rape, first-degree burglary and armed robbery. **He was sentenced to *life plus 20 years*. It is hard to imagine an effective and competent defense attorney who would agree to such a plea.**

**After a decade of being told there was no physical evidence remaining in the**



Edward Charles McInnis and niece with representatives of the N.C. Innocence Inquiry Commission after his release  
(Photo from The Laurinburg Exchange)

**case,** the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence encouraged McInnis to apply to the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission so an independent search for evidence in his case could be conducted.

In March 2015, a new search for the physical evidence **found swabs from the rape kit** in an evidence

storage facility at the Laurinburg Police Department. On August 5, 2015, **DNA testing excluded McInnis** as the source of semen on the swabs and generated the DNA profile of an unidentified male.

Five days later, on August 10, 2015, Superior Court Judge Tanya Wallace vacated the convictions and granted a motion to dismiss the charges and **McInnis was released from prison after 27 years.**