

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Ex-fugitive 'Charlie Free' to be freed from jail

A former fugitive who spent three decades on the lam is going to be freed from jail later this month.



Jack Hazen, aka Charlie Free, in 1975.

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A former Florida fugitive captured last year after more than 30 years of life on the run under the assumed name "Charles Free" will walk out of Dade Correctional Institution on March 31 after the Florida Parole Commission approved his release, his lawyer announced.

Jack Hazen, aka Charlie Free, slipped away from a prison work program in North Florida in 1976 when he was 29. Hazen was 61 and suffered from multiple sclerosis and a brain tumor when police arrested him in his Las Vegas home in January 2008.

Hazen, a Vietnam War veteran, married and raised a family in Las Vegas under the name Free, which he says he got from a student ID he found shortly after he absconded. His wife and daughters knew nothing of his other life until police knocked at their door. A Florida Department

of Corrections cold-case squad tracked him down. Department officials wouldn't say what led them to the Las Vegas home.

According to the police report from the 1975 crime, Hazen robbed a Pompano Beach 7-Eleven clerk at knife point, stealing more than \$100 from the cash register.

When police arrested him shortly after the crime, he told the officer: "I did it because I was hungry."

Hazen was sentenced to seven years in prison and completed about 10 months of his sentence before he walked away from a Union County prison carpentry shop.

After his re-arrest in Las Vegas, he was extradited to Florida to serve the remainder of his sentence and additional time from escape charges.

Hazen's Florida attorney, Don Pumphrey Jr., has been working since then to win Hazen's release.

"I just spoke to him to tell him the news and he was elated. He sounded like a new man," Pumphrey said Thursday night. "He can't wait to walk out."

Pumphrey credited the Florida Parole Board for listening to and agreeing with his plea to release Hazen.

He said the commissioners were sympathetic to the fact that Hazen is in poor health and had not proven to be a threat during his 32 years in hiding.

"I told them what he told me at the beginning," Pumphrey said.

"He knew what he did was wrong, and he always wanted to pay his debt to society. He just didn't want to die in jail."

Hazen, said Pumphrey, is suffering from several medical conditions, including Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and cancer.

Pumphrey has arranged for Hazen to have a job and a place to live when he's released.