

Crowd Greet Harlem 4, Out of Jail After 8 Years

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By LACEY FOSBURGH

After eight years behind bars, the young men known as the Harlem Four were finally freed on bail and stepped out of the Manhattan House of Detention yesterday into the arms of their families and friends.

It was an emotional moment for the four, who entered the jail as teen-agers in 1964, charged with the murder of Mrs. Margit Sugar, a Harlem shopkeeper.

For more than three hours, a crowd of 200 relatives and friends had been waiting outside the jail, known as the Tombs, at 125 White Street. Then, shortly before 1 P.M., the mothers of the four—Walter Thomas, William Craig, Ronald Felder and Wallace Baker—were ushered inside to greet their sons in private.

Moments later, Mr. Thomas emerged, his mother, Mrs. Mildred Thomas, crying in his arms.

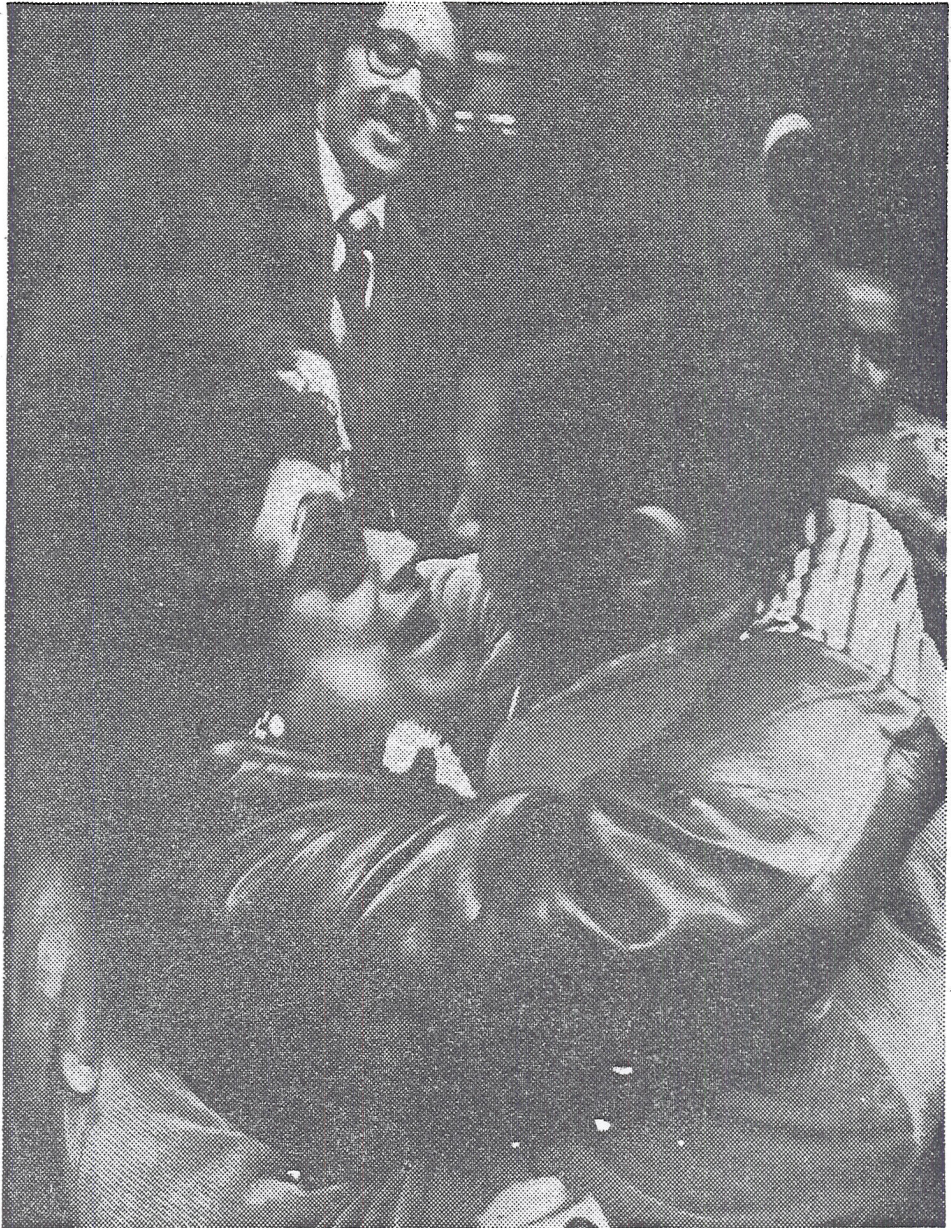
"What can I tell you?" he said as the cheering crowd surged around him. "What can I say?" he repeated, tears welling in his eyes. "It's like being born all over again."

After him came the others. Each was grabbed by members of the crowd, hugged, kissed, questioned and pushed.

Mr. Craig, 25, was scratched on his left hand, but he only looked down at the red mark and said, "I love it, I love it."

Mr. Thomas, when someone thrust his 9-year-old daughter, Avis, into his arms, hugged her

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The New York Times/Don Hogan Charles

Walter Thomas being embraced upon emerging from the Tombs after being freed on bail

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for the first time in eight years and could only say, "Oh, oh."

The four young men and two others had originally been arrested and charged with the murder of Mrs. Sugar on April 29, 1964.

Their first trial resulted in convictions that were later overturned. One defendant, Donald Hamm, later pleaded guilty, and another, Robert Rice, who the prosecution contends actually stabbed Mrs. Sugar, was convicted at a separate trial. Later trials for the remaining four defendants ended in hung juries, and their possible fourth trial is pending.

\$5,000 Bail Each Raised

On Wednesday, Supreme Court Justice Joseph A. Martinis reduced to \$5,000 the \$75,000 bail set in January. Yesterday morning, Dr. Annette Rubinstein and State Senator Sidney A. Von Luther, who organized the community effort to raise the cash bail, turned it over to the Correction Department.

Nobody said much yesterday, except to shout and cheer in the excitement, but on Thursday Mrs. Thomas explained what her son's release would mean to her.

"I just want to get him away from there," she said, referring to the Tombs. "I just want him to come home and get himself adjusted to life again. He's so used to having those doors slamming and banging and guards yelling, 'Lights out,' and no fresh air, no exercise, locked up. Oh, my, I just want to have him again."

All four defendants returned to new homes yesterday because their families had moved during the eight years.

But, as Mrs. Phoenicia Craig expressed it in an interview on Thursday: "That don't matter none. Willie don't mind. He told me last night on the phone all he wants is a nice soft mattress and a big heavy, thick quilt."

Hitch Almost Develops

For a few moments yesterday there was the possibility that Mr. Baker, 26, would not be released. The Correction Department revealed that no bail had ever been set on two eight-year-old indictments, for riot and assault, growing out of an incident two weeks before the murder.

Mr. Baker's lawyer, Lewis M. Steel, returned to Justice Martinis yesterday to seek bail. The judge set an additional \$2,000 bail, but agreed to release the defendant on condition that the money was paid by Wednesday.

On that day there will be a court hearing on new defense information charging that the testimony of the two key prosecution witnesses was perjured and fabricated to convict the defendants.

The question of what the young men will do now that they are released on bail, re-

mained unanswered yesterday. They are known to have studied and read a great deal in jail, and each has received a high-school-equivalency diploma.

Mr. Thomas, who in a recent telephone interview described the tombs as "like a university," said the four men wanted to work to help their community.

Senator Von Luther said yesterday, however, that he thought it was the community's obligation to help them now to develop their "interests and talents and skills."

"Too often," he said, "we take a person and make a cause out of him and then forget him. We don't want that to happen to these boys, do we?"