

# Burge accuser goes free

Served nearly 20 yrs.; says he confessed to murders because of police torture

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BY **RUMMANA HUSSAIN AND CHERYL V. JACKSON** Staff Reporters

Victor Safford said he confessed to two murders only because he was tortured by former Chicago Police Cmdr. Jon Burge's underlings.

And as the 39-year-old walked out a free man late Tuesday evening, he maintained his innocence, even though he pleaded guilty to one of the 1990 gang-related murders last spring.

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**Victor Safford (right) a.k.a. Cortez Brown, with his daughter Victoria Safford, walks out of Cook County Jail late Tuesday evening.**

*(Scott Stewart/Sun-Times)*

"Jon Burge is only the poster boy for corrupt cops," said Safford, also known as Cortez Brown. "He couldn't have done all that without his rogue detectives.

"They should be punished just like they punished others -- for them to go to prison and sit there."

While Safford was reveling in his newfound freedom, the man who allegedly ordered his beatings awaits his fate.

Burge, who was convicted on federal perjury and obstruction of justice charges related to the forced confessions at Area 2, is expected to be sentenced in November. He faces

up to 45 years in prison.

In May, Safford pleaded guilty to the gang-related murder of Curtis Sims but only so he could start a new life as a free man as soon as possible, according to Safford's lawyer Flint Taylor.

Cook County Judge Clayton Crane had granted Safford new trials for the murders of Sims and Delvin Boelter, citing overwhelming evidence that Brown was tortured.

While Crane sentenced the former self-admitted Gangster Disciple to 40 years in prison for Sims' murder, Safford was eligible for early release on Tuesday because he already had served nearly two decades in prison for the fatal shooting.

As part of a plea agreement reached with prosecutors, murder charges were dropped against Safford in the Boelter killing.

During last spring's hearing, Assistant Illinois Attorney General Vincenzo Chimera presented evidence linking Safford to Sims' murder, pointing to a 9mm Taurus used in the murder that was purchased by Safford's mother just weeks before.

Safford initially was sentenced to 35 years in prison for Boelter's murder. He was later convicted and sentenced to death in 1992 for killing Sims, but his sentence was commuted to life in prison by former Gov. George Ryan.

"We must continue to support those guys who are still in prison," Safford said.