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NYDailyNews.com

Originally Published: Monday, November 28 2011, 6:00 AM

DAILY NEWS

New York

Brooklyn mom's belief in son's innocence carries family through arrest ordeal.

Son was looking at a possible 50-year prison term after he was arrested for violent robbery/assault against four women

Denise Dowling with son Lanell, 26, as he displays police sketch used to charge him with robbery and assault. Case was dismissed after a nearly two-year nightmare.

Denise Dowling and her son Lanell didn't have Thanksgiving dinner together this year.

"I have to work," Dowling, a 47-year-old Greyhound bus driver, told a reporter the day before. "I like to pay my bills on time."

Lanell, 26, spent the day with his children — son Desheyon, 5, and daughter Nylah, 3 months. "I asked her [Dowling] to take the day off, but she said no."

Spending holidays together no longer carries the urgency it once did for Dowling and her only child. That was not the case nearly two years ago, when Lanell was looking at a possible 50-year prison term after he was arrested on April 3, 2010, and accused of a string of violent robbery/assaults against four women in East Flatbush, Brooklyn.

All of the assaults occurred over a 12-hour period.

The case against Lanell seemed strong. Four witnesses picked him out of a lineup, and a 67th Precinct police sketch of the robbery suspect could not have looked more like him if Lanell had modeled for it.

But Dowling said she never doubted her son's innocence for a second.

"A mother knows when her child is lying," she said. "Their mouths twitch, they can't look you in the eye. Lanell looked me in the eye and swore on his son that he did not do these crimes. I knew he was telling the truth."

Dowling turned down a public defender and instead hired defense attorney **Jay Schwitzman**. Over the next seven months, she peppered **Schwitzman** with phone calls and office visits, offering suggestions and any leads, no matter how far fetched, she thought could help free her son.

"I would call him at the office, on his cell phone," Dowling said. "Sometimes I would hang up and call him right back. But he always took my calls."



Denise Dowling with son Lanell, 26, as he displays police sketch used to charge him with robbery and assault. Case was dismissed after a nearly two-year nightmare.

"She was a mother trying to save her son," **Schwitzman** said. "Of course, I took her calls. Sometimes I had to tell her what she thought was



Lanell Dowling (c.), 26, is flanked by his mother Denise and defense attorney Jay Schwitzman leaving Brooklyn court after robbery and assault charges against him were dismissed.

evidence really was not. But she never gave up."

Lanell did seven months in jail, all but one week of it on Riker's Island. Some of the worse moments came immediately after his arrest, when he had to be kept in protective custody after inmates learned why he had been arrested.

"There was no telling if those women who had been robbed had family in there," Dowling said. "My son could have been killed or had his face cut for something he didn't do."

Schwitzman said cell phone records backed Lanell's claim that he was home when several of the robberies were taking place dozens of blocks away. "He called his boss,"

Schwitzman. "He was the only person who would have a reason to call his boss."

But the major break in the case came in July 2010 when 67th Precinct police released a sketch of a baseball cap wearing suspect wanted in murder/robbery that took place while Lanell was still in jail.

Except for the hat, the new sketch was identical to the one police used to arrest Lanell.

That — and two benches of supporters who showed up for the hearing — was enough to convince Judge Gus Reichbach to release Lanell on \$20,000 bail on Oct. 27, 2010. After Lanell took a lie-detector test, the Brooklyn District Attorney's office dropped all charges against him on June 30, 2011.

"My mother is my backbone," Lanell said. "She did what she had to do to get me out."

"I told Lanell to stay in prayer and everything would work out," Dowling said. "Jay believed in him and me. That made all the difference."

The Dowlings are planning to spend Christmas together.