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# Acton animal trainer is acquitted of rape

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In a situation loosely likened to the Gary Dotson case, a San Fernando Superior Court jury Wednesday acquitted an Acton wild animal trainer of charges that he raped his best friend's 15-year-old daughter.

After deliberating for 1½ days, the seven-woman, five man jury unanimously ruled that Gerald Luc Therrien, 28, did not rape the girl on Jan. 28, 1984, in her father's trailer. Therrien, elated, said he felt vindicated that his pleas of innocence were heeded.

Outside the courtroom, jurors said the Dotson case did not sway their decision, making them more sympathetic toward the defendant, but they noted that they were aware of the similarities between the cases.

Sunday, the governor of Illinois commuted the prison sentence of Dotson, 28, after his accuser recanted her testimony and said he had not raped her in 1977.

Therrien, according to the girl's account to police, had raped the high school student after attacking her in her father's trailer in the Saugus area. Authorities said Therrien had known the girl for about four years.

But Nancy Brown, 42, one of the jurors, said she felt the girl "fabricated a story (of being raped by Therrien) to get out of a situation she was in."

Jury foreman Vera Castro, 42, agreed, adding that the girl apparently had been assaulted, perhaps sexually, but not by Therrien.

James E. Blatt, Therrien's attorney, criticized the investigation by sheriff's deputies, saying there was no conclusive evidence to support the filing of charges against his client.