

## NASHVILLE SCENE

### Shootout on Lower Broad

A tale of a con, two cops and a lawyer

by [Rob Simbeck](#)

Not 20 minutes before a Nashville cop put five bullets in him, Roy Flowers looked like just another tourist out for a night of fun. He was leaving a Printers Alley bar, and if his stomach hadn't started hurting he would have left town the next morning.

Flowers wasn't a drinker, but he'd had a Tom Collins with his running buddy Bruce Fleming, and it had given him indigestion. The July weather wasn't helping. The city was four days into a heat wave, with temperatures peaking at around 100, and even with the sun easing below the horizon, the air felt like hot dishrags on his skin.

"Lookee here," he said to Fleming. "Let's go someplace where I can get a sandwich and a pack of Tums or Roloids."

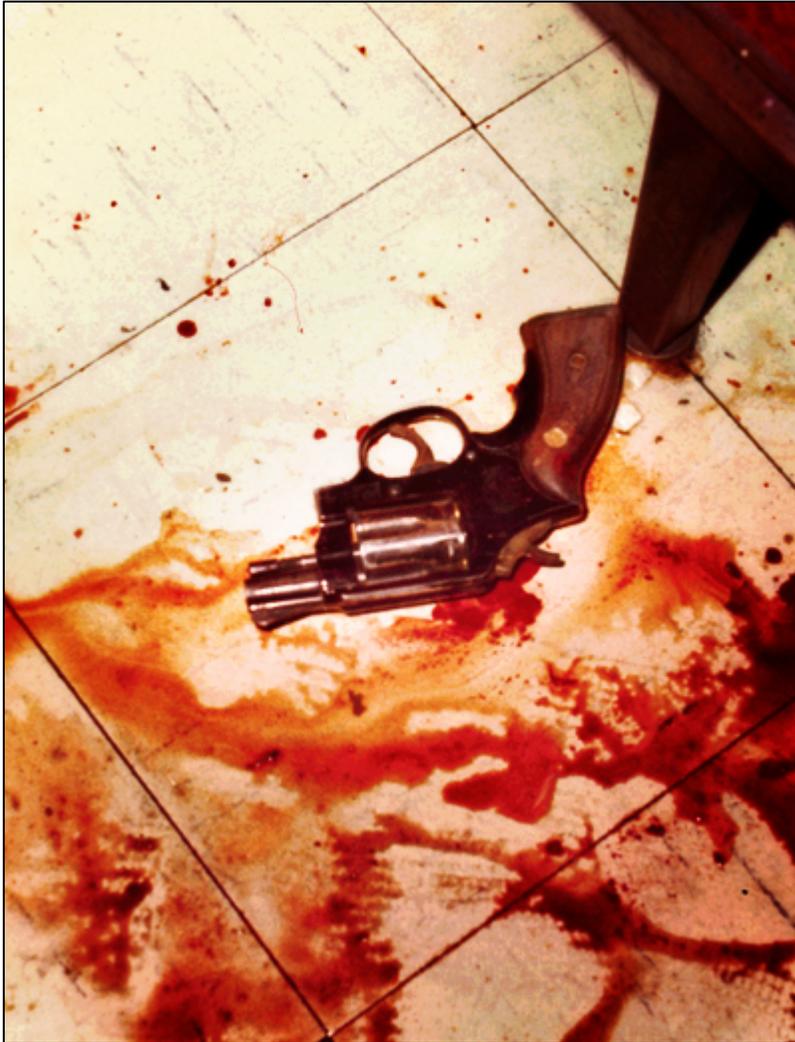
A passerby pointed them toward the bustling thoroughfare of Lower Broadway, and so the two men—escaped felons heading north from Georgia—walked the short distance to Merchants, a crowded bar and restaurant. A few minutes later, all hell would break loose inside, changing forever the lives of the three principals involved.

Roy Flowers' life to that point had been a case study in early promise gone wrong. Stocky, dark-haired and 34, he was an outgoing ladies' man and a terrific storyteller. He was also a cold-blooded outlaw with more than 40 felonies on his rap sheet, most of them violent. The crimes included drug dealing, kidnapping, burglary, armed robbery, assault and shootouts with law enforcement officers. He had already spent a decade in some of the South's toughest prisons, and he was on the run following his fifth escape. In all, his career would net him a life sentence plus 42 years in Virginia, 114 years in Alabama, 30 in Georgia, 25 in Tennessee and three 25-year federal sentences for crimes committed in Arkansas, Indiana and Kentucky.

Last year, though, a week before his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday, Roy Flowers left Tennessee a free man. He returned to Macon, Ga., where he had grown up. He went to work for a friend in the construction business and resumed a relationship with a girlfriend he met more than 35 years ago. At the time, he was robbing her.

Flowers would seem to be the longest shot imaginable for rehabilitation, and two Metro cops carry mental and physical scars to prove it. Yet at the age most people begin planning their retirements, a man who once seemed an irredeemable career felon has been handed a second chance, with the help and money of a few longtime friends and the talents of Nashville attorney David Raybin. The story begins where it almost ended: on a hot night in a bar in downtown Nashville.

If it hadn't been for Leon Taylor's forearm, Roy Flowers probably would have died 26 years ago on Merchants' beer-stained floor. The bullet that hit Flowers in the chest, Taylor says, passed first through that forearm, slowing it just enough that it didn't quite kill him. Instead, the bullet hit Flowers' sternum and ricocheted downward, lodging in his stomach.



Photos courtesy of the Metro Police Department, Leon Taylor and Roy Flowers

Taylor, then a slender 24-year-old Metro police officer, was sitting in a squad car in the alley beside Merchants the night Flowers and Fleming walked in. Fleming's rap sheet included robbery and murder. Taylor had been on the force for two years, after two as an officer in his hometown of Cadiz, Ky.

"It was almost like Andy of Mayberry," Taylor says of his time in Cadiz. "We only had one police car and we usually only ran one officer per shift. In a year's time you might

answer one or two burglaries, and the rest of the time you were just kind of there. It was almost like being a security guard."

If he was going to make a career of police work, he decided, it would be on a bigger force, and Nashville fit the bill nicely.

“It was a lot more intense here,” he says, “a lot more like I envisioned police work would be.”

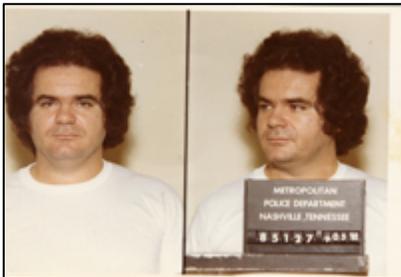
It was also a lot more dangerous. A Metro police officer was killed just before Taylor was hired, and another while he was in rookie school. While he was still in the academy, an officer shot two armed robbers, killing one and wounding the other, and a week later a citizen killed a third.

Sitting in the squad car with Taylor was officer Richard Harris, a 34-year-old who had been on the force for six years.

“My uncle was a police officer,” says Harris, “and I got to ride with him up front in the police car sometimes. I thought it was neat, and that’s where it all came from. I could never push myself away from it—I don’t care what I tried, it just kept coming back. I’d say, ‘I’m not happy. I’m not happy. Let me try police work and see if that makes me happy,’ and I was there 31-and-a-half years.” He retired last year.

On that evening in 1980, the honky-tonks that line Lower Broadway were interspersed with pre-gentrification adult bookstores and peep shows. Taylor and Harris watched the tourists, diners, bar patrons and the occasional streetwalker go by. Among the foot traffic were Flowers and Fleming, who heard music coming from inside the Merchants Hotel, then a low-end establishment with a restaurant and bar whose glory days lay far in the future.

“It looked like it was jumping,” Flowers says now. So the two went in, walked to the bar and ordered sandwiches. Flowers walked to the bathroom, where he moved the pistol he was carrying from the small of his back to the left front of his waistband. He then came out and joined Fleming in the booth nearest the door.



Music City Blues: Roy Flowers’ mugshot

Robert Moore, the Merchants’ manager, spotted Flowers’ pistol, then Fleming’s. He walked out onto the sidewalk looking for a policeman, came across Taylor and Harris, and explained the situation.

“He said, ‘They’re not causing me any problem,’ ” says Taylor. “ ‘They could be out-of-town policemen having a good time and that could be why they have guns, but it looks like they could be trouble. You might want to check them out.’ ”

Moore went back inside. A moment later, Flowers, who was sitting with his back to the door, saw his buddy Fleming look up as the two officers walked in.

---

Roy Flowers' life might have gone a lot differently. Flowers had been a terrific ballplayer since high school, when he was a star second baseman and catcher on a team that won two state championships. "I could have played professionally," he says. "I may not have made the majors, but I could have played pro ball." As late as 2001, when Flowers was 55, Miami cocaine kingpin Willie Falcon offered him \$500 to switch to Falcon's prison softball team when both were inmates at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta.

As T.S. Eliot said, though, sometimes between the idea and the reality falls the Shadow. The exact nature of the Shadow in this case, as in many lives gone wrong, is up for grabs. For David Raybin, the attorney who untangled hundreds of years of sentences spread over several jurisdictions in getting Flowers released, the judicial system has much to answer for.

"He got involved in a relatively minor burglary and the judge gave him an astronomical sentence," says Raybin, "and Roy sort of lost hope at that point. He started this string of escapes and bank robberies and more escapes and this is really a situation where—and I mean this in utmost sincerity—the criminal justice system initially failed. Some say that's an excuse, and I understand that, but if Roy had gotten probation or something, I think he could have moved on from there, but he got involved in the criminal justice system at an early age and it just ruined him, basically."

There is no doubt that, at the very least, his first stint in the notorious Georgia State Prison at Reidsville, known as the "Slaughterhouse of the South," hardened him. Still, it's instructive to look back much further.

Flowers was just 12 when his parents gave him written permission to rack balls at Macon Billiards, whose clientele included small-time thugs, gamblers and pool sharps, and where he learned to shoot pool and hone the toughness he'd learned on the city's streets. When he was 15, in 1961, one of the patrons asked if he could drive and if he wanted to make some money. Flowers said yes to both. He learned en route that he was the getaway driver for a bank robbery.



Polaroid from Roy Flowers' personal collection

The other three men gave him a quarter of the take, handing him \$18,000. The money turned him into a kid with more net worth than most adults he knew.

"That one incident," he says, "put me on the road to taking money."

He kept the cash hidden in a golf bag and finished high school, helping a few people, including his parents, anonymously with their bills. He continued to do well in school—he made good grades, got along with his teachers, and was voted Most Likely to Succeed his senior year—but it wasn't long before the dream of a ball career was history. To this day, his most memorable moment on a ball field was in 1993 at Nottoway Correctional Center in Virginia. He recognized a man nicknamed Downtown Brown, one of a group of guards who had beaten him during a prison riot in Richmond, tying him to a bed, breaking ribs and his collarbone and knocking out several of his teeth. Flowers grabbed an aluminum bat and walked to where Brown was standing, well off the first-base line.

“Look out, Downtown,” he yelled as he swung the bat and struck Brown once, then again, knocking him down, stopping only when guards in the gun tower shot twice and ordered him to back off.

In lieu of a baseball career, Flowers married his high school girlfriend and tried to settle into an ordinary working life with a \$1.15-an-hour construction job. But, he says, “I kept thinking about the fact that I could make \$10 to \$15 a game hustling pool.” That life drew him back in, especially after he recovered from a construction accident that left him with several broken bones and an addiction to painkillers.

“That was really the start of his downfall,” says Flowers’ brother Riley, a retired manufacturing worker and a longtime church deacon. “They kept him on drugs for so long that he got addicted to them, was what it was. From that point on, it was just downhill.”

Flowers began committing crimes, receiving probation for one burglary and 16 months in Reidsville for a second.

“It was the hardest time I’ve ever done,” he says. He learned quickly that “you’d better be able to fight” when he was marked for sexual assault but managed to stab two potential assailants.

“The strong run over the weak,” he says. “The only way you stop that is you get something and knock four or five holes in somebody. You just have to have a reputation of being willing to fight for yourself. Once people know that, they leave you alone.”



Scars and Stars and Bars: Polaroids from Roy Flowers’ personal collection

Prison food included “hog head stew,” in which you might actually find a hog’s ear. Rule infractions led to time in the “hole,” with no mattress, no razor and no toothbrush, with a diet of bread and water except for two

meals a week. During one stay of more than two months, he lost 35 pounds. Flowers worked on the prison farm, sometimes picking the same miles-long crop row from Monday through Friday. He saw inmates raped and mutilated, and once watched as a man was killed over a Baby Ruth candy bar.

“I should have learned my lesson,” he says, “but it turned me hard inside, and once you go hard inside, nothing or no one matters to you anymore.”

At 23, after a burglary, kidnapping, police chase and shootout while he was on the lam, he was sentenced to 90 years under Alabama’s Hardened Criminal Rule. Prison became a life of one-upmanship and revenge, of playing the angles and looking for escape opportunities. Life on the run meant burglaries, robberies and wild times with an assortment of female traveling companions.

During this period he met his current girlfriend, one of three women who got caught up in a robbery he committed in Atlanta in 1969. A drug-dealing associate had been robbed by three customers, and Flowers got the address and showed up with a pistol. As Led Zeppelin blared on the stereo, he had the three—who were doing acid—strip naked and put all their money and drugs in pillowcases. Suddenly, “three good-looking girls from Alabama,” who had rented the apartment earlier that day and whom the customers were visiting, came in from a back room. Flowers waved them back in with the pistol and told them to shut up and go back where they’d come from. Later that day, one of the women showed up at Flowers’ place with her suitcases—he was well-known enough that he was easy to track down—saying they’d been kicked out of the apartment and she needed a place to stay.

“I believe the first time I ever saw her I loved her, when I kicked her door down to rob those guys,” he says without irony. They have stayed in touch by mail ever since and met again after he was paroled last year.

In 1979, while at Holman Prison in Atmore, Ala., he was finally trying to better himself, studying art history, then training as a baker. He was overseeing a prison commissary and trying to stay clean, knowing he could be eligible for parole in 1981. It was just as Flowers seemed to be straightening out his life, though, that the paranoid ex-husband of a woman who had been visiting him in prison threatened Flowers’ family.

“I sat down on the side of my bed that night and I thought about it,” Flowers says, “and I said, ‘Well, I can do this time as it stands now, but if something was to happen to my mama and daddy and my son because of me, I don’t think I could handle it.’ ”

He broke out, something that put the fear of God in the ex-husband, then traveled the country for 15 months, robbing banks in Arkansas and Indiana. It was during this stretch that he got a call from Fleming’s father, with whom Flowers had served time. The younger Fleming had broken out of a Georgia prison, and his father asked Flowers to keep an eye on his son. “Yeah,” Flowers said, “send him on over.”

He, Fleming and their two female companions were leaving Georgia when a pharmacy clerk near Chattanooga's Ruby Falls recognized Flowers from a wanted poster in the store. The quartet hurried toward Nashville and stopped for the night at the Fiddler's Inn at I-40 and Briley Parkway. Flowers could hear Fleming and his girlfriend arguing violently in the next room, and finally Fleming called him.



Leon Taylor: "They fired 10 or 11 rounds and I got hit twice, but they were both superficial wounds, so it just wasn't my day to go."

"Let's get out of here, before I kill this bitch," Fleming said. The two of them jumped in Flowers' Cadillac, for which he had paid cash a few months before, and headed for Printers Alley.

---

"There's two police just walked in the door," Fleming said, as officers Taylor and Harris paused for a second in the doorway of Merchants.

"They're probably just making their rounds, man," said Flowers. "Don't worry about it."

The officers went to the bar and spoke for a moment to the bartender, then turned and walked to the table where the two escapees sat.

"Do you have a weapon on you?" Taylor said to Flowers.

Flowers and Harris remember the former claiming to be an undercover cop. Taylor says Flowers denied having a gun at all. In any case, all agree on what happened next.

"He made a real quick move with both hands and went to his waist area," Taylor says, "and he spun around and had a snubnose gun in his hand, and I may have just imagined it, but I thought he had a smile on his face."

Taylor was so close to Flowers that the gun hit his hands, and he instinctively tried to grab it. Flowers began firing, and a bullet went through the first joint of Taylor's little finger, nearly severing it. People all over the restaurant—in booths, at the bar—scrambled to the floor as Taylor and Flowers wrestled.



Leon Taylor on Roy Flowers: “That was his way of life, and if it wasn’t for guys like him, they wouldn’t need guys like me.”

“I could not get ahold of the cylinder to keep it from firing,” says Taylor. “I probably only weighed 135 or 140 pounds and he was real stocky—he could probably bench-press me with one arm—and I wasn’t strong enough or big enough to control his arm. I couldn’t keep the gun pointed away from me, and it would come back into my stomach and I’d push it away and he’d fire it again.”

Flowers’ partner hit the floor as Harris, standing behind Taylor, pulled his service revolver and began returning fire. His first shot grazed Taylor, cutting a shallow groove through his forearm before slamming into Flowers’ chest.

“I remember seeing it and feeling it,” Taylor says. “It left a pretty wide streak as it went back toward my elbow and it hit him in the chest. I realized later there was a shootout between two guys about five feet apart with me standing in the middle. They fired 10 or 11 rounds and I got hit twice, but they were both superficial wounds, so it just wasn’t my day to go.”

“Every time Leon would move and give me a shot at Flowers,” adds Harris, “I’d shoot at him.”

Flowers’ bullets hit the wall and a jukebox, with a piece of shattered glass from the latter slicing into a patron named Billy Ray Johnson. Four of the next five shots Harris fired, though, hit Flowers in the stomach, the hip, the arm and the hand, blowing a piece of his thumb off. Flowers slumped over, upending the table, which fell in front of him.

“You could have stuck a pencil in the hole in his chest,” Harris says of Flowers. “You could look down and see the blood squirting out.”

As Harris tried to reload, Taylor was finally able to pull his own weapon. The 80 or so patrons crouched behind booths and tables, nearly silent in the wake of the mayhem.

“The place was packed, and four bullets went through this crowd of people,” says Taylor. “How they didn’t hit anybody, I don’t know.”

He had more immediate concerns, though.

“Flowers was kind of leaning back against the wall, sitting up, with his head leaning down,” Taylor says, “and I kept telling him to lie down on the floor and he said, ‘I can’t.’”

I'm hurt. I'm hurt bad.' And once his partner had hit the ground, he had enough sense to stay there.

"I was ready to shoot by then," Taylor adds with a smile, "but nobody would do anything for me to shoot 'em for."

---

Leon Taylor never expected Flowers to get much time for shooting him. He and Officer Harris filed a civil suit to relieve Flowers of the money and car in his possession—each received about \$2,000—but had no illusions about sentencing.

"We said, 'Yeah, let him get 25 years for shooting at both of us,' knowing he wouldn't have done 25," Taylor says. "He might have served four or five at the most, and then they would have sent him back to where he came from."

He was nearly right about the amount of time Flowers served in Tennessee—it was three years—but it wouldn't begin until 2002, more than two decades after the shootout. Once Flowers recovered from his wounds, he was sent to face bank robbery charges in Arkansas and Indiana, receiving 25 years each. Back in Nashville, Judge A.A. Birch sentenced him to 25 years for the assault on Taylor and Harris in Merchants, then decided to send him back to Alabama first to serve out his 90-year sentence there.

But on Easter Sunday in 1981, Flowers arranged for cellmates in Nashville's Middle Tennessee Reception Center to distract a guard while he walked away from a visitors' area. He overpowered another guard, stole his shirt and walked out the door, waving to two officers as he headed toward a waiting car. He spent a short time on the run before being arrested after a bank robbery and a shootout with law enforcement officers in Virginia. That spree earned him life plus 42 years.

He remained a determinedly manipulative prisoner, running illegal food and gambling operations from his cell, assaulting other inmates, loaning money to guards. Finally, he tried bribing a guard with \$10,000 to help him escape. His plan was thwarted by an unexpected riot and the beating he took from other guards, who suspected him—wrongly, in this case—of helping to start it.

There was at this point only one person on earth with the power to summon the good in Roy Flowers. In the visitation room of a state prison in Richmond, in 1984, she gave it her best shot. "Please stop running," she said. "Don't make them kill you. Promise you'll stop escaping."

“Mama, don’t make me promise that,” he said. A man who is still fiercely devoted to the dictum that a man’s word is his bond, he would not promise anything, good or bad, lightly. “The only hope I’ve ever got of being out is if I keep running. I promise I won’t do anything stupid. You don’t know what it’s like.”



David Raybin: “It was one of the most complicated cases I had ever seen.” photo: [ericengland.net](http://ericengland.net)

“With tears in her eyes,” he says, “she said, ‘Yes, I do know. Every day you do, I’m doing one with you.’ ”

“You can’t explain to people what it is, being locked up,” he says, “but I could see her point. She had done every day with me. I knew she had been worried about me, and she finally pinned me down: ‘Will you stop running?’ ”

“ ‘I promise you I’ll try,’ I said to her, and she said, ‘That’s good enough.’ ”

And so, at the age of 38, he began devoting his time to the prison law library, to the recreation yard, where he rededicated himself to playing and umpiring softball, and to his job as a prison plumber. He applied for and was given a place in The Insiders, a program along the lines of Scared Straight that gave troubled youngsters the facts of life about crime and incarceration. He worked closely with a handful of the kids, earning gratitude along with the occasional midnight phone call.

“It’s one of the biggest things that ever turned my life around,” he says.

Through incarcerations in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee, he kept to himself as much as he could, and his record was clean enough that Raybin was able to get good time applied to most of his sentences. A parole official once asked him how he could have over 50 felony convictions before the age of 35 and spend 20 years in prison without a disciplinary record.

“I said I might have matured a lot over the years,” he says, “and I might be a little con-wise. I just stay under the radar—work, play ball, stay by myself.”

Still, he was never a candidate for sainthood. The desire to do something positive had always been there, but it was accompanied by a hair-trigger temper and an utter ruthlessness when it came to real or perceived wrongs perpetrated on him. He was the essence of Nietzschean will, for good or for bad. He spent time in honors pods, and yet he could turn in an instant into a cold-blooded enforcer. As late as 1999, he assaulted a man who had called him a liar, but managed to keep it off his record.

“Luckily,” he says of that last incident, “we weren’t where the cameras could pick it up. After that, I really started watching what I was doing.”

---

Standing before the Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole in 2004, David Raybin had the unenviable task of putting a parole-worthy face on a highly complicated man with an all but indefensible record.

“You’ve got a shootout in the Merchants Hotel, kind of like a Wild West thing,” says Raybin. “Clearly when I got to the parole board we wanted to explain it. There were no excuses. He explained what happened and said it was totally his fault; he was very apologetic. A lot of times prisoners will make excuses and blame somebody else. Roy didn’t. He took full responsibility for doing it, which I think impressed the parole board. He certainly didn’t intend to shoot the police officer, although whenever you have somebody carrying a gun who’s an escaped felon, you’ve got the potential for serious trouble.”

Flowers had faced a seemingly hopeless tangle of time encrypted within a labyrinth of paperwork. He had occasionally hired attorneys, some of whom just took his money and did nothing, but he was ready to try again after his transfer to the Whiteville Correctional Facility, a CCA prison near Memphis. Boyhood friends put up money, and a Nashville acquaintance of one of those friends recommended Raybin.

Raybin is a partner in Nashville’s Hollins, Wagster, Yarbrough, Weatherly & Raybin and is recognized as a top-flight criminal attorney. He is a former senior assistant attorney general, a former attorney for the parole board, and counsel to Nashville’s Fraternal Order of Police. He has also represented scores of criminals, and he was amazed at Flowers’ situation.



Roy Flowers: “I’m striving to keep the evil thoughts and the evil deeds away from my mind. I want to be free.” photo: Woody Marshall

“It was one of the most complicated cases I had ever seen,” says Raybin, “because you were dealing with five jurisdictions, and because he had so many different convictions in so many different places, the computations had added decades, really, to his sentences erroneously. And then there were the different systems of credit for good time.”

A key stumbling block was a clerical error in Tennessee—leaving the word “federal” out of a reference to an Arkansas sentence added 25 years to the time Flowers was serving and affected calculation of his good time. It took Raybin months to straighten it out, but, he says, “Once that fell, everything fell.” He waded through the maze of paperwork and decisions, separating the concurrent from the consecutive and getting good time applied properly. In many cases, Flowers himself was Raybin’s expert consultant.

“He’d write me and say, ‘No, that’s a Virginia sentence, not a Tennessee sentence, they’re referring to,’ and we’d go around and around until I got it right,” Raybin says. “He was never bitter about it, but there was some frustration. He could see himself languishing in prison literally forever because of this clerical error, with no way to fix it. Doing this for years, I knew who to talk to, but it took me months and months and months to get it fixed.”

As the tangle cleared and the possibility of freedom loomed closer, Flowers says, the time got harder and harder to serve, and it took more will power to deal with the petty annoyances of prison life. The final hurdle was the parole board.

“Sentence calculation is really mechanical,” says Raybin, “but once I got him where he needed to be, the parole hearing was more a matter of persuasion, of building a case. Given his extraordinarily extensive criminal history, I was concerned, in particular since a police officer had been injured.

“But the other thing was that Roy was much older. He had been in prison for decades without an incident, participated in programs everywhere and had gotten to what I call ‘the criminal menopause.’ He was beyond the age where people would commit bank robberies and things like that, and he had basically served his time in all these cases. This was not some kind of early release for Roy. Plus, he had some health issues and had a place to go, with family support. This was the kind of success story a parole board looks for to let these older, long-term inmates out.”

Flowers spoke to the board, apologizing for injuring Taylor, talking about his life and the things he had learned behind bars. Raybin ended his summation with the fact that even after 38 years in prison, Flowers had a network of supportive friends and family members. Raybin even cited the job Flowers had waiting for him on the outside, putting up drywall and installing windows for a boyhood friend who had done well in the construction business, and who had helped pull together the financing for Raybin’s services.

“I said, ‘Here’s a man who started out breaking windows, committing burglaries,’ ” says Raybin, “ ‘and now here he is about to be installing windows.’ I knew he was going to get parole because the parole board sat there and they actually laughed, because it was sort of a symmetrical thing.”

Well over a dozen family members met Flowers on the day of his release and accompanied him back to Macon. He moved into the basement of his son’s home, but

later got his own apartment when it bothered him that his two granddaughters were exposed to the fact that his girlfriend was occasionally spending the night. He got a new driver's license and began working when his health permitted—he has diabetes, high blood pressure and back trouble, among other ailments—although he is now receiving SSI disability payments. He is on parole from three states and the federal government, and is normally restricted to middle Georgia. Still, he was allowed to spend a week at a friend's place in Panama City, Fla., last month.

---

Leon Taylor says he hasn't thought much about Flowers over the years, except when he's asked to explain the missing portion of his finger or tries to scoop change out of bank or grocery change machines. "No telling how much has gotten away because of that little finger," he says with a laugh.

His wife Glenda had a tougher time of it. She was a police dispatcher working the radio the night he was shot. She and Taylor had been dating for a few months, and they married not long afterward. When the call came in that an officer had been shot, on a call she knew Taylor and Harris were handling, she didn't know which one had been hit. She found out later it was Taylor, and she went to the emergency room when her shift was over at 11. She found him happy, high on morphine and leftover adrenaline. He told her the doctor was going to let him watch as the injured part of his finger was snipped off with what looked like wire cutters. At that point, she knew he would be all right.

A self-described worrier, Glenda had feared just such an incident while they were dating, and she found Flowers' escape, which came when she was eight months pregnant, frightening. Once he was back in prison, though, she was able to set her fears aside to some degree.

"After [Taylor] got shot," she says, "to me, that was his time and it wouldn't happen again. That's how I made it through. I mean, I never worried about him because I thought it only happens once in their career, and that was his."

For Richard Harris, it wasn't so simple. The shootout affected him deeply.

"It woke me up," he says. "I had become complacent—you know, nothing's happening, nothing's going to happen, and then in a matter of going from zero to 60 in three seconds, all hell broke loose. He tried to kill Leon; he was shooting at me. I mean, it's a really terrifying experience and I'm glad I was well trained because I did stand my ground and continue to take shots at him every time Leon was able to move."

The training didn't help with the psychological aftermath, which was heavy, particularly after he was assigned one night to guard the still-recovering Flowers in his room at Nashville General Hospital.

"I couldn't believe it," says Harris. "I thought it was ridiculous that someone would send me over there to encounter this person I had shot and who had shot at me and whose intention was to kill me. I was thinking, 'Somebody really didn't think this through. This is not a real good move.' "

The two sat together for more than eight hours, with Flowers trying calmly but unsuccessfully to draw Harris into a conversation.

"He never threatened me," says Harris. "He just said, 'You know, I've been shot a lot of times, but you're the first one's ever shot me up this bad.' Even while he was talking to me, he laid there really quiet and calm. He's the first one that I'd ever arrested for any really serious crimes that didn't threaten me in some form or fashion, and that's why I was always afraid of him and why I always kept up with him."

Once Flowers had escaped, Harris took extraordinary precautions—leaving outside lights off when he left the house, buying a car whose interior light stayed off when he opened the door so he wouldn't be silhouetted against it, and taking a gun absolutely everywhere he went.

"That's how worried I was about him," he says. "I mean, he frightened me. He was wanted in so many states for so many things."

When Flowers was given life in Virginia, though, Harris was able to relax to a degree, although there are precautions he takes to this day.

Raybin, on the other hand, sees Flowers as "a character," an extremely bright individual from a good family who went astray young and has now served his time and earned his freedom.

"He really understands the criminal justice system," Raybin says. "If I were king, I'd put Roy as a consultant to the Department of Correction to kind of help get an inmate's perspective as to how the department could be improved when it comes to inmate issues. I don't mean by making things softer. I mean by having a more enlightened way of looking at things."

At 60, Roy Flowers remains a complicated man, enjoying his grandchildren, working as his health permits, still adjusting to the freedom he lost for nearly four decades.

"I'm striving to keep the evil thoughts and the evil deeds away from my mind," he says. "I want to be free. I want to be out with my family members and see my son [age 39] as he matures into middle age. Every day I thank the Lord that He's given me the opportunity to do this. I realize what kind of record I have. I realize the authorities are

looking at me really closely because I've got 54 or 56 felony convictions, the biggest percentage with violence, but anyone who knew me then and knows me now knows I am truly changed. I strive every morning to have a positive mind, and to make sure I don't put myself in a situation that could make me revert to the person I once was. One thing I will absolutely never do is own a gun. With one, I'm a fool. Without one, I have a chance. I promised myself I will never pick one up unless it's in defense of my family."

"I never really thought he would get out," his brother Riley says. "I really think it was the hand of the Lord. I'm so proud of him today because he is doing tremendous. For somebody to be locked up 38 years and to get out and adapt like he's doing, I never would have believed it."

The moment when Flowers and two of Nashville's finest clashed is one Taylor views as part of a cosmic dance where lives intertwine for a moment, then veer off again.

"No, I don't have a grudge," Taylor says. "I mean, there are guys like that and you just run into them. That was his way of life, and if it wasn't for guys like him, they wouldn't need guys like me. Guys like him gave me a job I like, a job I've enjoyed.

"So, yeah," he adds with a laugh, "we kind of complement each other."

.