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Man cleared of assaults on son

By Scott E. Williams
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GALVESTON, Texas – For Peter Michael Reed, four years of living under suspicion ended after about 15 minutes of jury deliberation Tuesday afternoon.

The 33-year-old was acquitted of charges he had sexually molested his then 8-year-old son. The verdict brought forward plenty of emotions from Reed as well as his ex-wife.

“I believed it would be a quick decision, but I was a little surprised it was that fast,” Reed said.

As Judge Susan Criss read two “not guilty” verdicts, Reed’s ex-wife got up and walked out of the courtroom in tears and was unavailable for comment following the verdict.

Seconds later, every member of Reed’s family in attendance was also in tears, as they hugged each other and thanked defense attorney Tad A. Nelson.

The 212th State District Court jury’s quick verdict ended Reed’s seven-day trial. Reed had been facing charges of sexual performance by a child and aggravated sexual assault of a child.

The charges pertained to alleged attacks against Reed’s son, now 12, in Texas City between 1999 and 2002.

Prosecutor Xochitl Vandiver told jurors the child had not immediately reported the attacks because he feared his father.

However, Nelson argued that the allegations were the product of a contentious custody issue between the two parents.

“It was always about visitation,” said Nelson, who characterized the child’s mother as “a blatant liar.”

Vandiver said attempts to demonize the child’s mother comprised a “rabbit trail,” designed to distract jurors from Reed’s guilt.

Nelson, however, said doctor visits offered as proof of abuse did not match the

child's visitation period with reed. He also accused the woman of forging documents that indicated abuse, including one purported to be from a doctor who later said he did not even know the child.

Vandiver showed the jurors a picture of a nude child that the boy claimed was him, saying that the picture could not have been a creation of the mother's.

"There is no explanation for that picture," she said, in closing arguments Tuesday.

However, the child's face was not in the picture.

After the verdict, Reed said the family and friends who had supported him throughout his legal struggle had been invaluable.

"I just couldn't thank them enough," Reed said.

Reed also said he would soon be back in court, suing to reassert his parental rights, now that he had been cleared.

"That's a problem we'll struggle with for a while," he said. "The thing I always put first is, what will be the best thing for the child," he said. "I think my being part of his life is in his best interest."