

Our Opinions

End Of Story

If newsmen in the hereafter can work at the trade they loved on earth, James McGuire has written the last installment of his greatest story. It could be one sentence — "Harold Miller became a free man, March 22," — or it could be a book.

But Jim McGuire wouldn't write a book, for then he would have to write about himself and his role in winning Harold Miller's freedom. Jim was not that kind of guy.

He was the kind of guy who would go to bat for anyone who got a raw deal, however. He did it before, and his efforts are preserved in a Heywood Brown award and in the movie, "Call Northside 777."

In that case, McGuire and two other newsmen produced witnesses and evidence that resulted in a pardon for a man convicted of murder.

The Harold Miller story was similar, except that Miller was accused of rape, and he was Negro and his accuser white.

It began in Chicago a few days after the Joe Louis - Rocky Marciano fight. Miller was pointed out by a passenger on a Southside bus as the man who attacked her on the night of the fight.

He was arrested, tried and sentenced to 99 years in prison despite the testimony of five witnesses that he was watching the fight with them at the time of the alleged crime.

McGuire covered the trial. His experience as court observer told him that the state had not proved its case. His instincts told him that Miller was innocent, but McGuire's editors were not interested in the story or his conclusions.

No one was interested except Jim Mc-

Guire, Miller and his family, and Charles "Chuck" Davis, then city editor of the Defender, to whom McGuire came with his story. Davis agreed with McGuire and cooperated in the investigation. The Defender published their findings under the title "The Story Nobody Would Touch."

To get the story, McGuire spent day after day on the Southside tracking down witnesses, ringing door bells and visiting taverns in the area of the alleged crime. The complainant mysteriously disappeared, and when McGuire located her two months after the trial, she was in a state hospital for the mentally ill, suffering from schizophrenia.

Jim McGuire didn't cover the new trial. He died two days after his last conference with Davis. He suffered a heart attack a few hours after a meeting with fellow newsmen. At that meeting, he had told of his elation over the coming hearing before the state Supreme court.

It would have been satisfying to Jim McGuire to have been in Judge John A. Sbarbaro's court last Thursday, when Harold Miller went free. But we cannot question acts of God. And we know that the objective of dedicated newsmen is not personal glory. It is simply to do a good job of reporting the facts and upholding justice.

Jim McGuire did this in the finest tradition of the industry, and the doing was his reward.

It seems, however, that somehow, somehow, the memory of Jim McGuire and his greatest story should be preserved as an inspiration to us all — newsmen, judges, prosecutors and readers alike.