

Man free after girl recants rape story

CLEARWATER, Florida: A judge has freed a man who spent 513 days in jail after an 11-year-old girl admitted fabricating a story that he had raped her.

The girl, who was nine years old when she testified, based her story that she was raped by 55-year-old Ivie Cornell Norris — her mother's lover — on a television police drama that depicted a rape case, attorneys said.

On Friday the girl told Judge Raymond Limer, "He didn't do it". "I thank the Lord this kid came up and told the truth," the judge said.

The girl's mother told the judge the girl had admitted a couple of months ago that she had lied to get rid of Norris because the couple fought and "she just wanted him away from me."

"I can't understand it," the mother said. "She convinced me. She convinced a jury. She convinced my parents."

The girl said she had lied after seeing an episode of the television

series *21 Jump Street* which depicted rape.

A juror at Mr Norris's trial in 1988 recalled how the girl's credibility was the key issue — as there was no physical evidence of rape — during four hours of deliberations. She said the girl appeared calm, a little timid, during her testimony.

The girl testified that the attack had taken place in March 1988 after her mother had entered a hospital for cocaine-abuse treatment and left her with Mr Norris.

Mr Norris was found guilty on November 9, 1988, but won a new trial. The second trial was set to begin earlier this month but the child's mother told prosecutors that her daughter had admitted she had fabricated the story.

Mr Norris said the affair had cost him his job, friends and time with his son. But he said he harboured no anger against the girl.

"She's a good liar, always was," he said.

— AFP