THE FERTILE CRESCENT:
CHALLENGING WESTERN STEREOTYPES OF MIDDLE EASTERN WOMEN

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER
JIM M-CLOSKLEY AND CENTURION MINISTRIES
HOW PRINCETON GOT ITS LAKE
MINIATURE BUILDING COLLECTION
McCARTER THEATRE'S BILL LOCKWOOD
named newspaper clippings recording moments of jubilation and triumph cover the walls of Jim McCloskey’s office at Centurion Ministries (CM), the Princeton non-profit he founded in 1983 to free innocent people wrongly imprisoned across the United States and Canada. Headlines and faces. Lou Thomas of Philadelphia who spent 40 years behind bars for a crime he did not commit. “Geronimo” Pratt, framed in Los Angeles on false testimony until a new trial brought his release after 27 years. Edward Baker, convicted on the word of the real killer and freed after 26 years. Jim Driskell who received a formal apology from Canada’s Federal Minister of Justice for the mistakes that led to his wrongful conviction. And then there’s Clarence Brandley, whose freedom came just eight days before he was to be executed in Texas in 1990.

And Joyce Ann Brown, who served nine years of a life sentence for a robbery and murder because she happened to look like someone else. In spite of the fact that the error was discovered before Brown’s trial, police and prosecutors went ahead with the case anyway. Hard to believe? And yet it happened, as was demonstrated by Centurion Ministries and a 60 Minutes exposé on CBS. Brown’s conviction was reversed and all charges were dismissed. On November 3, 1989, Brown was free.

Such nightmares of mistaken identity, false confessions, and coercive interrogation: justice undermined by police corruption, laziness, or simple indifference, are also stories of justice served because of the dogged determination of McCloskey and his dedicated team that even now comprises just seven full-timers, four part-timers, and some 20 volunteers.

“There’s an amazing story to each one of these,” says McCloskey, who has earned a reputation for taking on the most difficult cases. Cases tried years ago, before advances in DNA and other forensic tests, can take years of painstaking research and tedious hours of sifting through trial transcripts, pouring over every document, report, and phone message, re-interviewing witnesses, working with defense lawyers, retracing the steps of police and prosecutors, and gathering new evidence: all that is required to free innocent men and women from life sentences or death row.

Centurion Ministries differs from later groups in that most of its cases call for a great deal of legwork “in-the-field” investigation. The Innocence Project, for example, which was founded in 1992 focuses solely on exonerating prisoners via DNA evidence. Its famed director, lawyer Barry Schack, describes McCloskey and CM co-manager Kate Germond as “a national resource.”

JIM MCCLOSKEY: HIS STORY
It was some time before James McCloskey found his life’s work, his “calling.” He was born in 1942 and raised in Havertown, Pa, just ten miles west of Philadelphia. His father worked in the construction business started by McCloskey’s grandfather and his brother, James and Matthew McCloskey. The latter served the Kennedy administration as Ambassador to Ireland in the 1960s. The McCloskey Construction Company specialized in big projects and was said to have changed the Philadelphia skyline until hard times hit the business in the 1970s.

“I had a great childhood,” recalls McCloskey whose brother Richard was born in 1944 and sister Lois in 1954. He admits to having been somewhat spoiled—he received a car when he was 16 years old—but his father “could hold his feet to the fire when needed.”

The McCloskys assumed their children would do well in school and go on to college. They were also “churched” as McCloskey puts it. They lived around the corner from the Bethany Collegiate Presbyterian Church and McCloskey spent every Sunday from 4th grade
through high school in Church activities. By the time he was a student at Bucknell University (Class of 1964), McCloskey had had his fill. "I'm done with Church," he told his parents.

Looking back on his life's trajectory, McCloskey laughs when he recalls that his one, rather undeveloped, ambition was to become a "successful international businessman." He joined the U.S. Navy in hopes of traveling to Japan and spent a year and a half there (having his heart broken by a young Japanese woman.)

In the spring of 1966, with the war in Vietnam starting, McCloskey decided he wanted to get into the action, moved partly by youthful drive and partly by the ideal of doing his part to counter the domino-effect of Communism. After training at Camp Pendleton, he was sent to Saigon as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Naval Junk Fleet, the 50-foot long wooden boats that were patrolling the Mekong Delta. He won a Bronze Star for valor but came to see the war as a losing cause and the American government's ambitions as misplaced, a waste of lives and money.

Seeing false reporting, cruelty and barbarity on both sides—eroded his faith in government authority.

"I grew up in Vietnam, I saw the world and how it works and I was disillusioned."

To further his dream of international business, he went to the American Graduate School for International Management in Arizona. Then, with no job lined up but with tons of chutzpah, he moved partly by youthful drive and partly by the ideal of doing his part to counter the domino-effect of Communism. After training at Camp Pendleton, he was sent to Saigon as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Naval Junk Fleet, the 50-foot long wooden boats that were patrolling the Mekong Delta. He won a Bronze Star for valor but came to see the war as a losing cause and the American government's ambitions as misplaced, a waste of lives and money.

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 persistently proclaimed his innocence. "It's a great canard that all prisoners maintain their innocence," says McCloskey. On the contrary, he's found that the guilty are usually remorseful. "Jorge De Los Santos was a Puerto Rican out of the Trenton projects and there was something about him that moved me," McCloskey says. But the rule was that one was not to get involved. To do so might jeopardize the program that Ravenell had worked hard to achieve. Nonetheless, McCloskey had to follow his feelings.

He took a year off from his studies in order to prove De Los Santos's innocence, moving out of the seminary and into accommodation offered by a kindly Princeton resident. A grant of $7,500 from the National Presbyterian Church allowed him to hire Defense lawyer Paul Castellino.

The trial transcripts revealed that the conviction was based on the testimony of one man, who claimed De Los Santos had confessed to the crime while in prison. The informant, named Delli Santi, just to confuse things, had made a deal with the district attorney's office that the jury knew nothing about. Ultimately, McCloskey heard Delli Santi admit that his accusation was false.

In the beginning, McCloskey, was
skeptical that an innocent person could end up in prison. "Surely this man was innocent." [Luke 23:47.]

**LEGGWORK AND PERSISTENCE**

McCluskey was introduced to his next cases by De Los Santos: two other innocent men behind bars: Nate Walker (arrested 1977, freed 1986) and Rene Santana (arrested 1976, Newark, N.J., freed 1986).

Santana discovered Walker's 1976 conviction at a time when DNA testing was not widely available. The officer that had had to persuade the court to re-open the case turned out to be Walker's trial prosecutor and so took some convincing. But to his credit, he agreed to send a vaginal swab from the murder victim to the FBI for testing. Blood type can be determined from body secretions such as sweat, saliva and semen. Of course, even if the blood typed matched, it didn't mean Walker was guilty, but if it did not match, it was proof of innocence. The blood type did not match. Two days later, Nate Walker was freed. His release was widely covered in the media, including features in People, Ebony, The New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor. "Walker's story took Centurion Ministries national," says McCluskey who appeared with Walker on the Today show.

The exposure brought CM more requests from prisoners claiming their innocence. McCluskey had already spent 209 days in prison.

To date, Centurion Ministries has freed 49 individuals who have collectively served 956 years. Its efficient and dedicated team has become skilled in choosing where best to place its limited resources. Cases where further investigation reveals guilt rather than innocence are rare but it does happen.

Roger Coleman's was an infamous case of the sort that released prisoners open up to her. "When he was let out, he was devastated by the guilt," says McCluskey.

**What would Delli Santi lie?** Because it benefits the prosecution, criminal, Delli Santi was always in trouble with the law (with some "evidence" while Jorge was a drug addict, he wasn't a murderer."

Delli Santi lived with Germond and her husband for five years of a life sentence until he was freed by a former U.S. Prisoner Rehabilitation Program in New Jersey.


Lieutenant: "McCluskey's focus is razor sharp and he's able to switch off when need be. Germond admits to being more easily distracted by other, as McCloskey would discover.

Each case is a living breathing individual. CM spent the last 12 years reinvestigating and litigating the case of Barry Beach with the help of attorneys Peter Camill of Seattle and Terry Toews of Montana. Last year, Beach was released after 29 years of false imprisonment following a new trial granted by Judge E. Waynes Phillips. The new trial showed overwhelming new evidence of Beach's innocence and incriminated four other people as the culprits.

Yet, in spite of the judge's decision, Beach's name is still on CM's 'active' list. Why? Because the Montana State Attorney General decided to appeal the judge's reversal of the conviction to the Montana State Supreme Court. Until the appeals process is done and dusted, Beach remains unfinished business for CM. "This case is another of the all too frequent convictions of the innocent based on a false confession extracted by law enforcement in their zeal to convict someone for esoteric violent crimes so that they can look good to the public and to each other," says McCluskey, who acknowledged that the system was not always welcomed by those who work in the prosecutorial system. "It's not every case that is adversarial, however, McCluskey cites a District Attorney who helped free 49 individuals in 2006, after serving 24 years, on the basis of new DNA evidence. "The prosecutor was open to the possibility of his innocence whereas in other cases, such as Beach, they've fought teeth and nail," says Germond.

The case of David Alexander and Grey Strangner reads like a dime-store novel: the two men were set free by the Louisiana Parole Board after CM argued their case with the help of a former court clerk and former deputy sheriff. Evidence showed that both men were innocent and that a corrupt sheriff, rather than admitting his mistakes, went so far as to bury the murder weapon and to frame the real killers, who had later been released. CM went to the FBI, to retract their confessions. A 10-year effort by McCluskey and his team working with a reputable Parole Board ultimately achieved justice for Alexander and Grenner, freed in 2006 after 30 years behind bars.

"There's a lot of heartache in this work," says the indomitable McCluskey. "But there is a lot of joy, especially when you bring home the truth to those who believed him innocent and was with him when he died," he recalls. But after Coleman's execution, DNA testing showed that his sperm was on the victim. McCluskey immediately held a press conference. "If we can't admit that we sometimes get it wrong we are no better than those who did," she says.

A more difficult pill to swallow are cases where CM is convinced of innocence but unable to get a retrial. "The hardest part of the job is when we put our resources into working with someone in whose innocence we believe but after re-investigating their case we don't have enough evidence to get the case back to court," says McCluskey. "We have to leave them behind. Many people sit in prisons wrongly convicted and we just don't have the resources to help them all."

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