



On his first weekend out of prison, Michael Shannon attended a nearly round-the-clock family barbecue at his childhood home in New Orleans. It rained those days, but that didn't bring Michael down one bit. "I went out and played in the rain like a little kid," he said, before reflecting on the joys of his new-found freedom and his appreciation for Centurion's work: "I went from being in prison around a lot of lost and confused people to a house with air conditioning and a family with lots of love."

On July 29, at midnight in New Orleans, Shannon walked free into the loving arms of that family, including his now-adult daughters Beiouncia and Myeisha. Michael had been serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole at the notorious Louisiana State Prison (Angola) for a 2004 murder he did not commit. Earlier in July, New Orleans Judge Byron C. Williams granted Michael a new trial after finding that his lawyer at trial was incompetent.

Michael was convicted of shooting and killing a man in broad daylight based a single-eyewitness identification of his photograph six months after the shooting. Centurion was able to find and present five eyewitnesses to the shooting, none of whom had ever been contacted by his trial attorney. At an evidentiary hearing, all of them described the shooter as being 6'0" to 6'3" tall. Michael Shannon is 5'6" tall. Although Michael is free on bail, he continues to live with the threat of having to go back to jail. The State of Louisiana is appealing the judge's decision granting him a new trial.

Clearly Centurion's work is not done, but we celebrate a very deserving victory for Michael Shannon, his family, justice and the Centurion family.

# CENTURION

seeking freedom for the innocent in prison

november 2017

issue eleven

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# Letter from Executive Director, Kate Germond

*This has been an amazing year:*

*Seven overturned convictions and thus far, four men returned to their families.*

*We are counting on you to help us continue our mission. There are so many defenseless people dependent on us to help them through the horrors they are living in every single day. And we cannot forget their families who live this same nightmare. When we exonerate someone, we exonerate the entire family: they, too, are finally able to move on with their lives. Also, equally important though not spoken about as much: our aftercare is also vital for their very survival and success in reacclimating to a new world. The Centurion family is extremely important to them. As you can imagine, this time of year is an emotional struggle for all of them and for our entire staff.*

*Your partnership is vital to our mission. Your gifts ensure we can continue to respond to the cries for help from behind bars across the country. You are critical to our very existence, which is tightly woven into the single-minded thing that we do: exonerate from prison those people who are factually innocent, supported by our belief that they are our family. As such, I have one final request: light a candle in the name of the wrongly convicted this holiday time and think of them as you are surrounded by your family and friends. They are trying to find solace in the meaning of this season.*

*I have not said this enough: Thank you! We know you have many good organizations you could support, so we are exceedingly grateful to each and every one of you.*

*With respect and affection, **Kate***

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## **Imagine spending more than Half Your Life in Prison**

After 33 years of unjust confinement in various Alabama prisons for a 1984 rape he was innocent of, Centurion finally convinced the parole board to free 62-year-old Billy Ray Davis without any admission of guilt. Unfortunately, we were unable to exonerate Billy with DNA testing because all the crime scene's biological evidence was gone and unaccounted for by the time we began our work on his case in 2001. Nevertheless, we were thrilled when we picked him up on November 6 as he walked out the front gate of the prison carrying only a cardboard box containing his few worldly possessions. Later that morning, many tears of joy were shed and bear hugs shared when we delivered him to his two eagerly awaiting older sisters and their families. Sadly, Billy's wife Vera died of a broken heart in 2013, despondent over the parole board's refusal to release him that year. Even though it took Centurion 17 years to free him, it was all worth it watching him heartily eat a Wendy's hamburger, French fries, and a Frosty on the way home.





# THE SAV ANN AH3

## HOPING TO BRING THREE INNOCENT SOLDIERS HOME AFTER 26 YEARS

After an eight-year tortuous roller coaster effort on their behalf by Centurion, justice finally arrived for three former soldiers, Mark Jones, Kenneth Gardiner, and Dominic Lucci, who were falsely convicted of a fatal drive by shooting at their joint trial in Savannah, Georgia, almost 26 years ago. This past November 2, in a unanimous 9-0 decision, the State Supreme Court tossed the conviction ruling, saying that the State failed to provide evidence to the defense that at the same time these defendants were in custody on the night of the crime, other persons similar in appearance to the defendants were threatening a racial attack like the one suffered by the black pedestrian victim in this case. We hope to have all charges dropped and these men home with their families well before Christmas.

## Lamonte McIntyre's case is a tale of two Friday afternoons

It begins on a Friday in April, 1994, when 17-year-old Lamonte, a high school student in Kansas City, Kansas, learned that the police had come by his grandmother's house that afternoon looking for him. Lamonte had no idea why the police wanted to talk to him, so his mother, Rosie, drove him to the police station to resolve whatever it was. They figured he'd be at the station for 15 minutes. **Fifteen minutes turned into 23 years.** Due to severe police and prosecutorial misconduct and ineptitude, Lamonte was convicted of a double homicide based on two photo-array identifications of him, one that was recanted years ago by a witness who said she was threatened by police and the other by a witness who told police that she saw a different man named Lamonte commit the crime. Centurion began fighting for Lamonte's freedom in 2009. On a Friday afternoon in October 2017 (a Friday the 13th, no less), Lamonte's ordeal finally came to an end when the Wyandotte County district attorney, on the second day of an evidentiary hearing that was expected to last 10 days, agreed to dismiss the case, exonerating him completely and setting up a long-awaited reunion with his mother.



Rosie likes to say **it took 23 years and 15 minutes for her son to come home.** He's now 41. That's longer than any mother should have to wait.

A black and white portrait of a man with a beard and short hair, looking slightly to the right. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with some lights.

Ralph Lee

His

Journey

Home

to be continued...

**The arrest,** prosecution and conviction of Ralph Lee is disturbing because it contains so many of the elements that lead to innocent people being imprisoned for years: false confession, misidentification, suppression of exculpatory evidence and incompetent lawyering. His case also reminds us of the importance of independent judges who listen and act based on facts and the law.

Ralph and his co-defendant, Eric Kelley, were convicted of stabbing a store clerk to death in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1993 during the commission of a robbery. The Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, which brought the case against them, is the same office that prosecuted one of the most notorious wrongful conviction cases of our times, the Rubin "Hurricane" Carter and John Artis case.

Because Ralph Lee's case is based primarily on the discovery of DNA evidence on a hat left at the crime scene by the perpetrator, it is different from most of Centurion's cases, which routinely are non-DNA cases. This DNA discovery led to a reexamination of the evidence used by the prosecution. The subsequent review uncovered significant additional evidence of the men's innocence.

At the time of the incident, Ralph Lee was a 28-year-old father of a young son, Quron, and had no criminal record. At his 1996 trial, it was alleged he was the man wearing a distinctive green plaid baseball cap who a female customer saw just before the robbery. The police found the hat lying in a non-public area of the store, within three feet of the victim's body. Clearly the man wearing the green plaid hat that the woman saw, and misidentified as being Mr. Lee from a photo array, was involved in the murder.

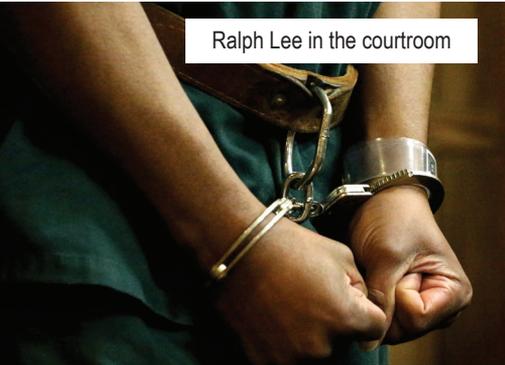
Two days after the incident, Mr. Lee and Mr. Kelley were picked up by the police and brought in for questioning based on a conversation a woman claimed she'd overheard in a laundromat and an anonymous informant's statement, which said Lee and Kelley were seen in the vicinity of the store shortly before the crime occurred. In fact, Ralph Lee lived down the block from the store.

At police headquarters, the detectives were able to get the two men to sign nearly identical confessions, containing only information the police already knew and/or information which could not corroborated, which are two classic signs of a false confession. The green plaid baseball hat was subjected to DNA testing in late 2014 and the results showed that the hat contained the complete DNA profile of a man who had been released from prison two months before the murder of the store clerk after serving time for a similar knife-point robbery in Paterson, New Jersey. Based on this new DNA evidence, Centurion, representing Mr. Lee, and the Innocence Project, representing Mr. Kelley, filed motions for a new trial.

A little over a year later, in late 2016, a state court judge conducted a ten-day evidentiary hearing, during which a DNA expert testified that the DNA on the hat not only matched that of the man who committed the knife-point robbery and had just been released from prison, but that none of Mr. Lee's or Mr. Kelley's DNA was present on the hat. Based on the newly discovered DNA evidence, a crime scene expert was brought in. His analysis revealed that the crime could never have happened as stated in the confessions. In addition, the defendants' team produced a witness who had walked in on the robbery and quickly left, whose observations the police suppressed. He testified that he told the police that the perpetrator was neither Mr. Lee nor Mr. Kelley.

On September 15, 2017, the court vacated Mr. Lee's and Mr. Kelley's convictions and ordered new trials. The court set bail and the prosecution appealed the bail all the way to the Supreme Court of New Jersey, losing each step of the way. Finally, on November 8, 2017, the two men were freed after 24-years in prison. Despite the overwhelming evidence that Mr. Lee and Mr. Kelley are actually innocent, the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office persists in prosecuting them while refusing to reinvestigate the case. Evidently, they would rather let the real murderer continue to walk free than admit that they convicted two innocent men.

Ralph Lee is now living with his son Quron, his daughter-in-law Denean and his two granddaughters, Myouri and Kayson, while Centurion continues the fight the State in its appeal of the new trial order.



Ralph Lee in the courtroom



Centurion Legal Director, Paul Casteleiro in court with Lee



Ralph Lee's son, Quron



Centurion Legal Director, Paul Casteleiro, with Ralph Lee, his co-defendant, Eric Kelly, and Inccence Project Attorney, Vanessa Potkin



## Food for Freedom

Imagine having no choice about the food you eat. Chefs from NY and NJ joined with Centurion to raise awareness and funds to help free the innocent. Look for more Food for Freedom events in 2018. If you are interested in hosting an event, please contact [diane@centurion.org](mailto:diane@centurion.org) for details.

## Break Bread for Justice



## An Autumn Auction & Dinner at Bedens Brook

honoring the memory of Bill Sword Jr.

**raised over \$190,000!!**

# Why I give



Because it has been proven to me time and again that the wrongly convicted incarcerated people who Centurion has been able to free are fine, humble, grateful and lovely human beings. They are you and me on our best day. They appreciate every moment of freedom they have to live, they treasure their families and loyal friends, and know but for the grace of God go you and I. Every single one of them, to a man and woman, is miraculously not bitter nor vengeful. They have become a part of the Centurion family not only because their innocence has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, but because they are exemplary ambassadors outside of prison walls; they represent the human goodness we all aspire to embody.

These are real live, thoughtful, life-affirming people who deserve the chance to experience each day just like you and I do - taking the good with the bad, but grateful for the chance, every morning. *Martha Sword*

# .....CASE UPDATES.....

**Larry Walker** In the coming weeks, Centurion will ask the Philadelphia district attorney's office to review Larry Walker's 1983 murder conviction. Philadelphia voters recently elected a reform-minded district attorney who has pledged to expand his office's conviction review unit, which came under fire in a 2016 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article for not reinvestigating Larry's case. Larry was 22 years old when he was convicted of murdering his close friend. No physical evidence linked him to the crime and the main eyewitness expressed uncertainty about his identification. In addition, police failed to follow up with another witness who claimed she knew the actual killer. Larry was convicted and sentenced to life in prison without the chance of parole.

**Dwayne LeBlanc** The Louisiana Supreme Court is expected to rule soon on Dwayne LeBlanc's petition for post-conviction relief. At the time of the 1994 New Orleans murder for which he was convicted, Dwayne was 2,000 miles away in Long Beach, California. A school attendance record from a California trade school proves his alibi. The likely perpetrator of the crime is a New Orleans man who lived near the crime scene and had a strong physical resemblance to Dwayne.

**Shawn Henning** Centurion client Shawn Henning and his co-defendant Ricky Birch continue their long struggle against their unjust convictions. Both of them have been wrongfully incarcerated for 29 years for a murder. The injustice of their incarceration has drawn press attention, and several articles about them should be appearing soon. Despite uncontroverted proof that the bloody footprint left by the assailant at the crime scene is much, much smaller than either of their feet, and thus they could not have been its source; and despite the evidence that someone else's DNA is mixed with that of the victim on the murder weapon and 3 other items intimately associated with the homicidal attack; and despite other exculpatory forensic evidence and the utter absence of any inculpatory evidence, the State stubbornly presses on. Appellate arguments should take place in early spring next year. We are guardedly optimistic.

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## **Waiting for David Bryant to Come Home... Again.**

In August, 2017, Centurion won a critical victory for David Bryant in Federal Court. Judge Robert Sweet of the Southern District of New York issued a 60-page ruling granting a federal habeas writ and ordered a new trial for David. The Judge found that the serological evidence at the crime scene, which excluded David as the perpetrator, was sufficient proof of David's actual innocence for the court to consider his petition for habeas relief. The court went on to find that David was deprived of his right to effective assistance of counsel, as his counsel failed to test for and present this exculpatory serological evidence at his original criminal trial. David's journey through the court system has been particularly agonizing and heartbreaking. In 2013, after serving 38 years for a murder he did not commit, the Supreme Court of Bronx County freed David, vacated his conviction and ordered a new trial finding that his trial counsel had been ineffective.

David was free and living a productive life when the New York Appellate Division reversed the Bronx County Judge's order, requiring David to turn himself in and go back to prison. He has been imprisoned ever since. Thankfully, the Federal Court recognized the significance of the serological evidence and the obvious failures of David's trial attorney and ordered that he be released or retried. The Bronx District Attorney says it will retry David and is appealing the Judge's retrial order. We hope to be able to bring David home soon.



# YOUR DONATION BRINGS JUSTICE

Together we are making the wrongs right

## 2017 VICTORIES

SO FAR...



Michael Shannon..... FREED  
Lamonte McIntyre..... FREED  
David Bryant..... ordered free  
Ralph Lee..... FREED  
Billy Ray Davis..... FREED  
Mark Jones..... new trial won  
Dominic Lucci..... new trial won  
Kenneth Gardiner..... new trial won

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