picture of what happened in the wrongful execution cases of two men she believes were truly innocent — Dobie Gillis Williams and Joseph Roger O’Dell.

Williams lived in rural Louisiana, and he was accused of raping and murdering a woman in 1984. His court-appointed lawyer neither investigated the prosecution’s contrived crime scenario prior to his trial, nor challenged it during his trial. Williams was executed in 1997. Less than two years later the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to execute a man with Williams’ IQ of 65.

O’Dell was convicted in 1986 of rape and murder in Virginia, based largely on the testimony of a jailhouse informant. For more then ten years, O’Dell unsuccessfully sought court ordered DNA testing of crime scene evidence that might have proven his innocence. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun disagreed with the Court’s decision not to review his case, because he found “serious questions as to whether O’Dell committed the crime” and warned of “the gross injustice that would result if an innocent man were sentenced to death.” O’Dell was executed in 1997. Virginia destroyed the evidence in 2000, so the truth will never be known.

Prejean legitimizes the voices of the accused by the seemingly sheer act of taking the time to ask questions and listen to the accused, Prejean brings attention to key pieces of evidence that might have been ignored, disregarded, or not included by those at every stage of the judicial process. Sadly, as Prejean shows, these cases exemplify the many faults in the court systems across the United States.

Prejean writes in the preface, “I used to think that America had the best court system in the world. But now I know differently.” Through-out the book, this revelation is illustrated. “When I first started visiting the condemned in 1982, I presumed the guilt of everyone on death row. I thought that an innocent person on death row would be a pure anomaly, a fluke. Not with all the extensive court reviews and appeals. Now, after working intimately with so many of the condemned and their attorneys, I know a lot better how the criminal justice system operates and how innocent people can end up on death row.” (p. 9).

Fifteen years later, O’Dell continued from p. 26
accused — including the loss of his thriving business. He said, “Sally (his wife) and I are very disappointed with the judgement.” 8 His daughter Sabrina wasn’t as restrained in her comments. In a radio interview days after the award was announced, she said, “I am completely outraged, and I do take it as a personal insult.” 9 She said that her father’s experience in fighting the charges against him prior to his trial, his conviction and imprisonment, his quest to clear his name, and then his fight for compensation — all of which lasted for 12 years — has permanently altered his personality, “He is a different person now. He is completely obsessed with this case because he was so wronged, and he continues to be wronged and he was wronged again on October 12th.” 10

Endnotes;
1 Shocking Short Story, by Barry O’Kelly, GET SOURCE, August 11, 2002.
3 id.
4 Shocking Short Story, by Barry O’Kelly, GET SOURCE, August 11, 2002.
5 id.
6 That is the dollar amount, since Ireland uses the Euro. The actual award was €1,923,871 (Euros). Based on an exchange rate of 1.1853 Euros per Dollar on December 23, 2005.
7 That is the dollar amount, since Ireland uses the Euro. The actual award amounts were €806,221 for losses related to Point Inn plus €550,000 in lost profits. It also included an award of $500,000 under the Criminal Procedure Act, exemplary damages of £500,000, and costs of €175,000. See, Shortt Awarded $1.93m for wrongful conviction, Irish Corruption website, October 13, 2005.
8 Nightclub owner disappointed at €1.9m payout, Irish News, October 12, 2005.
9 Daughter of Frank Shortt ‘Outraged,’ supra.
10 Id.