

Wrongful Conviction Hall of Honor

Wrongful convictions are not a recent phenomena. They have occurred during the thousands of years since people first began organizing a tribunal of some sort to determine whether a person would be judged guilty of committing an act that was deemed to be criminal. However, the near instantaneous communication techniques available today may make it seem to the uninitiated that their prevalence is unique to our age.

The correction of a wrongful conviction, publicizing their occurrence, and analyzing their causes or prevention only occurs because of the efforts of interested persons. There have been many such people through the years, and *Justice:Denied* is inaugurating a Wrongful Conviction Hall of Honor to publicly recognize the contribution these people have made in one form or another, to rectifying, alleviating, or publicizing wrongful convictions.

The initial eight honorees are a diverse group. Two are from England, one is from France, one is from Germany, and four are from the United States. They include two authors, a law professor, an actor, a movie director, a seminary graduate, and two lawyers. Six are deceased. What they share is a personal significance when looking at wrongful convictions from a historical perspective. These eight are far from being the only people deserving of recognition. Their accomplishments, however, sets a standard to evaluate future selections. In the order of their birth, the eight honorees are:

- Voltaire. 1694-1778. Father of the innocence campaign and compensation after exoneration. (See p. 29)
- Max Hirschberg. 1883-1964. A wrongful conviction lawyer, and the author of many articles and a 1960 book about wrongful convictions. (See p. 27)
- Edwin Borchard. 1884-1951. Pioneer advocate of wrongful conviction compensation in the U.S., and the author of a 1932 wrongful conviction book. (See p. 24)
- Erle Stanley Gardner. 1889-1970. Founder of the world's first innocence project and publicist of wrongful prosecutions in books, and on radio and television. (See p. 23)
- Alfred Hitchcock. 1899-1980. Director of many movies portraying the plight of a wrongly accused person. (See p. 24)
- David Janssen. 1931-1980. Portrayed Dr. Richard Kimble's four-year search for evidence to exonerate himself of murder as millions watched *The Fugitive* weekly. (See p. 25)
- Gareth Peirce. Living. Wrongful conviction lawyer whose many successes inspired creation of England's Criminal Case Review Commission. (See p. 21)
- James McCloskey. Living. Founder and director of Centurion Ministries, the United States' oldest innocence project. (See p. 20)

Following this introduction are articles about each of the eight honorees.

The search for difficult truths has defined James (Jim) McCloskey's life, the founder of Centurion Ministries, the oldest innocence project in the country.

James McCloskey – Founder Of The Oldest Innocence Project In The U.S.



By Elizabeth Perry

Centurion Ministries is a secular organization that has freed 40 people convicted of crimes they did not commit through exoneration or early parole by exhaustively re-examining their cases and finding new evidence.

McCloskey left a successful career in international business after feeling compelled by God to join the ministry. His life changed again when he met an innocent man in prison and couldn't walk away.

"The Jim McCloskey the world knows now is not the Jim McCloskey his friends knew. They were shocked when he decided to do this," said Kate Hill Germond, Assistant Director of Centurion Ministries.

She marvels at McCloskey's decision, knowing it didn't come easily.

"For me, I've always done this but for Jim, he hasn't—but then his heart changed." says Germond.

Jim McCloskey grew up in suburban Philadelphia and graduated from Bucknell University in 1964. McCloskey was awarded the Bronze Star for courage under

fire as a naval officer in Vietnam, though he declined to discuss the circumstances, saying he did "nothing really heroic."

McCloskey excelled in the business world, working as an executive in Tokyo and Philadelphia. Despite his outward success, McCloskey struggled inwardly.

"I didn't share my decision to leave the business world with anyone. It took two years to come to the decision and the only person I consulted with was my minister," he says.

McCloskey entered Princeton Theological Seminary in 1979, and in 1980 was assigned to chaplain Trenton State Prison where he met Jorge De Los Santos.

McCloskey became convinced De Los Santos was innocent. He delayed his studies for a year to prove it. When he told his parents "they thought all kinds of dark thoughts but eventually came to support me."

"He had to right a wrong, and that became his life's work," says Germond.

Through McCloskey's efforts, De Los Santos was freed in 1983. After McCloskey earned his degree, several things coalesced, causing him to incorporate Centurion Ministries that same year.

De Los Santos introduced him to two other New Jersey inmates he believed were innocent. His parents gifted him \$10,000 which could be used as "seed money." Then McCloskey had a dream he came to see as a spiritual message.

"I had a dream I was in Vietnam in the Mekong Delta," says McCloskey. He describes standing on a riverbank and a boat loaded with Vietnamese villagers sank before him. Just as he was mourning their fate, a helicopter full of green berets appeared in the sky. They dove into the churning water and saved the Vietnamese.

McCloskey decided, "I am going to come to the prisons and bring them out."

Centurion Ministries is named after the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of Christ's cross and said, "Surely, this one is innocent."

For the first seven years of the project, McCloskey's worked and lived rent free in

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