

Schappelle Corby's long-awaited autobiography, *My Story*, was published amidst much fanfare. From the time of Schappelle's arrest in 2004 for allegedly smuggling marijuana into the Indonesian island of Bali, her tragic plight has captured the hearts of

Australians. Interest in Schappelle is so intense that *My Story's* sales of more than 100,000 copies makes it a runaway bestseller in a country of only 20 million people.

For those unfamiliar with Schappelle's story, after arriving in October 2004 for a family vacation on the Indonesian island of Bali, a custom officer at Denpasar airport found 4.1 kilograms of marijuana in her boogie board bag. When questioned by Indonesian officials, the 27-year-old Schappelle adamantly denied knowing anything about the marijuana or how it got in her bag. (She did not handle her bag after she arrived in Sydney to transfer planes to Bali.)

Schappelle was charged with drug smuggling, which in Indonesia carries a maximum sentence of death by firing squad.

Schappelle's trial that began in January 2005 was a major media spectacle. The idea that a beautiful, vivacious young woman bound for a fun-filled holiday in Bali could be wrongly prosecuted for a capital drug crime captivated the imagination of Australians. Her Bali trial was at least as big of an event in Australia as O.J. Simpson's trial was in the United States, with one major exception: polls showed that more than 90% of Australians believed in her innocence.

The prosecution's primary evidence was the testimony of a customs officer that Schappelle was reluctant to open the boogie board bag when asked, and that she admitted the marijuana found inside was hers. Schappelle's defense counsel brought forward evidence that directly contradicted the agent's assertions, including eyewitness testimony that she opened

My Story

By Schappelle Corby
with Kathryn Bonella

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Review by Serena Nicholls

the bag without hesitation and was shocked when she saw the marijuana. Defense witnesses also testified that Schappelle was a victim of a drug smuggling network operating in Australian airports.

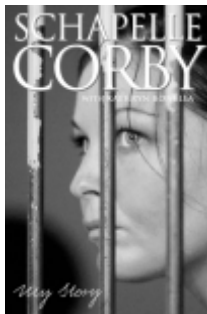
On May 27, 2005, millions of Australians breathlessly watched the verdict announced live on national television. The Indonesian court found Schappelle guilty and sentenced her to twenty years imprisonment. Schappelle filed many appeals against her conviction and sentence, but ultimately all were for naught.

Even though the judgment and sentence sparked enormous sympathy for Schappelle, this book is the first time she has revealed, in her own words, the unheard evidence that proves her innocence. She also gives the readers an in-depth, never before disclosed account of the investigation and questioning that led to her arrest.

My Story is also a gut-wrenching account of the daily hell of living inside Bali's notorious Kerobokan prison. She describes Kerobokan as cramped and vermin infested, with raw sewerage often flooding the floor on which the female prisoners sleep among the rats.

The prison is riddled with sickness and diseases. It is difficult for people familiar with prison conditions in a western country such as Australia or the United States, to grasp the barbaric conditions in a third-world prison. Schappelle is effective in emotionally connecting the reader to the inhumane environment that is known to weaken a once healthy prisoner to the point that they can die after 10 to 15 years imprisonment.

My Story also describes the great gender divide in the prison, with



women living like 'caged animals' as they are locked up for longer hours than male prisoners.¹

Schappelle also has to fight against the intense corruption of the prison guards and police officers. She reveals a situation that occurred when she was initially jailed: The Bali police put a stash of drugs in the visitation room in the hope of later "discovering" them in her possession. This was aimed at gaining secondary evidence that she was involved in drugs and thus guilty of the crime that she had been charged with.

My Story notes the injustices that are prevalent throughout Indonesia's criminal justice system. In particular, Schappelle relates that she has shared a cell with many inmates that were found guilty of gruesome slayings, but were sentenced to less than six years. Similarly, many prisoners convicted of trafficking drugs, such as 5.2 kilograms of cocaine, received less than half of her twenty-year term. These inconsistencies in sentencing led Schappelle to argue: "I have to accept that I'm here; accept that this is my life, at least for now. But I will not accept my sentence – I don't know why I call it 'my sentence'. It's not mine. I will never accept twenty years. ... I will fight. My family will fight."²

Schappelle blames the Bali Nine for the severity of her prison sentence. She states: "I hated the Bali Nine. I felt sure their crime of trafficking heroin a month before my verdict had contributed to me getting twenty years."⁴

Schappelle is not only extremely critical of Indonesia's judicial system, but also of her legal defense team. She argues that they were incompetent and largely responsible for her inability to raise an effective defense. These allegations have received backlash from her lawyers, even to the degree that they have threatened Schappelle with litigation.⁵

Although a great deal of *My Story* revolves around the awful conditions of an Indonesian prison, Schappelle acknowledges that it is worse being innocent and serving a long sentence for another person's crime: "Perhaps the very, very worst thing about all this is that I didn't do it. I have to live this life knowing that I'm innocent, that I don't deserve to be here for one night, one hour or minute – let alone twenty years. I'm being punished for someone else's crime."⁶

Her youth adds to the emotional battle she faces. She writes: "I also thought about being locked up for years, losing my youth and growing old in prison, never having a normal life, never having a baby, never getting married."³

Overall, *My Story* successfully portrays Schappelle's situation in such a way that the reader can feel her anguish and desperation for freedom. It is a fascinating depiction of a young woman's struggle to prove her innocence while trapped within the quicksand of Indonesia's legal system. It also provides a harrowing day-by-day account of the adversities faced by a female foreigner in a primitive third-world prison.

Schappelle defiantly concludes *My Story* with the words "I sound like a broken record but I will keep saying it: I'm innocent, I'm innocent, I'm innocent."⁷

Schappelle's remarkable story is one that will be remembered by the reader for years.

About the reviewer: Serena Nicholls lives in Queensland, Australia. She has completed a Bachelor of Laws, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice, and a Masters of Laws. She is completing her Doctor of Philosophy in the field of wrongful conviction.

Endnotes:

- 1 Corby, Schappelle & Bonella, Kathryn (2006), *My Story*, Pan Macmillan Australia, p3.
- 2 *Id.*, at 297.
- 3 *Id.*, at 124.
- 4 *Id.*, at 249.
- 5 John Stewart & Renata Gombac, 'Legal Assistant Challenges Corby Biography', June 12, 2006, *The 7:30 Report*, ABC.
- 6 Corby, *supra*, at 6.
- 7 *Id.*, at 301.