

First Ever Women And Innocence Conference Was Huge Success

By Karen Daniel

In April 2010, five women who were wrongfully convicted and later exonerated met at a national innocence conference, where they were vastly outnumbered by the male exonerees in attendance. These women formed a network of female exonerees, who decided that the special issues facing innocent women caught up in the criminal justice system merited a conference of their own.

That vision became a reality on the weekend of November 5-7, 2010, at the inaugural Women and Innocence Conference, held in Troy, MI. The conference was a huge success with close to 100 attendees, including exonerees, academics, authors, attorneys, investigators, students, supporters of not-yet-exonerated women prisoners, and other interested observers. The organizations rep-

resented included Michigan State University, Northwestern University School of Law's Center on Wrongful Convictions, Proving Innocence, the Cardozo School of Law's Innocence Project, the University of Illinois Downstate Innocence Project, the Thomas M. Cooley School of Law's Innocence Project, the University of Texas at Arlington Exoneree Project, and others. Sponsors included Richard Bernstein, Ann Mervene, the Art Loft, and Kate Spade. The Somersett Inn of Troy did a fabulous job hosting the event and the Somersett Mall made all of the guests feel welcome.

Women fighting wrongful convictions face special challenges. Wrongfully convicted women were often accused of causing harm to people close to them, meaning they had to deal with deep personal loss along with the criminal charges. Women are viewed as



Stephanie Horten, Judith Royal, Julie Harper, Karen Daniel (left to right). Julie Harper was exonerated of murder in 2006, the others are with Northwestern University.

society's caregivers, so women charged with heinous crimes are particularly reviled. There is typically no DNA evidence in cases with female defendants, making their convictions harder to fight. Sometimes there was not even a crime at all; for instance, a natural or accidental death might be mistaken for shaken baby syndrome or arson.

These types of shared concerns and experiences will form the basis for the Women and Innocence Conference.

The conference attendees agreed to work together going forward; possible future projects include a book about wrongfully convicted women, a permanent Women and Innocence organization, and further conferences.

For information about the 2011 conference contact Julie Harper: juliereaharper@sbcglobal.net

Lindy and Michael Chamberlain Still Seeking Justice 30 Years After A Dingo Killed Their Daughter

Lindy Chamberlain's murder trial in 1982 for the 1980 disappearance of her daughter was a media sensation and one of the most heavily covered trials in Australian history. While camping near world famous Ayers Rock in August 1980, 9-week-old Azaria Chamberlain was alone sleeping in the family's tent when she disappeared. A dingo had been seen in the area and Azaria was heard briefly crying before she vanished. An intensive search didn't find her body.

In 1982 Lindy was tried for murdering Azaria and her husband Michael was tried as an accessory after the fact. She was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Michael was convicted and given an 18 month suspended sentence.

In 1986 a piece of clothing was found near the campsite that Lindy had insisted Azaria was wearing when she disappeared, and which the prosecution had argued at trial she wasn't wearing. Five days after discovery of the new



Lindy and Azaria Chamberlain on Ayers Rock hours before she disappeared. (Chamberlain family photo)

evidence Lindy was conditionally released after four years imprisonment.

In 1988 a Royal Commission concluded after investigating the case that the convictions of Lindy and Michael Chamberlain were "unsafe." Based on that investigation the Northern Territories Court of Appeal quashed the Chamberlain's convictions in 1988. Lindy was subsequently awarded compensation of AU\$1.3 million for her four years of wrongful imprisonment.

The Chamberlains were divorced in 1991 after 22 years of marriage.

Although Lindy and Michael had been cleared of any involvement in their daughter's death, in 1995 the third inquest into the case resulted in an "open verdict" about the cause of Azaria's death. So her death certificate lists her cause of death as "unknown." Azaria's body has never been found.

Now 30 years after Azaria's death, Lindy and Michael are seeking a fourth inquest based on significant new evidence that a dingo has not only made many attacks on people, but they have killed at least two people much larger than 9-week-old Azaria. They want Azaria's death certificate amended to the cause of her death was a dingo.

Meryl Streep starred in the 1988 movie — *A Cry In the Dark* — about the Chamberlain's case. Ms. Streep was nominated for the Best Actress Academy Award. The movie swept all the top awards in Australia, including Best Actress, Best Actor for Sam Neill as Michael Chamberlain, Best Movie, Best Director, and Best Screenplay.

Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton's website has extensive information about her case, www.lindychamberlain.com

Source:

"Fourth Azaria inquest 'will set record straight'," *Australian Broadcasting Corp.*, November 8, 2010.

Compensation Bill Filed in Washington State

A compensation bill was filed in the Washington State legislature in January 2011 that provides compensation of \$50,000 per year for a person wrongly convicted of a non-capital crime and \$100,000 per year for a person convicted of a capital crime. The bill provides for \$25,000 for each year spent on parole, community custody, or as a registered sex offender. The bill also includes education-tuition waivers, and health and dental assistance. Because of budget cuts the bill would not take effect until 2014.

Source: House Bill 1435, 62nd Washington Legislature, 2011 Regular Session