

Lime: 13th November 2007

*Amicus Assisting Lawyers
for Justice on Death Row*



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Anthony Cardew
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Sister Helen Prejean

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Joanne Cross
Shirley Drummond-Coles
Sunny Jacobs
Carole Murray
Jane Officer
Peter Pringle
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The patrons and committee thank:

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**The patrons and committee request
the pleasure of your company at Lime:**

Date: Tuesday 13th November 2007

Time: 7.30pm

Venue: The Dorchester, London W1

Dress code: Black tie

Programme:

7.30pm: Champagne reception

8.15pm: Dinner

Over coffee: Sister Helen Prejean
(author of 'Dead Man Walking'
and 'The Death of Innocents')

After dinner: Auction

Followed by: Dancing

1.00am: Carriages

RSVP: Enclosed form
admin@amicus-alj.org

www.amicus-lime.com

Sunny Jacobs

“When I went in I was a mother of two young children, and a daughter and a wife. When I came out I was a widow, and an orphan and a grandmother.”

In 1976, Sonia ‘Sunny’ Jacobs and her partner Jessie Tafero were wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death for the shooting of two police officers in Florida.

In spite of the jury’s recommendation that Jacobs receive a life sentence, the judge in her case, M. Daniel Futch – also known as ‘Maximum Dan’ who kept a miniature electric chair on his desk – imposed a death sentence. Jacobs spent five years on death row before the judge’s decision was overturned, and her sentence changed to life. It would take a further 12 years for her to be released from prison.

The actual killer Walter Rhodes was a friend of Tafero’s and an ex-con. He received three life sentences in exchange for false testimony against Tafero and Jacobs. Evidence that Rhodes failed a polygraph test, as well as a statement from a prison guard stating that Rhodes had bragged about committing the murders himself, was suppressed by the prosecution.

Jacobs’ trial rested on the testimony of Rhodes and a jailhouse informant, Brenda Isham, who claimed that Jacobs had confessed to the crime. Isham was a young college student charged with possession of pills without a prescription. She was threatened with jail time by the district attorney if she did not testify. Many years later Isham would again take the stand, this time for Jacobs, and retract her former statement. Isham was still so terrified of the district attorney that she had a heart attack on the witness stand.

Following Jacobs and Tafero’s convictions, Walter Rhodes confessed several times to the shootings, admitting that he was solely responsible. However, on 4 May 1990, in spite of the evidence of his innocence, Tafero was put to death in Florida. It was one of America’s most notorious botched executions. The electric chair malfunctioned sending flames through Tafero’s head and smoke out of his ears. It took three attempts at pulling the switch and 13 1/2 minutes for Tafero to die.

It took 17 years for Sunny Jacobs to be released from prison. She now lives in Ireland with her partner Peter Pringle. Pringle was also wrongly convicted of killing a police officer. He was exonerated in 1995. Their stories are featured in the award winning play ‘The Exonerated’.

Today

Sadly the problems surrounding suppression of evidence, false testimony and unreliable witnesses encountered by some people facing the death penalty still appear to exist.

In the case of Kenny Richey (a British man sentenced to death in Ohio) the prosecutor said:

“Even though the new evidence may establish Mr Richey’s innocence, the Ohio and United States constitutions nevertheless allow him to be executed because the prosecution did not know that the scientific testimony offered at trial was false and unreliable.”

In August 2007, Mr Richey finally received news that he is to be granted a retrial following an appeal court ruling in January 2005 that his original conviction was unsafe.