NEWSLETTER OF THE DOWNSTATE ILLINOIS INNOCENCE PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD/INSTITUTE FOR LEGAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND POLICY STUDIES

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Diane Fanning, Author of *Through the Window*, Speaks at UIS

With no physical evidence to back up the state's prosecution, Julie Rea-Harper was convicted in 2002 of killing her own child and sentenced to 65 years in prison. She languishes in prison now even though a serial killer, Tommy Lynn Sells, has confessed to the murder.

Diane Fanning, author of *Through the Window: The Terrifying True Story of Cross-Country Killer Tommy Lynn Sells*, discovered the truth when Sells confessed to her that he, not Rea, had committed the murder. Sells confession is recounted in the book.

Fanning discusses Sells and the Rea-Harper case on Thursday, October 23rd in the Public Affairs Center Restaurant at the University of Illinois at Springfield. The program begins at 6:45 p.m. and is preceded by a cocktail reception at 5:30 p.m. Both events are free and open to the public.

Diane Fanning 's book disclosed that Sells killed Joel Kirkpatrick — not Julie Rae-Harper

Fanning has also published one suspense novel, *the Windwalkers*, and she is co-editor of Red Boots & Attitude, a diverse collection of fiction, non-fiction and poetry by thirty-four Texas women writers. Two of her own short stories are included in the book.

In her next book, *Into the Water*, which is about to be released, she writes about the murders of sisters Kati and Kristin Lisk and Sofia Silva in Virginia, and the serial killer who is responsible Richard Marc Evonitz.

Julie Rea-Harper's Case Heard by the Illinois Prisoner Review Board

Julie Rea-Harper, a Lawrenceville women convicted of the 1997 slaying of her 10-year old son, Joel, filed a petition with the Prison Review Board, asking for executive clemency.

In her petition, Rea-Harper cites dramatic new evidence uncovered by the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project that ties convicted killer Tommy Lynn Sells to Joel's murder. The petition urges Governor Rod Blagojevich to grant a full pardon based on her actual innocence of the crime.

The petition is supported by an affidavit from Innocence Project investigator, Bill Clutter, disclosing evidence that corroborates Sells' confession. The hearing before the Prisoner Review Board occurs on Friday, October 24th in Chicago.

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Currently, the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project conducts research and investigative activities in cases where there is a strong likelihood that an inmate is actually innocent. The Project involves students who are taking a class on actual innocence as a part of their course of study at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

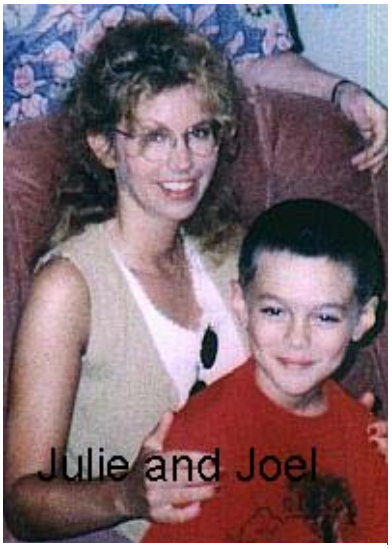
Private Contributions Sought to Support the Work of the Innocence Project

For the past two years, the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project has survived on small grants from a number of sources and small gifts from a few generous contributors.
With the expansion of the Project's work into the investigation of cases, like the Rea-Harper case, which require labor-intensive investigation resources, additional support is needed.
The project is seeking contributions in any amount. All contributions are tax-deductible.
Contributions in support of the Innocence Project can be sent to:

Innocence Project (5M5ZV),
University of Illinois Foundation
P.O. Box 3429
Champaign, IL 61826-9916.

If your company will match your gift, please indicate and provide the name of your company.

Innocence Project Works on the Julie Rea-Harper Case



Earlier this year, the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project began providing investigative assistance to the attorney and family of Julie Rea Harper. Working under the direction of Bill Clutter, director of investigations, students, former students and volunteers have been talking to witnesses and following other leads.

In March 2002, a Lawrence County jury found Rea-Harper, 34, guilty of first-degree murder, dismissing her claim that an unknown, masked intruder stabbed her son to death as he lay sleeping. She was sentenced to 65 years in prison.

Two months later, Sells admitted killing Joel to Texas author Diane Fanning, who was writing a book about his murder of 13-year old Kaylene Harris in 1999.

The Innocence Project recently uncovered supporting evidence, including eyewitness accounts of a man matching Sells' description in Lawrenceville at the time of the murder.

Sells, on Texas Death Row for the Harris slaying, has confessed to more than 50 murders in 12 states over a 17-year period. Investigators with the Texas Rangers have conclusively corroborated 14 of these murders, including the killing of four members of a family in Ina, Illinois in 1987.

Tipped off in March 2002 about Sell's possible connection to Joel's, police murder failed to pursue that and other possible leads.

The result was a terrible miscarriage of justice. Mark Harper, Julie's husband and a law student at Northern Illinois University, said,. "Here you have my wife who was convicted of a crime with virtually no evidence, and you have a serial murderer who has admitted the crime, and how we have evidence that puts him at the scene of the of the crime. Isn't it time to rectify this injustice now?"

For more information on the case visit the website: www.justiceforjulieandjoel.org.