

Living Lord Book Club

June Book Review

by Brad Baker, Living Lord Book Club

On Tuesday June 1, we reviewed *The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town*, by John Grisham. This book is John Grisham's only nonfiction work to date. The setting was Ada, Okla., in the 1970s and 1980s. A cocktail waitress named Debra Carter was murdered. The story centered mostly on Ron Williamson, a terrific athlete who was drafted by the Oakland A's in 1971. He played in the minor leagues for several years, but could not advance. He came back to Ada. He partied a lot in his younger years, and when Debra Carter was murdered, the police, after years of frustration in searching for a killer, charged Ron and his friend Dennis Fritz.

The book covered all facets of the investigation. It became obvious to us, the readers, that the police were doing a bad job and were overlooking some glaring clues. In addition, the police fabricated evidence against Ron and Dennis. It was maddening to read how all this progressed. It appeared the police and prosecutors just wanted to get the case off their books and not necessarily charge the real killer. In the end, Ron Williamson and Dennis Fritz were convicted. Ron was sent to death row and Dennis to life in prison.

Some advocacy groups took up the cause of these two convicts. With a lot of work, they were able to convince a judge to stay the execution and eventually to order a new trial. As the new trial progressed, DNA testing had become a reality and Ron and Dennis did not match the DNA collected from the crime scene. The real killer was then identified by the same process and, when confronted, he confessed.

Ron Williamson and Dennis Fritz had spent 14 years in prison for a crime they did not commit. Ron had severe mental and physical problems resulting from a variety of medication that had been given to him for years while in prison, and from his early days of alcohol and drug abuse. He had aged a lot from this experience. The Book Club members who read this book were very upset at this miscarriage of justice. A couple of our members were so upset that they could not finish the book. What an eye-opener this book was about what can and does happen in America at times, when police and prosecutors abuse their power.

The Living Lord Book Club gave *The Innocent Man* an Enjoyment Index of 8 out of a possible 10. We really did not enjoy much of the story, but it was well-written and told the entire sequence of events in a logical, readable manner. Kudos to John Grisham for tackling this project. If you want to read a book that really makes you mad, this is it!

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