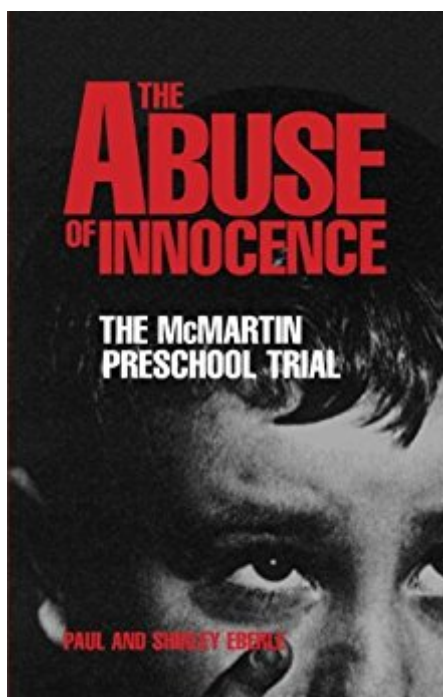


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The Abuse Of Innocence: The McMartin Preschool Trial



Synopsis

On August 12, 1983, Judy Johnson called the police and told them her two-year-old son had been sexually abused at Virginia McMartin's Preschool in Manhattan Beach, California. Mrs. Johnson accused a teacher, Raymond Buckey. After searching the school and the homes of the owners and teachers, police distributed a letter to parents of children attending the McMartin Preschool urging them to ask their children if they had witnessed any acts of sexual molestation by Buckey. The result was mass hysteria. Although the children denied being molested or witnessing any molestations, the D.A.'s office began sending them to a private clinic to be interviewed by "evaluators" and examined by pediatricians. Parents were then informed that every child who had attended the McMartin Preschool had been sexually abused, which led to charges being filed against Virginia McMartin, Peggy McMartin Buckey, Raymond and Peggy Ann Buckey and three other teachers at the school. During the hearings, children described how teachers had raped them, forced them to engage in satanic rituals, and slaughtered animals before their eyes. The ensuing trial triggered a nationwide epidemic of child sexual abuse cases with allegations of infants being raped by devil worshippers and of blood sacrifices. The McMartin trial itself clogged the courts for over seven years and cost taxpayers over sixteen million dollars. None of the allegations were true. Investigative journalists Paul and Shirley Eberle witnessed the McMartin Trial and uncovered stunning amounts of prosecutorial misconduct, all revealed in this disturbing book.

Book Information

File Size: 4798 KB

Print Length: 416 pages

Publisher: Prometheus Books (October 29, 2003)

Publication Date: April 30, 1993

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B002R5B8D4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #853,317 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #126

inÂ Books > Law > Rules & Procedures > Witnesses #977 inÂ Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Abuse > Child Abuse #1109 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Law > Criminal Law

Customer Reviews

With all the publicity surrounding the McMartin preschool trial, now over a decade removed, one would suppose that the definitive book on the subject-and this is certainly the definitive book, and a good one at that-would be a best seller, but it didn't happen. Why? Because the public wanted a villain, somebody to hate, and what they got were some innocent people wrongly accused. With that kind of result the public lost interest. The Jon Benet Ramsey case sold a lot better because the public had clear targets for its hate, John and Patsy Ramsey. Here, Ray Buckey was to be the designated fall guy with his creepy glasses and his nerdish style, but he wouldn't fall because he was clearly innocent of the sensational charges against him. So the public was stuck with no clear villain on whom to vent. The real villains, as graphically revealed in this book, were the press, the prosecutors and the social workers, especially Kee MacFarlane, who indoctrinated the children into describing perverted events that never took place. This was written from the trenches on a daily basis when the overwhelming tide of public opinion was that of a lynch mob desperate to hang Buckey and his family from the nearest tree. The Eberles built a strong case in blaming the media for poisoning the public's understanding of the case, partially through incompetent reporters, and partially through a media lust to sensationalize. Part of what's interesting about this book is how it presages the O.J. trial, especially in the incompetence seen in the district attorney's office. Ira Reiner was D.A. at the time with Garcetti as a critical underling. It is scandalous that they would find the need to use a paid felonious informant to bolster their case against Buckey.

The Eberles have shone a much-needed spotlight of analysis on one of the worst miscarriages of justice in U.S. history: the McMartin Preschool case. After a brief introductory section to tell of how the fiasco all began, they give a detailed, blow-by-blow accounting of the trial, often with lengthy, word-for-word quotes of the lawyers' questions and the witnesses' responses. This is a good journalistic technique if not overdone; I often used it in reporting on criminal trials during my 39 and one-half years as a daily newspaper reporter. The couple also illuminates the "child molester" witchhunt which has preoccupied this country for a number of years now. The battle cry, "We must protect the children!" which any sane adult obviously wants to do, has been used to justify some hideously extra-legal investigations, arrests, and prison sentences for palpably innocent people. The

Eberles tell us about this in some detail. The flaws in their book come in the areas of attribution and of sources. Over and over the authors tell of "a lawyer in the cafeteria" or "a heavyset woman" approaching them to comment on the trial, with no names or other hints as to identity. While this is sometimes necessary in reporting, excessive use of it as is done here makes the reader suspicious about the authors' fairness. At any rate, it made THIS reader suspicious. Several instances are recounted in which someone approaches outside the courtroom and says words to the effect, "You don't REALLY think they're innocent, do you?" Then one or the other of the Eberles proceeds to make the person look like an ignorant fool with a brilliant interrogation as to what they really know about the trial (nothing, in each case.) Once again, it's a little too pat, especially with no names to pin the quotes to.

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