

Advocating for those wrongly convicted

BY ELLEN NORMAN

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When Keokuk native and 1997 KHS graduate Lisa Spees was looking for a movie to watch while traveling on business, it was by happenstance she selected a documentary named "Navy SEAL: Murderer? Framed?" Target of Opportunity?" "My brother was a colonel in the Air Force," said Spees. "The film's title probably held interest for me because of him."

That was 2016. Spees didn't know then what a tremendous impact the documentary's story would have on her life.

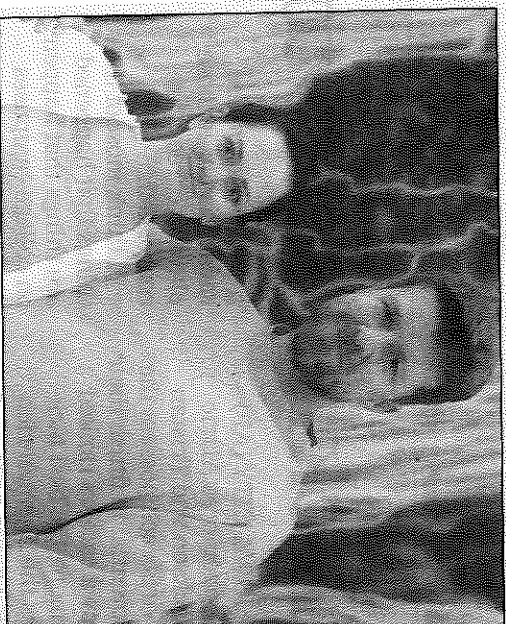
Spees said she has always been drawn to stories about wrongful convictions. When she learned of Dustin Turner's story, she said she couldn't get it out of her mind. She watched the film a second time, and then went to the internet to research everything she could find about the case.

Turner, the subject of the documentary "Navy SEAL: Murderer? Framed? Target of Opportunity?" was accused of first degree murder in 1995, just a few weeks from successfully completing his training to become a Navy SEAL. The victim was a 21 year-old co-ed, who was visiting Virginia Beach, Va., where Turner was stationed. Turner was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. In 2008, Billy Joe Brown, one of Turner's classmates, confessed to the murder. But Turner remains in prison.

Spees believes, as do many others, that Turner was wrongfully convicted and he should be released. Through social media, Spees contacted Turner's cousin who had been working on Turner's behalf for his release. Spees offered her support and Turner's cousin put her in contact with Turner.

"At first, I thought I would work on raising awareness of Turner's case on social media," said Spees. "I kept thinking

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COURTESY PHOTO

Keokuk native Lisa Spees is pictured with Dustin Turner on July 4 of this year. Turner is the subject of the documentary, "Navy SEAL: Murderer? Framed? Target of Opportunity?" which played at the Keokuk Public Library on Friday.

TURNER: still in prison

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what if this were my sister?"

It didn't take Spees much time before she was so incensed with Turner's case, she moved to Virginia.

Spees made contact with some high profile people she knew could be of assistance. One of those was Jason Flom, a NYC music executive who was a founding member of the Innocence Project which works to exonerate the wrongly convicted and make reforms to the criminal justice system to prevent future injustices.

"The governor of Virginia is the only one who can grant Turner clemency," said Spees.

Spees discovered a non-profit organization called "Virginians for Judicial Reform". Even though the group was established prior to Spees arriving in Virginia, they weren't very active. Spees made contact with the group, began working for them and in time, found herself the director of the group.

Since March of 2017, Spees has been working

with Flom on Turner's case as well as on a couple of other cases for which they believe there was a wrongful conviction.

Keokuk Public Library Director Emily Rohls was a classmate of Spees at KHS. After talking with Spees and learning of the Keokuk connection, Rohls decided to show the documentary "Navy SEAL: Murderer? Framed? Target of Opportunity?" at the Keokuk Public Library, which she did this past Friday evening.

There was a sizable group in the Round Room to view the film, and Spees was there to answer questions at the end.

Spees is visiting family while in Keokuk, and will return to Virginia later this week to continue her work on behalf of Turner.

According to the Innocence Project website, since its inception, the organization has led to the freeing of 358 wrongfully convicted people based on DNA, and the finding of 155 real perpetrators.