

# THE PRUNO FUND SPEAKERS BUREAU CONVERSATIONS SERIES PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

*5-Part Series Profiles 10 Exonerees, Experiences and Activism*

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While over 3,000 individuals have been exonerated of wrongful convictions since 1989, statistics by the National Registry of Exonerations indicate that between 2%-10% of those in currently in prison are innocent. Headlines in the papers on exonerees don't offer the opportunity to really see or understand the person behind that wrongful conviction—what they faced, how they kept their humanity, hope and faith intact while incarcerated--knowing that they were innocent. Nor do they speak to the exoneree's activism. [The Pruno Fund](https://prunofund.org), an organization that helps those who have been wrongfully convicted transition from life in prison

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Despite the harshness of prison and the unfairness of their incarceration, these are people who persevered and remain hopeful about the future. Our speakers are ideal in delivering such messages.”

*Nikki Pope*

Nikki D. Pope, Co-Founder. “Despite the harshness of prison and the unfairness of their incarceration, these are people who persevered against nearly insurmountable odds, who remain hopeful and upbeat about what lies ahead for them. Our speakers are ideal in delivering



**THE PRUNO FUND**  
**CONVERSATIONS**  
Monthly Series  
Wednesdays at 3pm ET/12pm PT

A monthly series hosted by award-winning author and WBEZ and NPR journalist, Natalie Moore

June 8th – Sabrina Butler Smith  
July 13th – Eugene Gilyard, Kristine Bunch, Ronnie Sandoval-Carmona  
August 10th – Obie Anthony and Zavion Johnson  
September 14th – Darrell Siggers, Virginia “Ginny” Lefever and George Toca  
October 12th – Fernando Bermudez

[prunofund.org](https://prunofund.org)

Conversations Series participants and air dates

such messages.”

The Conversations series features compelling interviews with the following individuals, who spent collectively 159 years imprisoned for crimes they did not commit or did not occur:

- June 8th - Sabrina Butler-Smith, the first woman to be exonerated from Death Row. 18-year-old Sabrina found her 9-month-old baby lifeless. She valiantly tried to resuscitate him. She was arrested for murder the very next day. She was innocent, yet convicted and spent over 6 years in prison, with almost three of them on death row.
- July 13 – At 17 years old, Eugene Gilyard was convicted of murder due to witness misidentification. He was in prison for 16 years. Misleading forensic evidence by the ATF put Kristine Bunch in prison for murder and arson for 17 years. Ronnie Carmona-Sandoval’s son, Arthur, was misidentified in a lineup for armed robbery because of a Lakers cap. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison.
- August 13th – Obie Anthony was arrested and convicted for murder and spent 17 years in prison when he was nowhere near the crime scene. Zavion Johnson was convicted of murdering his own child and spent 16 years in prison.
- September 14 - Darrell Siggers was convicted of murder and spent 34 years in prison. Virginia “Ginny” Lefever was convicted of murdering her husband and was imprisoned for 11 years. George Toca was only 17 when he was convicted of murder and spent 30 years in prison.
- October 12 - False accusations and mistaken identity are common threads when sending innocent people to prison. Fernando Bermudez is one such example and those accusations landed Fernando in prison for 10 years for a murder he did not commit.

Concludes The Pruno Fund Co-Founder, Courtney B. Lance, “The Pruno Fund Conversations is an extraordinary series. I found the extraordinary in the exonerees activism. They are resolute in their desire to change the criminal justice system. They have passed bills, lobbied for legislation and speak, regularly, with lawmakers to help those innocent women and men, still in prison right the wrongs that they’ve suffered for crimes they did not commit. I also find the extraordinary in their support of each other. There is a definite brother/sister hood that exists among the exoneree population that is considerate and supportive of the needs of the newly exonerated as they re-enter and navigate the unfamiliar world, and of those who are still struggling to prove their innocence. This series will illuminate the public’s perception of wrongful conviction, and the characters’ of these men and women. This series will shed a light on the fact that what has happened to them can happen to anyone, at any time.”

Early bird registration for the Conversations series is \$15 per episode or \$50 for the entire series. Please visit [www.prunofund.org](http://www.prunofund.org) to register.

#### About The Pruno Fund

The Pruno Fund was established to help exonerated men and women succeed in transitioning from prison to life on the outside. The Fund provides grants to. The Pruno Fund also offers a Certification Program, for which any Exoneree interested in public speaking will be able to register to receive training towards certification.

## About The Pruno Project

The Pruno Project published its first book, *Pruno, Ramen and a Side of Hope: Stories of Surviving Wrongful Conviction* telling the stories of 10 exonerees from three perspectives: the actual case, the exoneree and a loved one. It produced an award-winning audiobook of the same name featuring Whoopi Goldberg and Bill Kurtis as narrators, along with talent such as Ashley Judd, Ricki Lake, Esai Morales, LisaGay Hamilton, Laraine Newman and Richard Steele. Later this year, The Pruno Project will release the 2nd edition of the inspired book, with new cover art by Fernando Bermudez.

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