

Getting Life: An Innocent Man's 25-Year Journey from Prison to Peace: A Memoir

By Michael Morton

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“A devastating and infuriating book, more astonishing than any legal thriller by John Grisham” (*The New York Times*) about a young father who spent twenty-five years in prison for a crime he did not commit...and his eventual exoneration and return to life as a free man.

On August 13, 1986, just one day after his thirty-second birthday, Michael Morton went to work at his usual time. By the end of the day, his wife Christine had been savagely bludgeoned to death in the couple's bed—and the Williamson County Sherriff's office in Texas wasted no time in pinning her murder on Michael, despite an absolute lack of physical evidence. Michael was swiftly sentenced to life in prison for a crime he had not committed. He mourned his wife from a prison cell. He lost all contact with their son. Life, as he knew it, was over.

Drawing on his recollections, court transcripts, and more than 1,000 pages of personal journals he wrote in prison, Michael recounts the hidden police reports about an unidentified van parked near his house that were never pursued; the bandana with the killer's DNA on it, that was never introduced in court; the call from a neighboring county reporting the attempted use of his wife's credit card, which was never followed up on; and ultimately, how he battled his way through the darkness to become a free man once again.

“Even for readers who may feel practically jaded about stories of injustice in Texas—even those who followed this case closely in the press—could do themselves a favor by picking up Michael Morton's new memoir...It is extremely well-written [and] insightful” (*The Austin Chronicle*). *Getting Life* is an extraordinary story of unfathomable tragedy, grave injustice, and the strength and courage it takes to find forgiveness.

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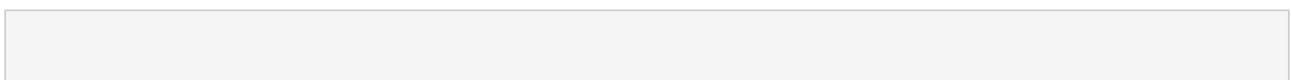
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Editorial Review

Review

"Morton poignantly recounts half a lifetime spent behind bars and underscores the glaring errors of our justice system." (*Oprah.com*)

"A stunning memoir...A great deal has been written about the shortcomings of the American criminal justice system, but perhaps nothing more searing than Morton's book, 'Getting Life.' It is a devastating and infuriating book, more astonishing than any legal thriller by John Grisham...Morton is able to deliver this aching and poignant look at the criminal justice system only because he didn't get a death sentence. " (Nicholas Kristof *The New York Times*)

"Imagine spending twenty-five years in prison for a murder you did not commit. Imagine the murder victim was your wife, the love of your life. And imagine it all happened because prosecutors and law enforcement officials cooked up a case against you and hid evidence that would have identified the real killer. Michael Morton doesn't have to imagine, because he lived it. It's usually a cliché to say someone has been to hell and back, but in Morton's case that is exactly what happened, and his stunning and lyrical account of the journey will break your heart, then make you mad, and finally fill you with hope." (David R. Dow, Founder of Texas Innocence Network and author of *The Autobiography of an Execution* and *Things I've Learned from Dying: A Book About*)

"An intimate, gripping portrayal of a grievous miscarriage of justice." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"A true Texas story of how our system of justice can itself be criminal. Michael Morton's powerful tale will take you with him into mourning, into prison, and finally, thankfully, back out into the light." (Dan Rather)

"[An] eloquent, page-turning memoir." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"In straightforward, thoughtful prose, surprisingly devoid of bitterness, from his personal journals as well as with court transcripts, Morton details his love for his wife and son, his loss of both, and his years spent surviving in prison and trying to prove his innocence. A powerful memoir and a powerful indictment of the U.S. judicial system and its potential to imprison innocent men and women." (*Booklist*)

"Even for readers who may feel practically jaded about stories of injustice in Texas – even those who followed this case closely in the press – could do themselves a favor by picking up Michael Morton's new memoir...It is extremely well-written, insightful, infuriating, and, in places, quite funny." (*The Austin Chronicle*)

"A lively and intimate account of his rise from pariah to celebrated survivor after DNA evidence and determined lawyers proved his innocence after 25 years in prison...What makes Morton's story so intriguing is the ease with which most people can put themselves in his place — the victim of a crime treated like a criminal — and wonder if they could cope, let alone survive." (*Austin American-Statesman*)

"A jarring testament that truth really can be stranger than fiction...the writing is snappy and clean, with more wit than one might expect." (*San Antonio Express-News*)

"A tale of grave injustice and, finally, great strength and courage and intelligence." (*Hudson Valley News*)

"Riveting." (*Parade*)

About the Author

Michael Morton was born in Texas, grew up in California, and moved back to Texas in high school. While living in Austin, Michael was convicted of murdering his wife—a crime he did not commit. He spent almost twenty-five years in prison before being exonerated through the efforts of the Innocence Project, pro bono lawyer John Raley, and advances in DNA technology. Michael is now remarried and lives on a lake in rural East Texas, relishing and appreciating what others may take for granted.

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Getting Life

Prologue

The door closed.

Not with a click or the sound of tumblers finally hitting their marks or the sturdy clunk of wood and metal meshing as if they were made for each other.

This was different.

It began with the long, hard sound of steel sliding against steel.

Like a train, the heavy door built speed as it barreled along its worn track, the portal to the real world growing smaller as the barrier of thick and battered bars roared into place.

It locked with a cold, bone-shaking boom that rattled me—literally—me, the guard outside my door, and any other inmates unlucky enough to be nearby.

I was alone in my cell, alone in the world, as alone as I had ever been in my life.

And I would stay there—alone—listening to that door close, over and over and over again, for the next twenty-five years.

Twenty-five years.

My wife, Chris, had been savagely beaten to death several months earlier. Before I had time to begin mourning, I was fighting for my own life against a legal system that seemed hell-bent on making me pay for the murder of the woman I would gladly have died for.

I was innocent.

Naïvely, I believed the error would soon be set right.

I could not have been more wrong.

As the years went by, I saw the three-year-old son my wife and I had doted on grow up and grow away. He believed his father was the murderer who'd killed the person he loved most.

And why wouldn't he? That's what everyone told him. On each of the rare occasions Eric saw me, my imprisonment—my inmate uniform, the guards and the guns, the bars and the buzzers—was a stark reminder that the world had decided I wasn't fit to walk free.

Ironically, Eric was one of the two people who knew what had really happened. He was in the house when something evil entered and destroyed our lives. At the time, our son tried to tell others what he had seen, but no one believed him.

And through all my time in prison, through all of my son's heartache, through our whole family's grief, the man who killed my wife was free—free to travel, free to commit crimes, free to kill again.

And again.

As the years passed, I watched the world go on without me through the keyhole of a door I could not unlock.

For a quarter century—a generation—my life was lived in penitentiary television rooms where you could get killed for changing the channel and on hard labor farms where violent men would feign fainting just to get a brief break from the unrelenting Texas sun.

I ate every meal in chaotic and cavernous prison chow halls where, as the old joke goes, the food was terrible, but at least you got a lot of it.

Needless to say, my dining companions were much the same—they were terrible and there were a lot of them.

If I was very lucky, weekends were spent in packed visiting rooms that were either too hot or too cold, and were always overrun by shattered families—virtually all of them walking wounded, scarred by addiction, abuse, and ignorance.

While I was desperate for company from the outside, whenever I entered the visiting room, I knew there was a terrible downside for me, as well as for the people who had made the long trek to see me.

Everyone who visited had to try to act “normal” in an almost unimaginably strained setting. Because they loved me, they would ask that we pose for pictures together in front of the dirty, cracked walls washed in harsh fluorescent light. I would stand next to my family in their colorful street clothes, while I grinned grimly for the camera—year after year—getting ever grayer, looking more worn out, always in my poorly fitting prison whites.

Smile!

Click.

And on those visits, I would see my mom and dad—my biggest boosters, my eternal believers—spend year after year in shabby rooms surrounded by failure and sadness, aging before my eyes, struggling to smile through their pain, their shame, and their profound anger.

I was doing the same.

We spent all those visits and all those years talking about old times and planning for a future we could only

pray would come to pass.

What none of us knew was that in the small town where I had stood trial, in a nondescript concrete warehouse where police stored old evidence—a dingy place packed with damaged cardboard boxes and haphazardly marked plastic pouches—was hidden the tiny piece of truth that would one day set me free.

Decades after I entered prison, a DNA test would change everything—not just for me and for my son but for the man who so unfairly prosecuted me. The DNA test would make huge changes, as well, in the broken legal system that tried to keep me behind bars.

For the cruel monster of a man who killed my wife, the truth came roaring out of the past with a vengeance.

This is the story of how I got a life sentence and survived what felt like a lifetime behind bars—only to have everything change again. I got my life back, and this time, I understood it.

Twenty-five years after I was swept away, the tide turned.

The wind changed.

The door opened.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ernie Swisher:

Reading a book being new life style in this 12 months; every people loves to read a book. When you examine a book you can get a lots of benefit. When you read books, you can improve your knowledge, due to the fact book has a lot of information onto it. The information that you will get depend on what types of book that you have read. If you wish to get information about your research, you can read education books, but if you act like you want to entertain yourself look for a fiction books, these kinds of us novel, comics, and soon. The Getting Life: An Innocent Man's 25-Year Journey from Prison to Peace: A Memoir will give you new experience in looking at a book.

Sharron Marty:

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Keesha Marks:

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