

Geter Claims Education Best Approach For Handling Injustice

By Jalyne Strong
Post Managing Editor

Imagine you are a young, college educated black man. At age 26, you're employed as an aerospace engineer making \$24,000 a year. Your career is off to a great beginning and, as far as your personal life, there's a beautiful hometown girl you're planning to marry. Life seems to be spread before you as one nice, easy road.

Then one day you're arrested. You're innocent and have what you perceive as air-tight alibis. However, you can't convince law enforcers of your innocence. You're charged with a crime you did not commit. Suddenly you find yourself tried, convicted and finally sentenced to life in prison.

Perhaps it's difficult for you to imagine such an adverse upheaval in a life that held such promise, but these are exactly the circumstances that did happen to Lenell Geter five years ago.

In Greenville, Texas, in 1982, Geter was falsely arrested and given a life sentence for armed robbery. He spent 16 months in prison before public outcry pressured authorities to grant him a new trial.

Following a national publicity campaign that claimed Geter was a victim of racism, he was free on \$10,000 bail in December 1983. By April 1984, before his new trial began, another suspect was implicated and Geter was cleared of all charges.

Today, two years after his exoneration, Geter is in high demand as a public speaker. He was in Charlotte last week as the featured speaker for Friendship Baptist Church's "Career Day" program.

During an interview at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, Geter spoke about how the ordeal he went through is behind him, except in the way it has changed his life.



Lenell Geter Photo By Calvin Ferguson

"I am just one little guy who was abused and is standing up for his rights."

"I acknowledge the ordeal, which I call a 'lemon,'" he began. "I suffered a lot of pain and endured quite a bit in the experience. I had to rely on the positive experiences from my family and friends."

"But that 'lemon' is turning into

lemonade inasmuch as I am now educating people; exposing the fact that there are inequities in the system."

"I am encouraging young people to seek an education," said Geter, who explained that he is unoffi-

cially on a lecture circuit, speaking at programs across the country which concern youth and education.

"People who've been calling on me feel I have the experience to edify the need for education, primarily for the purpose of trying to prevent the wrong I went through from happening again."

"I encourage and motivate the young to obtain knowledge so anyone hoping to profit off injustice would be sorely discouraged," Geter maintains.

A native of Denmark, South Carolina, and graduate of South Carolina State College, Geter believes his educational background was an asset in his coping with the miscarriage of justice that temporarily wrecked his life.

"Education and achievement is the best approach for handling any type of injustice," Geter related. "Martin Luther King successfully handled major injustices using those ingredients. In doing so, he presented the best format for solving inequities: Confront, expose and get results. It can be worked out through the system."

Geter admitted he does not foresee himself becoming a major civil rights leader along the lines of Martin Luther King. But he pointed out that the ordeal he went through, consequently, thrust him into a type of leadership role and he intends to live up to it.

He elaborates, "I had a good life before the ordeal. However, it was a life limited to my personal self and my family—not because of selfishness. But because my scope, experience and angle on life did not dictate my speaking to people at different functions across the country. No one knew me."

"All that changed after the ordeal I went through," Geter concedes. "And I feel I have to do something about it. I'm not the type of person to stand by and do nothing."

Motivational speeches on education is just one of the actions Geter is now involved with.

He also carries the message to the public of the need to support scholarship funds. Last Sunday, Geter made a request to the congregation on behalf of the C.W. Kerry Scholarship Fund.

"Many young people and adults have benefitted from the program," he remarked. "I want to en-

courage individuals and groups to continue their donations so no deserving person will be turned away from college for lack of funds."

Additionally, in another area of utmost concern for him, Geter has opened the Geter Justice For All Foundation, a referral service for prison inmates who could possibly be innocent.

"It's an agency that helps, at the request of the innocent, render investigation and legal support," he explains. "The foundation provides names of attorneys, civil rights agencies, Justice Department officials and others who assist people facing criminal charges."

"I am investing a lot of time to the foundation," maintains Geter, who is employed with E-Systems, the military and electronics contracting company where he worked prior to his arrest and incarceration.

Upon his release from prison in 1984, Geter married Marcia, the young woman who stood by him throughout his two-year ordeal. The couple still resides in Greenville, Texas, and now have a one-year-old daughter named Marquita.

Through the public activities he has taken on, Geter continues to squeeze from the "lemon" of his life a sustaining nectar he hopes will benefit others. Nonetheless, he does confess that the time wretched from his life still bothers him.

"Am I bitter?" Geter responds. "Certainly I am. I am human. And I also have to say, I get depressed. Sure it sometimes bothers me at night—these are all characteristics of being human."

"But God has blessed me not to exist predominantly in that negative realm."

"So I will continue as a normal, average citizen. I will continue to be an engineer—the best I know. I will go on with my foundation," he assures.

In a soft-spoken but thoughtful manner, Geter downplays all the attention he has received, saying, "I am just one little guy who was abused and is standing up for his rights."

"My purpose now is to admonish that no one should let anyone ride his or her back. They can only do it if you bend over and allow it to happen."



Lenell Geter poses with his wife, Marcia and daughter, Marquita. Photo By Calvin Ferguson

Bills Pass To Reduce Prison Crowding

With unprecedented unanimity and speed, the North Carolina legislature has approved sweeping legislation aimed at keeping state control of the crowded prison system. Two bills passed, one capping the prison population at 18,000 and the other appropriating \$15 million for emergency prison housing and parole officers.

Special Deputy Attorney General Lucien Capone III praised the

Legislature's quick action. "It shows your willingness to do what's needed, and I'm already seeing the effects of it before Judge McMillan," he said. McMillan is the federal judge monitoring the \$12 million consent agreement in the Charlotte region.

But legislators realize that much more needs to be done. "All we've done is bought a little time," said Anne Barnes, House co-chair of

the Special Committee on Prisons. "We've got to have a more comprehensive, systematic approach to corrections policy in this state."

Confusion is also prevalent, as sheriffs try to figure out how the cap legislation affects their crowded jails. "Even the people in the Department of Corrections are confused about how this is going to work," said one source who asked to remain anonymous.

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Public Utility, U.S. and Canada	993,481	Paid in Advance	581,744
Industrial and Miscellaneous	25,432,286	Taxes and Accrued Expense	2,372,039
	17,927,875	Employee Benefit Reserves	632,231
Stocks		Mandatory Security Valuation Reserves	1,265,568
Preferred	\$ 969,616	Group Contingency Reserve	15,518,146
Common	6,199,312	Other Liabilities	3,944,968
Mortgage Loans		TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$193,034,575
Conventional	\$22,643,253		
Insured or Guaranteed	13,703,815	CONTINGENCY RESERVE AND SURPLUS	
Real Estate		Appropriation for Contingencies	3,000,000
Properties for Company Use	\$ 5,761,027	Unassigned Surplus	18,504,026
Other Properties	1,473,129	Total Surplus	21,504,026
Policy Loans	4,867,855	TOTAL LIABILITIES AND SURPLUS	\$214,538,601
Investment Income Due and Accrued	2,726,673		
Premiums in Course of Collection	28,953,361	INSURANCE IN FORCE	\$9,803,324,000
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