

= Sarah Conlon =

Sarah Conlon (née Maguire) (20 January 1926 ? 19 July 2008) was an Irish housewife and a prominent campaigner in one of the most high @-@ profile miscarriage of justice cases in British legal history . She spent decades campaigning to have the names of her husband Giuseppe and son Gerry cleared over the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) pub bombings at Guildford and Woolwich , and helped secure an apology from former British prime minister Tony Blair in 2005 for their wrongful imprisonment .

= = Guildford pub bombings = =

The Guildford pub bombings occurred in 1974 , when an IRA unit planted bombs in two pubs in Guildford , Surrey , and the resulting explosions killed four soldiers and one civilian , and injured 50 others . The investigation into the bombings led to the arrest and conviction of Gerard Conlon , Patrick Armstrong , Paul Hill and Carole Richardson , an Englishwoman ; dubbed as " the Guildford Four " . The four were jailed for life in 1975 for the bombings , and each served 15 years in jail before their convictions were quashed by the Court of Appeal . This was due to an extensive inquiry carried out by Avon and Somerset Police into the original police investigation . The inquiry found that the way the confessions of the four were noted were seriously flawed , concluding that the notes taken were not written up immediately and that officers may have colluded in the wording of the statements .

Giuseppe Conlon , Sarah 's husband , was convicted in 1976 along with six members of the Maguire family (the seven being dubbed the Maguire Seven) of running an IRA bomb factory in North London , on the basis of forensic evidence . Each was sentenced to up to 14 years in jail , served their sentences , and with the exception of Giuseppe Conlon who died in 1980 , were released . The Maguire Seven 's first appeal , in 1977 , was turned down , but a later appeal , prompted by the release of the Guildford Four , found that test kits used to detect traces of explosives had been contaminated . In 1991 , the Court of Appeal quashed their convictions after it was ruled the original evidence against them was unsafe . On 9 February 2005 , then Prime Minister Tony Blair issued a public apology to the Maguire Seven and the Guildford Four for the miscarriages of justice they had suffered , saying that he was " very sorry that they were subject to such an ordeal and such an injustice " , and that " they deserve to be completely and publicly exonerated . "

= = Role in the sentences and appeals = =

Sarah Conlon won huge admiration in Ireland for her quiet dignity and refusal to feel bitterness . During the years that her husband and son were in jail , she sent weekly parcels of cigarettes , sweets , and Irish newspaper clippings to them , and saved up her prison visits for the two weeks of her annual holiday . Her regular letters to them always ended the same way : " Pray for them ones who told lies against you ... It 's them who needs help as well as yourself . "

Father McKinley , a priest who noticed Sarah crying after the 1977 appeal was turned down , and others helped her begin a campaign to free her husband , son and other members of the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven . She took to lobbying dignitaries , church leaders and the media , in addition to writing to numerous Irish politicians , including the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) members of parliament Joe Hendron and John Hume , to ask for their support . At one stage she travelled to London to meet Cardinal Basil Hume to ask for his assistance . Her campaigning led to the start of the aforementioned inquiry , announced in 1989 by the home secretary Douglas Hurd , into the Guildford bomb cases , which led to Gerry 's release . News of her husband 's death reached Sarah just after she received a message from home secretary Willie Whitelaw stating that her husband was about to be released on compassionate grounds .

Twenty @-@ five years after her husband 's death , Sarah Conlon and her family decided to fight for a public apology for the miscarriage of justice on her family . Once again she led the campaign , lobbying church leaders and politicians , among them the Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern , who

pledged his support , which culminated in Tony Blair 's apology to the Conlon family . III , she was unable to make the trip to London to hear the apology , but her children spoke to her by telephone from the House of Commons . After securing the apology , she mentioned that she no longer had to worry about dying and what it means .

SDLP leader and Foyle member of parliament Mark Durkan described Sarah as " a true heroine of our age " and " shining example to us all " , saying that she had the " patience of a saint " and " huge reserves of faith , fortitude and remarkable forgiveness " , and that " her story is an inspiration of faith , hope and love " .

= = Personal life = =

Conlon was described as a woman of " immense Catholic faith " who was protective of her son Gerry , and who held the family together with her hard work , wanting their life to be respectable , holy , and quiet . She spent years working at a scrapyard sorting old clothes , and later worked long hours for low pay in the kitchens of the Royal Victoria Hospital , serving food to patients and mopping the floors .

Conlon 's husband , Patrick " Giuseppe " , was a pacifist who evaded the draft during World War II . He once worked at Harland & Wolf painting the hulls of ships , where the lead in the paint damaged his lungs . His condition was worsened by the humidity and condensation in the house , and he subsequently developed tuberculosis and emphysema .

Sarah Conlon died of lung cancer in July 2008 , aged 82 .

= = In popular culture = =

The Hollywood movie In The Name of the Father , starring Daniel Day @-@ Lewis and directed by Jim Sheridan , is based on the Conlon family 's story . Northern Irish actress Marie Jones played Sarah Conlon . The movie was adapted from Gerry Conlon ? s autobiography Proved Innocent , later published as In the Name of the Father .

The 1990 made @-@ for @-@ television film Dear Sarah is based on the letters Giuseppe Conlon wrote to his wife while in prison . The film was produced by Raidió Teilifís Éireann , directed by Frank Cvitanovich and written by Tom McGurk . It featured Stella McCusker as Sarah Conlon .