

Meet Dr. Gosnell—America's #1 Serial Killer

Deal W. Hudson

Ann McElhinney and Phelim McAleer, *Gosnell: The Untold Story of America's Most Prolific Serial Killer* (Regnery Publishing, 2017)

This is the most difficult book I've ever read, which has nothing to do with how it's written, organized, or argued. The difficulty arises, in part, from the ease of reading the prose of Ann McElhinney and Phelim McAllen and, perhaps, more importantly, the horrific details the authors uncovered through their exhaustive research and documentation.

Gosnell tells the story of a monster, but as a reader I often had to remind myself that this monster was real, not a character imagined by a writer of fiction. But in reading the book, I became constantly aware of another distinction: between his monstrous actions, killing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of babies born alive, and the person who wielded his scissors so casually on breathing newborns, without regret or hesitation, because murder had made him a wealthy man.

No one who knew Dr. Kermit Gosnell could believe he was such a monster: the African American physician was admired in his community of East Philadelphia for his exuberant charm, enveloping personality, and his obvious success. Dr. Gosnell and those who worked inside his clinic, however, "joked and laughed amidst the carnage." That carnage included "forty-seven dead babies . . . their remains stuffed into old milk cartons and kitty litter containers," all found on the night when the clinic was raided on suspicions of illegal drug peddling.

Yes, the horrors committed by Kermit Gosnell for over thirty-

five years at his clinic were accidentally uncovered. Philadelphia detective Jim Wood, "Woody," did not begin his investigation of "Women's Medical Society" abortion clinic to corroborate the long list of illegal procedures committed by Gosnell and his staff on a daily basis, but to "bust" Gosnell for supplying drug dealers with massive quantities of addictive drugs by trading fake prescriptions for cash. "On a typical night, Gosnell would sell two hundred scripts" of Percocet, Oxy-Contin, etc.

The tip-of-iceberg appeared when Woody was interrogating an informant, Tosha Lewis, who worked the front desk of Gosnell's clinic, handing out prescriptions and receiving the cash in return. Tosha inadvertently revealed some alarming details about the conditions inside the clinic, including piles of medical waste, flea infestation, and general filth, but then she mentioned the death of an Asian woman, Karna-maya Mongar, after an abortion.

When Woody went looking for a police report of Mongar's death, he couldn't find one. He did find the report of her autopsy that ruled her death accidental. "But Woody didn't buy that for a moment—not after he had heard Tosha describe how patients were being treated by unqualified staff."

When Wood began investigating a possible homicide, he experienced resistance inside the Philadelphia Police Department. At first it seemed to him a matter of one department protecting its turf from another, but as he found out, and McElhinney and McAllen show in meticulous detail: there was institutional unwillingness at every level.

Those whose professional job it was to insure the public safety of citizens from substandard medical care and fraud not only ignored the obvious conditions inside the clinic but also provided cover for Gosnell's serial crimes to continue over decades. What they should have reported, they did not. For example, in 1992, the state health inspector, Janice Staloski,

visited the clinic and reported “no deficiencies.” Even on the night of the raid, which Staloski took part in, she allowed Gosnell to perform abortions after seeing a “filthy flea-infested excrement-covered clinic with expired medicine, broken machinery, and unsanitary instruments—staffed by unlicensed, untrained employees.”

And one thing more was found that night: when Detective Wood opened a cupboard he found five shelves of glass jars *containing babies feet*. As it turned out, Gosnell kept these feet as kind of trophies for his work well done—there was no medical reason to chop off the feet and bottle them, though he claimed there was.

When complaints were sent to state officials, they were ignored. Under Pennsylvania law, any abortion clinic was required to have one person on the staff who had completed a residency in obstetrics and gynecology. Gosnell never completed his, but kept a doctor who did complete his residency on staff until 1989. After that, Gosnell was on his own, a fact noted by two health inspectors shortly afterward, but recommended that Gosnell’s license be approved for another year! The fact is, Gosnell’s clinic should have been closed *decades* before his license was suspended in 2010.

Even more sickening, a Gosnell employee, Marcella Choung, wrote a detailed letter of complaint to the Department of State about the conditions in the Women’s Medical Society clinic, which amounted to a summary of all the information the grand jury would hear much later. Choung listed everything, the untrained staff doing ultrasounds and administering anaesthesia, the filthy conditions, “and the two flea-infested cats [who] roamed around the procedure rooms, where Gosnell would eat sandwiches.”

The entire bureaucracy of the State of Pennsylvania did not want to put an abortionist out of business and create a larger problem for the abortion industry in general. Indeed, when the

pro-abortion Tom Ridge was elected governor in 1995, he changed the law by putting an end to all regular inspections of abortion clinics, thus giving "Gosnell carte blanche for the next seventeen years." No one from the Department of State ever visited the clinic to investigate the claims. Two attorneys from the Pennsylvania State Board of Medicine declared the case file, "Prosecution Not Warranted."

When the Department of Health's chief counsel, Christine Dutton, testified before the grand jury she defended the inaction of her subordinate, Janice Staloski, ending with the comment, "People die." Her callousness incensed the grand jury and stunned attorneys prosecuting the case. Dutton, along with Staloski and many others who ignored Gosnell's crimes, would be fired by Governor Tom Corbett who took office in 2011, just as the grand jury released its report on January 11 of that year.

In addition to Jim Wood, these two attorneys are bona fide heroes of this tale. They were willing to sacrifice their careers to bring Gosnell to justice. Christine Wechsler, who was to give birth to two children during the investigation and trial, dealt with the emotional strain by watching reruns of *I Love Lucy* and reading "99-cent novellas" late at night. Working with her colleague Joanne Pescatore, Wechsler encountered the same institutional resistance met by Woody—she could not find physicians who would talk about the abortion procedure: "Medical professionals did not want to contribute to any official proceeding that might shine a negative light on abortion."

Wechsler, before going to trial, was interrogated by a new supervisor in the District Attorney's office, who asked, "You tell me why I should give a damn about these dead babies." She did give up the case before the trial, but not because of intimidation—she got a job offer from Governor Corbett in Harrisburg. Fortunately, her colleague Ed Cameron took over the case with the same commitment and determination evinced by

Wechsler and Pescatore.

With the exception of Marcella Choung, Steve Massof had the typical attitude of the many staff who assisted Gosnell, except that Massof was educated, a medical school graduate, but unlicensed as a physician. He would operate the ultrasound for Gosnell when he tried to kill the baby by injecting Demerol into the heart. When Gosnell was successful, and the heart immediately stopped beating, Massof would describe it as a "good shot." He felt no compunction at "snipping" the neck of the babies born alive, often seeing patients on his own. He helped Gosnell manipulate ultrasounds to falsify the age of the unborn child. Abortions in Pennsylvania were illegal after twenty-three weeks and six days. His testimony at the trial was vivid, and he evidently enjoyed himself giving it:

"'Literally. . . it would rain fetuses,' he said. 'Some days I would come up, I'd be called—a scream, and I would go running, and fetuses all over the place and blood.'"

But no one was more merciless than Kermit Gosnell himself. Kareema Cross, who worked as a receptionist, testified about the abortion of "Baby A," whose mother was Shayquana Abrams. After drugging her into complete submission during an eight hour wait, she awoke only after the abortion was done. When Abrams had been brought in for the procedure, "the baby just came out." Gosnell did not immediately snip the baby's neck, he "put the baby boy in a Tupperware container. He was still breathing." But the container wasn't big enough for the eighteen-inch child, so Gosnell tried a shoebox which was also too small. Only then did Gosnell use his scissors to cut the baby's neck, who was lying in fetal position. Cross and another employee, Adrienne Moton, took pictures of the child in the shoebox, "pictures that ensured Gosnell's conviction five years later."

When Kermit Gosnell went to trial on March 18, 2013, over three years after Jim Wood lead the raid on his clinic, he

pleaded innocent. The media section of the large Room 304 in Philadelphia Justice Center was empty, symbolizing their complicity in the determination of the state bureaucracy and the medical profession to protect the abortion industry from official scrutiny and negative publicity. Only the efforts on social media to cover the trial, and particularly of journalist Kirsten Powers, shamed the mainstream media into the courtroom. Yet, even so, the Gosnell story did not penetrate very far into public awareness. When I was telling my twenty-year old son about what Gosnell had done, he asked, "Why didn't we hear about it on the news?"

The two-month trial pitted Jim Cameron against Philadelphia's top defense lawyer, Jack McMahon. It was quite a duel, with McMahon not only playing the race card but also picking apart any of the prosecution's evidence that did not completely support the charges against his client. But in the end, it was the power of the images, such as the pictures taken by Cross and Moton, and Cameron's methodical reiteration of the basic inhumanity, illegality, and avarice of Gosnell's actions that led to his conviction on three counts of first degree murder. Gosnell is now spending the rest of his life at the state Correctional Institute in Huntingdon, PA.

Deal W. Hudson, the former publisher of Crisis Magazine, presently publishes The Christian Review; hosts a weekly one-hour radio show, "Church and Culture," on the Ave Maria Radio Network; and writes a weekly column, "On Religion," for Newsmax.