

# real stories

*The lives, dramas and triumphs of women just like you*

## She Frees Innocent Prisoners

*Haunted by the disappearance of her high school best friend, Alicia O'Neill has made it her mission to find justice for the wrongly convicted.*

BY LYNN HARRIS



STYLIST: RACHAEL WANG; HAIR AND MAKEUP: LISA GLEESON; THEORY SUIT

When assistant district attorney Alicia O'Neill, 34, first met Michael Anthony Green in a Houston courthouse, he was "very nice, very smart, very organized," she says. He was also a convicted rapist 25 years into a 75-year sentence.

But Green, 46, had always insisted he did not commit the crime. O'Neill was determined to find out the truth. She's part of

a new vanguard of district attorneys across the country who are increasingly willing to open old cases in which the convicted still claim innocence.

Green's saga began on a spring night in 1983. A woman had been abducted in Houston by four men and driven to a secluded  
*Continued on next page* ➤➤



# real stories

The lives, dramas and triumphs of women just like you

## She Frees Innocent Prisoners

Haunted by the disappearance of her high school best friend, Alicia O'Neill has made it her mission to find justice for the wrongly convicted.

BY LYNN HARRIS



STYLIST: RACHAEL WANG; HAIR AND MAKEUP: LISA GLEESON; THEORY SUIT

When assistant district attorney Alicia O'Neill, 34, first met Michael Anthony Green in a Houston courthouse, he was "very nice, very smart, very organized," she says. He was also a convicted rapist 25 years into a 75-year sentence.

But Green, 46, had always insisted he did not commit the crime. O'Neill was determined to find out the truth. She's part of

a new vanguard of district attorneys across the country who are increasingly willing to open old cases in which the convicted still claim innocence.

Green's saga began on a spring night in 1983. A woman had been abducted in Houston by four men and driven to a secluded  
*Continued on next page* ➤➤



spot, where three of them raped her. Green was seen walking by the area; despite his constant protests of innocence, he was the only person convicted of the attack.

O'Neill hoped that DNA testing, which wasn't available in 1983, would provide more definitive answers. But it took her two years of dogged investigation to get enough information to satisfy the legal requirements necessary for the testing.

It wasn't the only time she'd worked so tirelessly. When she was 20, her best friend, Jessica Lee Cain, 17, drove away from a meet-up at Bennigan's and disappeared. Cain's truck was found on the side of the road with no signs of struggle. O'Neill helped with on-foot searches and screened leads, but her friend was never seen again. "Right then, I started thinking about a career in law enforcement," says O'Neill. "I liked the idea of seeking justice, especially after Jessica and everyone who loved her had been denied it."

Although Cain's case had gone cold, Green's heated up: O'Neill uncovered a box of evidence stashed away in a dusty warehouse. Inside were the victim's jeans. And the DNA on them? Tests proved it was not Green's.

How did it feel when he heard the news after 27 years behind bars? "One word: beautiful," he told *Glamour*. Sadly, the real rapists can't be prosecuted because the statute of limitations has expired. (Two are in prison for other crimes, but one is free.)

O'Neill is continuing her work. This March she helped prove yet another man's innocence—after he'd spent 17 years in jail. And Green is now a paralegal, helping evaluate cases like his own. "Righting a wrong like this," says O'Neill, who sees Green often, "is what you go to law school for." ■



O'Neill, right, with Cain before her disappearance

HMM, WHAT'S MISSING?  
Do you see a she in this super-powered crowd?



## EDITORIAL

# Dear Hollywood, Where's Our Superhero Movie?

Coming soon to a theater near you: *Captain America*, *Green Lantern* and, next year, new Batman, Spider-Man and Superman flicks. Not coming soon to a theater near you? A superhero movie—*any* superhero movie—starring a woman. And while we do appreciate men in tights, we feel it's time a leading lady got to use her own extraordinary powers to save humankind. The planet needs it!

Why the superhero disparity? The perception at movie studios, says Hollywood veteran Laeta Kalogridis, "is they won't be profitable." Kalogridis, executive producer of *Avatar*, wrote one of the numerous scripts for *Wonder Woman*—a project that's been "in development"

for at least 10 years. And while the Amazon queen will debut on TV, her big-screen moment is still stalled after all this time.

In fact, the only female superheroes to star in theaters in the past decade have been Aeon Flux, Catwoman and Elektra, who didn't get to be total heroes—unlike most of their male peers, who get to be hot *and* heroic. Not coincidentally, they sank at the box office. "People often point to [them] as examples of female-superhero films that weren't breakout hits," notes Kalogridis. "By that logic, the disappointing performance of *The Punisher* would mean that no male comic book movies should be made either."

It doesn't seem fair that schlubby boy nerds get to be reborn as sexy superstars and we don't (wouldn't you love to see Tina Fey as Elastigirl?). We've certainly paid to watch women without superpowers kick ass: Sigourney Weaver's Ripley grossed more than \$550 million in the *Alien* movies, while Angelina Jolie's Lara Croft made \$274 million in just one film.

"It's time to call out the people in Hollywood with power," says Manohla Dargis, cochief film critic for *The New York Times*. "Why isn't James Cameron going after *Wonder Woman*?" And hey, female directors: What about Spider-Woman or an X-Girl? "Sometimes all it takes is one film," says Kalogridis. "Before *Star Wars*, science-fiction movies weren't thought of as the huge performers they are now." Hollywood, just give a superchick a chance—in a *good* movie with a *good* script—and she'll show you what her powers can do. ■

LEFT: COURTESY OF ALICIA O'NEILL. SUPERMAN: WARNER BROS./EVERETT COLLECTION. IRON MAN: PARAMOUNT/EVERETT COLLECTION. BATMAN: WARNER BROS./EVERETT COLLECTION. THE HULK: UNIVERSAL/MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT/KOBAL COLLECTION. SPIDER-MAN: COLUMBIA/EVERETT COLLECTION