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**Out of Prison, Doctor Hopes to Regenerate His Lost Fame**

By [ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/anemona_hartocollis/index.html?inline=nyt-per)

"I could give you a baby," Niels H. Lauersen told a 50-ish woman sitting in the Boathouse Cafe in Central Park, a line he has used to charm thousands of anxious women over the years.

Mr. Lauersen was once Dr. Lauersen, the toast of Park Avenue and the Hamptons, one of the most renowned fertility specialists in New York, if not the country.

As he spooned up clam chowder and drank sparkling water from a blue bottle a few days ago, he peered hungrily at the well-dressed couples and happy-hour revelers in the restaurant.

A few short years ago, he was comfortable in the company of movie stars and presidents. But as he spoke to the woman in Central Park, he was one week out of Allenwood, a low-security federal detention center in Pennsylvania, where he spent five years, stripped of his medical license and serving a sentence for insurance fraud. Though he dyed his graying curls russet soon after his release, two weeks ago, other signs of his time in prison are harder to hide. He could not keep up his expensive dental work, so he muffled his consonants and smiled at the woman through missing teeth.

In some ways, he is like any ex-convict trying to regain his bearing on life. But the story of Mr. Lauersen, once called the "dyno gyno" by Geraldo Rivera, is also a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of celebrity.

Since he got out of Allenwood, he has been calling old friends, eager to put his tattered life together, though at 69, or maybe 66 — he says he can't remember his age — it may be hard.

He is fighting deportation back to his native Denmark, where he has not lived for four decades, trying to recover his medical license and re-establish his connections with New York's elite.

He still introduces himself as Dr. Lauersen. "I'm going to come back," he said, sitting in his old office at 784 Park Avenue, near 74th Street, a duplex suite he still owns. "I'm a big warrior, a Viking warrior."

Mr. Lauersen was convicted in 2001 of billing insurance companies for gynecological operations when he was really giving fertility treatment for women he said could not afford it. The year after his conviction, the State Legislature passed a law requiring insurance companies to cover most infertility treatments.

He estimates that he has delivered or helped to deliver 10,000 babies in his 40-year career, and his patients, or their husbands, seem to pop up everywhere he goes: the wife of a court stenographer at his trial, three women visiting inmates at Allenwood, the wife of the handyman who was installing air-conditioning in his former office last week.

Gerald Shargel, one of Mr. Lauersen's lawyers, says he still doesn't understand why the jury sympathized with insurance companies instead of with his client, who he said treated rich and poor patients alike. The only explanation he can come up with is that Mr. Lauersen's success inspired resentment.

"He was a prominent doctor who traveled in lofty circles with very prominent people," Mr. Shargel said. "A lot of people, doctors included, were jealous of him. Maybe he wasn't even the best fertility doctor, yet he got publicity, he traveled in society circles, he was a guest of [Bill Clinton](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/bill_clinton/index.html?inline=nyt-per) at the White House. That kind of prominence, whether in medicine, law or any other profession, results in envy. A lot of the criticism of him results from envy."

Mr. Lauersen showed a talent for cultivating high society and popular appeal early on.

He arrived in the United States as a medical school graduate from Copenhagen in about 1965, for a surgical internship, he said last week. He eventually advanced to being a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York Medical College, at Lenox Hill Hospital.

Within a decade, he had risen from itinerant medical student to the right crowd. In January 1975, he announced his marriage the previous October to Rebekah West Harkness in a society note in The New York Times, which said the couple had spent the previous Christmas in the Bahamas. Mrs. Harkness, roughly 20 years his senior, was a wealthy socialite with homes in the Bahamas and Rockland County and a patron of medicine and dance. Mrs. Harkness, then 59, was previously married to Benjamin H. Kean, a professor at [Cornell University](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/c/cornell_university/index.html?inline=nyt-org) Medical School and later physician to the exiled Shah of Iran.

They separated after a few years, Mr. Lauersen said, and Mrs. Harkness died in 1982.

But it was enough to give him an entrance into the celebrity world, and in 1977, he published the first of several books about women's health care, which tapped into the same feminist niche as "Our Bodies, Ourselves." He wrote the books because "it was a negative time," he said. "I thought that women weren't treated nice, it wasn't what I saw in Europe." He says two appearances on Phil Donohue's television talk show helped make him a national figure.

By 1984, he said, he was able to spend $1 million to begin cobbling together his suite of offices at 784 Park Avenue. In the late 1980's, he began treating infertility patients in his office instead of at the hospital as most other doctors did, a practice that he said reduced the waiting time for treatment.

In the early 90's, his practice got a boost from Mr. Rivera and his wife, C.C. Dyer. Dr. Lauersen treated Ms. Dyer for endometriosis, and after years of frustration, she was able to conceive two children, now 13 and 11, a story that she subsequently told on Mr. Rivera's talk show. She was won over by the doctor's warm manner, and they are still friends, she said last week. "I thought, 'Oh my God,' this is the best-looking doctor," Ms. Dyer said. "He had energy, a smile."

She said the publicity from her husband's show brought many women to Dr. Lauersen's practice who could not afford to pay for fertility treatment, and she defends his breaking the rules to bill insurance for such patients. "To me, he was Robin Hood, taking from the big bad companies and giving to the poor just trying to have a baby," Ms. Dyer, who is now divorced from Mr. Rivera, said.

Around the same time, Dr. Lauersen began dating [Denise Rich](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/denise_rich/index.html?inline=nyt-per), the pop songwriter known for parties in her Fifth Avenue apartment, who gave heavily to the Clinton White House and Democratic causes, and whose ex-husband, the fugitive financier [Marc Rich](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/marc_rich/index.html?inline=nyt-per), was pardoned by President Clinton. With her, he says, he visited Stavros Niarchos, the shipping magnate, on his private Greek island, and Bill and [Hillary Clinton](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/hillary_rodham_clinton/index.html?inline=nyt-per) in the White House.

Ms. Dyer remembers that she and Mr. Rivera spent a Christmas vacation in the Grenadines with Dr. Lauersen, Ms. Rich, her daughter, Ilona Rich, and Ilona's husband, Kenny Schachter, an art dealer. "I think it was Kenny who gave Niels the 'dyno-gyno' name," Ms. Dyer said, although Mr. Rivera made it famous.

Dr. Lauersen also delivered three of Ilona Rich and Kenny Schachter's four children.

In October 2000, two years after Dr. Lauersen was indicted for insurance fraud, the State Health Department revoked his medical license, saying he had been negligent in the care of several patients, including in the delivery of a baby who suffered brain damage. Mr. Lauersen said he did everything he could for that baby, adding, "People always like to kick the guy that's down."

In the insurance case, prosecutors accused him of collecting $2.5 million from 1987 to 1997 by billing for operations like cyst removal when he was really doing fertility treatment. Mr. Lauersen says what he did was standard practice, comparing it to a plastic surgeon who submits insurance forms for fixing a deviated septum, but gives the patient a button nose at the same time.

He contends that he became a target of the insurance companies because he was a statistical outlier — someone with so many patients that he stood out from the crowd.

Since his release, influential friends and some of his former patients have lobbied federal officials to stop his deportation, and Carolyn Maloney, his congresswoman, has written a letter of support, but lawyers say it is an uphill battle.

In many ways, he is starting his life from scratch. He was ordered to pay $3 million in restitution to insurance companies, though he says they stopped paying legitimate claims and owe more money to him. Although he is cagey about his finances, he often wears the same suit and tie and seems to depend on the kindness of friends who take him out to dinner. Gael Greene, the restaurant critic, took him to the new Mr. Chow's in TriBeCa on Friday. They have been friends since the 1970's, she said, and corresponded while he was in prison.

Yet his friends marvel at his optimism. He recounts how his surgical skills made him an expert knitter of hats and scarves for his fellow inmates, and how he taught a popular class on movie musicals. He married Nuala O'Connor Robinson, a former fertility patient of his, last August.

She went to pick him up on April 28, the afternoon he was released from prison, but was told that he was already gone. Mrs. Lauersen turned around and found her husband trudging along the side of the road in prison-issue sweats, carrying his legal papers in a bag slung over his shoulder. On the way home, they had to stop every half hour so he could get out of the car and look at the stars.

"First, we went to McDonald's," she said. "Then we walked the streets of Manhattan till 1 o'clock in the morning. He's so anxious. So excited."

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