

Lawyer Clara on mission to win justice for detainees holed up in secret prisons

By Annie Brown

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IT'S only at parties that Clara Gutteridge wishes she had chosen a different career.

Inevitably, when she says she is an investigator into secret prisons and renditions, she faces her own mini-interrogation.

It's not exactly hairdressing.

Clara said: "I love my job but when I tell people what I do, they want to know everything."

"Sometimes you don't want to think about work and it's not the kind of job where you can switch off easily."

The 31-year-old Scot is the only woman in her field. She has been instrumental in securing the release of falsely detained prisoners across the globe.

Clara focuses mainly on illegal detentions of "ghost prisoners", where the US and the UK may have been complicit.

Between trips to east Africa to find hidden prisons, she is helping former detainees to sue the British Government.

This week, the US appointed a special prosecutor to investigate allegations of CIA torture of "terror suspects".

The Obama administration released CIA memos providing disturbing details about the agency's overseas secret prisons



CHILDHOOD CALLING: Clara, left, and with Binyam, below. Far left, an art mock-up of Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba

From death row to Guantanamo

MEET THE

SCOT WHO BRINGS TORTURERS TO TASK

programme. The 2004 report reveals how agents tortured prisoners by conducting mock executions, stuffing rags in their mouths and pouring water over them until they choked.

They dragged prisoners along corridors, and forced some of them to inhale smoke until they vomited.

Inside the CIA secret overseas prisons, some prisoners were kept in isolation for years, blindfolded and their legs shackled.

Clara said she has been hearing tales of prison brutality for years.

Illegal detentions and torture have been booming since 9/11 and it's Clara's job to expose it.

She works as a lawyer for Reprieve, a legal charity for prisoners from death row to Guantanamo Bay.

The role is a natural fit for a woman who had a deep sense of justice even as a little girl growing up in Stirling.

She said: "I remember being told by a primary school teacher, in a slightly accusatory tone, 'You always stick up for the underdog'."

"I always felt strongly about what I thought was right."

Reprieve is that we do actually win cases, so there is a sense of progress."

Clara was instrumental in securing the release of Binyam Mohamed, the British resident who was freed without charge in February after being detained at Guantanamo Bay for seven years.

Clara was looking at extraordinary conditions, where suspects are transferred from one country to another.

"With another Scot, Gavin Simpson, we found that Binyam had been picked up in Pakistan, transferred to Morocco, held for 18 months then taken to a secret prison in Afghanistan before being dumped in

has reached daunting numbers. In Afghanistan alone, there are believed to be 80,000 ghost prisoners.

Clara has just returned from Nairobi where she has been investigating secret prisons in Africa.

The existence of the jails are known to only a handful of officials in the United States and, usually, to the

people I work with. I can always get on a plane home because I am a British citizen. The people I work with really do put themselves in danger.

"I am protected by my passport and the colour of my skin."

Clara refuses to take UN flights and she does not have government escorts. Instead, she uses rickety old

investigator is 99 per cent working with other people and the rest is about thinking analytically.

"It is only through making good relationships with other people that I get anywhere."

There have been times when Clara feels that being a woman has made a positive difference in her work.

