



Gary Kyles

***[UPDATE: Gary Kyles was granted a pardon from Gov. Wolf in July 2022. He is now free.]*** Gary Kyles has spent his entire adult life incarcerated. Arrested at 18, sentenced to life without the possibility of parole at 20. He is now 60, and has shown himself to be a very different person than he was 42 years ago, worthy of a second chance.

Remarkably, some of Gary’s strongest support for why he should receive mercy comes from Jean Mayes, the sister of the victim in Gary’s case. “My family and I all agree you should have a chance and be reunited with your family,” Jean wrote in a letter to him. “From day one I have always prayed for your mother. How her heart must ache. After all, both of our mothers lost a son that day.”

Four decades ago, Gary was convicted of second-degree felony murder, which carries an automatic life sentence in Pennsylvania. He was holding a gun during a robbery in a car in Allegheny County in 1979, when there was a tussle in the backseat. The gun accidentally went off and killed the victim, Jean’s brother, Tony.



“I made a terrible mistake that day, and nothing I can say or do can change that,” Gary wrote in an apology letter to Jean and her family. “I’ve spent these years of incarceration looking back, and know I’ve done everything I could to better my life and be a better citizen if the opportunity arose for my release.”

Jean and her sisters agree. Jean says, “Gary would like to give back to his community. And where they’re from is where I’m from, too. There’s a lot of crime now. There’s a lot of drugs. There are a lot of gangs. And seeing what he’s done in jail, how he’s changed and how he helps people, I can only imagine the positive good he could do in our community once he gets home.”

During his decades of incarceration, Gary has earned his high school diploma, numerous vocational certifications, and a plethora of personal development certifications, including in violence prevention and mental health mentoring. He has become a certified peer specialist. He’s earned the nickname Coach Gee because of his mentorship and his participation as a sports official.

Prison staff members who have worked with Gary in the mental health wing, where he volunteers, describe him as “a man of strong moral character,” and a “role model” for other inmates, who “has an extraordinary aptitude to help others.”

Gary is a gifted artist and has produced several stunning paintings. When he has the chance to practice his art — COVID and lockdowns have made that hard — he is most happy. “I love doing landscapes. I find peace of mind.”

Jean says her family assumed Gary had been released at some point during his incarceration. It wasn’t until decades later that they found out he was still in prison. The family almost immediately began thinking about ways to help get him out.



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But it was a happenstance encounter that would help bring the two families together. Jean was volunteering with a food bank when she ran into a friend of Gary's sister, who helped her reach out to Addie Kyles, Gary's mother. The families are now friends and they have been able to visit and write to Gary in prison.

*Just as he provides a calming force in a chaotic situation in prison, he hopes to do the same for at-risk people in his community.*

"I'm telling you, when he gets out," Addie says. "It'll be like heaven for him, and he wants to do so much. I had to watch him grow up to be a man behind bars. I've watched him carefully. And I believe sincerely in my heart, he has a caring heart for people, especially for the ones who have taken the road that he has taken."

According to Gary, he wants to be able to give back to his community if he has the chance to be released. Just as he provides a calming force in a chaotic situation in prison, he hopes to do the same for at-risk people in his community.

Gary's incarceration now only serves to meet a state-imposed retribution, one that even the victim's family believes is too much. "My biggest fear is he won't get home before his mom passes away," Jean says.

Gary suffers from diabetes, which puts him at a heightened risk of illness or early death. A second chance — in the form of medical parole or clemency — would provide a much-needed opportunity for release.

Gary has applied for a commutation. However, of the more than 5,400 people serving life without parole in Pennsylvania, fewer than 100 have received commutations in the last 40 years.



Jean wants to beat those odds. “We all want you to know,” she wrote to Gary, “we are behind you and will do anything in our power to help you get released.”

Gary’s Artwork:



*Life So Vivid, by Gary Kyles*





*Doing Time, By Gary Kyles*



## The Facts

**Name:** Gary Kyles

**Sentence:** life without parole

**Offense:** second-degree murder

**Priors:** none

**Year sentenced:** 1981

**Age at sentencing:** 19 and 6 months



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