**FOR LIFE: THE PODCAST**

Episode 103: Gloria Killian

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| **COLD OPEN CLIP** | *My breaking point in prison came when I had been there for 5 years. And Lifers will tell you that at either 5 or 7 years, most Lifers crack. I literally couldn’t put another foot forward.**It was hopeless and I was drenched in despair.* |
| **HOST VO (General)** | **This is FOR LIFE: THE PODCAST, from Sony Pictures Television and ABC. I’m your host, Isaac Wright Jr.****In America, it is estimated that there are thousands of wrongful convictions each year. Thousands more are overcharged and over-sentenced. In 1991, I was one of the thousands of people wrongfully convicted of a crime. I was sentenced to life in prison and, unfortunately, had no hope for freedom and no one to fight for me other than myself. I taught myself the law and, as a paralegal, I was able to help some of my fellow inmates get reduced sentences and released from wrongful convictions, while seeking my own justice.****After eventually getting my own conviction overturned, I became a lawyer, and have continued to be an advocate for those in need. My story also inspired the new fictional drama series FOR LIFE on ABC.****But there are so many others with stories like mine.****In this six-part series, we’re hearing real-life, first-person accounts of other wrongfully convicted men and women who, against all odds, prevailed, were exonerated – and emerged from their unthinkable adversity with grace and purpose.****These are stories of tenacity, faith, friendship, transformation, compassion, and family.** |
| **HOST VO**  | **Gloria Killian was a former law student with no criminal record when she was implicated in a murder-robbery in Rosemont, California in 1981.****The ensuing tragedy would show Gloria that friendship and community could be found in a place she never expected.** **This is Gloria’s story.** |
| **Gloria Killian (GK)** | My name is Gloria Kilian and I am 73 years old, and I have lived in California most of my life.No one in my family had ever been in trouble with the law prior to my arrest.There was a lot going on in my life that wasn't necessarily good, but it mainly stemmed from the fact that there had been a catastrophic end to a relationship that I was in and it really threw me for a loop.And that impacted every single thing that I did. I would say that basically I was walking around with my head stuffed in a pillow, and the decisions that I made weren't necessarily very wise.Prior to my arrest and wrongful conviction, I would have to describe myself as a hot mess.I was living in Sacramento, California. I had been attending law school, but I had really run out of money to pay for that. It's extremely expensive. I had been the victim of a robbery and I lost every single thing that I owned. It impacted me in ways that I didn't realize at the time. |
| **HOST VO** | **To make ends meet, Gloria took a job at a local coin shop called Allied Coins -- a position she got thanks to her boyfriend's friendship with the store owner, Virgil.** |
| **GK** | I did a lot of work for him. I did whatever he asked me to do. Everything from finding people to, you know, serving process for people that owed him...I knew nothing about the coin collector community. It turns out there was a string of robberies that occurred during that period of time. |
| **HOST VO** | **On December 9, 1981, another robbery struck the coin community --** **In a violent home invasion, the elderly man was shot and killed. His wife was critically wounded.****Multiple suitcases filled with silver were stolen.** **Several days later, police got an anonymous tip that named two local men, cousins Gary Masse and Stephen DeSantis, as the perpetrators.****Police also received an anonymous tip that looked into a law student named Gloria Killian.** |
| **GK** | I was at work with my boyfriend in his car repair shop.So I decided that the clever thing to do would be to close for lunch and then we could sneak off to the back room and have sex. I was in the process of taking off my sweater when there was a knock on the door. There were three men there and they said they were looking for Gloria Kilian and I said, “I'm right here.”They said that they were detectives.I was aware that Virgil had been questioned by the Sheriff's department the night before. I suspected that they probably wanted me to just verify, you know, what Virgil had said about his whereabouts.I was nervous. I was embarrassed. I'm thinking, well, let me just go downtown and get this over with. So I grabbed my purse and off we went.They put me into an interrogation room, closed the door, and left.Just like they do it on TV, which was exactly what I thought. But I still had not made the connection or even remotely considered that they considered me as a suspect.Two men came in and one of the first things they said was that they were going to Mirandize me. That startled me. You don't Mirandize somebody unless they're a suspect.And then I thought, ‘well, this is stupid. I haven't done anything wrong. So of course I'm going to talk to him. I'll waive my Miranda rights.’The interrogation started with a vengeance and they immediately began with the accusations. They'd asked me a question, I would answer the question, and then they'd tell me I was lying.And this went on for, I dunno, a couple of hours. They were insistent that I had planned this robbery and that I knew all these people whom I did not know. I was much more confused than I was afraid until the interrogation began to wind down and I started to become very nervous.I'm a small woman and these men are leaning over me and basically getting in my face and in my space, and I was feeling very uncomfortable. I think I was twitching like a hamster. I had cold chills down my back. I felt like I couldn't breathe. And finally they stood up and said, “fine, you're under arrest.” And I said, “Okay.” And then they started asking me if I would take a polygraph test. And one of them was insistent and was angry and yelling, and I had nothing to say except that I'm invoking my constitutional right to remain silent and to have a lawyer, and he continued to say, “will you take a polygraph?”I said, “I want a lawyer.” And we just kind of glared at each other for a minute or two and then he went away. And I later found out that he said to another cop, “yeah, the bitch ain't giving nothing up.” When I read that, I thought, ‘Oh, the bitch didn't have to tell you anything, and she didn't.’ |
| **Host VO** | **Gloria was arrested and charged with murder, attempted murder, robbery, burglary and grand theft auto. She was facing the death penalty and was denied bail.** |
| **GK** | The day after I was arrested, female officers came to my cell and they put chains around my ankles. They put a chain around my waist that had handcuffs to it, and they took me out to get on the prison bus.There were probably 20 other women. They all stared at me like I was a mass murderess. I was singled out. I was in a completely different place and these women acted as if I was something to fear, which I didn't get. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria spent almost five months behind bars as her attorney worked on getting the charges against her dropped. During that time, she lived in constant fear in a world that was starkly different from anything she knew.** |
| **GK** | I was afraid of the other prisoners. I had no experience with how to judge the situation at all. When people are glaring and snarling at you it invokes fear, but the simplest description is that I was terrified the entire time.I had no idea what it was like to be discriminated against until I went to prison. And I had a few incidents in which I was definitely mistreated because of my color or because of my education.It was like I was little miss whatever. And I think it's an experience that every white person should have. I think it's an experience that everyone who has never faced discrimination should have. It's a shock and it will change your perspective forever.  |
| **HOST VO** | **After a preliminary hearing, the initial charges against Gloria were dropped and her case was dismissed due to a lack of evidence.** **She was released, but the charges against Gary Masse were still pending. Masse sat in jail, awaiting his trial and planning his defense strategy.****Meanwhile, Gloria -- with the help of those who loved her -- tried to return to her old life.** |
| **GK** | I went back to work. My boyfriend and I moved into a different apartment and some people had brought me a cat as a present because I love cats, and so I focused probably more on the cat than I did my own legal fate.My case was dismissed because there was no evidence against me, but way down deep in my soul I had a terrible feeling those people were coming back. |
| **HOST VO** | **A year and a half later, Gloria's worst fears were realized. Gary Masse, implicated Gloria and Stephen DeSantis, in the murder and robbery.****In June 1983, Gloria was arrested for a second time on the same charges.** |
| **GK** | I was incarcerated for eight and a half months after my second arrest, and no plea deal was ever offered to me.When they took me into court, my lawyer was there and he said, “it's- you're getting bail,” at $25,000, which was really shocking for the type of crime with which I had been charged. In fact, the district attorney had me back in court at eight o’clock the next morning, and he was just furious. And he started ranting about what a horrible, heinous crime this was and what a monster I was, et cetera. My first arrest, I spent about $40,000 on legal fees. My family contributed and I had nothing left by the time my second arrest came around. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria was out on bail for three years. When her trial began in February 1986, she was appointed a public defender.** **She and Stephen DeSantis were tried separately. During his trial, DeSantis said he'd never even met or heard of Gloria Killian before the crime took place.****But when Gary Masse testified for the prosecution in Gloria’s trial, he told the jury that Gloria orchestrated the whole thing.** **Masse’s testimony was the only direct evidence against Gloria.** |
| **GK** | And the minute the jury walked in I knew, I just knew that I'd been convicted. It gave me shivers, it made me... for a minute I thought I was going to throw up. I just was sick, was absolutely sick.The jury convicted me of murder, attempted murder, robbery, burglary and grand theft auto.Prior to my experience I absolutely believed the justice system worked. I don't recall ever hearing the term “wrongful conviction.”I don't think I spent a lot of time thinking about it. I knew that it worked, but I also had this weird reactions ricocheting from believing that ‘they couldn't possibly convict me for something I didn't do,’ to thinking, ‘Oh my God, they're going to execute me tomorrow.’My family was not present for the verdict. Actually no one was present with me because of the fact that the jury had been deliberating for several days. And you... they tell you, you know, you've got half an hour to get to court.I did not call anybody else at all. I think everybody just knew that I was going to be acquitted. I didn't do anything.After I was found guilty, I did not see my mother until she came out to visit me at the branch, which was the- the County Jail that was 25 miles out of town. She and my boyfriend would come out together. No one was in court when I was sentenced. I didn't want them to be there. I didn't think they could take it. I was actually sentenced to 32 years to life, and one of the police officers gasped out loud. Everybody in the courtroom turned and looked at her. Everyone was stunned. The district attorney had stood up at my sentencing and the judge asked him if you want to make any remarks. And he started by saying, “Gloria Kilian. I mean, she's upper middle class, she's educated, she's never been in trouble. She was going to law school, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And I thought, this is weird. You know, it sounds like he's working for the defense. And that was when he nailed me and he said, “because of all of this, she should get more time than anybody.”And I did. I was sentenced to more time than the actual perpetrator. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria was sent to the California Institute for Women, a women's state prison in Riverside County, California.** |
| **GK** | The minute you become an inmate, you become less than. And it comes across very clearly. My soul was being stripped away, I was no longer a human being.  |
| **MIDROLL AD** | **The friendships Gloria cultivated and the community she created while in prison would support her and change the direction of her life.****The theme of friendship can also be found in Sony and ABC’s fictional drama series FOR LIFE.** **Here is star Nicholas Pinnock, speaking about how friendship plays an important role in the series.***Aaron is doing what so many people couldn't do. So he represents them and he gets them off.* *That’s the thing that he’s holding onto, that is driving him, his fight against a judicial system that was unlawful and unfair to him and people like him.* *You can feel that- that longing and that loss that he feels through not having his actual family with him on a day-to-day basis.**There’s a- a character called Jamal who is his best friend in there and he- he becomes, you know, family. He’s created a family within the prison system.”***Be sure to watch Sony Pictures Television and ABC’s drama series, FOR LIFE, Tuesdays on ABC.****Now back to Gloria’s story.** |
| **GK** | They take your clothes off you, they inspect you, they douse you with lice powder, shove you into a shower. A physical search is so humiliating, you are so vulnerable. Imagine standing in a room with someone. I mean, you know, they're not just dressed, but they have all of the equipment the cops carry and you know, they're basically armed with the teeth, with mace, handcuffs and sticks and whatever they have, and you're totally naked and then they want to examine your body. It's horrifying. I never got over it. It takes years to get over it. I never did.Women's prisons are not nearly as violent as men's. Even though everybody you look at terrifies you. My breaking point in prison came when I had been there for five years. And Lifers will tell you that at either five or seven years, most Lifers crack.I literally couldn't put another foot forward. I wouldn't come out of my room. I wouldn't talk to anybody. I wouldn't do anything. I mean, I would go to work, but that was about it and I was just, I was- it was hopeless and I was drenched in despair. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria’s community of “Lifers” -- small but strong -- recognized what she was going through, and they did whatever they could to help.** |
| **GK** | There's usually a woman or two that will be kind to you, especially Lifers.They would come get me every night after five o'clock, after dinner and they would drag me out to the yard and they would make me walk with them. And I don't remember that anybody said anything brilliant, but they just kept doing it.And gradually I just, I got over it. I got through it.My family didn't come and visit me, and I was really devastated because at the time there was something called “family visiting,” by which family members visit a prisoner and live in a trailer that was on the back of the prison grounds for three days.My mother was not well. She had a lot of serious health issues, but I didn't have the warmest relationship with my mother.She did the best she could, but she was very, very emotionally cut off. My boyfriend was falling apart and I actually cut him loose because he couldn't handle it. When my mother died I’d been in prison for quite some time. I didn't grieve well for my mother. I still sometimes grieve for her today. But people did really nice things for me. They brought me cards, cops would come by my cell late at night, you know, and talk to me through the wicket.I still have an entire huge folder full of cards and letters and different things that people gave me, which was nice. |
| **HOST VO** | **Over the years, as Gloria’s estrangement from her family increased, her bond with her fellow inmates grew stronger.** |
| **GK** | Della was my roommate. She was on the same housing unit that I was, they used to call it “Killer Miller” because it was where they put all the Lifers. She was an older woman. And she looked like somebody's mother, somebody's neighbor. She was just a nice normal person. I was able to pick her. Other people weren't so lucky. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria's choice of her roommate proved lucky in another way.** **It was Della who first advised other inmates to ask Gloria for legal help, since Gloria worked as a clerk in the prison law library - a job she’d gotten thanks to her time as a law student.** **For the next 16 years, Gloria stayed strong and sane by helping other incarcerated women** **with their appeals and sentence modifications. She also worked with the University of Southern California to help create the first Law Project in a California women's prison.** |
| **GK** | My roommate became really interested in a woman named Ducky, of all things. Ducky was always in trouble. There wasn't a vicious bone in her body, she was just a mess. One day this woman came into the law library, and she handed me a handful of crumpled up papers and they were her rule violation. And I started reading it and I started snickering because it made no sense, the date was wrong, the rule violation was wrong, everything was wrong about it. And she said, “I always get convicted.”And she had a string of rule violations, like, I don't know, 15, 16. So I said, “okay, I can deal with this.” She came back the next day, I gave her her written appeal and she filed it in the appropriate places, and it was granted, she won, her rule violation was dismissed. And she was ecstatic.I was able to help people with their outside court cases.There was a woman who came with a life sentence, which was illegally imposed on her, and it was life without the possibility of parole.She was pregnant and she was- it was medically a disaster. And in California law you can get a sentence recalled within the first 120 days. I wrote her a letter. I submitted documentation, I did all this stuff. I had no belief that I was going to win because those are rarely, rarely, granted. And the judge granted it. I was as shocked as she was, but she ran screaming out of the library and I was just so happy for her.It's not that I'm so brilliant or anything, it's that these were mistakes that had been made that I was able to correct.Most of the time it felt great to have success for other people, even though my own appeals were denied.I was able to separate the two, because I- I could see very clearly what there was that I could do and I was just blocking out my own situation because it was hopeless at the time. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria had been in prison for eight years when she met Joyce Ride in 1994.****After raising her two daughters -- one of whom was Sally Ride, NASA’s first female astronaut -- Joyce spent over 25 years working with incarcerated women.****Once Joyce and Gloria met, Joyce began working tirelessly to prove Gloria’s innocence.** |
| **Joyce Ride (JR)** | My name is Joyce ride. I'm 96. I was involved in visiting women in jail, and then when I graduated to women in prison, I met Gloria. |
| **GK** | I met Joyce Ride when she sent me a letter asking if I would send her some articles that I had written.I had just published my articles in the USC Law Review. Joyce is one of those women who stayed home, raised her children, and did good works back in the 50s. And she had always been interested in- in incarcerated women.She's one of the founders of Friends Outside, which is a national organization. She created the Jail Visiting Program in LA County jail. |
| **JR** | We visited and tried to keep them in touch with their families and we went there to listen, not to talk to them about what they did wrong.Tried to bring a little humor or a little life to their time in prison. |
| **GK** | We corresponded for a while, and then she wrote to me one day and asked if she could come to visit me.I actually went to our Friends Outside rep and said, who is this person to tell me about it.My impression of Joyce was that she was a nice, normal woman. But what I appreciated about her the most was that she was very well read. She could talk about the things that I like to talk about.Books, plays, movies. It was quite a bit different than the average conversation in the penitentiary. And she had a great sense of humor. |
| **JR** | So I visited with Gloria for a year before I asked her why she was there. My training was never ask them why they’re there. She sounded different. And she told me she was wrongfully convicted.  |
| **GK** | And I knew for a fact that it's a rule, you do not ask people why they're in prison. And then one day she looked at me and said, “why the hell are you here?” And I was really startled because she doesn't normally use vulgarity. And so I told her and she said, “Hmm.” And went away. |
| **JR** | I'm annoyed by injustice. So I- I said, “do you mind if I hire a detective to go up to Sacramento where you lived and tell me why, what happened? Would it be all right if I hired an attorney?” She said, “you'd be wasting your money.” Uh, I'll worry about that.I don't pay much attention to what people tell me. |
| **GK** | I didn't think it was anything that could be done.And she went ahead and hired one anyhow. He went up to Sacramento, talked to a few people, looked around and came back and the report that he wrote, you know, “there's no way, there's no way that this woman did it.” |
| **HOST VO** | **The investigation made possible by Joyce Ride helped Gloria access crucial evidence that pointed to Gloria's innocence, including a letter to prosecutors written by Gary Masse, where Masse stated: “I lied my ass off for you people.”** **It was also discovered that Masse received a reduced sentence in exchange for his testimony against Gloria.** |
| **GK** | When I read the letter in which Gary Masse said that he lied his ass off on the stand and then said, “I gave you Kilian and DeSantis.” And just then I thought, well, I can't repeat what I thought at the time. But it suddenly all made sense. It was- it was like staggering around in the dark and someone turning the lights on because I would rack my brain thinking, why did this person do this to me?I could understand that part. What I could never understand was the district attorney because he had no- why would he do this to me?And to this day, I mean, there is no answer. I think every exoneree in the country would like to know, why did they do this to me? |
| **HOST VO** | **In 2002, after serious doubt was cast on Gary Masse’s testimony, Gloria's conviction was overturned -- but she didn’t hear the good news right away.** |
| **GK** | There was an article in the LA Times discussing the reversal of my conviction and my case. Someone who worked at the prison. In fact, she was a prison guard, came to work with the LA Times and asked her clerk to go find out if I was still in the prison. This officer had assumed that, you know, they would immediately come and let me out.But her clerk came running over screaming and yelling, and that's how I found out basically. I managed to get on the phone. I called my lawyer. Uh, his sister ran his office and I said, “is it true?” And she said, “yes, it's true.” |
| **JR** | They finally overturned it, her conviction. And I went out to the prison to let her know that it had been overturned. And, uh, I think they had already heard it on the news. |
| **GK** | At first it was- it was shock and disbelief. I had changed a lot, I didn't trust a whole lot of people. I was ecstatic. But I also felt vindicated. You know, it's about time, somebody finally believed me. |
| **HOST VO** | **Five months after her conviction was overturned, Gloria was released from prison.****One month later, in September 2002, the charges against Gloria were finally dropped.** |
| **GK** | Nobody on my unit left for dinner. It seemed like everybody stayed because they wanted to say goodbye, including the people that wanted all my personal property that I was giving away. Then there was this whole gang of people that walked us to the gate.The watch commander came down to release me personally, I had known her for a long time. So she walks me to the gate and Joyce is sitting there and the watch commander gives the paperwork to the gate guard, who looks at it and goes, “Wait a minute, I can't accept this, there's something wrong.” Joyce almost has a heart attack and dies right on the spot, and I just laughed.They fixed the problem and they come and they let me out. There's a grassy area where everybody can, you know, go out and sit or hang out or do whatever. Everybody who was visiting was out there and they were all jumping up and down and waving, and I glanced toward the building and the visiting Sergeant was out there waving goodbye to me. The only strange thing about that was she couldn't stand me and I couldn't stand her and she's still out there waving goodbye to me.Everybody was just so happy. |
| **JR** | She had been pretty popular among the inmates because she had enough of a legal background to be able to help them with their divorce cases and other- other ways she was useful to them. The inmates came rushing out to see her ago. And they're all waving goodbye. |
| **GK** | And Joyce said, “well, you want to take a victory lap?” And I said, “no thanks. Let's just go. Before they come after us.” |
| **JR** | And then I said, ”Do you have some place to go?” No, all of her relatives had died while she was in prison. So I said, “I- I have a three bedroom house in Pasadena. Would you care to move in?”  |
| **HOST VO** | **It's been 18 years since Gloria Killian was released from prison -- and she's lived with Joyce Ride ever since.** |
| **GK** | I was so grateful to Joyce that she had done this. I didn't know for a long time a lot of the details that went into this. I never could understand why Joyce did what she did. She spent $100,000 on me. She always acted like it was kind of a normal thing to do, I don't think so.And Joyce's answer to that is always that injustice annoys her, which is, I don't know. It's- to me, it's puzzling.As long as you know, we've lived together and she's 96 now, and basically she can't live alone without me, so I'm delighted to do whatever I can. I'm incredibly grateful. You know? |
| **HOST VO** | **Several years after Gloria's release, the District Attorney who presided over her case was tried by the California State Bar for misconduct.** **Gloria attended the trial.** |
| **GK** | I went to the trial. I walked in there with about 10 lawyers that were friends. I knew that I couldn't keep staying there and that thing was dragging on forever.It suddenly dawned on me that I could get up and walk out of that courtroom and do any damn thing I pleased. It was done. |
| **HOST VO** | **Gloria Killian now works as a fierce advocate for incarcerated women and exonerees.** |
| **GK** | I've been able to use my knowledge about the prison culture and everything that goes on inside in a more beneficial way. I've testified at a lot of places. I've been before the US Congress, state congresses, everywhere. And I think that perhaps that is more valuable. Nowadays, if they're going to incarcerate women, they need to start by looking at them as women, not just miniature men. I came to believe that was my mission in life was to go to prison. I have no idea to this day if that's simply rationalization, if it's what kept me from going insane, or if it's really true. But that was what I came to believe because I did help change the law in California from prison.And yeah. I still believe it. |
| **Host VO** | **While she was in prison, Gloria helped organize and facilitate hearings in which legislators met with battered women who had been incarcerated for killing or injuring their abusers.****In 2001, her efforts helped inform new California State legislation that allowed victims of domestic abuse to present their partners’ history of violence as evidence in their defense.** **Women represent 10% of the overall prison population and 8 - 9% of overall exonerees as of 2019.****Whether she was helping others or allowing others to help her, Gloria’s incarceration showed her the power of community and friendship, and it changed the course of her life.****In the years since Gloria’s release, she and Joyce have housed six parolees transitioning to life outside prison.****Next time on FOR LIFE: THE PODCAST, a story of transformation as a man sentenced to death buries the sorrow of his past and embraces his future self.***“The first song that came on ironically, was Elton John “Philadelphia Freedom”, and you know, and that just was so- so much of a- a nerve shot to me. I'm on the way to death row and “Philadelphia Freedom's” playing on the radio.”* |
| **Credits** | **FOR LIFE: THE PODCAST is produced by Treefort.** **Executive producers are Lisa Ammerman and Kelly Garner for Treefort. And Nicholas Austin and Nathan Staudinger for Sony Pictures Television.****Our producer is Tanayi Seabrook.****With additional production help from Jamie Tenenbaum, Tim Schauer, and June Rosen.****Thom Monahan is our senior audio engineer and sound supervisor. With production and editing by Jasper Leak and production assistance from Elijah Wells.** |
| **Host VO** | **If you’ve enjoyed what you’ve heard, please subscribe, rate us and review us on Apple Podcasts. It really helps to raise awareness and get the word out so more people can hear these powerful stories.****The stories in this podcast are real.** **While the television series was inspired by my life, that story, including all characters, events, incidents, portrayed scenes, and dialogue is fictitious.** **And be sure to watch Sony Pictures Television and ABC’s drama series FOR LIFE. Tuesdays on ABC.** **I’m Isaac Wright Jr.**  |