

## Testimony of Elizabeth Geyer In Support of SB293

Hello, My name is Elizabeth Geyer. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my boyfriend, George Trudel. George was convicted of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree felony murder ( under accomplice liability) and has served 30 years of his life without parole sentence. He resides at SCI Graterford. The 2nd degree felony murder law in Pennsylvania is a gross miscarriage of justice for so many men and women who have been convicted of it, including George.

The tragedy of George Trudel's case, is he has been languishing in prison for 3 decades, destined to die there, because of a murder that another man, Robert Barrett, committed during an altercation with someone in the middle of a residential street. George came outside of the house when he heard the arguing. The man Robert Barrett was fighting, pulled out a knife.

Robert Barrett took the knife from the man and stabbed him in the arm and chest. The man broke free of Robert Barrett and ran away. This man later collapsed in the street a few blocks away from where the fight ensued, and died from his wounds.

George never was involved in the altercation. He watched the fight from the street, but never intervened. He was asked by Robert Barrett to take the weapon and hide it. George hid the weapon in his basement that night, and gave it to Robert Barrett's father the next day. Robert Barrett's father also asked George to testify in support of his son. George reluctantly agreed. It was for these actions that he was convicted of felony murder and condemned to die in prison.

I am not condoning George's behavior. He was 100% wrong. I'm trying to explain why he did what he did, because of Robert Barrett's father asking him to do it. George, just turning 20 years old, looked up to the father of Robert Barrett and did what was asked of him. George testified for Robert Barrett at his trial and lied on the witness stand to try and help protect him from getting in trouble.

Robert Barrett was the principle and the murderer in this case. He received a plea agreement of 3rd degree murder, and was released after serving only 7 1/2 years in prison. Robert Barrett has enjoyed his freedom since July of 1994.

George was not arrested for this crime, as an accomplice, until 11 months after the murder. George pled not guilty to 2nd degree murder. Because he never killed anyone. He went to trial and was found guilty of 2nd degree murder, as an accomplice, which has a mandatory sentence of life without parole.

Why is it, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree felony murder rule in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, that it allow a person, the principle, to take a life, and not be sentenced to life without parole but agrees with sentencing the accomplice, who was with the murderer at the time of the crime, but killed no one, to die in prison with no end to his/her suffering? No parole, just death by incarceration. How is it possible, that the murderer in the crime would ever be released before the accomplice? It makes no sense!

This law needs to change, Now! There are over one thousand prisoners serving life without parole sentences for 2nd degree felony murder in Pennsylvania, and are destined to die in prison. Approximately 480 of them, have not actually taken a life, like my boyfriend, George Trudel. This law is horrendous and has succeeded in ruining so many lives! Not only the prisoner's, but his or her entire family!

The devastation this sentence of death by incarceration has caused George, his family, and myself is horrific. The heartbreaking death of George's mother, Pat Trudel, just 7 weeks ago, On April 21, 2018, has truly shown, without a doubt, how cruel and unfair George's disproportionate sentence is.

It was always George's dream to walk out of the prison doors, and drive right to his Mother, where she would be waiting for him with loving arms, opened wide, to hug her son, a free man! Tragically, this will never happen now for George and his Mother. George has always believed that he will come home, that he will receive justice from the cruel and unusual punishment he has endured now for over 10,950 days of his life.

During his incarceration, George also lost his beloved Gram, Sophie Martin, who raised him when George's Father chose to leave and walk away from his family. She fought tirelessly, hiring lawyers to look at his case and grant him justice, until her death in 1998.

George has an amazing sister, Heather Saba, who could not be here today because of work, but she wanted me to read to you what she has to say. And I quote,

“ The hopelessness you feel day in and day out from the injustice that has been placed upon your brother, it is almost smothering. You feel as if you cannot breathe. You pray every day someone, somewhere, will see it and change the law. You hope people will believe they are worthy of a second chance, that despite having no chance, someone will give my brother that chance.

A visit once a week if you are lucky, because you are trying to work to keep a roof over your head in hopes that your brother will someday come home and you will need to be able to provide a place for him to live or money to be able to put on his account. Holidays are barely celebrated because there is no joy without my brother. My Grandmother and Mom fought so hard trying to bring him home. There is so much pain a family goes through, and I have passed that pain on to my own children. The family gets incarcerated too.”

George has a beautiful, 29 year old daughter, Samantha, who because of his incarceration and the severe stress of having to deal with her father being away, is estranged from her Dad. It is probably much too painful for her to keep in touch with him. George has two wonderful grandchildren, Samantha and Emilio, he sadly has never met because of his estranged relationship with his daughter.

He also has an awesome niece, Taylor, and nephew, Paul, whom he does not get to talk to or see often because of their schedules with school and work.

George was once married to the woman he loved, his wife, Gina, inside the prison in 1995. The strain and stress of their prison relationship was too difficult to endure and sadly ended in divorce in 1998.

The relationship between George and me, is a beautiful one. We are not only in love with one another, we are best friends. We hold each other up when the other is down. We laugh so much on a daily basis because it keeps everything bearable. We are a strong team together. We are both on the Legislative Committee together as active members of the organization, CADBI ( The Coalition to Abolish Death By incarceration) We have weekly visits and we have probably broken the record on phone communication, due to talking 6-8 times per day. It makes up for all the sadness and longing we feel day and night, not being able to wake up with each other, cook and eat dinner together, go on dates or watch TV together.

We do not have the pleasure of going to sleep together, like other couples. We never have any privacy together. It is hard for both of us. He is worth all of the struggles we endure.

George is an amazing human being. You too, would think so if you met him. Sometimes I cry at night because of how much my heart misses him. I know he misses me just as much. Emotions run high like now, reading this and most days, out of pure frustration, needing him, and wanting to enjoy him.

But what keeps me up most nights, is thinking about why he is still in prison? Why he hasn't been released? Why no one is doing anything about these laws that keep our deserving men and women from their families? George Trudel and many others, should not die in prison. George Trudel never took anyone's life. He should not have to pay the price with his own.

Despite the terrible life George Trudel is forced to live, due to his co- defendant committing murder, he has lived a life to be very proud of. George has completed every program offered at SCI Graterford and he worked diligently for 17 years, earning his Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts, graduating *Magna Cum Laude*, from Villanova University.

George has an extremely important job working directly with the Supervisors and staff. Remarkably, George has never had a misconduct in 30 years. He is the epitome of the model prisoner at SCI Graterford.

He is supported by Professors, Dr. Joseph Betz and Dr. James Wetzel from Villanova University, Dr. Ronald Paul Hill from George Washington University, Dr. Brian O'Neill from West Chester University and Sr. Cecilia Cavanaugh, The Dean of The School of Undergraduate Studies from Chestnut Hill College.

This speaks volumes of the character that George Trudel possesses. This group of prestigious men and women would not put their reputations on the line today at this hearing, if they did not know for sure, that George Trudel will be a true asset to society, when he is released from prison.

I beg all of you to please do what is right! Pass this Bill. Take a minute, and think of George Trudel as your Father, Son, or Brother. Would you fight as hard as you could for his freedom? Knowing he did not take anyone's life but will die in prison because of this horrible felony murder law? I know each of you would. Just like I am here, today.

I will end this testimony with a powerful quote by Margaret Mead. She said, and I quote " Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I promise you ladies and gentlemen, in front of me today, I am one of those people! Laws need to change in the criminal Justice system and they need to change now!

I want to thank all of you for listening to me. I'm grateful to tell George's story. And let his voice be heard.

Elizabeth Geyer- Girlfriend of George Trudel, #AS2262, SCI Graterford