

GONE

A FILM BY GRETCHEN & JOHN MORNING

LOGLINE

A veteran New York police officer embarks on a harrowing search to find her son, when he disappears under suspicious circumstances in Austria.



SYNOPSIS

Kathy Gilleran is a twenty-year veteran police officer of the city of Ithaca, New York. Her son, Aeryn, is a researcher at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna, Austria. On October 31, 2007, Kathy receives a call from UNIDO with distressing news: Aeryn failed to show up for work for two days in a row, and his colleagues are concerned for his well-being. Kathy immediately flies overseas to find him.

Upon arriving in Vienna, however, Kathy learns that the police have no interest in an investigation. Detectives tell her that Aeryn had been at the Kaiserbründl — an exclusive men’s sauna in downtown Vienna — on the evening of October 29th, when he suffered an extreme and sudden emotional breakdown, fled the sauna wearing only a towel, ran naked through the city streets, and jumped to his death into the Danube Canal. The police claim Aeryn committed “spontaneous” suicide.

Yet to Kathy, this explanation makes no sense, especially because no body had been recovered. Alone, short of funds, yet with abundant resilience, she initiates her own painful quest for the truth — all the while encountering overt police intimidation, abuse, and bigotry. But as she hones her instincts as a mother and her skills as a cop, Kathy ultimately discovers her own strength to keep fighting for her son — even to this day, nearly four years after he went missing.

GONE is the feature documentary that chronicles the story of Kathy Gilleran and her search for answers to Aeryn’s fate. With intimate footage shot in Vienna, and compelling direct-to-camera interviews, directors Gretchen and John Morning tell a searing story about her tireless efforts to find her son amidst lies, prejudice and a possible cover-up.

GONE is written, directed and produced by husband & wife filmmakers Gretchen and John Morning. It is executive produced by Jim Butterworth, produced by Daniel Chalfen for Naked Edge Films, and edited by Joel Plotch and Gretchen Morning.

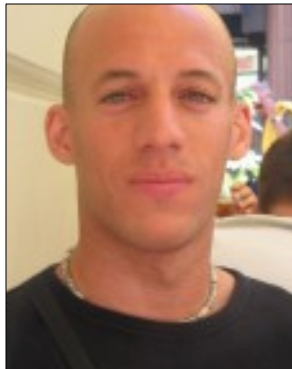
SUBJECT BIOS

Kathryn Gilleran

Kathryn Gilleran grew up in Elmira, New York, and began her career as a social worker in Tompkins County. A single mother raising two sons, Kathy joined the Ithaca Police Department in 1985, where she served as a Patrol Officer and Neighborhood Police Officer. Kathy was also trained and certified as a Mounted Police Officer, was a member of the Emergency Response Team, and is one of the first female officers in the United States to complete Advanced SWAT Training with the International Association of Chiefs of Police. As a police officer, Kathy was deeply involved in community outreach programs, where she helped to connect local residents with the police department. Kathy frequently appeared on the local news in stories pertaining to the police, and was the recipient of numerous awards, including Crime Prevention Officer of the Year by the New York State Crime Prevention Coalition and the Michael Padula Award by the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission. In 2006, she retired from the Ithaca Police Department after more than twenty years of service.



Aeryn Gillern



Aeryn was raised in Groton, New York, and graduated from Groton High School in 1991, where he was a member of the chorus and the Varsity boys track team. From a young age, Aeryn was very deeply involved in the Roman Catholic Church, serving as an altar boy and later as an acolyte. An exuberant student, Aeryn earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Franciscan University, as well as two masters degrees: Theology & Christian Ministry from Franciscan University and International Relations from Webster University in Vienna. Aeryn was also an accomplished athlete and model for advertising campaigns, including Vienna's popular charity event, The Life Ball. In 2005 and 2006, Aeryn was nominated Mr. Gay Austria, and was the first runner up in the international Mr. Gay 2006 competition. Beginning in 2003, Aeryn was employed as an economic research clerk for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna, Austria, and was elected to UNIDO's Staff Council in 2007. He was an employee of UNIDO when he disappeared in October 2007.

— Please note: Kathryn Gilleran uses the original spelling of her family surname. —

FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

A woman sits in front of the camera. The backdrop is black, with a faint streak of blue light. It is the same color as the woman's deep Irish eyes. When we first see her, she looks hardened, or perhaps uncomfortable in front of the camera. But then we hear her story and we realize that what we're witnessing is rage.

Her name is Kathy Gilleran. She's a twenty-year veteran police officer of the Ithaca, New York Police Department. Kathy tells us how much she loved being a police officer, helping those in her community on what was often a very bad day. And we believe her. She looks like the kind of cop you'd want by your side if the shit hit the fan. What sticks with Kathy most from her two decades on the force is the adage, "There but by the grace of God go I."

But for the past four years, Kathy hasn't seen much grace in her life. On October 29, 2007, her 34 year-old son, Aeryn, vanished in Vienna, Austria.

We first read about Aeryn Gillern in a local Syracuse, New York newspaper nearly ten months after he disappeared in Vienna. We contacted his mother, Kathy, who lived only thirty minutes from our home in New York, and asked if she would be willing to be interviewed on camera. Our intention was to get a fuller understanding of Aeryn's case, since so little was written about it. We were uncertain exactly what the story was, and whether or not we would choose to pursue it.

We interviewed Kathy a few months later in December 2008. We didn't know it then, but this was the first time she was revealing the full extent of her search for Aeryn. Even her closest friends didn't know. But even though we knew we were onto an extraordinary story, we were unsure how to approach it. We thought we were pursuing a narrative about a missing man, but after meeting Kathy, what we realized was that GONE was really about a mother's ongoing struggle to find her son amidst a surreal tale of lies, intimidation and cruelty.

And so, as we began to shoot GONE in Central New York and Vienna, Austria, we were guided by a simple, defining premise: to immerse viewers in Kathy's mesmerizing, personal quest for the truth.

TIMELINE

- April 28, 1973 Aeryn Gillern is born in Elmira, New York.
- June 1991 Aeryn graduates from Groton High School in Groton, New York.
- 1997 Aeryn graduates from Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio) with a Bachelor of Arts in Theology.
- 1997-1998 Aeryn attends seminary in Graz, Austria.
- 1999 Aeryn receives Master of Arts with Honors in Theology and Christian Ministry from Franciscan University of Steubenville.
- 2003 Aeryn is hired by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna, Austria as a research clerk.
- 2005 Aeryn is nominated Mr. Gay Austria 2005 and Mr. Gay Swimwear.
- 2006 Aeryn is nominated Mr. Gay Austria 2006 and is first runner up in the international Mr. Gay 2006 competition in Palm Spring, CA.
- 2007 Aeryn receives his second Master's Degree in International Relations from Webster University, and is elected to UNIDO's staff council.
- September 2007 Aeryn flies home to Cortland, New York to visit his family for ten days. Kathy makes plans to sell her home and move to Vienna to stay with Aeryn for several months.
- October 27, 2007 Kathy speaks to Aeryn on the phone for the last time.
- October 29, 2007 At approximately 6:00 p.m., Aeryn signs out of UNIDO and goes to the Kaiserbründl sauna, where he has a private dressing room, #5.
- October 31, 2007 Kathy receives a call from a UNIDO staff member alerting her that Aeryn has not been at work for two days.
- November 1, 2007 Kathy flies from Syracuse, New York to Vienna, Austria to search for Aeryn. In Austria, Aeryn's friends file a missing persons report with the police. (According to Kathy, the Austrian police had initially refused to accept a missing person's report because Aeryn was not an Austrian citizen. UNIDO contacted the Austrian Foreign Ministry, who intervened.) When Kathy arrives in Vienna, she meets with UNIDO representatives and the Austrian police.
- December 2007 Kathy returns home to Cortland, New York.

- July 2008 Kathy resigns from her job at the Cortland SPCA. That summer, she also speaks to the U.S. media for the first time about Aeryn's disappearance.
- October 2008..... Kathy returns to Vienna to hold a vigil for her son.
- October 30, 2008 Kathy meets with Green Party members of the Austrian Parliament, Ulrike Lunacek, Peter Pilz and Dr. Ewa Agata Dziedzic, regarding Aeryn's case.
- November 19, 2008..... Journalist Joseph Gepp writes article "Der Tag, an dem Aeryn verschwand" for *Der Falter*. Several days later, two witnesses come forward and state they saw Aeryn on the night of October 29, 2007, running naked up a staircase near a U-Bahn station.
- November 26, 2008..... Journalist Joseph Gepp writes a follow-up article "Einen total perplexen, verfolgten Eindruck" for *Der Falter* about the two witnesses who contacted him.
- December 11, 2008..... Green Party members file an official inquest into Aeryn's disappearance with the Austrian Parliament and Minister of the Interior, Dr. Maria Fekter.
- February 10, 2009..... The Austrian Parliament releases the results of the inquest to the public. They decline to investigate Aeryn's case further.
- October 2009..... Kathy returns to Vienna to hold another vigil outside the Kaiserbründl.
- October 2010..... Kathy returns to Vienna to hold a vigil outside the Kaiserbründl.

FILMMAKERS

Gretchen Morning (Writer, Director, Producer, Editor)

Gretchen began her career in non-fiction television as a writer/producer on TLC's award-winning ten-part series "Gunfighters of the West." Since then, she has become a successful writer, editor and producer of short- and long-form reality and non-fiction television shows. In the past decade, she has written, produced and edited over 50 hours of programming for Discovery Channel, National Geographic, Lifetime, TLC, Food Network and The History Channel. Her credits include series such as "Seriously Funny Kids," "Hoarding: Buried Alive," "Fabulous Cakes," "Anxious," "Dr. G: Medical Examiner," "Factory Floor with Marshall Brain," "History's Lost and Found," "Big Deals," "Top 5," and "Ultimate Factories." Gretchen holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Moravian College and studied philosophy abroad at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University in Israel.



John Morning (Writer, Director, Producer)



John cut his teeth as a writer on Nickelodeon's long-running animated series "Blue's Clues." He has written television episodes for National Geographic, Discovery Health Channel, and a feature screenplay for Intercontinental Pictures, based on the true-life story of a Colombian kidnapping. A distinguished graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, John's award-winning short film, "Truckstop," won NYU's First Prize Wasserman Award, as well as accolades from Martin

Scorsese and Warner Bros. Studios. His feature screenplay "What Would Fabio Do?" won Best Comedy in Austin Film Festival's prestigious screenplay competition and the festival's Burnt Orange Award, and his comedy script, "Coal," was optioned by Keylight Entertainment. Currently, John is completing UCLA's Professional Program in Screenwriting.

Gretchen and John are married and live in Los Angeles. They are producing a new feature documentary, BURN, about volunteer firefighters. John was a volunteer firefighter for six years in upstate New York.

Daniel J. Chalfen (Producer)

Chalfen is the founder of and producer at Naked Edge Films. His films have screened at festivals in over 60 countries, have been theatrically released and broadcast worldwide and have been featured on some of the world's leading networks, including ABC, Al Jazeera, ARTE, BBC, CBC, CNN, HBO, PBS and ZDF. Additionally, they have screened for United Nations, military and government audiences, NGOs and on university campuses on six continents. Chalfen's producing credits include the award-winning feature documentaries "Donor Unknown," "War Don Don," "Budrus," "The Disappearance of McKinley Nolan," "Meeting Resistance," "Encounter Point," "39 Pounds of Love," and the television series "Ordinary People." His forthcoming films include "Cape Wind," "Untitled Haiti Project," "The Life and Mind of Mark DeFriest" and "Pretty Old."

Jim Butterworth (Executive Producer)

Jim Butterworth is the founder and president of Naked Edge Films, where he has served as executive producer for films including "GONE," "War Don Don" and "The Disappearance of McKinley Nolan," and the forthcoming films "Cape Wind," "Untitled Haiti Project" and "The Life and Mind of Mark DeFriest." Jim's own film "Seoul Train," which he produced, directed and shot, has been translated to more than twenty languages and broadcast on TV globally. In 2007, "Seoul Train" was bestowed the Alfred I. duPont – Columbia University Award for excellence in broadcast journalism and investigative reporting, and also was runner-up for the National Journalism Award. Jim also is a successful technology entrepreneur and investor, and an advisor to a number of nonprofits, startup companies and investment funds. He was one of the pioneers in the streaming of audio and video over the Internet, and holds 12 issued U.S. and foreign patents in this field.

Joel Plotch (Editor)

Joel Plotch has been editing feature films for the last twelve years. Included in the 20 films that he has edited is an ongoing collaboration with award-winning writer-director Neil Labute that includes such films as "In the Company of Men," "Your Friends and Neighbors," "Nurse Betty," "The Shape of Things," "Wicker Man," and most recently "Lakeview Terrace" starring Samuel L. Jackson. Additionally, he has continued his long career editing commercials, music videos, television programming and documentaries for, among others, PBS, HBO and MTV Networks. He also has directed the award-winning short film, "Heavy Put-Away," which was adapted from a Terry Southern short story ("Easy Rider," "Dr. Strangelove," etc.) starring Gretchen Mol, Dallas Roberts and Mark Boone Jr.

Attila Boa (Director of Photography, Vienna)

Attila Boa is an award-winning Austrian cinematographer who has brought his unique and beautiful imagery to dozens of feature films, documentaries, and television programs, including "The Forgotten Space," "Zwerge Srengen," "Run," "The Making of 'Futbol'," "Contact High" and "Kill Daddy Good Night." He began his career as a camera assistant with acclaimed director Wolfgang Thaler, with whom he still collaborates, and is a graduate of the University of Bern.

Dan Roach (Director of Photography, New York)

For more than 30 years, Dan has been behind a camera. His experience began in local television news in Syracuse, New York. Dan has worked for shows on Discovery, History, ESPN and Biography, and has shot live-sports events for networks such as ESPN, CBS College Sports, Fox, TNT and the Golf Channel. Dan has shot the Olympics, ESPN's X Games, the PGA Tour, The NFL, NHL and NCAA college football, basketball, hockey and lacrosse. His company, Camera1, is located in Syracuse.

Erik Blicher & Glenn Schloss / G&E Music (Original Score)

Erik Blicher and Glenn Schloss founded G&E Music in 1997, and together have scored commercials, promos, short- and long-form features including "The Nine Lives of Marion Barry" for HBO Films and "The Assassination of Dr. Tiller" for NBC's Peacock Productions, as well as for PBS, VH1, ESPN, Nickelodeon, Versus, Saatchi & Saatchi, and many other major networks, ad agencies and production companies.

GONE END CREDITS

Written and Directed by

Gretchen Morning
John Morning

Executive Producer

Jim Butterworth

Produced by

Daniel J. Chalfen

Produced by

Gretchen Morning
John Morning

Edited by

Joel Plotch
Gretchen Morning

Director of Photography

Attila Boa
Dan Roach

Original Music by

Erik Blicher and Glenn Schloss

Featuring the song "Gone" by Jenn Morson

Additional Camera

Michael Brown
Florian Dalik
Kathryn Gilleran
Gretchen Morning
John Morning

Production Sound

Matt Langley

Production Assistant

Crystal Lyon

Assistant Editor

Kevin Badami
Jesus Silva

Post Production Finishing Services

Fancy Film Post Services, Los Angeles, California

Color Timing by

Michael Smollin

Online Editor

Matthew Hopkins

HD Finishing Consultant

William Macomber

Post Production Sound Services

Coupe Studios Music & Sound Design, Boulder, Colorado

Sound Design and Mix

Ed Kaufman

Audio Producer

Eric Singer

"Gone" original song written by Jenn Morson,
performed by Jenn Morson, Brian Frederick, Joe Morson, and John Athayde

Additional music provided by G&E Music, Producer's Toolbox
in Association with Three of Change

Archival stills were generously provided by

Heribert Corn

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Joseph Gepp

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Ingrid McWilliams

Rob Montana

Ana and Chris Morley and Family

Jack and Janice Morning

Joe Morra

The Morson Family

Alexandra Czernin-Morzin

The Mullins Family

Alex Russin Ottaviano and Family

The Pato Family

Lisa Pilewski and Family

PFLAG Ithaca-Cortland

Rainbow Alliance of Central New York

Steve Ralls

SUNY Cortland LGBTQ Committee

Lisa Tibbles

Basil Tsiokos

US Embassy, Vienna

Umberto Weiss

Vienna Film Commission

George Murphy-Wilkins

Vicki Wilkins

Brad and Krista Williams and Family

Joan Wood

A Mother, Her Son and a Test of America's New Foreign Policy

Steve Ralls, *The Huffington Post*, April 14, 2009

In recent months, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans have begun cautiously expressing hope that, in addition to recent, hard won victories here at home, we may be on the verge of a little bit of progress abroad, too.

Our community rightly cheered when the Obama administration recently reversed a Bush administration policy and [endorsed a United Nations declaration](#) on protecting the world's LGBT people. And we looked on with admiration and pride again as [Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently said](#) that she and President Obama intend to stand against anti-gay animus on the world stage, too. Speaking in March to a group of enthusiastic supporters in Brussels, Clinton told the crowd that "Human rights is and always will be one of the pillars of our foreign policy. In particular, persecution and discrimination against gays and lesbians is something we take very seriously."

The remark, press outlets reported, brought about wild applause and, for perhaps the first time, sent a clear message to foreign leaders that the United States intends to speak out against anti-gay atrocities abroad. It was, to paraphrase Secretary Clinton's famous words as America's First Lady, intended to put the world on notice that we believe "human rights are gays rights, and gay rights are human rights, too."

But, as noble as the sentiment of both actions were, they gave little comfort to Kathy Gilleran, a mother from upstate New York whose son, Aeryn, has been missing in Austria for more than a year and a half. Because, while Kathy would love to believe that a new day has dawned in diplomatic affairs, she continues to struggle in her heroic efforts to learn the truth about her gay son and continues to meet roadblock after roadblock in her quest to uncover the facts about what happened in Vienna.

As we [reported last year](#) here at Huffington Post, Aeryn Gillern was last seen in October 2007 in Vienna, where he was working with the United Nations International Development Organization, or UNIDO. He disappeared suddenly, without any prior warning, and for no apparent reason. According to his mother, Aeryn seemed happy and content with his life abroad the last time they spoke, just shortly before he vanished, and there were no indications that anything was amiss.

"Aeryn loved the history and the culture [of Vienna], especially the architecture and music," Kathy writes at [the website](#) she has set up to honor her son, where she also notes that she often switches, in her writing, between the past and present tense when talking about him. "I think you will find that I switch back and forth because although I believe Aeryn is no longer alive, he is and he was," she says.

And, by all measures, he had much going for him in life. Aeryn was successful in his career, had a loving, supportive mother and was enjoying his life in Austria. And, he was also openly gay, which, as far as Kathy was always concerned, was nothing close to a big deal. But mounting evidence indicates it may be why his disappearance continues to be shrouded in mystery and why, despite numerous efforts, Kathy can't seem to get Austrian officials to take his case seriously.

In fact, Kathy has now flown to Vienna twice since her son vanished, and has implored local investigators to launch a comprehensive investigation into what happened on the night Aeryn disappeared. She has implored the U.S. State Department to intervene and press Austrian officials to do the right thing. And she has even met with members of the Austrian parliament.

And this is what it has gotten her so far:

A statement from investigators in Vienna to the press characterizing Aeryn as "an emotionally unbalanced gay man."

Charges - to his own mother - that Aeryn likely committed suicide because, as a gay man, he was likely HIV-positive and despondent about his health.

Disproven reports that DNA samples were available to investigators.

And a parliamentary inquest that resulted in local police defending their own actions and concluding, after investigating themselves, that they did nothing wrong.

Meanwhile, Aeryn Gillern is still missing and there don't appear to be enough people who are taking it very seriously. And, more and more, it seems likely that the lack of initiative is being driven by an over-abundance of homophobia.

Several people, Kathy Gilleran told me when I spoke with her yesterday, have recently come forward to give her information on other people missing abroad - missing in Vienna, even - whose disappearances have been thoroughly investigated. Those cases, they point out, have warranted the intervention of the U.S. Embassy and the interest of other diplomatic venues and officials.

The only difference between those missing persons and Aeryn Gillern is that Aeryn happened to be gay.

In a letter sent this week to New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who represents the Gilleran family in the Senate, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays ([PFLAG](#)) - the only organization, Gilleran says, who has stood by her side throughout the entire ordeal - encouraged the new Senator to push for a full investigation.

"PFLAG has been proud to support Ms. Gilleran in her quest to learn about the details surrounding Aeryn's disappearance, and we support all efforts to discover the details about what happened in Vienna," the organization wrote. "We hope that Congress, the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Austria will take the case seriously and explore every viable option for discovering the details about what happened to Aeryn. It is simply unacceptable that Ms. Gilleran has been unable to learn the facts about her son's disappearance and disheartening that Austrian authorities appear not to have taken the case seriously."

Indeed, the case of Aeryn Gillern may be an early test of just how LGBT-inclusive America's new foreign policy will be, and how much diplomatic pressure officials are willing to exert to protect, defend and stand up for LGBT people living - and missing - abroad. Because until the search for Aeryn is taken seriously, we cannot truly say that LGBT equality - and respect for the dignity of LGBT people - is a pillar of U.S. foreign policy.