# Former US death row inmate Sonia Jacobs and companion die in County Galway house fire



A tragic incident has claimed the lives of two individuals, including Sonia "Sunny" Jacobs, a former death row inmate who was wrongfully convicted of murder in the United States. The fire occurred on Tuesday morning at a residential property in rural County Galway, Ireland, where local authorities found Jacobs, in her 70s, and Kevin Kelly, a man in his early 30s, deceased at the scene. Firefighters and gardaí responded to the emergency call at approximately 06:20, quickly cordoning off the area. While the investigation into the fire’s cause is ongoing, initial reports suggest that foul play is not suspected.

Jacobs’ story is a poignant reminder of the devastating impacts of wrongful convictions. In 1976, she was accused of killing two Florida police officers, resulting in a life sentence initially set to be served on death row. After spending 17 years in prison, her conviction was ultimately overturned. Following her release, she became an outspoken advocate against the death penalty, passionately calling for systemic reforms within the criminal justice system. In a TED Talk delivered at NUI Galway, Jacobs shared her experiences and the importance of resilience, highlighting the critical choice between hope and hopelessness she faced during her time behind bars.

She resided in Ireland for several years, marrying another wrongful conviction survivor, Peter Pringle. Pringle himself faced a harrowing journey, sentenced to death after being accused of a double murder during a bank robbery in rural Ireland. He spent nearly 15 years imprisoned before being acquitted. Their mutual experiences of suffering and injustice brought them together, leading them to establish The Sunny Centre, a charity aimed at supporting others who have been exonerated, helping them reintegrate into society.

Jacobs’ contributions to the discourse surrounding justice and human rights extend beyond her personal narrative. She has been featured in numerous platforms engaging audiences about the emotional and psychological toll of wrongful imprisonment. Her reflections emphasised not only the challenges faced while rebuilding lives post-exoneration—a journey rife with obstacles such as finding employment and mending familial relationships—but also the profound growth that can emerge from such harrowing experiences.

The legacy Jacobs leaves behind is one of hope, advocacy, and resilience, inspiring countless individuals grappling with their own adversities. Her life’s work, alongside her late husband, advocated for the value of human rights and the urgent need for reform in a system that has failed many.

As the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the house fire continues, the community mourns the loss of a figure who embodied the fight for justice, transforming her painful past into a beacon of hope for many around the world.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy3vrgj4j8o), [[4]](https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/the-gift-of-life-after-death-row/26289154.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy3vrgj4j8o), [[2]](https://www.independent.ie/life/health-wellbeing/former-death-row-inmate-delivers-moving-speech-to-irish-students-i-had-a-choice-between-hope-and-hopelessness/34461982.html), [[5]](https://www.galwaybeo.ie/news/irish-man-wrongfully-convicted-sentenced-7986357)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/life-after-death-row-how-this-couple-escaped-capital-punishment-and-started-again-in-rural-ireland/35054443.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/feb/12/theatre)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/the-gift-of-life-after-death-row/26289154.html), [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/stealing-back-time-1.997710)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy3vrgj4j8o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.ie/life/health-wellbeing/former-death-row-inmate-delivers-moving-speech-to-irish-students-i-had-a-choice-between-hope-and-hopelessness/34461982.html> - Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs, a former death row inmate, delivered a powerful TED Talk at NUI Galway, sharing her experiences of wrongful conviction and the importance of hope and mindfulness. She recounted her 17 years in prison, including five years in solitary confinement, and discussed her journey towards forgiveness and healing. Jacobs emphasised the choice between hope and hopelessness, highlighting how she found freedom through spiritual practices like yoga and meditation. Her story serves as an inspiration for those facing adversity, illustrating the resilience of the human spirit.
3. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/life-after-death-row-how-this-couple-escaped-capital-punishment-and-started-again-in-rural-ireland/35054443.html> - Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs and Peter Pringle, both wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death, now reside in rural Ireland. Jacobs was exonerated after 17 years in prison in the US, while Pringle was released after 15 years in Ireland. The couple met in 1998 and married in 2011. Together, they founded The Sunny Centre, a charity in Galway that offers support to fellow exonerees, providing a sanctuary for those adjusting to life after wrongful imprisonment. Their story highlights themes of resilience, justice, and the power of human connection.
4. <https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/the-gift-of-life-after-death-row/26289154.html> - Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs, a former death row inmate, reflects on her life after release, discussing the challenges of reintegration and the importance of personal growth. She shares her experiences of rebuilding relationships with her children and the difficulties of finding employment after wrongful imprisonment. Jacobs emphasises the significance of self-empowerment and the choice to move from victimhood to survival. Her journey underscores the complexities of life after exoneration and the ongoing process of healing and self-discovery.
5. <https://www.galwaybeo.ie/news/irish-man-wrongfully-convicted-sentenced-7986357> - Peter Pringle, who was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death in Ireland, passed away at the age of 84 in County Galway. Pringle served 15 years in prison before his conviction was quashed. He married Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs, a former death row inmate from the US, in 2012. Together, they founded The Sunny Centre, a charity in Galway that supports fellow exonerees. Pringle's death marks the end of a remarkable journey of resilience and advocacy for justice and human rights.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/feb/12/theatre> - An article discussing the experiences of former death row inmates, including Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs, who was wrongfully convicted and spent 17 years in prison. The piece highlights the psychological and emotional toll of wrongful imprisonment and the challenges faced by exonerees upon release. It also touches upon the broader issues of the death penalty and the justice system, providing insights into the personal stories of those who have lived through such ordeals.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/stealing-back-time-1.997710> - An interview with Sonia 'Sunny' Jacobs, a former death row inmate, discussing her wrongful conviction, time in solitary confinement, and eventual release. Jacobs reflects on the psychological impact of her imprisonment and the journey towards healing and forgiveness. She shares her experiences of rebuilding her life and relationships after exoneration, offering insights into the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of hope and personal growth.