

## **RANSOM SEASON 1, EPISODE 9: Endings**

**Art Rascon:** When we started making this podcast, Paulette drove us out to see McKay's grave.

**Paulette:** And this road was not four lane you know, you know it was very wooded and it was two lane, but things change.

**Art Rascon:** We pulled into the cemetery a flat green expanse, peppered with trees with graves stretching out as far as the eye can see.

**Paulette:** This is what's bizarre to me, we were one of the first ones out here. Now look. It's covered in graves.

**Art Rascon:** So much has changed in the 28 years since McKay was buried here in 1995. Conroe has gone from an idyllic town, where safety was assumed and kids roamed free, to a crowded city of 100,000 where McKay's story has largely been forgotten.

**Ben Kuebrich:** You're saying when you moved here you knew everyone when you'd go into a restaurant.

**Paulette:** And now I know everybody in the graveyard.

**Art Rascon:** McKay's headstone is a black, marble cross.

**Paulette:** And there's a little foot thing that says how about those lions.

**Art Rascon:** A memorial to the last words he spoke to his father before he was abducted. Twelve-year-old McKay's sheepish way of saying 'I love you.'

**Paulette:** Carl's buried here and McKay's buried here. Such as life, right?

**Art Rascon:** For those even peripherally involved, McKay's kidnapping was a dramatic and significant period in their life. Then, after the trial, it was over. Media moved on to the next big story, lawyers to new cases, and law enforcement to other investigations.

But for Carl and Paulette, and Hilton and Connie, there was no moving on. The consequences of Hilton's decision to kidnap and murder McKay would haunt both families for the rest of their lives.

From KSL Podcasts, I'm Art Rascon. This is the finale of Ransom: Position of Trust, Episode 9 Endings.

**Art Rascon:** Author Tannie Shannon had begun corresponding with Hilton Crawford before the trial but he didn't actually meet him in person until 1996 after Hilton received his death sentence.

**Tannie Shannon:** I'd never been inside a prison before.

**Art Rascon:** Tannie wanted to figure out who Hilton really was and what led him to kidnap McKay.

**Tannie Shannon:** He had an awful lot going for him for someone that would go to this extreme and wind up being executed for this heinous act. To me it just boggles the mind. And that's why I started interviewing him to begin with.

When I went out to meet him for the first time. The death row at that time was about 15 miles outside of town. It's very remote. Outside the building everything is covered with high fences and razor wire on top of that.

You have to go past a guard tower first where they will look underneath your car, your vehicle and all that to make sure that you're not bringing anything in. Then once you park then you have to go through another checkpoint, where they use a scanner to see if you have anything metallic on your body and so forth. Then you go in through about at least two gates before you are ushered into the visitors area and the visitors area.

The ceilings were so high and there were windows right at the top of the ceiling that were open for ventilation. They had ceiling fans way at the top. These buildings were not air conditioned. It was a little like walking into a, something in a horror movie.

**Art Rascon:** As author Tannie Shannon walked into the death row visitor's room, he saw Hilton sitting behind a plexiglass barrier, dressed in a white prison uniform.

**Tannie Shannon:** He's clean cut. If he didn't have his prison whites on, you would think that he's probably a businessman, a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Every time I saw him his prison whites were perfectly pressed. And I asked him about this one time, he said, Well, what I do is when I find one that's fairly new, I don't send it to prison laundry, I wash it by hand in the toilet. And then I let it dry and put it underneath my mattress, to press for visitors.

**Art Rascon:** Tannie explained to Hilton the project, to write a book with Hilton's side of the story, trying to figure out what had compelled him to kidnap McKay.

**Tannie Shannon:** I hadn't been interviewing him very long, and a big, loud Sirene type noise came up and I said, What in the hell is that? And he said, well, there's been a break. Of course it wasn't. It was just the little lunch Sirene saying that the lunch time was over or something like that. I don't know what it was. But it was just announcing the time. Even in the face of lots of pressure, he maintained his sense of humor. Little on the dark side.

**Art Rascon:** Following the trial and Hilton Crawford's conviction, Tannie says he was one of Hilton's only visitors.

**Tannie Shannon:** His wife turned completely against him wanted nothing else to do with him whatsoever.

**Art Rascon:** Connie divorced Hilton after the trial. But in the dozens of interviews Tannie recorded with Hilton, Hilton stayed devoted to Connie.

**Hilton:** We've never had an argument. We've never cussed at each other. We never spent one night away from each other.

**Art Rascon:** Tannie spent seven years interviewing Hilton always through a plexiglass wall.

**Tannie Shannon:** After he had been on death row for a few months, he was going through a hard time out in the exercise yard and he had fallen to his knees and was crying. Feeling like he just wanted to die and having such a profound regret for everything he had done. And the inmate in the yard right next to him comforted him and they prayed together and he got him through this incident.

**Art Rascon:** For the first few years, Hilton was held at the Ellis unit, where well-behaved prisoners could work in a garment shop and spend a few hours a day talking and watching movies.

But that changed on Thanksgiving day 1998. During their outdoor recreation time, seven death row inmates secretly sawed through a fence, climbed onto a roof, and waited for nightfall. They'd left dummies in their beds, so guards wouldn't notice that they were missing. After sunset, the inmates continued their escape but they were spotted by a guard who raised the alarm and began to shoot. Six of the seven escapees surrendered immediately but one man began to scale the prison's high perimeter fence.

**Tannie Shannon:** He had insulated his clothing with cardboard so as he threw himself over the razor wire, it wouldn't cut up his body. And he actually made it away and they searched for him for a week or so and finally found his dead body in the river a few miles away. Apparently he had tried to swim the river without removing the cardboard and that created a problem for him.

**Art Rascon:** Following this prison break, death row was moved to a new facility with even stricter conditions. At this new unit, inmates spent 22 to 24 hours a day confined in small cells, with breaks only for showers, or brief stints outside. That gave Hilton plenty of time to think about his life.

**Tannie Shannon:** He would sometimes cry when he started talking about McKay. He felt quite a lot of remorse about what he'd done.

**Art Rascon:** But Tannie saw Hilton as a man of contradictions.

**Tannie Shannon:** His remorse and his denial were kind of in conflict with each other and I would sometimes stop him and ask him to kind-of explain it a little better, or expand a bit and he said, Well, that's what happened and that's the best way I can put it and he would often get annoyed.

**Art Rascon:** Associated Press reporter Mike Gracyzk said he had a similar experience with Crawford.

**Mike Gracyzk:** As a reporter, if something doesn't sound right, you know, you asked him follow-ups. Well, can you explain that for me? Or, This doesn't sound right, how, how can this be and then he'd come up with some other explanation. And you take everything with a grain of salt.

**Art Rascon:** But even though he'd dance around certain questions, Gracyzk says Hilton kept to the story that while he'd kidnapped McKay, he hadn't killed him. Hilton insisted the mysterious R.L. Remington was the murderer.

**Mike Gracyzk:** Hilton Crawford was pretty consistent.

**Art Rascon:** Still, from his years of reporting on death row inmates, Gracyzk doesn't think consistency counts for much.

**Mike Gracyzk:** These people who are locked up, I'm pretty convinced they could pass a polygraph. You're locked in a six by nine, concrete cell. And all you have to have is time to convince yourself that I didn't do it, I wasn't there.

**Art Rascon:** And Gracyzk has a lot of experience with death row. As a reporter for the AP, based out of Huntsville, Texas, the site of the country's most active death row, Gracyzk has the dubious distinction of witnessing more executions than anyone else in America.

**Mike Gracyzk:** Texas has carried out more executions than any other state. And I've covered most of them here.

**Art Rascon:** In fact, he's lost track of the exact number.

**Mike Gracyzk:** I've watched probably 450.

**Art Rascon:** But out of the hundreds of death row inmates Gracyzk has met and interviewed, he says that Hilton stood out.

**Mike Gracyzk:** He used to send me Christmas cards, wrote me letters. Kind of weird. You don't usually get people in their 50's being sentenced to death.

**Art Rascon:** By all accounts, Hilton was a charming man. And in the years between the trial and execution, Tannie says he grew closer to Hilton than he ever expected to.

**Tannie Shannon:** When I first started visiting, I thought, well, you know, I could never be friends with somebody that's done something like this. I had friends when they learned I was writing about him, they had some nasty things to say to me. But when you spend that much time with someone sharing all the intricacies of one's life, it's pretty easy to get close to him. In fact, I might have been his only friend on the outside. Now he had his bad sides, he was a little bit manipulative but you know, most gamblers are. They try to take advantage of other people or try to win at whatever game they're playing.

**Art Rascon:** Tannie says that, while he was working on his book and meeting with Hilton regularly he bought into the stories that Hilton told him about R.L. Remington: how Hilton had never intended for McKay to get hurt, and how he was just trying to get out of debt to provide for his family.

**Tannie Shannon:** To do this, I was convinced that he was telling the truth, I had to be, I think, to follow through with it.

**Art Rascon:** But remember, Hilton was a manipulator who obsessed over how people perceived him. Perhaps he saw Tannie's book as his last chance to rehabilitate his image.

But even though Hilton managed to convince Tannie that he never intended for McKay to be killed, Tannie could never understand why Hilton had taken such a wreckless risk with an innocent boy's life.

**Tannie Shannon:** Regardless of what the situation was, he's still guilty of McKay's death. And I could not understand what would drive him to that.

**Art Rascon:** Tannie viewed Hilton as a man who had been consumed and destroyed by his gambling addiction.

**Tannie Shannon:** He was addicted to the adrenaline of putting himself on the line. Playing for more than he could afford to lose. That's when it's fun and the adrenaline starts pumping and his personality did not permit him to admit his failure to his family. And he did whatever it took to keep from doing that. And became way too much.

**Art Rascon:** And perhaps, when Hilton completely exhausted all his money and credit, he came up with a final gamble to get the biggest adrenaline rush of his life: Kidnapping McKay.

**Art Rascon:** Before his conviction, there were two Hiltons, Hilton the family man, and Hilton the gambler and criminal. After the conviction, and after his wife Connie cut off all communication, a new Hilton emerged, Hilton the monk.

**Tannie Shannon:** He really became religious after being on death row.

**Art Rascon:** Hilton had begun corresponding with European nuns who were anti-death penalty activists. And he said that in prison he'd found religion. He became a Franciscan monk, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to god. Then again, a pledge to give up material wealth, love, and freedom isn't much of a sacrifice for a death row inmate.

Another incentive for this religious conversion may have been the fact that visits from spiritual advisors, didn't count towards an inmate's visitor limits, so it afforded Hilton more time outside his cell.

But despite his supposed spiritual awakening, Tannie says he heard that Hilton continued gambling behind bars.

**Tannie Shannon:** In fact, I belong to a hunting club in the Houston area. We used to do a football pool every year for bowl games, and I got him to pick my bowl games one year and he won it that, and when they found out that the pool had been won by a death row inmate, that was a story that was told over and over. Now he would not accept the money when I tried to put it into this account, but he did get me to agree to host some visitors that he had coming from London. Two elderly nuns that he wanted me to chauffeur around and stuff.

Now when he got his execution date and early 2003. It was a tough time for me. Honestly, you get close to someone and then you're given a date that they're going to die. And are going to be put to death? That's pretty hard to deal with. But he wanted me to attend and so I did.

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**Art Rascon:** In the time between Hilton's trial and his execution day, Paulette and Carl were struggling. Paulette had hoped that after the trial, their life would start returning back to normal but the grief was still overwhelming. Carl dove back into running his oil company, which often took him out of town. But Paulette felt like he was avoiding her.

**Paulette:** He would disappear for long spans of time.

**Art Rascon:** And when he and Paulette would see one another, they weren't on the same wavelength.

**Paulette:** He kept trying to get me to go to Amway meetings, and I finally just told him, I can't do this. And so I began to stand back up on my own two feet and, you know, that didn't please him

**Art Rascon:** And while Paulette went to therapy to process McKay's death, Carl refused to get professional help.

**Paulette:** He stuffed it. He didn't talk about it and deal with it and learn how to cope.

**Art Rascon:** Instead, Carl began binge-eating comfort foods.

**Paulette Norman:** He would eat and eat and eat and eat and eat.

**Art Rascon:** Carl and Paulette never figured out how to talk about the tragedy they'd been through. In 1999, Three years after the trial, and after 28 years of marriage, Paulette asked Carl for a divorce.

**Paulette:** It was tough. I didn't want to divorce Carl, but I had no choice. I had to take care of me. And that's what I learned too. We have to make decisions for our own life that make no one else happy. And you've got to stand by what's good for you.

**Art Rascon:** After the divorce in 1999, Carl Everett continued to struggle. He did start seeing a counselor, but he still stuffed down his feelings and ate to cope with the stress. When he first met Stacy, the woman who'd become his second wife, he'd gotten so good at hiding his grief that she had no idea what he'd been through.

**Stacy Everett:** When he walked into a room, it lit up. He had a big belly laugh like Santa Claus. He was always happy. He was always very chatty and you know, so it just was very shocking.

**Art Rascon:** As they started dating, Carl opened up to Stacy about McKay. She was surprised to learn the extent of Carl's trauma.

**Stacy Everett:** Oh, it just broke my heart. There would be times that Carl would just sit there and cry, especially around McKay's birthday, basically the whole week surrounding the kidnapping, you know, just he said that he can just relive it every moment, every second that whole week. He felt that as a man, he'd failed in his duty to protect his family. That's something that he was just never able to get over. And I think betrayal of people that they knew. You know, it tore a family apart. I just, I sat and listened. I cried and I felt his pain because it's so hard to see someone that you love go through so much pain.

**Art Rascon:** But the way that Carl dealt with the loss of McKay, evolved throughout his relationship with Stacy.

**Stacy Everett:** When I first met Carl he told me I cannot ever have children. I can never go through anything like I've ever been through and I'm like, You know what, that's fine. I have two nieces. You know, I'm okay.

**Art Rascon:** Carl and Stacy got married in December, 2001. And a couple of years into the marriage, Carl had a change of heart.

**Stacy Everett:** He goes you know what, McKay always wanted a brother or sister and he goes, I will never take that away from you and I'm not going to take that away from him.

**Art Rascon:** But in February 2003, Carl received a notice in the mail informing him that Hilton's execution would be in July of that year.

**Stacy Everett:** I think it just conjured up so many feelings and, and emotions and didn't know whether he should just be so angry or he should just cry or. He was just at a loss.

**Art Rascon:** Carl couldn't decide whether he wanted to attend Hilton's execution.

**Stacy Everett:** He went both ways, talked about going, talked about not going and then I basically found out I was pregnant three weeks prior to the execution. Press were calling him and he needed to get away. And we hopped on a plane and went on a cruise. I think that he emotionally would not have been able to handle seeing Hilton Crawford again.

**Art Rascon:** Paulette wasn't sure whether she wanted to go to Hilton's execution either. Eight years had passed since McKay's kidnapping and murder she didn't know if seeing Hilton killed would bring closure, or stir up more anger and grief. But, in the end, she did decide to attend.

**Art Rascon:** Hilton's wife Connie and his sons chose not to witness Hilton being put to death, but author Tannie Shannon says, Hilton's son Chris did come to visit Hilton on the day of the execution.

**Tannie Shannon:** For an hour or so something like that. And as he walked away, I saw Crawford kind of turned around and he had tears just rolling down his cheeks. You know, he just watched him walk out of the room and that was a very touching scene.

**Art Rascon:** Also in the visitor's room, was Hilton's spiritual advisor, a woman named Rebecca, who'd helped him on his monastic journey. When Hilton's son Chris left, Rebecca and Tannie spoke with Hilton.

**Tannie Shannon:** She said, you're going to wake up in a marvelous place. God's going to take you by the hand and he's going to guide you. He's, she said, it's going to be such a wonderful experience. And she said, in fact, I want to sing you a song. And she belted out this beautiful, she had such a beautiful voice, but it was a religious song I didn't recognize. But everybody in the whole visitors room just kind of stopped and listened and turned around. And yeah, it was, it was wonderful, actually. But when she finished, Crawford says, that was wonderful. Thank you so much. And, I could see this little glint in his eye. He said, You know what he said, that was so great. He said, This is my last day on on Earth and a you two are my only friends. Tanny I'm going to ask you to sing a song as well. I had no idea what to do. I said, "All right then. You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."

So he starts laughing and she's upset. And she said, "Hilton! What's that song about? Is that song about gambling? Hilton don't you know, that's what got you in here!" And he's laughing so hard tears are coming out. And he said, "Tell the truth – is gambling really a sin?" And she said, "Hilton, you know, gambling is a sin." And he just kind of looks down like this and shakes his head, he said," so guess I'm going to be in line longer than I thought." On the day of his death. Can you imagine that?

**Art Rascon:** The execution chamber in Huntsville Texas is a small mint-green room, that's subdivided into 3 areas. There's the death chamber where the inmate is strapped to a gurney facing two barred windows. Behind the windows are two viewing chambers, one for the inmates invited witnesses, the other for the victim's family. At the time of the execution, Tannie, Rebecca, and some prison chaplains entered the offender's side of the viewing chamber. Paulette was there on the victim's side along with AP Reporter Mike Grazcyk and a few other journalists.

**Paulette:** The rooms were teeny tiny, teeny tiny, low, low, low ceilings, and the ugliest green



you've ever seen.

**Art Rascon:** Grazcyk has seen so many executions that they blend together, but he kept notes on each one. He says Hilton was already strapped to the gurney in the death chamber when the witnesses walked in.

**Mike Gracyzk:** My notes show that he was wearing a, something around his neck that had a small wooden cross.

**Paulette:** I guess he had become some sort of monk while he was in prison, and I'm thinking Oh, get real.

**Mike Gracyzk:** He has belts on each wrist and belts at the knees and belts at the ankles.

**Paulette:** And I was like, what? Do they think he's gonna get up and run?

**Mike Gracyzk:** So we walk into the chamber and he's four or five feet away and if the glass wasn't there, you could reach out and touch him. The only thing he can really move is his head from side to side. And he turned and looked at Paulette and I think he made a joke about how he should have eaten more of his meal that he had selected. And then he gives his final statement.

**Art Rascon:** Here are excerpts of Hilton Crawford's final statement read by a voice actor.

**Hilton Voice Actor:** "First of all, I would like to ask Sister Teresa to send Connie a yellow rose. I want to thank the Lord, Jesus Christ, for the years I have spent on death row. They have been a blessing in my life. I would like to thank Father Walsh for having become a Franciscan, I would like to thank the Nuns in England for their support. I want to tell my sons I love them. I have always loved them. They were my greatest gift from God. I want to tell my witnesses, Tannie, Rebecca, Al, Leo, and Dr. Blackwell that I love all of you and I am thankful for your support. I want to ask Paulette for forgiveness from your heart. One day, I hope you will. It is a tragedy for my family and your family. I am sorry. My special angel, I love you, and I love you, Connie. May God pass me over to the Kingdom's shore softly and gently. I am ready."

**Paulette:** I guess he thought he was some great public speaker. He had something to say laying on the gurney. well you know it's a little late. It's just a little too late.

**Mike Gracyzk:** Once the final statement has been made by the inmate, the drug is turned on.

**Art Rascon:** As the lethal drug cocktail flowed into Hilton's veins, the prison chaplains started reciting prayers.

**Paulette:** Just mumbling mumbling mumbling mumbling.

**Mike Gracyzk:** And as the drugs took effect, he turned purple.

**Paulette:** His whole skin tone went through this series of levels of Lilac purple bluish grayish until he was dead. And then I was like, That's it?

**Mike Gracyzk:** Yeah, it's very quick. They essentially go to sleep. They may cough or gasp a

couple of times. We've heard comments that "oh I can feel it. It's cold, it's hot. It burns. But, you know, 30 seconds later. They're either unconscious or they're dead.

**Art Rascon:** The whole situation bothered Paulette she thought Hilton had gotten off too easy. A final meal, a final statement, and an anesthetic putting Hilton to sleep before he died. McKay had gotten none of those comforts.

**Art Rascon talking to Paulette:** If they would have asked for you to push the button, you would have gladly done so.

**Paulette:** Yes.

**Art Rascon talking to Paulette:** If there were anything you could say to him, what would it be?

**Paulette:** Was it worth it? Look what you left your children to bear up under. I can say I am so proud of my son. My son was a courageous 12-and-a-half-year-old. What can they say?

**Art Rascon:** For Tannie Shannon, it was tough to see his friend being put to death right in front of him.

**Tannie Shannon:** I walked out. I was a little upset. And I was probably saying some things. Little comments about how efficiently they had put someone to death. And I'm sure I was sobbing a little bit or whatever.

**Art Rascon:** As Tannie went to the prison parking lot, he thought about the final exchange he'd had with Hilton earlier that day.

**Tannie Shannon:** We had been joking about him sending me signs. If you see a guy on a horse walking down the street you'll know to beat on the Cowboys. We had this little joke going for weeks before he was executed. But the last thing that I said to him, I said I want a sign I want to know that you made it. He said, I'm going to send you a sign I promise. I had asked one of the chaplains for a transcript of his final statement, and we walked out to the parking lot. He's got the transcript in one hand, and we shake hands with the other hand. And right at that moment, at that precise moment, a bird [beep] right on the top of my head. And I'm not talking a little bird, I'm talking about a splatter that went down to both shoulders. I had to go in a room and shower before I would drive home and that was, I've never seen anything like that. And I thought, well, I guess he made it. It sounds like something he would do.

**Art Rascon:** Carl Everett's daughter was born in 2003, half a year after Hilton's execution and it brought back a side of Carl that some thought had been lost. Here's Carl's friend John Husbands.

**John Husbands:** That little girl you know kinda put the glow back in his eyes. Second chance at being a dad I guess.

**Art Rascon:** Carl's second wife Stacy says that Carl was a devoted father.

**Stacy Everett:** He was just an amazing father. I mean, there was no question. He woke up every day and said, Do you know how much your Daddy loves you?

**Art Rascon:** But Stacy is adamant that Carl never moved on from McKay.

**Stacy Everett:** McKay was always on his mind every single day. And always in his heart and, you know, if you love Carl you accepted that. Carl would sit there and tell stories about how McKay loved peanut butter and honey sandwiches. You can't take that away from somebody. And it brought so much joy to be able to share that.

He loved us. Unconditionally he loved us. But he, his heart was with McKay. His heart was with his child. And he did everything he could to make us happy. He was great in the kitchen. You know, he was everything but ultimately, I mean, he died of a broken heart.

**Art Rascon:** Even though Carl loved his wife and daughter, he was still haunted by McKay's murder. He continued to cope with his grief through food.

**John Husbands:** Carl proceeded to try to eat himself to death. I mean, a lot of people drink themselves to death. Well, Carl Everett would stop and buy a whole pie and a gallon of milk and stuff and eat it in the roadside park.

**Stacy Everett:** He became a diabetic. He had a heart attack, he actually had about three or four heart attacks.

**John Husbands** I mean, he had quadruple bypass surgery. He had cancer surgery, you know, stomach cancer.

**Art Rascon:** And despite these health consequences, Carl didn't, or couldn't, change his lifestyle.

**Stacy Everett** I would beg him, let's go walking, let's do something. It was not ever acknowledged.

**John Husbands** I'm telling you, Carl, put his body through. I mean, he literally never tried to kill himself except passively, if you will.

**Stacy Everett:** It just ultimately ended his life. He'd had a heart attack in Fort Worth, where he was working. And he had been in the ICU for a couple of days. They took him out of ICU, they gave him a room. So he could go home the next day, so we could drive back to Conroe. And I went ahead and went to the hospital. And this poor nurse, it was her first day of work. Hi Mr. Everett? I'm here to take your vitals. And he's like, Well, darlin', why don't you take her vitals and we'll get out of here a lot faster. And he started laughing his deep belly laugh, and then he died. The doctor said it was instantaneous.

**Art Rascon:** Carl's laughter dislodged a blood clot that went straight to his lungs.

**Stacy Everett:** But he died laughing. I mean, I would like to die laughing. And I just, you know, I know, he's happy. And he's with McKay. He's in heaven with McKay.

**Art Rascon:** Carl Evertt died on April 1st, 2011, 15 years after McKay's abduction and seven years after the birth of his daughter. Carl was only 57 years old. Stacy thinks Hilton's betrayal was just too much for Carl to deal with.

**Stacy Everett:** It took a man that was just so loving and beautiful and it broke him.

**Art Rascon:** Like Paulette, Carl thought Connie was somehow culpable ...

**Stacy Everett** He was completely convinced Connie had something to do with it as well.

**Art Rascon:** Carl had tried to get in touch with Hilton right after McKay disappeared, but Connie said she didn't know how to reach him. Carl thinks at the very least, she knew that Hilton was behaving erratically and thought he might be involved.

Carl thought if Connie had opened up about her suspicions of Hilton that night, they could have figured out how to reach him on his cell phone, and it might have saved McKay's life...

**Stacy Everett** He really felt that if she would have come forward in the very beginning, then McKay would still be alive today.

**John Husbands** Knowing his number, Carl calling him on the phone could have saved McKay. I mean, that's the that's the thought. That's why they're so angry.

**Art Rascon:** Carl struggled with trust for the rest of his life, especially when it came to his daughter.

**Stacy Everett:** He was very, very protective. And rightly so. But it got to the point of it was, it was overbearing. He was is very selective as to who was allowed to watch her, he didn't want her to go to play dates because something could happen.

**Art Rascon:** That was something we heard from many people close to this story, that Hilton's betrayal made it harder for them to trust others. Here's neighbor Nancy Kahn and her daughter Hailey.

**Nancy Kahn:** You can't trust people. It's unfortunate that we have to live in a world that people are like that. Well, especially I think, knowing that someone that you know, could do that is what didn't really go away. It changed all of us.

**Art Rascon:** It's hard to know what to make of a story like this, where someone so deeply betrays a friend's trust. Here's FBI Agent Lloyd Dias.

**Lloyd Diaz:** You know, you hear about strangers doing things to people all the time. But, you know, here's a family friend. Giving him a football Well, I think literally, it was two weeks before this happened. You know, from your uncle Hilty. My god what is wrong with you? You can't live life without trusting anybody my God, but this sure does make people think real hard.

**Art Rascon:** Sheriff Guy Williams

**Guy Williams:** That's the bad thing about this case is I mean Hilton Crawford. kind of messed it up for everybody is like, how do you teach your children be wary of bad things in the world when bad things come knock on your door? You can teach your children about bad people. But do you make your friends and family bad people?

**Art Rascon:** In many ways Hilton Crawford is an aberration and crimes like this fascinate us

because they are so unusual. But statistics show that violent and sexual crimes are more likely to be perpetrated by friends, family, and acquaintances than by strangers.

**Art Rascon:** Over the last 28 years, Paulette has spent a lot of time thinking about this issue and how to prevent another tragedy like what happened to McKay.

After McKay's death, she and Carl started the Samuel Everett McKay Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to keeping children safe.

**Paulette:** It started with the monies that were sent in for the ransom demand.

**Art Rascon:** When McKay's kidnapping had initially been publicized, they'd received anonymous donations to help pay for McKay's ransom.

**Paulette:** People just randomly send in cash with no return address.

**Art Rascon:** They used the donations to start the Samuel Everett McKay Foundation which designs educational materials for schools. In particular, the materials use McKay's story to emphasize the fact that family friends can be perpetrators too like this animation they produced that's racked up millions of views on YouTube.

**ABC's of Safety:** D is for Danger, a person who can cause you harm is not always a stranger. "I am not a stranger" "Aaaaah!"

**Art Rascon:** The dangerous man in that cartoon, by the way, bears a striking resemblance to Hilton Crawford. Paulette's advocacy work even brought her to the white house in 2003.

**Archival:** Ladies and gentlemen the president of the United States

**Art Rascon:** When George W. Bush signed the PROTECT Act, establishing a national Amber Alert system.

**Bush Protect:** No child should ever have to experience the terror of abduction or worse. No family should ever have to endure the nightmare of losing a child.

**Art Rascon:** In addition to her work with the foundation, Paulette also wrote two books about McKay's kidnapping. The first, *Deadly Betrayal*, she co-wrote with two professors of criminal justice. It covers the whole case and trial.

The second, *A Waltz with Insanity*, is more of a memoir about coping with grief. And maybe more than anything else, Paulette has become a mentor for others undergoing unthinkable losses. Strangers will hear her story and reach out for advice or friends will put people in contact with Paulette.

In fact, our interview with her was interrupted by one of those requests.

**Paulette:** See, this is my life now.

**Art Rascon:** Paulette showed us a text she'd just received.

**Paulette:** They're trying to help somebody whose son died. Overdosed on fentanyl? Can we give them your number?

**Ben Kuebrich:** That's just today. You just got that?

**Paulette:** Yep. That's every week.

**Art Rascon:** It's difficult work, but it's a role that Paulette feels specially equipped to deal with.

**Paulette:** You'll hear counselors and speakers say, don't waste your grief, don't waste your hurt, don't waste the tragedy. There's something here that god wants us to get from all this. Once something tragic happens, you're left with, what is your response? What are you going to do? Of course, you're going to grieve. But then what are you going to do? How do you cope? What do you say? What do you do? We are made up of all these experiences. Good, bad, ugly, whatever you want to label them. And we're still left with, what is my choice on how I respond? Period. And I've watched myself respond appropriately, respond inappropriately, have it together and then blow it. You know, but it's all about what are you going to do with what happened? Is it going to make you a better person? A better parent? A better friend? what?

**Art Rascon:** The grief never really stops in a story like this. There's no closure.

**Paulette Norman:** You close windows and doors, you don't close things like this.

**Art Rascon:** But although the grief never goes away, it does change over time. Memories of McKay no longer overwhelm Paulette.

**Paulette:** My eyes will just water but it's not like I'm taking out time to cry. I'm still doing what I need to get done.

**Art Rascon:** Sometimes, Paulette drives out to McKay's gravesite and thinks back to his funeral and all the people who gathered to honor him.

The circumstances of McKay's death brought on what felt like a neverending procession of stress and chaos. The week-long investigation, the media circus, the court proceedings, her stroke, and the collapse of her marriage. Even McKay's funeral felt overwhelming at first.

**Paulette:** So many people would just want to do something and want to do something. And I had told Carl I said if anybody has to do anything else, let's just kind of back up because I'm feeling overwhelmed. Sure is that came out of my little arrogant mouth an FBI agent came and asked if he could play Amazing Grace on the bagpipes at the graveside. And I thought, shut up, Paulette. Just shut up. And back up. This is not just about your grief, it's about other people's grief too.

**Art Rascon:** On the day of the funeral, as the FBI agent played Amazing grace, Paulette thought back to young McKay teaching himself the song on the violin.

**Paulette Trip:** There's a FBI agent who was playing the song that McKay had taught himself there's beauty in that. As tough as this is, that is a little fleck of light and all that darkness.

**Art Rascon:** The funeral was a moment when time seemed to stand still, and everyone could focus on McKay. The 12-year-old boy who'd been robbed of his future and all his potential.

**Paulette:** We gave people magic markers so that they could write on the casket their goodbye. Because hat was stolen. So many people loved him, I mean, you could see it on everybody's face. There were law enforcement agents crying.

**Bob Lee:** McKay's funeral is the hardest thing I had ever done in my 25 years with the Bureau.

**Art Rascon:** Agent Bob Lee.

**Bob Lee:** The church was crowded. A lot of friends, families, well wishers. A lot of law enforcement was present. You become very close to the family during an investigation like this. I was glad we were there to help comfort the Everetts. It was just a tough day but looking back I'm glad I did it.

**Art Rascon:** And McKay's young friends made the scene all the more emotional. Jack Cochran.

**Jack Cochran:** That was one of the first funerals I ever remember going to. Just somber, people just crying, wearing sunglasses. And everyone's around and just everyone's gravitating towards Miss Paulette, and Carl. Handshaking, hugs.

**Art Rascon:** Having gone through this unthinkable ordeal, there's one thing Paulette knows for sure.

**Paulette Norman:** It never took away my love for McKay. That remains to this day. And I don't regret putting my careers on hold. At all. If there was anything that made it easier for me was that I lay down my life. He was my little light for 12 and a half years. He brought a perspective to my life that I would not have known, had I not known him. In all of this, I have been part of a beautiful love story.

**Art Rascon:** But the love Paulette feels for McKay, doesn't temper her anger, it ignites it.

She's convinced that Hilton's wife Connie was somehow involved, and she doesn't feel like her concerns were taken seriously.

And Paulette still suffers every day from the consequences of Hilton's actions back in 1995.

Despite his losses and mounting debts, Hilton couldn't or wouldn't quit gambling. He kept doubling down and doubling down, until finally he decided to gamble with McKay's life and his own.

Hilton made the reckless decision to kidnap McKay, and when the plan went off the rails and McKay was screaming in the trunk of his car Hilton had the four-hour drive to Louisiana to search his soul a million moments to turn around the car, and free the boy who called him Uncle Hilty.

Even if Hilton was so cold and callous that he didn't care about McKay. As former law enforcement, he should have realized he wouldn't be able to get away with the crime.

But Hilton could never tell when he was holding a losing hand. So he did what he always did. He doubled down yet again. He murdered McKay and tried to get away with it.

Despite his supposed love for his family and friends, Hilton committed the ultimate betrayal.

Despite a capital sentence, Hilton never learned from his mistakes.

In the decades since, Paulette stitched back together a sense of purpose, but there was no repairing the loss of innocence that died with McKay.