

RANSOM SEASON 1, EPISODE 6: Gambler's Logic

Sam Petro: Let me ask you a question. Do you have a best friend? How big would it shock you if tomorrow you woke up and somebody told you that your best friend just killed somebody? Because this can't be right. He didn't do it. This guy didn't do that.

There were a lot of stories at the beginning. About somebody else being involved and other people and I didn't do this and all this stuff, and you want to believe that because you don't want to believe you've been friends with a killer. That's not something that you want penetrating your mind. You just don't. He may have stolen money. He may be a bad, bad guy that way, but to kill a 12 year old boy, no, you didn't want to believe that. Then you figured out after a while? Wow. Yeah, that's what we're dealing with.

If I would have put all of this stuff together, I would, I would have done something, then McKay would still be alive.

Art Rascon: From KSL Podcasts, I'm Art Rascon. This is Ransom: Position of Trust Episode 6: Gambler's Logic

[Music]

Art Rascon: This episode we're diving into who Hilton Crawford really was and what led him to the point that he kidnapped and murdered a close family, 12-year-old McKay Everett, the boy who called him Uncle Hilty.

Of course, Hilton continued to insist that he didn't kill McKay, but investigators had become convinced R. L. Remington wasn't real. And even Hilton's close friends didn't buy the Remington story Here's one of those friends, Sam Petro.

Sam Petro: I thought it was a bunch of bull right away. I mean just think of the name, Remington?

he had to have a mental breakdown is what I thought at the time.

I mean, the guy has, he had children or two boys, he's got his wife saying there's got to be some kind of reason for what happened. We got to get to the bottom of this thing but then the deeper you got into it, the deeper he knew you're dealing with something that's really bad here.

Art Rascon: Although Hilton Crawford had cultivated an image as a trustworthy family man, he was ex-law enforcement, a little-league baseball coach, and a charming storyteller but when we dug into his past, we found red flags that showed he had a much darker side as well.

Hilton Crawford was born in 1939 in Beaumont, Texas. A small industrial town near the border of Texas and Louisiana. Hilton's classmate Paul Anderson can still remember him well.

Paul Anderson: He was a hero in high school. I mean, he was. He was a jock. He lettered four sports. He did football, baseball, track and basketball.

Art Rascon: Hilton was personable. As far as his classmates at South Park high school could tell, he never got into fights or behaved unusually.

Paul Anderson: Back in those days we really didn't look for red flags. Yeah, I mean, it was pretty much what you see is what you get era and when this stuff popped up it was it busts a lot of bubbles.

Art Rascon: Hilton met his wife Connie sometime in the late '50s.

Paul Anderson: I remember her being two classes back. But everybody was paying attention to Hilton.

Art Rascon: A black-and-white yearbook photo from 1957 shows Hilton and Connie as homecoming royalty. Six-foot-tall Hilton towers over a meek Connie. His face is gaunt, and serious with a chiseled jaw, hers looks young and innocent.

Tannie Shannon: But Tannie Shannon, the author who interviewed Hilton in prison, says Hilton wouldn't start dating Connie until a couple years later. He had an interest in Connie, so he got back in touch with her and asked her out and after the first date, they were pretty much a couple. From then on.

Art Rascon: Early into dating, Connie's father was diagnosed with cancer.

Tannie Shannon: When he asked her father for her hand in marriage, her father asked him to promise that he would take care of her because he had this illness, and he was not expected to live and Hilton agreed. He always felt a very deep responsibility for his family, which probably led to his inability to admit to his failures.

Art Rascon: Hilton and Connie married in 1962. At the time they were both junior college students, and Hilton worked night shifts at the Beaumont police department. The Beaumont police had recently come under scrutiny after a shooting in broad daylight over territory for illegal gambling. It came out that gangsters had been bribing the police chief, so the chief and one of his head detectives were fired. But despite the reforms, the new department wasn't squeaky clean.

Tannie Shannon: When he went to work for the Beaumont Police Department, he was introduced to some things that probably would not be allowed today. Merchants giving away merchandise to have police officers come on and check on their businesses and so forth.

Art Rascon: By giving officers free products, store owners would make sure they were part of the officer's patrol routes and that they stayed in the good graces of the police. But Hilton's indiscretions as a police officer in Beaumont went well beyond little handouts from stores.

We obtained police documents that have never previously been published, showing clear red red flags about Hilton Crawford's behavior and his pattern of lying to cover up his crimes.

On Friday, September 14th, 1962, another patrolman noticed that the police car Hilton and his partner had been driving was missing a hubcap. When confronted, Hilton's partner, who was a new recruit, said the car had slid as they were responding to a call. Their supervisor sent Hilton's partner back to investigate the site.

Voice actor for police official: I sent him out to look at the surface of the road, to see if there was any foreign substance there that could have caused a slide. He returned a few minutes later and told me he wanted to tell me the truth about what happened.

Art Rascon: While on duty, Hilton had wanted to take care of some personal business, and they'd left the area that they were in charge of patrolling.

Voice actor for police official: They left their District without permission. And that is where they were when they received the call to go to the Greyhound bus depot, so they left in a big hurry to get back where they belonged, and they made a fast turn onto Corley St. and the rear end slid on them and struck the curb. He states that there was a car there, but they were going entirely too fast, and this is what caused the slide. Crawford asked him to tell the story to keep them both out of trouble.

Art Rascon: But the damage to the car was only one of the concerning incidents that happened that night. Hilton had also been accused of misconduct by a man he arrested.

We couldn't find the victim's accusations or his name, but Hilton Crawford signed a sworn affidavit about the incident. Here's the statement read by a voice actor.

Hilton Crawford Voice Actor: My name is Hilton Lewis Crawford. I am a white male, 23 years of age. About 12:40 am September 14, 1962, my partner and I while on routine patrol. Saw a 57 Ford turned sideways stuck in a ditch. As we walked up to the car we saw a negro man laying in the front seat. The doors were locked and the windows were rolled up. We knocked on the windows and after about 5 minutes he woke up and we got him out of the car.

Seeing that he was drunk we had him stand in front of us and touch his toes, and we pushed him into the ditch. We asked him to get out of the ditch and reached to get him. As he was getting out of the ditch he started to fall and we pushed him again. We yelled him to get up several times. Seeing that this was not doing any good we punched him in the ribs several times just hard enough to wake him, because he had passed out. We did this because we did not want to stand in the water. After punching him and seeing that he was not coming to, one of us

jokingly remarked that he looked like he was dead. I told [my partner] that I would try to get him out of the ditch without us getting wet. I fired my pistol into the ditch several feet away from him. I did this in an effort to wake him up but it didn't work.

Art Rascon: At this point in the affidavit, Hilton Crawford has already admitted to pushing a black man down into a ditch full of water, twice. The second time knocking the man out. Then Hilton says he tried hitting the unconscious man with his night stick to rouse him but couldn't, so he claims he fired his pistol toward the man to wake him up.

Hilton Crawford Voice Actor: We then had to get into the ditch to get him out. As we were going this he woke up. When we got him on the street, we asked him if he had been drinking. He said he had not but we could smell alcohol on his breath and his speech was very impaired.

We asked him to run about 10 yards and turn around quick. He did turn around and as he ran back toward us he fell down. He told us that he worked at the Holiday Inn and if we would bring our own girl out there he would try to get us a room. We then placed him under arrest for being drunk and asks which wrecker he wanted to come after his car.

At no time did we use force on him other than punching him with our night sticks to wake him up.

I have read the above statement and it is true and correct, so help me god. H. L. Crawford.

Art Rascon: This typed document is marked up with a pen. The phrase "we pushed him into the ditch" is underlined and in the margin is written "didn't hit him."

In the documents we obtained, there's a second sworn affidavit that appears to be a sanitized version of the same account. Many parts are identical, but in this version, Hilton and his partner don't push the man they were arresting into the ditch, instead he's already in the ditch when they find him. And in this version, Hilton doesn't fire his gun in an attempt to wake him up but he still readily admits to beating the man's ribs with his nightstick.

Five days after these incidents, on September 19th, 1962 Hilton Crawford was indefinitely suspended as a police officer for excessive use of force and for drawing his pistol in a public place when it was unnecessary to do so.

Hilton had clearly abused his power as a police officer, and his actions show he was unfit for that kind of responsibility.

But Hilton appealed the decision, and two weeks later a hearing was held at city hall. A newspaper article about the hearing says that witnesses were called over the course of 3-and-a-half hours to vouch for his character.

Hilton was still well-known and beloved in the community from his high school sports days.

When city commissioners made their decision, they mentioned Hilton's young age, the fact he was working while attending Lamar Tech, and his record of service with youth, the church, and the community.

Ultimately, Hilton Crawford's suspension was reduced to just 4 months. Hilton's image as an upstanding member of the community, let him get off with a slap on the wrist.

And so in January of 1963, Hilton returned to the Beaumont police. And he continued his work as a police officer for the next three-and-a-half years.

And evidently, the hearing and suspension didn't tarnish Hilton's record in the eyes of future employers, because in 1966, Hilton got a new job with the local Sheriff's department. Hilton started as a jailer, but Author Tannie Shannon, says he quickly rose through the ranks.

Tannie Shannon: He did move up within the sheriff's department rather rapidly becoming a captain in charge of the warrants division.

Art Rascon: Through his job in the Jefferson County Sheriff's office, Hilton grew in prominence within the community and befriended a group of local business owners, who'd love to golf, bet on sports, and go on trips together to Vegas. These businessmen were in an income bracket far above Hilton's, so he often couldn't afford to go on these trips. But occasionally he'd splurge and go.

Tannie Shannon: He was going on, on junkets to Las Vegas. Where one person takes a group of people out to a casino and everything's paid for.

Art Rascon: On these junkets, Hilton only had to pay for airfare and gambling, the rooms and other expenses were covered.

Tannie Shannon: And that makes you feel kind of special. You know, of course, if you stopped to think about it, oh, yeah, there's a reason they do that. The reason is because you lose a little more money than other people do. But it does make people feel special when they get treated like royalty or whatever. And that's kind of what Crawford got involved in when he was he got special rooms. He described some of the presidential suites that he stayed in and was really treated with a whole lot of affection, a whole lot of freebies.

Art Rascon: And as a former star athlete, Hilton felt he was specially-equipped to beat the odds at sports-betting.

Tannie Shannon: He began gambling thinking that he's a little smarter than everybody else. And usually, that's what gamblers tend to think is they know a little bit more about sports than the next guy so they should be able to figure out the winner of this football game or that basketball game.

Art Rascon: On these trips to Vegas, Hilton met casino managers, who took note of the fact that he worked for a sheriff's department near Houston. At the time, a common problem for casinos was guests from out of town writing bad checks.

Tannie Shannon: He began making collection calls for some of the casinos in Las Vegas when people from the local area would ride hot checks, and in return they put him on their VIP list, you know, it made him feel important. It made him feel respected and so forth and that's kind of what his job in law enforcement as well. He likes to feel important and control.

Art Rascon: In Vegas, and among his businessman friends, Hilton became known as The Sheriff and it appears, Hilton enjoyed this nickname. Because in 1975, after 9 years in the sheriff's department, Hilton quit. He no longer wanted to work for the sheriff, Hilton Crawford wanted to be the sheriff.

[Music]

Art Rascon: In April, 1976, at age 37, Hilton Crawford, announced he was going to run for Sheriff against his former boss, Dick Culbertson. Hilton is quoted in a newspaper saying that high levels of turnover showed the department was being mismanaged.

Voice actor for Hilton Crawford: Morale within the Sheriff's department has now hit rock bottom. I know. I was here. Oddly enough, our present Sheriff seems content to plod along with a crippled department.

Art Rascon: Hilton accused Sheriff Culbertson of running a whisper campaign against him, telling people that Hilton was connected to the mafia.

In retaliation, Hilton released a letter detailing alleged scandals that had taken place under Culbertson's watch.

Hilton Crawford Voice Actor: "The sheriff received checks in 1972 from supervisors at Texaco and used the money to buy a car."

"Deputies worked up a a narcotics case against a drug pusher who was the son of a law enforcement officer Culbertson personally halted the investigation."

"A man was arrested for murder and placed in the county jail. He was visited by his girlfriend, who then had sexual intercourse with one of the jail officers. The sexual exploits were then used to blackmail the officer, so the prisoner could roam the jail for his own sexual reasons.

Art Rascon: Culbertson denied all of these allegations. An article later that month described a town hall meeting where, quote "the county sheriff race dominated the evening and overshadowed every other county race." During the question and answer sessions, Hilton was

asked a question about his suspension from the Beaumont Police. Hilton responded that he was reinstated after a hearing of the civil service board, and then added.

Hilton Crawford Voice Actor: "I used poor judgment then, but I have come a long way since that incident. I feel I have overcome this."

Art Rascon: Hilton was asked about the financing of his campaign. He responded that in addition to donations, he'd taken out 3 loans of his own that totaled around \$8,000. Equivalent in today's dollars to over \$42,000.

But it appears, that investment was not enough. On May 1st, 1976 Hilton Crawford lost the primary. And the personal loans he'd taken out to finance his campaign may have been the start of his struggles with debt that would continue over the next 20 years. Or perhaps the loans and campaign itself were symptoms of something dark that had already taken a hold of Hilton.

In the late '70s Hilton and Connie moved from Beaumont to Conroe, right around the same time that the Everetts did. And Paulette and Connie started teaching next door to one another.

Paulette: I think she'd mentioned once he had run for sheriff or something down in the county where they were living prior to moving to Conroe and that he didn't win. So they basically, I think they decided to move.

I wondered since McKay, you know, what was the whole impetus of them moving to Conroe? If it was embarrassment or what?

Art Rascon: And it was in Conroe, that Hilton met and befriended Sam Petro (Pee-tro), the man who you heard at the beginning of the episode.

Sam Petro: He was the last person on Earth that I would have thought would have done that deed.

Art Rascon: In the late '70s, after his failed run for Sheriff, Hilton moved from Beaumont to Conroe, where he met businessman Sam Petro.

Sam Petro: I was in the wholesale produce business, and I met Hilton through my kids, coaching Little League Baseball. I coached Hilton's son Keven at the time. And then Hilton and I kind of got together as friends coaching and that's where all of this began.

Hilton was a really good parent, he cared about his kids, he cared about his wife. Every Sunday morning, he would get up early to take his wife's car to the gas station to fill it up and take it to the carwash, wash it and did the same thing for his kids.

I mean, I've been married, my wife and I've been married 58 years and I don't think we've known anybody that just gets up and does those things. Hilton did them. And he did them because he

cared and I do things for my wife, most people do. But I just thought that was, that was a little uh, little beyond. It every once in a while, he did that on a regular basis.

He wanted to be loved. Hilton always had that. That desire for people to really like him. That was a big deal for him.

Art Rascon: Petro was a businessman of the sort that Hilton had befriended in Beaumont. And he was the type of man that Hilton aspired to be rich and carefree.

Before long, Petro and another businessman named John Powell were joining Hilton on trips to Vegas.

Sam Petro: Hilton and Jonathan and I were really good friends. We played a lot of golf together, we'd take trips together. We went to Vegas several times. It was just, it was all in fun.

Art Rascon: Petro viewed Gambling as entertainment, but Hilton seemed to view it differently.

Sam Petro: John and John Powell and I both made more money than Hilton. I mean, he'd be playing blackjack for \$2-300 a hand and we're just saying, this is insane. The guy's working for a security guard company?

Art Rascon: But Hilton was confident that he could beat the odds.

Sam Petro: He should tell me I know what I'm doing. I got this stuff figured out. I know what I'm doing. And then when he'd go to vegas and bet heavy, he'd tell me. You know this guy I work with gave me 5,000 and this other guy I work with gave me 5,000 and so I got 10,000 dollars. And I'm splitting my winnings with him. He'd always have stories like that. Something that would kind of make you think, Oh, he knows somebody that's given him this money.

Art Rascon: For the most part, Petro ignored his suspicions. He even went into business with Crawford. The two of them opened an Italian restaurant in Conroe called Izzo's. Hilton also asked Carl and Paulette if they wanted to invest in the restaurant.

Paulette: I love going out to eat, I love good restaurants. But I don't want to own a restaurant. And so I told Carl, I said I'm not interested. And Carl said well I am and Hilton needs our financials. And I said Well hold on just a minute.

Art Rascon: Hilton said he wanted documents about Carl and Paulette's finances to vet them as investors which Paulette didn't want to share. Ultimately, Carl and Paulette decided not to invest in the restaurant.

Paulette: But Carl gave him all of our financials, came to find out. And so that has really bothered me since McKay's abduction and murder is that he knew what we had. And that really

bugged me. Still does. You know, you don't ever release that kind of information. You just don't do that.

Art Rascon: Hilton and Petro opened Izzo's sometime around 1983 but the business was short-lived.

Sam Petro: It was there for about a year and a half or two years I don't remember exactly. Really good restaurant. It was it was doing really well. But it wasn't the money wasn't showing up as a profit the way it should have been with the money that was coming in. I never knew what happened there really didn't.

Art Rascon: When Izzo's shuttered in 1985, Petro thought the company was just being mismanaged. Four years later in 1989, Petro again went into business with Hilton, after learning of a security business that was being sold.

Sam Petro 33:24 I called Hilton. I said there's a security guard company I can buy. and I think it's a good deal. But I don't know how to run one of them. What if I made you a partner? Would you be interested in coming to run this thing? He said, Oh, absolutely.

Sam Petro: And I said, you know, if I bring you over, can you get new accounts? He said, Yeah, I can bring some of my customers with me and I can get some new accounts. Okay, that's good. So I bought the security guard company. And he hired a girl. He said, I've got the perfect girl around the office. Colleen, I said okay, that's good. I had trust, this is my issue. I trust. If I trust you, and I believe in you, then I trust you. So I turned over the company, business to Hilton. I said you know, I'll come in every once in a while, once or twice a week, and check on you. If you need anything, let me know. You're running the company. I've given you a partnership. And let's see where it goes. It wasn't a full partnership but it was, he had a good chunk. So everything went fine. And the company was going well.

Art Rascon: But Petro started noticing changes in Hilton.

Sam Petro: One of the things that we really noticed was he didn't have time for golf anymore. You know, and all of a sudden he often, I can't play. I can't play this week. I can't play next week. I can't do this. we just knew something wasn't right. He always said he was so busy, so busy, so busy.

Art Rascon: And Hilton started telling Petro that money was tight, and that he would need Petro to put more money into the company. Petro thought something wasn't adding up. Business was good and he thought the security company should be making money.

Sam Petro: So I was talking to a very good friend of mine that owned a security company. He said, Have you ever thought of a shock audit?

Art Rascon: A shock audit is a way of catching embezzlement or fraud.

Sam Petro: The auditors walk in and just shut the business end of it down. Not the, not the services. But the financial part. Nothing's going to happen financially until we look at all the money.

So we started this shock audit. And Hilton was just raising hell. Why are they doing this and can't operate when you're doing stuff like this. I said look Hilton, I don't want to deal with this. I've got my little business to run other companies. I gotta get out of it.

Art Rascon: Petro wasn't sure he could trust Hilton to run the company anymore, and he didn't think it was worth the hassle. He says rather than pay to continue the shock audit, he decided to just sell the business, a process which would require its own accounting of the finances.

Sam Petro: So if we're gonna sell the company, all that information was gonna come to pass anyway.

Sam Petro: And we had a business broker come in and sold the company immediately. I mean, security business was good. We had a lot of customers and a lot of billable hours.

Art Rascon: Petro figured that things would end on a good note. He would get a pay out, Hilton would get a payout because he was a partner, and the new owners could sort out what was going on with the company.

Sam Petro: Well, that's what I thought on the surface. company gets in, they start doing their audit. And they call us and this is where the story gets interesting. They said somebody's stealing from the company. You got money bleeding. The girl running in the office, had gotten about 60,000. Hilton had taken out about 300,000.

What they were doing was she was handling the office. So she was handling the payroll. And she would write checks to guards that didn't exist that were just names. And some of these check cashing places back then, you could go in there and cash a check and give them 10% of the funds. They don't ask for identification and all that stuff. So that's, that's where all that came from.

Art Rascon: Petro came to learn why Hilton had been too busy to play golf and why he'd embezzled so much money.

Sam Petro: Well, the reason we've finally found out the reason was because he was spending too much time gambling on sports. When you're trying to make a living gambling, which is what he was trying to do, there are games that go on all day long.

they'll make a couple of bets on games played at noon. Alright, I'm winning those. So now I can, instead of betting 200 on this next game, I can bet 400 Because just won some money here, or how I lost that game during the day, so I gotta bet more here to make up for that. So it becomes

an all day affair. It becomes obsessive. People that are addicted to this stuff, and I've been through it, with a couple of people. None more than Hilton. But when you're addicted to that stuff, it just controls their whole life. Golf becomes just a nuisance.

Art Rascon: After discovering the embezzlement, the people interested in acquiring the security guard company backed out of the deal, and the business went bankrupt. It put Petro in a difficult place; he'd been betrayed by his good friend. Hilton came to him with all kinds of excuses.

Sam Petro: He said, I'm sorry, I did that. I feel really bad that I did that. But I was in a jam. And I owed these bad money, and if I didn't start paying them, they were gonna harm my family. You gave me all of these stories, but I didn't believe any of them really didn't.

Art Rascon: Petro decided to cut his losses and cut off his ties with Hilton.

Sam Petro: Here's the thing. I couldn't sue him. Because I loved his wife and his kids. What am I going to do? Sue him and get satisfaction out of that? I told Hilton, I said Hilton, you can't pay me back. I thought you were a friend. We're through. I don't want to talk to you again. I don't want to see you. Adios! But I am going after Colleen. She got 60,000. I want 60,000 back. He said you can't do that. I said why not? And he said Colleen's dad is head of Houston Light and Power company buildings. They're a big customer of mine. If you're gonna shut this down. Then I have to go get another job and they're big customers. They're important to me making a livelihood. I said, Hilton, I have to go after her. He said please you can't, don't go after her. I'll pay you the 60,000 I said you can pay me 60 cents. So no, I'm going after her. I Really kinda knew I couldn't get 60,000 out of her. But I wanted to construct some misery just as revenge. I could tell ya, you know it was different but it's not.

Art Rascon: Hilton told a very different story to Tannie Shannon. In some ways a diametrically opposite story. Hilton claimed it was Petro that had embezzled from the security guard business in fact, he said Petro had skimmed off the top of the restaurant as well.

Tannie Shannon: Entertaining his friends and all that and never charging them and so forth and taking money out of the restaurant. Well, of course, it might have been Crawford that was taking the money out I don't know.

Art Rascon: And though Tannie made it very clear that he was publishing Hilton's version of events, he did put Hilton's accusations about Petro in his book. Petro was angry that Tannie never tried to verify Hilton's story.

Sam Petro: A lot of things that Hilton said in that book are just ridiculous.

Art Rascon: Tannie says that Petro read the book and confronted him about it.

Tannie Shannon: He called me the day the book was released. He was very annoyed about some of the things I had said. And I said, Well, what I'm doing is repeating what I was told, in

interviews and so forth. What he objected to is being called overbearing, overweight and dishonest to the point of fudging charity, golf tournaments. He says, I'm not that fat, but yeah whatever. That doesn't bother me at all. I've had people mad at me before. I'm not not concerned with that.

Sam Petro: It didn't bother me what he said about me, I think he said I was overweight and annoying or something. But you know, the author of that book didn't verify anything in that book. How can you have a story about somebody that's telling the story themselves, which you don't verify? Especially a murderer.

Art Rascon: After his falling out with Hilton, Petro started hearing stories about other scams that Hilton had run.

Sam Petro: One of the things I found out he did, he took some people on a vacation. I forget where it was, I want to say Hawaii and he paid for everything. And then when he came back, he called the credit card company that he put everything on and told them I just noticed my credit cards been missing. You know, I just got this big bill, somebody's been traveling, using my name, my credit card. So the credit card company just you know, they just wipe it out. Right? And he did that. So, found out a lot of things that Hilton did that were not kosher.

But Hilton's big thing was he wanted to be more than he was. He lied about his golf scores which doesn't sound like a lot, but the game of golf is a very self policing sport. When you put that kind of stuff together with the rest of it, he wanted to make people believe that he was more successful than he was. And he couldn't get that way unless he worked at it. He didn't want to work at it. He wanted to do it through gambling. And he always wanted to hit that big jackpot he wanted to win.

He didn't need that to impress people. People genuinely liked him. He could have been himself and things would have gone on.

Art Rascon: A couple of years after their falling out, Hilton reached back out to Petro asking to meet up. Petro saw Hilton as a flawed, but fundamentally good person, who'd just gotten too deep into a gambling addiction. Petro hoped Hilton had gotten his problem under control and was doing better, so he and their mutual friend John Powell decided to check up on Hilton.

Sam Petro: So, Kevin called us, he said meet me. He had a new race track. So John and I went to the new race track.

Art Rascon: Petro realized that Hilton had fallen in with others whose whole lives revolved around gambling.

Sam Petro: He said I want you to meet somebody. So he brings this guy in and then he introduces him to us and he was a horse trainer. There was something about the guy that John and I just both looked at each other and said whoa. So we talked to him casually for a little

while. And he left. And Hilton said hey, how'd you like this guy and John and I both said, Hilton, Don't ever bring somebody like that around us. He said, what's wrong with him? It smells to high heaven. There's something not right about this.

Art Rascon: At first it almost sounded like Sam was describing R.L. Remington. But this was Billy Allen, the man who owned the storage site in Lumberton where Hilton hid his gun. Allen helped Hilton buy a race-horse and introduced him to the horse-racing world.

Sam Petro: To bookmakers and a whole lot of other people that he shouldn't have been in touch with. That's how he ran up such huge debts.

Betting on horses, betting on football games, betting on baseball, basketball I mean if you put two birds on a wire he bet on which one would fly off faster. And he didn't have that kind of money.

Art Rascon: By the time he kidnapped McKay he had \$300,000 in debt spread out over 40 banks and credit card companies And that's just what was officially recorded. There was also the money he allegedly owed Petro, money he'd borrowed from family and friends, and likely debts to loan sharks as well.

Sam Petro: He kept getting deeper and deeper and deeper in debt and we knew it.

Art Rascon: That day at the racetrack, Petro realized Hilton wasn't doing any better.

Sam Petro: I told Hilton, I don't want you calling me, I don't want you talking to me, I don't want you saying the damn thing to me. Until you get your act together don't don't bother me. And John told him the same thing. Well it was three months after that conversation, that's when he kidnapped McKay.

Art Rascon: After Hilton's arrest, Petro tried to help Connie and Hilton's sons navigate the situation.

Sam Petro: And I felt sorry for his family. My thinking was, this is not normal. Something has gone wrong. His brain, you know, it snapped. Because you know, he'll do some things, yeah he'll screw you out of money but I never thought he'd kill anybody. Never thought it would be anything near that. I do believe he was very deep in debt to bookmakers. To some really bad people. That he was so deep in debt, that he felt like the only way he had out was to do something nefarious. Well, he took it too far. He kidnapped a kid. He murdered the child. You know, my heart still bleeds for the Everett family. The dad passed away, but Paulette still lives and breathes that horror every day. And I felt sorry for Connie and I felt sorry for Chris and Kep.

Art Rascon: Petro thinks that Hilton kept his illegal activities secret from Connie. He definitely kept the extent of his gambling from her.

Sam Petro: Hilton hid every bad aspect of his life from Connie. And he hid it very well. He would tell Connie something like, I've got business. We have a client in El Paso I have to go see that guy. Be there for a couple of days and go to Vegas. He did that on, on a lot of occasions.

Art Rascon: Petro regrets all the red flags about Hilton's gambling he ignored early in their friendship.

Sam Petro: You know when I look back on Hilton, I was as dumb as a rock. I saw him over gambling when I saw him gambling money he didn't have. Yes, he's telling me that, okay, this money came from somebody else and I'm gonna, you know, we're gonna fit on there. If I had a serious thought about it at the time, rather than just saying that's just Hilton talking. I would have reacted, I would have done something. I would have had serious conversations, I would have taken him to a psychiatrist, to find out why are you doing the things that you're doing? You know, what I would have confronted him with all this stuff going wrong. Stealing 300,000 from the security company. The deal in Hawaii with the credit card. If I would have put all of this stuff together, I would, I would have done something, then McKay would still be alive.

Art Rascon: Petro says in retrospect, he feels like he was watching a drunk pull out their keys to drive home.

Sam Petro: He was drunk with gambling. You know, It wasn't alcohol, he didn't drink. But you know, your mind can fall apart and a lot of ways. Doesn't have to be physical, there's mental you know. The takeaways keep your eyes open. Don't keep your mouth shut.

Art Rascon: When Hilton Crawford's case was brought before the Grand Jury, the District Attorney subpoenaed Sam Petro but it wasn't the kidnapping they asked him about but rather the car that Hilton had reported stolen years earlier the one that they'd found when they'd searched Billy Allen's storage site in Lumberton. Grand Juries operate in secret and their proceedings are rarely made public but we managed to obtain Petro's testimony.

Sam Petro: I remember Hilton telling me his car had been stolen. I did not know that he did that. I had my own thoughts about it. But he didn't tell me he had Connie's Jewelry in the trunk. And that kind of made me suspicious.

Art Rascon: Petro thought it was too big of a coincidence that Connie's jewelry was in the trunk of the car, right when her car was stolen. He figured it was one of Hilton's schemes. But assistant District Attorney Mike Addudel seemed more interested in Hilton's wife Connie, than in Hilton.

Interviewer: And did Connie ever talk about her jewelry being lost.

Sam Petro: Yes, she did.

Art Rascon: Hilton had filed an insurance claim for \$40,000, alleging that thousands of dollars worth of Connie's jewelry were in the trunk of the car at the time it was stolen.

Interviewer: Did she ever tell you why all of her jewelry? was in a bag in a car?

Sam Petro: I don't remember where I got the story. But the story I got was that they had a new maid or something. And Hilton had told Connie to put the jewelry in the trunk because he didn't trust the maid.

Art Rascon: Prosecutors were suspicious that Connie was in on the insurance fraud, because friends had seen her continue to wear the jewelry that had been reported stolen. Connie said that Hilton had found it for her in a pawn shop. Petro thought that was another of Hilton's obvious lies, but he said that Connie seemed to believe it.

Sam Petro: Connie Crawford thought Hilton was a saint because he was spending his days going around from pawn shops to pawn shop finding her jewelry one piece at a time. As hard as it is for you or I or anyone in this room to believe that she believed what I'm telling you, that's as naive as She is.

Art Rascon: Petro didn't think Connie was involved. He'd seen Hilton pull the wool over Connie's eyes for years when it came to gambling. Petro felt she'd fallen victim to loving and trusting Hilton the same way he had.

Sam Petro: I love her to death. She's is the sweetest person in the world –

Prosecutor: She may be up her neck.

Sam Petro: No she's not up to her neck in anything. If she is, it shouldn't be there.

Sam Petro: Connie Crawford is dumb as a doorknob. She is as naive as any human you've ever been around in your entire life. More naive than you could ever believe. And you can believe that. She would tell me, Hilton is just so wonderful. He's going around spending his days as busy as he is checking out pawn shops and finding my jewelry here and there.

Art Rascon: Petro testified that he didn't think it was his place to burst Connie's bubble.

Sam Petro: What would you tell her If you were in that situation? Connie, you're dumb? no you can't do that I know you understand where I'm coming from where I couldn't just tell this lady. But that's his that's as naive as Connie Crawford is. That is the single most naive woman I've ever seen in my life. I don't know how to put it any more succinct.

Art Rascon: But Paulette didn't believe that Connie was that naive.

Paulette: No wife is that dumb. She might not be the brightest cookie in the cookie jar but you're not that dumb. She wore some of the jewelry to school, and the teachers at school went 'we thought that got stolen?' and she said 'Hilton found it for me in a pawn shop' *Yeah right.* I don't buy it. And the other teachers didn't either.

Paulette: And some people would say she didn't even know how to pump gas. Oh, give me a break. I didn't trust her. If you're married to a man, you get that good feeling whether they're doing right or wrong. Period, don't be mean excuses. And if the FBI came to my house, I would have gone to his sock drawer and go, here's his socks. Here's his undies. What else you want to know? I don't like it when a female plays dumb. I thought she's playing dumb for a reason. What are you hiding? What are you covering for? You don't want to own what you see?

Art Rascon: Next time on Ransom

Prosecutor: And let me tell you if there had been a little more evidence I would've indicted her

Paulette: I am following a police car and Hilton Crawford's in the back of it, and he said 'I have my pistol pulled. I want to shoot him.'