

Ray Martin: Road to Redemption

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It's a year since my last 60 Minutes' story. I've been writing some memoirs, locked-away in the proverbial garret.

Doin' time with yourself can sometimes seem like cruel and unusual punishment.

But, I came back to do a real crime story. It's an enthralling yarn, which has a twist in the tail worthy of a PD James or Jeffrey Archer. I must say, I'm still shaking my head at the way it's unfolded over many years.

It's the story of Ken and Karl, a bizarre relationship, I guess, between a killer and the dad of his victim. Each has been vital to the other's rehabilitation, and now they're talking about working together, to try and break the circle of violence. And maybe ease the pain, for victims like Ken. It's been an agonising, and highly controversial journey, a journey worth recounting.

Ken Marslew's son, Michael, was murdered back in 1994. Michael was a bright-eyed uni student who wanted to teach primary school kids or maybe sing in musicals. He was too full of life to die; 'the last kid you'd ever expect to get involved in violence', his grieving dad says fifteen years later, still with tears in his eyes.

Michael was working part-time at his local Pizza Hut in the Sydney suburb of Jannali when the terrible crime occurred. He was killed by a shotgun bullet to the back of his head. As Ken puts it, 'four maggots' came in and blew him away.

For the first few years, Ken wanted to kill them, even taking out a contract on their lives.

Well now, the bloke who organised the deadly robbery has walked out of gaol, a free man again.

Karl Kramer is now 39 years old, having spent 14 years in a range of prisons, ending up in Goulburn's Maximum security joint. It's significant that although he sat in the getaway car the night of the robbery, Kramer still pleaded guilty to murder. Kramer never earned an early parole, like the bloke who pulled the trigger, but spent the last year-and-a-half in solitary — alongside the serial killer Ivan Milat and those despicable pack rapists, the Skaff brothers.

When Kramer walked through the big exit gates at Goulburn, the only person there to meet him was Ken Marslew, with a handshake.

Ken is the first to admit that he's obsessive. You've probably got to be, if you're going to change both laws and public attitudes towards violent criminals. He's an amazing bloke, with more courage and forgiveness than I could ever muster. While Ken is adamant he hasn't 'forgiven' his son's killers, that's exactly what some people accuse him of doing - especially his ex-wife - Michael's mother, Joan. She still wants Kramer to rot in hell.

Ken's 65 now. He's lost a lot of hair since I first met him back in the '90's. And, about 40 kilos in weight! Following four heart attacks, and so much stress that his specialists feared he was about to have a stroke, Ken underwent radical stomach surgery. He looks a lot healthier and happier than he used to be. Ken insists the only way to handle his hatred and anger, was to try and change things for the better, to do something positive in Michael's memory. In spite of those who accuse him of 'betraying' his boy, even of being 'a coward', Ken set-up a non-profit organisation called 'Enough is Enough'.

Through this group, Ken has spoken with — even counselled — thousands of schoolkids and criminals about violence, and the agony that it spreads. He's been influential in changing prison sentencing laws, and the attitudes of politicians and the public, about the lunacy of locking violent criminals up and then tossing them out onto the streets again. Ken's also convinced that he's managed to set quite a few thugs on a different path, too.

Karl Kramer tells us that while he can never accept forgiveness for Michael's murder, saying that he's 'not worthy' of it, he has committed himself to join Ken in his counselling work — especially with potentially dangerous boys and young men. He figures his fifteen years, spent with some of the worst and most dangerous criminals, has given him enough training and insight to help others avoid going down the same path.

Kramer insists that Ken Marslew has been 'the most influential person in my life, no question'. Without Marslew, the convicted killer told us, 'I would have been coming outta gaol a mean and dangerous Mother F***er'.

You only have to look at the scars he wears from brawls and even knifings in prison, to believe him.

I like Ken Marslew a lot. For his sake, and maybe for the rest of us, I hope he and Karl can really make a difference. As they say, the jury will be out for quite a while on that one. I truly doubt that Ken Marslew's sanity could cop a repeat offence, if Karl Kramer lets him down.