

Ken Marslew, 64, lost his 18-year-old son Michael in 1994 during an armed robbery organised by Karl Kramer, 38. Karl is planning to work for Ken's Sydney-based anti-violence organisation, Enough is Enough, when he completes his 15-year prison sentence in June next year.

# 2 of us

Ken Marslew & Karl Kramer



**Karl:** I saw Ken on *A Current Affair* and Ray Martin asked if he wanted to confront his son's killers. He said he did, so I wrote to him. I'd already written 20 letters to him but never sent them. I'd thought, "Writing a letter makes me feel good, but who am I to decide that this guy should take it?" I didn't have any guidelines about the meeting apart from not wanting the media involved. But Ken asked if it could be filmed [for the 1999 documentary *Facing the Demons*] and I can't say no to anything Ken asks.

I went to a restorative justice conference with Michael Marslew's family and friends not wanting anything. I didn't even want to explain myself. I was there as an object for them to vent on – to do whatever they needed to do to process their anger and grief. Any time anyone spoke I looked them in the eyes and just absorbed. It's hard to say this to people who might not understand, but it was the most spiritual and freeing experience of my life.

Afterwards there were two one-on-one meetings with Ken. It was mainly him showing me pictures of his son, telling me about him. He told me about the sacrifices he had to make. He'd had a job that paid good money, he loved sailing and used to have a boat, but he had to give all that up to do Enough is Enough. After that we spoke on the phone and exchanged letters. He sent me money a few times. Ken encouraged me to study psychology, he sent me stuff on positive mental thinking. It would be an insult to him to say he was fatherly, but he did

**"Karl finds our relationship confusing in some ways. He can't understand why I'm not behaving towards him the way he'd expect the dad of a murdered child to act."**

relationship with any of my three co-offenders, though he's reached out to them.

I've been subject to things in prison, been a victim, and if it wasn't for Ken Marslew I'd be one dangerous motherf...er. There are times I've thought, "Why don't I just be one of the boys, join one of the gangs, instead of having them trying to kill me?" But I won't be swept up in that. I don't have any hate in me, because the person who has every moral right to ... hate me showed me compassion.

Forgiveness isn't relevant. The question, "Ken, have you forgiven me?" has never, will never, come out of my mouth. If I save five people's lives in prison, or spend the rest of my life trying to prevent kids from becoming criminals, do those lives weigh up against the one I took?

guide me. Not that I'd ever say I was his mate. I'm uncomfortable even calling him by his first name, even though he's asked me to.

Our relationship is very specific, it's an extension of the work Ken's doing – I'm a tool he can use. [To my knowledge] no other relationships like this have happened through restorative justice,

and Ken doesn't have a

There's no answer to that. In the Bible, in Ezekiel, it says you must pay back what you have stolen. But I can't return what I've stolen. I don't forgive myself but I can't let it drive me mad. It would be too easy to just say, "Oh well, I'm just f...ed up, I'll go hide in drugs, go on methadone."

A lot of programs have police and social workers talking at young offenders, and they come back with, "How would you know what it's like, you don't come from housing commission, broken family, violence and alcohol." They can't say that to me. What's missing is offender-to-offender counselling, which is what me and Ken have talked about doing together.

Standard prison philosophy is that when you walk out the gates, you forget everything. I'm going to do the opposite. Every time I look at Ken, I'll be reminded, and I plan on having a lot to do with him.

**Ken:** After Michael's murder I petitioned for the reintroduction of the death penalty. I looked into taking out a contract on Karl, but for a raft of reasons didn't proceed. I started this anti-violence group dedicated to creating peace and harmony but I still had so much hate in me I was prepared to take someone's life. Parents, dads especially, have the concept that if anyone touches your kids, you kill them.

Only two of the four guys involved in the robbery, neither of whom actually shot Michael, had the balls to turn up to the conference. I got to say what I felt and hear what they had to say, but it wasn't completely satisfying, so I asked to meet Karl privately. I told him what it was like to lose a son and broke down. Then he told me what it was like to have had the life he'd had and he shed a few tears as well. After that I started to get some internal peace.

He saw [self-help guru] Anthony Robbins on TV and asked me to send in some of his material. I sent other books to help him go in a positive direction, and when he said he didn't have money for phone calls I sent him a little cash. He's chosen his own path, but I may have said things that kept him going in one direction when, if he'd gone the other way, he'd probably have been embraced by the other cons and fitted into the prison system better. I'm painfully honest with him and I find him to be sincere in his dealings with me. But maybe I'm a sucker, I don't know.

I'm not insulted by him suggesting I've been fatherly towards him – to some extent I have been. I was insulted when psychiatrists suggested that I have become his father and he has become my son. Some of these psychiatrists must go into the profession because they're so nipped in the head. We're definitely not close; I don't think we've even been alone in the same room since that meeting nine years ago. And I haven't forgiven him or the others. I think Michael is the only one who can forgive these blokes and he is not here. But I have chosen to let go of hate for the reason it hurts me more than it does anyone else.

Even the best person has some bad in them and the worst has some good in them. I can't say Karl is a bad bloke, though his actions were f...ing pathetic. I think he finds our relationship confusing in some ways. He can't understand why I'm not behaving towards him the way he'd expect the dad of a murdered child to act. I do want to use him as a tool, not for my benefit, but to help others. He's got the cred to be taken seriously if he was to counsel other offenders or give talks to kids at risk.

I gave him a commitment that there's a position for him at Enough is Enough when he's released. But he's got to get his own life together before he can stand up and start telling other people how to live theirs. He's changed his ideas and values, but I don't know how well prepared he is to come back into society after 15 years inside. I think he can make it, but he's going to need a lot of help.

Karl's a dad, and in my last letter to him I said his first priority has got to be rebuilding his relationship with his son. Some days I feel Michael, but I can't have a relationship with him, hug him, the way other people do with their kids. I told Karl to make sure to hug his son when he gets out. **GW**