



FEATURE CLE: Truth, Evidence, and the Power of a Story



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**TRUTH, EVIDENCE, AND THE POWER OF A STORY:
A FIRESIDE CHAT WITH ANDREA CANNING**

I. OPENING & PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

- A. You've spent years telling some of the most emotionally complex true stories in America. What first drew you to investigative journalism?
- B. When you begin working on a story, what are the first things you look for to determine whether there's more beneath the surface?
- C. Your work often deals with tragedy, conflicting narratives, and imperfect evidence. How has that changed the way you think about "truth"?

II. TRUTH, CREDIBILITY & HUMAN BEHAVIOR

- A. In your experience, what are the biggest indicators that someone is withholding information or shaping a narrative?
- B. How do you approach interviewing people who are highly emotional, defensive, or potentially deceptive?
- C. What role does silence play in an interview – and how do you use it?

III. STORYTELLING & PERSUASION

- A. Lawyers sometimes say that cases are won or lost based on the story the jury believes. Do you see similarities between courtroom advocacy and documentary storytelling?
- B. What are the biggest mistakes people make when trying to tell a persuasive story?
- C. What do journalists notice immediately when someone is overly scripted – and what creates authenticity when someone is speaking to an audience?

IV. THE CRYSTAL ROGERS CASE

- A. What first drew *Dateline* to the Crystal Rogers case here in Kentucky, and what made you realize it was a story that needed national attention?
- B. The Crystal Rogers case involves years of rumors, shifting theories, and intense public speculation. How do you separate verified evidence from community narrative?
- C. The emotional toll on families in long-running cases is enormous. How do you approach interviews with loved ones who have been waiting years for answers?

V. ETHICS, HUMAN NATURE & CLOSING

- A. In an era of social media and instant public verdicts, what responsibility do journalists – and lawyers – have in protecting the presumption of innocence?
- B. After covering so many true crime stories, what have you learned about human nature?
- C. Considering your significant experience with covering difficult topics, what still gives you hope?

VI. MISCELLANEOUS

- A. Have you ever gone into a story believing one thing and completely changed your mind once the evidence unfolded?
- B. What is the one question you wish someone would ask you that no one ever does?
- C. What's one lesson from your career that everyone – lawyers included – can benefit from?

DATELINE'S ANDREA CANNING ON CRIMES OF PASSION AND HITMAN-FOR-HIRE PLOTS

Juicy Scoop™ w Heather McDonald

Transcript April 8, 2026

Reprinted with permission. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpEtZgGZhGs>.

HM: Hello and welcome to Juicy Crimes. You guys are going to be so excited. I have the queen of crime, *Dateline*, mother of six, gorgeous Andrea Canning.

I'm so excited to have you on *Juicy Crimes*. Thank you for coming on.

AC: I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me on.

HM: Well, I mean, I'm obsessed obviously with crimes, and I've always loved you on *Dateline*. You've done so many other things.

AC: Thank you.

HM: But I mean the thing that I also I years ago I had your colleagues um Keith Morrison and um Josh Mowitz and I did ask them so I'm just going to ask you like when you're interviewing these people sometimes the possible uh perpetrator sometimes the victims.

How what has been the most interesting situation where you're interviewing this person, you know, maybe they're on trial, but in your opinion, you know, they're guilty and you have to kind of play along and be like, "And when you first got married, you guys were really you were the town um prom king and queen and you know that he like murdered her." How do you do that?

AC: Yeah. I mean, because it's, it's always sort of that fine line, right? Because you want to start the show. We don't go from, you know, 0 to 5 minutes where we're telling you, hey, he did it, right? So, you have to sort of build that love story and how did these people meet and why did they fall in love and you know, I say to people all the time, you don't run into the arms of a killer, right? So, so there's usually a love story there, you know, where it started off okay and then something goes wrong. So I try to keep myself in in that sort of frame of mind, of like there was a time when these two people probably were in love, you know, and so you're trying to get that sort of like initial story of them. And then it's also questionable about like do you smile, you know, do you, what should your facial expressions be knowing how this story ends? Cuz usually we know, um, you know that there you know there's been a verdict, right? So we when I interview this person, usually they're in prison. Um, very rarely do I do it, you know, before trial where I interview an accused killer. Um, which is also a whole other dynamic. But yeah, it's like smile, not smile. I don't want to look sympathetic, but at the same time, I'm trying to get this sort of real story of what happened before everything went wrong.

HM: And when you do somebody in prison, because I noticed like 20 years ago, this would always kind of bum me out is that like I would see that, you know, it was just super close on the guy's face. And then once I figured it out that it's because he's in an orange jumpsuit, but then I when I was interviewing um Keith and Josh, they said, "Yeah, well, sometimes we do bring them another shirt and maybe like put a plant in the corner."

AC: Absolutely. Um, sometimes the, you know, the closeup can be a giveaway, right?

HM: Right.

AC: That *Dateline* is hiding something. I think Josh purposely interviewed someone who was acquitted closeup. Anyway, that's the story for Josh. Um, but I, you know, I remember going to do this interview with Tony Tongue in T-neck, New Jersey, who was accused of killing his uh ex-wife or soon to be ex-wife. I can't remember if they were officially divorced. And the producer brings in the summer this giant like Himalayan scratchy sweater that seriously looks like something you'd buy I don't know like Peru or some like I'm making up a country here but like it was so thick and heavy and scratchy. And the associate producer who was there, she was like, "Do you want me to go run to Macy's and grab like a polo or something?" He's like, "No, no, this is good. This is good. It's mine. It's my sweater. It's fine." And I'm like, "Oh my gosh." Like, as much as I don't feel sorry for killers, I was like, "Oh, he's going to wear that in this hot, stinky jail in New Jersey." And so he wore it, and the guy was like sweating because the sweater was so hot.

HM: But that's amazing.

AC: Then believe it or not, the producer actually like took it home after that. I was like, "For me, that would be in the trash." But

HM: Yeah.

AC: Yeah. No, he kept it.

HM: Now, how long have you been doing *Dateline*?

AC: Almost 14 years.

HM: Wow. That's amazing. You have not aged a day.

AC: Oh my gosh, you're so nice.

HM: And I don't know how you do it. Your kids are, you said, from 6 to 16.

AC: Yes.

HM: And so, you're just in the thick of it. Do how do you manage everything?

AC: You know, I have a nanny who's like, you know, who comes during the day. My husband works close to home. That helps out a lot. Um, but it's really hard. Like, you know, I'm getting a text message like, "Mommy, can I skip my tutor today?" Like, while I'm on with you and I'm like, "I am not answering you. Like, figure it out. Like, I can't talk to you right now." You know, there. So, there's times where I'd love to say, "My kids always come first, which generally they do, but there's some examples where they don't." Um, because, you know, it's kind of a, it's, this job is a lot. You know, there's a lot going on. And so I'm trying to be everything to everybody and that's you know we just know that's not real.

HM: Well I mean you've done so many cases, and you do the kind of cases that really interest me which is you know my favorite genre of true crime and I've created the genre of it. I don't know that anyone else would say it is infidelity killings one spouse for their insurance money and it's I'm usually

attracted to a couple that is very relatable to myself and someone you know steps out of the marriage or makes one wrong decision that then leads them in a life that they were never didn't even have a speeding ticket to looking you know at a lifetime of prison. Um, you know, we just had the uh Corey Richens case and with her um being convicted, I guess they're going to do the sentencing in a few weeks

AC: In May. Yeah.

HM: Um I was very shocked to see um that her defense and just remind people this is the one where she poisoned her husband allegedly. Well, not allegedly because she's convicted.

AC: Not anymore.

HM: Poison poisoned her husband with fentanyl in a Moscow mule. He died. She wrote a book um a children's book about getting on after your children's father dies. She had a lover. She thought she was going to get all this money, and she didn't and she was convicted. But what did you think when her defense didn't put on a defense at the very end? They didn't bring up any witnesses after the prosecution. I mean, don't you think like she might have a real case now to say she was misrepresented and asked to be appealed?

AC: Yeah. Ineffective assistance of counsel. Um maybe. I mean, you know, that we'll see. I... those are always hard claims to make. Um because also Corey seems very involved in her defense. Um my guess, and I'm not in that room with them, is you know, they probably consulted her on that. You know, they probably said, "Hey, here's what we're thinking." And again, I don't know that that happened. Um, but I'm but my guess would be that Corey was probably on board with that. Um, I did interview a couple of jurors who said that they would have liked to have seen the defense put on some witnesses, but, you know, sometimes defense attorneys, they make that hard decision because maybe putting on, you know, other people will open, you know, go down a rabbit hole of more, right? Things that might hurt Corey or maybe they just felt confident in their cross-examination that, you know, that they had done enough that they were really going for reasonable doubt in that case. Um, and maybe they felt like they had reached reasonable doubt the time it was their turn.

HM: Yeah. I always would because I was, you know, I was, you know, obviously it seemed very stacked against her, but I was always looking at like, well, you know, uh, the maid that said she bought it from, she was like had a criminal past and, you know, and yeah, I there's always the case of somebody who if their husband died wouldn't be overly sad. I mean, you know, like they that always seems to be the thing of like why weren't you overly sad and like, well, we weren't, we didn't have a great marriage. You know, he had cheated. I had cheated. Like I was sad for my kids, but no, I wasn't overwhelmingly, you know, bummed about it. I mean, think about how many people who are in unhappy marriages that secretly wish, you know, when they hear an ambulance that it was coming for their husband. I'm sorry. I think it's true. So it's like I always wonder why that's not played up sometimes more in like a defense.

AC: Yeah. And I sort of agree with you too because if she had already moved on to lover phase, you know, where she's with this Josh Grossman, obviously there's something is not great in that marriage, if she's having an affair, right, which is the accusation and her lover testified um in trial, you know, that they were having this affair and they had all these text messages. Um, I think once you've moved on to that point, you're probably not in the happiest of marriages. So, I totally agree with you that not

everyone has to be bawling their eyes out because they had the greatest love story of all time. Um, you know, so that that's a good point that you make, and it's like that for, look, my dad had a girlfriend that I didn't love and, you know, and, she died, and I was really sad for her kids, but like I wasn't bawling my eyes out, you know, because I didn't totally love this woman.

Hm: Yeah.

AC: I felt bad, you know, I really felt bad for him and for her. But you're going to have like different sorts of reactions to things based on how you feel about someone.

HM: Yeah. One thing that I don't think that you guys covered in your in the *Dateline*, I haven't really seen it is, and maybe you can't or you don't know about this, is a story that uh Corey's mother also had a either second husband or a serious boyfriend that died of poisoning.

AC: Really? Okay. I'm not aware of that. Yeah. I can't comment on that one.

HM: Yes, that, that is something new to me there. There just that might be in the Reddit world, but I've seen it in more places than one and it just might be kind of interesting for the sleuths to look into.

AC: Wow.

HM: Um because the mother was, you know, obviously very supportive of her daughter, which is, you know,

AC: And still is very uh supportive of Corey. Yeah. They she has been supportive of her throughout this entire thing. Um and is yeah like her number one supporter for sure.

Hm: Right. Do you ever think that sometimes there is an overzealous like male detective to go after the wife who is like the vixen who cheated who has the scarlet letter whose husband is now dead.

AC: Um, I mean, look, that's like the number one accusation, right, from defendants is tunnel vision. You know, the defense attorneys, they had tunnel vision.

HM: Yeah.

AC: Um, and they, you know, they look at the spouse and they don't look anywhere else. I mean, that's kind of a defense as old as time, right? Sloppy investigation, tunnel vision. Um, you know, all the evidence points to the spouse. I mean, that like 90% of [unintelligible] say...

HM: Well I want to talk to you about this crazy case which I have not covered yet, and I've only seen bits and pieces so I'm glad that you're really covering it because it's insane and it's about a husband who attempted to hire someone to kill his wife not once but twice. Can you kind of walk us through it?

AC: Yeah. So, this is a story that uh takes place in Rockland County, New York, which is just north of New York City. Ira Bernstein is a podiatrist, and he falls in love at Penn State with Susan, and Susan and Ira get married. They have a few kids. Uh they start spending a lot of money. You know, they live in this beautiful house, and he's got multiple practices at this point. He's um got some real estate and

also Ira happens to be the foot doctor for the Rockland County uh sheriff's department. So he's, you know, very intimately involved with all the officers in town with their feet, you know, doing surgery and whatnot. Um and so he has a girlfriend, this woman, she is very eclectic. Her name is Kelly, and she is a former mortician, aspiring model, and shoe orthotic saleswoman.

HM: Okay, we have a couple questions. First of all, how old is she in comparison to his wife, current wife that he's with? So, he's clearly cheating on the wife, right? They didn't have like an open thing.

AC: They, well, there was some talk of that it was an open marriage you know that that's between them but yes there was definitely like he, that was Ira's claim that they had an open marriage and it's possible you know I'm not exactly sure because we've never interviewed Susan. So Kelly had been to Ira, Kelly his girlfriend, had been to Ira as a patient for her feet and then later she started selling these shoe orthotics and so she comes Ira for help with this business or whatever and they start this relationship. He says she's hot. Um, you know, they start and then he says that he was going to give it another go with Susan. He, I guess they were separated for a bit in the story and wants to go back to Susan because divorce is messy and blah blah blah. So, fast forward, Kelly goes to this car salesman named Marckensy, BMW car salesman, who she knew, and says like, "Hey, can you take care of something for me? I need someone dead." So, she had sort of misinterpreted a conversation she had had with him like earlier when she was talking about her ex-husband, and he gave her some advice and she sort of took that as like he knows assassins. Um, so she comes to him and she's like can you find, can you help me find someone? I need this woman killed this suburban mom. Um, so he's like yeah I think I could help you with that. And so what does he do? He calls his friend who's a police officer and he says, "I have a woman who wants to have this other woman killed." And the police officer is like, "Okay, you need to call, like, detectives. I'm going to tell you how to reach them." So, they set up this big sting operation that ends up being multiple sting operations, cameras in Marckensy's car, the so-called, you know, hitman or who knows a hitman. And so he has Kelly come in. They really have to get money to exchange hands, you know, for a proper like arrest and all of that, right? You have to, you can't just talk about it, you have to actually say, "I want this. Here's the money." He takes the money. So he's trying to lure Ira, the podiatrist, into the sting. So he's like, "I need to see Ira." So, this takes a little detour where they pause on the hit on Susan and they say, "Actually, first we want to beat up a couple of insurance investigators because Ira was accused of overbilling."

HM: Oh my god.

AC: And these insurance guys were like kind of, you know, hot on his trail. And so the police come up with this plan. Let's beat up like look like we're beating up, Hollywood, a script. We're beating up these insurance investigators. So they do make like they're like throwing punches. They're like, you know, there's like makeup, whatever. And so Marckensy gets Ira into the car by saying he needs to see the photos. I can't give these to you. Ira needs to see them. So Ira gets in the car. He shows him the photos. And then Ira says at one point, like right out of a movie, he looks into the back seat and he sees like something in the back, like a camera or hole or something, and he goes, "Is that a camera?" And Ira's face is like, you know, like right up in the and the police are watching and and Marckensy goes, "Oh, no, no, that's just a game console like for my kids." And I was like, "Oh, okay. Okay." Like all good. You know.

HM: So wait, I have a couple questions.

AC: Yeah.

HM: I have always said when you know and I've interviewed cops too when I'd watched like TV shows about cops I was always like well if I could be the decoy hooker that would be kind of fun if I had to be a cop I'd want to be the one that's like under 'cause I'm an actor I really you know I was like if I can't be an actor I'd like to be like a cop who's like you know and I always think that's the undercover thing has always really been so intriguing to me um when someone is an officer or undercover for the mob or whatever.

AC: Yeah.

HM: And I've interviewed people that really have to have like a separate apartment, a whole separate life for, you know, like a year on end.

AC: Scary.

HM: And it's, it's scary, and it's crazy, but I'm like, you do realize that like you're an actor. And the guy's like, "Oh, I never thought of it like that." I'm like, "Yeah, you're full on acting." And which is really kind of amazing in choosing that career that it could also lead to something so elaborate as that. And I also think, don't you think they kind of have fun with it? Like for a cop, that's a more exciting or detective a little more exciting thing than like, you know.

AC: Yeah. Keeps your heart pounding, right? I went undercover for *Dateline* as a, I was actually pregnant for real, but we were doing an investigation on adoption scams, and I met with this like baby broker type person. And you know, she ran an adoption agency, but it was like there were big issues with the adoption agency. Obviously, we're doing an investigation. And so I was trying to sell my baby basically. You know, I'm saying everything that's wrong. I'm like, what if what if I was on drugs? Do I need to put that in the form? No, no, no, no. We can leave that off. I want, what if I want this? What if I want a new car? Like all the things that are breaking the laws of adoption. And...

HM: Wow.

AC: She was like, this woman was accused of, you know, leading on different parents, perspective parents for the same child, right? And then, you know, money is exchanging hands and then at the end you're like, sorry, they chose someone else and you've been lying the whole time. So, anyway, we, I was at a Starbucks with her and I'm like, I'm with *Dateline*, you know, and she's like and but her instincts were so wrong. She knew her instincts were telling her something was up because she thought I was running away from an abusive husband.

HM: Oh.

AC: Not that I was an investigative journalist. So, she, her Spidey sense was going off but like telling her the wrong thing.

HM: That's so interesting.

AC: So, she picked it up, you know, and I was dressed in like head-to-toe Walmart, you know. I had no makeup on, hair in a ponytail. I probably had a baseball cap on or something. I don't remember. But like, still, she was getting the vibe of like, you know, that I, you know, wasn't some down and out person. I was like actually running from like abuse was her thought process. Um, so that was like a

really, I mean I remember waiting for the call in the hotel room to see if she would meet us, and I was like I felt, I swear I felt sick that day. I'm like I don't know if I can do this, you know.

HM: No. Was that way more difficult and scarier than how you do your career now and just interviewing people?

AC: Heck yes. Absolutely. Because it's like you're stepping out of your comfort zone. You're like pretending to be something you're not.

HM: Yeah.

AC: I mean, well, I was pregnant, but I certainly was not selling my baby.

HM: Um, I mean, even the few times I've done like a hidden camera thing, like even though it's comedic and I have to like walk up to a, you know, a person on the street with like weird glasses or a hidden camera and like say something strange or, I didn't like, I actually didn't like it. It actually wasn't my forte of comedy. It made me feel uncomfortable like being dishonest like that and tricking someone into thinking I'm like a weirdo. I don't know.

AC: Yeah, it's hard.

HM: Yeah, it is.

AC: Yeah. I guess there's something about like if you're not used to being deceptive, right? It's going against the grain that now you're like...

HM: Right.

AC: You know, lying to somebody.

HM: Okay. Well, let's get back to the story. Sort of got off track. So, the detectives get away with saying, "Oh, no, that's just a game console. That's not a hidden camera." And that's after they've shown him photos and videos of that we've done the first task which is beating up these insurance uh detectives that are investigators that are after your shady podiatrist business.

AC: Yes. So he, he's happy with the photos. He trusts Marckensy at this point and so it goes forward and then you know eventually Kelly's, gives the answer that you know they, final answer in money yes we want her dead and um so they get Kelly and then they get Ira um and then at one point Ira's defense and Kelly's defense was something about that they tried to back out but Marckensy said it was too late and um this one wasn't on camera and Marckensy said that if they backed out that these special ops were going to feed them to the alligators and so they couldn't back out at that point. So that was their, that was what they said that was said that the reason they didn't ultimately back out. And they even talked about how it was going to be done. Um, so they said that they wanted Susan to be run over. And actually that idea came from Kelly because Kelly earlier in her life had actually run like hit someone in her car and killed someone by accident.

HM: That even makes it worse.

AC: And like but like nothing happened. You know what I mean? Like she got away with it. Meaning, meaning like she wasn't charged. You know what I'm saying? Like so she...

HM: Oh, so she thought that was a good...

AC: They thought the police thought maybe that's where that idea came from that that Kelly it was, you know, she just walked away from that experience. So could we, could we just like, could someone hit Susan?

HM: Yeah.

AC: And then anyway, obviously it did not get to that point.

HM: Right.

AC: Because they were arrested. And then Kelly saw Marckensy at the jail. I believe when they took her to the jail, he was there and she's kind of like it was like she saw a ghost, you know, there's like, um, yeah.

HM: And wait, how old is the Kelly woman? Is she significantly younger or not?

AC: Um, she was in her 30s, I believe, at the time.

HM: And how old was the podiatrist guy?

AC: He was like 30s or 40, early 40s. I honestly, I can't remember. It was like nine years ago.

HM: Okay.

AC: Yeah, I can't remember. But like not, not super old or anything.

HM: Okay.

AC: Thirty, late 30s or early 40s maybe.

HM: So how does Susan react when that's presented to her? She's still married to him at this point, right?

AC: Yeah. Their divorce really dragged. Um yeah. So Susan is like they tell Susan actually they tell her oh gosh you know what now I can't remember if they told her during the stings or like when he was arrested. I actually forgot. I'm sorry Heather. Um yeah she I mean obviously she's shocked you know she's like whoa. I mean, and you know, her life has been now a life of looking over her shoulder and she says, "It's a life of fear and you know, really just around every corner like is someone going to kill me?" Um, she's, you know, she's so lucky that they went to Marckensy, you know, who did the right thing because imagine if they did find somebody...

HM: Yeah.

AC: Have a problem killing someone, right?

HM: Right. I mean, I always think it's interesting, too, that then because it didn't go through or because the murder wasn't successful, why someone gets such a lesser sentence for attempted murder than when you actually succeeded at murder. I don't even, I don't think it should matter.

AC: I know. I always wonder that, too. It always bothers me because your intention was for that person to be dead,

HM: Right?

AC: You're just lucky that it didn't work out.

HM: Right?

AC: You know, and I guess the defendant is lucky, too, because they get this light sentence. Well, not really lucky because they didn't carry out what they planned, but at least, you know, you get a second chance, right? I mean, you got four years. So, you know, that's a, that's a moment to say like, hey, I can do something better with my life, you know, and by the way, like I remember describing it the first time we did this is like his and hers prisons, right? Because they, both these lovers went off to prison. But Kelly, when they were initially arrested and got out on bail, she was like, "This is my ride or die. I love Ira till the end. We're going to be together forever." And I'm thinking to myself like really, like you really think this is going to work out? And also he bailed out of jail immediately. Like within I want to say it was like I don't know within days like a few days. He left, like she was in there for four months because she couldn't afford the bail.

HM: So he didn't even pay for her. Yeah. He was distancing himself.

AC: And she's stuck in there and then he says, "Oh, she was the mastermind behind the whole thing."

HM: Right. I mean, that's what you always have to do when it's a triangle thing or when it's always whenever it's the...

AC: Yeah.

HM: Hired the, you know, hired someone to kill the lover of the wife, of my spouse, whether it's a woman doing it or not. It's always I did not know that my person that I had on the side was so obsessed with me and thought that my spouse was so horrible or abusive. I never told them that. They did all this behind my back as like a gift, and I just didn't know that that always has to be they always turn on each other for that reason because that's the only way they can get out of it there.

AC: And there was a validation of sorts for Kelly because of part two of all of this and...

HM: We can, let's get into that. So they, yeah. So they end up getting each sentenced, right?

AC: They get, they both get like four years, and they both get out. Kelly, you know, doesn't, there's no contact with Ira that we know of. She goes about her life and, uh, trying to get, you know, trying to get her life back. Ira starts with, starts in with this landscaping business. So, there's a man who has this

landscaping business. Ira knew him because this man used to or, you know, still does the property where like Susan and Ira lived. So he knows this landscaper. He gets in contact with the landscaper and they go into business together, and so Ira ends up somehow according to the landscaper convincing the landscaper to let him in on the business. And I said to the detective I was like, did he not watch *Dateline*? Like did he not know about this story with Kelly and Susan? And he's like no, no he did, but Ira told him it was all Kelly. So he trusted him I guess enough. All right. So they go into business together and then over some wine and cheese, according to the landscaper, Ira starts asking him if he knows anyone who can kill Susan. So here we are again. Here we are...

HM: Now. Why does he still want to kill her at this point? What would he gain from her dying now four years later?

AC: That is a good question. Um, my guess is it, I mean Ira has denied it. So, you know, again, this is sort of like, this is like through the prosecution's eyes, right? Um, angry at her. Maybe there's still money issues, unresolved money issues. I know Susan is still trying to get money from him. Um, that I believe they say is hidden, you know, that he has money, you know, people, offshore accounts, all that kind of thing. Like...

HM: Yeah.

AC: So, probably some anger, some, you know, money issues there. They've got three children that Ira, you know, claimed to me he loved and he'd learned his lesson and, you know, he just wants to be a better man for his children.

HM: Right?

AC: Well, yeah, we saw how that turned out. So this landscaper gets very upset about something else. He feels that Ira has stolen money from him, that he has taken like half of his business or whatever, and he's really mad. So he uses this request to have Susan killed against Ira. So he goes on Amazon, he orders like three tape recorders and he's like, I'm going to record this guy. But this is different from Marckensy, the first guy, because Marckensy was working with the police. This landscaper guy is now doing it to like hopefully get his business back and just say so he sets up a meeting with Ira and his sister who's an attorney and...

HM: His sister, Ira's sister...

AC: Is an attorney. Yes. So he's basically saying if you give me my business back I will not give these recordings to the police. So these are recordings of Ira talking about Susan.

HM: Oh...

AC: And wanting her killed. So, and some of the recordings were like, you know, it's some of them are, you know, sometimes those recordings were a little vague about what the person's talking about and some of them the audio wasn't that great. And so, it wasn't, it wasn't like perfect, right? It wasn't like the smoking gun, per se. But he tries to use the recordings against Ira. He ends up going to this landscaper who knows Susan ends up going, the landscaper goes to Susan and says this is happening. Susan goes to the district attorney's office and says I think Ira is trying to have me killed again.

HM: Amazing.

AC: So they couldn't do another sting because Ira, you know that that wasn't going to work again, right? But they had the recordings, and so Ira ended up taking a deal for something, not it wasn't like the, it wasn't as strong as the first time around, you know, solicitation to commit murder or whatever that it was something along the lines of tampering with evidence. I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was like a lower level crime that they were able to get him on. So, he really got a light sentence. I mean, he could be out I think this time it could be as short as a year and a half. I think it was like a year and a half to three years.

HM: I mean, that's crazy.

AC: Yeah. I mean, the judge like really admonished him in court and he was like, "This is mindboggling. Like, I'm confused. Like, why would you do this?" And you know, Susan, Susan's in court and she's just saying how her life has been destroyed. And Ira is once again blaming everybody else. He blamed the landscaper in his statement in court. Said he never wanted to have Susan killed. You know, he's just, he's always, he's just always like everybody else but me.

HM: Really horrible luck, right? Yeah.

AC: No. And it's just like come on.

HM: And then was he doing landscaping because he could no longer be a podiatrist because he had a felony or...

AC: He has a felony. Yeah. So he can't be a doctor, and you know there's a lot of other things he can't do you know with and the judge even said to him he goes you're on the verge of becoming a serial like felony offender. They have a name, they have like some fancy name for it but like if you do it one more time you could go if you do something a felony one more time you could go to prison for the rest of your life as a serial like for serial felonies. It's kind of like a third strike law, but they didn't that. Um, so there was a, you know, like you know, tiniest violin. And I actually saw him on his way. I was waiting for him on his way into court and the courthouse. And I said, "Hey, Ira, do you want to say anything?" You know, and he said something like, "Um, why would I, um why would I talk to *Dateline* when you screwed me over the first time?" And like I felt like saying, you know, I tried to keep it professional, but I was like, "No, you screwed yourself over, buddy." Like, "No, like we just, we did an interview with you."

HM: Right?

AC: And, you know, had told people the facts and gave your, you had your side, you know, he fully had his side. So, yeah.

HM: Have you ever had a case, and you've had so many suspects putting you on the spot with no prep, but like have you ever had a case where the person's been convicted or they do get convicted and you're interviewing them, and they're claiming their innocence and you did feel like, you know what, I don't know, maybe, maybe they didn't do it.

AC: Hmm. I mean I wish I could tell you there were a bunch of those but there's not really. You know at that point I've seen so much of the evidence like I know, we like, *Dateline* does stories you know we do wrongful convictions, and we have had cases where it's like mistrial after mistrial you know and um so I think there I think that exists you know. I just, I just don't really...can't really think of one actually in all this time where I was like maybe.

HM: Do you ever feel sorry or more sorry for the women because they end up spending their life behind bars and they are a mother and you're a mother? Like I always think that even with the Corey Richens, I'm always like, "Oh my god, she has three sons." Like, you know, are they really going to continue to visit her every week for the next 25 years? You know, and who's going to bring them there? And once they become teenagers, like, is that going to be something that you want to do? And what if they don't believe that their mother's innocent, even though because I think they're being raised by his side of the family, which is usually how it always happens. They usually never give it to the perpetrators like sister or the, you know, the accuser, the accused's sisters or what. That's always like the side of the of the dead parents that get the kids.

AC: Funny story because, well, it's not funny. Nothing's funny about it, but there is an element um that there was this woman in New Jersey and she ends up with this guy who basically I think they called him like a sperm donor, like she just wanted like a dad. She just wanted to and he ends up and he has no job kind of, you know, I don't know where he's going in life, but anyway, she got her kid. He the kid ends up turning his life around. So, he's so happy to be a dad and um he really is active in this child's life and he's so excited. Well, she didn't like that because she really wanted, you know, you're the sperm donor kind of thing, but now he's like in the child's life. Her dad and, this is like a this family like mom was on the school board, you know, dad was a businessman of this I believe it was Neptune, New Jersey. And so the dad ends up killing the baby daddy. And I'm not sure if they were ever... I can't even remember now if they ever got married or if they were just boyfriend and girlfriend and then broke up, but they were broken up. So the dad, her dad kills him and she was apparently in on it because they both end up in jail and then in prison. But the child right is at the center of all of this. So the defendant, the woman, the mom, her mom, grandma takes the child. Sorry. Actually, wait, I got that wrong. The mother of the dead the deceased boyfriend or husband, the dad. The grandma of the dead man gets the child. So our defendant's mom, the other grandmother in this, is, they're furious that...

HM: Yeah. The whole reason they killed him was to have the baby to themselves.

AC: So they're furious that the paternal, you know, grandmother now has the child. Sorry, this is, I'm making [unintelligible] it should be. I hope everyone's following along. Yeah. Yeah. So the what happens is the maternal grandmother. She decides maybe I should look into a hitman.

HM: Oh my god. So to kill the to kill the paternal grandpa.

AC: Yes. So the police, this is the police accusation, is that she ends up hiring this hitman um tries but they do a sting in the Target. So, grandma comes into the Target with the photo of the other grandma, meets with this so-called hitman who's really an officer, gets in her car and leaves, pull grandma over, she's arrested. So, grandma on grandma. So, now we have we had the grandmother, the mom, you know, the grandmother, the grandfather, the daughter, they are all behind bars. And I'm not sure where what the status is of any of them now. So, I, she may not be behind bars anymore.

She's probably out by now, I'm sure. But anyway, so the whole family ended up getting in trouble all because of this child that this woman wanted so badly. I mean, it was just a disaster. The whole...

HM: What was that, what was that family like? Like were they like a classy family otherwise and just got obsessed with this grandchild or were they, you didn't have a criminal background?

AC: No, no criminal background. I can't remember, that I recall. I can't remember what the daughter did for a living, but I just remember very clearly the mother was on the school board, so she was like, you know, active in the town, and the dad was some type of a businessman. He owned his own business. I can't, I can't remember exactly what it was.

HM: That is so interesting. Like the possessiveness of grandparents because that reminds me of the very famous case. I know when I start talking you'll remember it. I don't remember the names, but the girl was married to a like a law professor, and they were living in Florida and they were married and had the two boys and both her in the end her brother and her mother got convicted of hiring someone to kill her husband that she was going through the divorce with because she wouldn't be able to move back to Miami with the kids. They would have to live in the same town because he was granted 50/50 custody. And the grandparents wanted her and the kids to be near them.

AC: Yes.

HM: And if he wasn't going to agree to that and make her life and their life easy because he wanted to be an active dad, then then he just has to go.

AC: Yep. And that, we, *Dateline* just did that story. That and remember she was the mom was getting on the plane and she, where was she going to, Vietnam?

HM: Vietnam

AC: And they were like, "Uh, no." Because they don't extradite in Vietnam. So, she knew her days were um numbered because the son who was also a dentist had a girlfriend who was like working with them but was a girlfriend and it was her like ex-baby daddy or ex-husband or ex-boyfriend or somebody. She was the one that then put the hitman together, um got the hitman to do it, and that's how they, that's how they could connect back to the brother because she was an employee and a girlfriend of the brother's and then apparently the mother the daughter you know of the two her whole thing was she didn't know. She didn't know, they did it behind her back you know because they wanted to protect her, and I don't know. I think at this point they would never throw her under the bus because why? Who's going to raise the kids now?

AC: Yeah.

HM: But um maybe they just never had enough evidence to prove that she knew. But I mean I would think that she knew. I can't imagine two people going again let's do this gift for our sister. Let's do something nice for your sister. Kill her husband. You used to always tease her when she was 12. Now is your time to make up for it. Go get her husband killed, but let's not tell her. Let's have it be a fun surprise when she's a widow instead of a divorced woman. Like, there's no way they didn't have conversations where she was just like, "I don't know if you could make it happen. Please make it

happen because he's making my life hell." And they're seeing her crying and she's the little princess of the family.

AC: That was a twisted one. I just, I never understand. I mean, mostly we talk about, you know, divorce. That's like a custody, more of a custody issue, but it's like just get a dang divorce. Like, it'll save everyone heartache and prison time and funerals and, you know, it's just so much easier and you're probably not going to get away with it.

HM: I always just think it's so interesting, too. So you marry this person, you have their kids, and you want to get divorced, but you tell yourself in your mind like, "I hate this person so much and he will make my life hell or I won't get the money I need to live and he's such an asshole." Whatever. I, how someone like that can then compartmentalize that even though he's an awful person to you, he is someone's son, he is someone's brother, he is someone's delight at work, he is your kid's father, you know that you could compartmentalize like I think Corey Richens did. The kids will be fine. I'll write this book. They're... he'll be in heaven, and I'll get another dad to play baseball with them, and we can live a more lavish life, and you know they don't have to go through a divorce and like how someone can just tell themselves that like I'll get away with it and things will be better for everybody you know.

AC: Yeah I mean I have interviewed so many children of you know that are the products of murders and bad marriages and it's not okay. They don't you know... they're... it destroys them. You know it is the worst thing, that, you know, divorce is bad enough for kids and then add murder to it.

HM: I always think what's really sad and this happened with the Betty Broderick the murder. She had four kids.

AC: Yes.

HM: And to this day, I believe the four kids are split in that two never talked to her again, never visited her, and two are going to the probation board saying, "Please, our mother's, you know, elderly now. She could live with us." You know, something like that. And I do think that's really sad, too, in those cases that you guys cover where the kids sometimes are always on their dad's side. They don't believe it, you know, we won't stand for it. And then but other times the kids split and then not only do they lose the parent that died, they lose the parent that's convicted, and then they lose the one or two siblings that they had because you are not on your convicted dad's side and they are.

AC: That happens a lot. That happens a lot. And um you do see a lot of cases where they choose to stick with the you know the accused parent because I think they don't want to lose another parent you know they don't want to or they don't want to believe that parent is capable of something like that you know. So um you know and I've interviewed those kinds of kids too and I'm like have you seen their, the evidence, like yes I've seen the evidence and I'm like oh okay you know I guess we saw it with different lenses, you know.

HM: Yeah. I mean, when you think of like O.J. Simpson's kids, Justin and Sydney, I mean, in the end, they live private lives now, but they did, they this, you know, they're after he was set, you know, was free and everything, they did go live with him in Florida. That was their primary home and parent. They were not living with the grandparents in Orange County anymore. And so...

AC: They had to. He was acquitted.

HM: Yeah, they had to tell them they had to believe the story. But you got to think as they get older, maybe it's one of those things where they chose never to look into it, never to read the books, watch the movies, watch the specials.

AC: Possible. Yeah.

HM: And I could see that too where they're just like, but you always wonder if one day, you know, 26, 32 years old, will they ever just go, it's time I like face what happened? Especially now that he is gone as well.

AC: Yeah.

HM: Yeah.

AC: Maybe, maybe the truth is too painful.

HM: Yeah.

AC: Situation.

HM: And so you were saying before we started about a crime that did happen in a town you knew with a firefighter and his wife.

AC: Yeah. Yeah. Um Ashley Schwam was murdered at the hands of her husband James. And this actually this crime happened in my very small hometown in Canada. My grandfather started a ski resort there and it's known for all the ski clubs and skiing and these people were skiers and one day you know. Ashley the, a car is found on fire by a guy going to the slopes he's a groomer on the ski hills. He sees a big fire. He pulls over. The car is like fully engulfed in flames at this point. He can't save anybody. He calls the fire department. They find a very badly burned body. The tags register back to James Schwam. So, they're thinking, "Oh, is this James? He's a firefighter. You know, he's um lives in town." And turns out James is okay. So, it's Ashley, his wife. And he had said that she had gone for a hike that morning at the slopes. And there was a, there was a snow, a storm the night before. The roads were really icy, and you know, just slippery and all that. And it looked like the car had slid off of the road, you know, down into the embankment. Um, so turns out James the firefighter had staged the whole thing. That he had actually killed Ashley in their home in the middle of the night, they believe, by strangling her. And then he set up this whole ruse that was actually pre-planned if you can believe it. So it wasn't even like a cover up, like, oh I got to cover up.

HM: Right or yeah like a crime of passion where they got in a fight and he you know didn't mean to...

AC: And then was like you know covering up the this crime of passion. No, it was, it was like premeditated. He had bought the gas cans, and he had done all these things in advance and it you know was incredible police work by the Ontario provincial police and this so-called crash which was not a crash happened three miles from my house where I grew up. So it was very unusual for me to do the story. The detective went to my high school. The victim and I had multiple mutual friends. I had never met her, but we had all these mutual friends.

HM: Was she a mother? Did they have kids?

AC: Was, yeah, she had two children.

HM: With him?

AC: With him. And he was a fire captain. So he was like...

HM: A hero.

AC: Coach. He was the fire captain. Wealthy families.

HM: And what was the motivation? Did he have a girlfriend? Was she going to divorce him?

AC: She had had an affair with her boss, and he found out about it. What happened was the boss's wife called Ashley, the victim. So, she was in the Bahamas for her 40th birthday. Her phone rings. It's her boss's wife. And he says, she says, "Tell your husband, James, that you're having an affair with my husband or I will." James was like on his way to the Bahamas like when this happens. She tells him out on the beach. What happened? He freaks out. They, Ashley wants to fight for her marriage. They're going to counseling. You know, they're working on it. Meanwhile, he starts sort of this emotional relationship with the boss's wife. Almost like a Shania swap, you know?

HM: Yes. I was just going to say Shania Twain.

AC: Yeah. So, like, but they're not, it's not believed that they're physical, but he's interested in her and he's talking about the future and like I can make this happen for us kind of thing. And Ashley has totally stopped seeing her boss. You know, she's like, "I'm sorry. I screwed up." Her family acknowledges she screwed up. And they're like, "We, we'll never love you any less. You know, you made a mistake." And Ashley acknowledges she made a mistake. And some I guess, James just could not get over it. And he stages this whole elaborate plan to kill her. And thank God that those police detectives did such an amazing job of solving this.

HM: Because the whole plan was so he kills her, he puts her in the car, he drives the car, he like pushes it down an embankment or whatever, lights it on fire like it crashed, thinking that the fire then would destroy evidence of how she in fact died of strangulation. Yes, I do remember this story now. And I remember thinking one of the first things is sometimes when the wife goes missing, okay, she went for a walk. She went shopping in Cancun by herself at 7:00 a.m.

AC: Yeah.

HM: While she's got little kids still sleeping like...

AC: Exactly.

HM: And it was a storm. I remember going, "Okay, this isn't the ideal kind of weather." And you'd really leave your kids in the morning to go on this hike. Like you go I'll go another day. I live in this area all the time. Like I'll just go another day. Why would I go in horrible conditions?

AC: They said, "Yeah, she never like went hiking that early. It was early in the morning. It was like dark. It was, you know, the snowstorm. She never hiked in that area. Like all kinds of red flags of what?" And also she always hiked with friends. Like just all kinds of things weren't adding up.

HM: Yeah. But when these guys kill their wives, they really don't know their patterns very well. Like things just, you know, there was that the other one was the woman who rode her bike. She went on a bike ride on Mother's Day.

AC: Yes.

HM: And then those two daughters I remember they were definitely on their father's side. And then they like found the bike.

AC: Morpew.

HM: I can't remember if they ever did they ever find her body.

AC: Um yeah, because she was uh they found the tranquilizer, the remember wasn't it like a special animal tranquilizer in her system?

HM: Oh, so they did find the body but the whole thing was she, I think I remember, it's just like she went for a bike ride on Mother's Day by herself. And it was like really like it just was such a weird you know it's just always that kind of thing. And that's why with that one case in Cancun where the guy was the producer for *Survivor* and he and his wife and the two kids they had had some marital issues. They go to the resort, and you know she's gone all day and then finally he's like "I don't know where my wife is. She left at 7:00 a.m. to go shopping in town in Cancun." And I remember I was like, "Okay, that's where I was like, bullshit." Because you have two little kids. You're a working mom. She had restaurants. You're going to spend the time with your kids at the resort. There's no, there's not like credible shopping in Cancun where the dollar is so great and you're going to, you know, be able to get a Prada bag for, you know, 50% of the price. It's not one of those places that I'd go, okay, maybe that makes sense. In certain cities and things I could see. Why would you do and go at 7:00 like leave first thing in the morning by herself? I mean, so then when they found her body in like a manhole and you know, but he did get convicted.

AC: He did.

HM: And then his defense was like, well, of course, Cancun is not going to, you know, want to believe that a workman did it or anything because people then would be afraid to come to Cancun. But I also think that's always my biggest fear is like to be convicted of a crime in another country.

AC: Oh my gosh. Yeah, that would be truly awful. I'm actually working on an international case right now where the guy flies home without his wife because he said she wanted to go visit her parents only she never made it. And then he claims that he flew back for like a day to meet her at the airport and she wasn't there. So we just flew home even though no one had seen her, like red flags.

HM: Yeah. The red Yeah. When...

AC: Sign. Yeah.

HM: There was whatever. It's like well and then you know we just went home. You know...

AC: Even though no one had seen her, you know who, like I'm sorry who does that?

HM: Yeah. That's why that whole... Oh, this is the other thing I was going to ask you. I just watched like the number one movie on Netflix and it's a Lifetime movie, but it's called *Gaslit by My Husband*.

AC: I saw that. I want to see that.

HM: It's good. And I was just wondering, it's basically a woman who's married and it was based on a true crime story because I kind of remembered it, but I didn't remember enough of it that you know, but still it was well done. And I, and her husband is gaslighting her and it's, I'll let people watch it. But I was going to say, is it interesting when you do cover a story and then a few years later you can watch it?

AC: Yeah.

HM: In a movie version.

AC: I always am like, I did that. I did that story. Yeah. Um that's always what goes through my mind. I... sometimes I won't watch them because it's like, like the Karen Reeds movie is, you know, on Lifetime, and I haven't seen it.

HM: Oh my god, I was so disappointed. I know there's going to be other ones, but that one was so bad. The one, the one that was out there was nothing to it. I was like, "No, what we want to see in it is we want to see for the Karen Reed is all the other theories that made people have reasonable doubt."

AC: So, they didn't show them?

HM: No, they just showed what was in the court and stuff. It was really, and I'm like, if I was to write a movie about it, I'd be like, in order to get in there, I'd have them in the war room and then them being like, "Now, wait a minute. Let's focus on the dog for a second, you know, this dog. Let's focus on that." What if this happened and then we see it acted out?

AC: Yeah.

HM: As someone who like covered it, that's... I would I like to see things acted out, you know, in a movie scenario. And like to see all the different that's the way I think would be relieved if like almost like um you know the there was a show on Showtime called the affair where the first half would be her point of view and the second half would be his point of view. Like that's, that's hoping so if someone's listening to this and you're still working on the Karen Reed series movie whatever that's what we need to see because...

AC: Well I'm sure whatever Karen is working on will have lots of different points of view, right? Because she says she can do it. So, she's, she's I mean, that one will probably assuming she's got something going on.

HM: Yeah. I mean, that would be very interesting. Well, this was so great to talk to you and tell everybody. I know you're always doing so many different things and projects and how they can follow you and all of it.

AC: Yeah. Um, I'm on Andrea Canning, uh, Andrea Canning is my Instagram. Um, that's where I give all my updates for any show any new *Dateline* that are coming out or my podcast *Dateline True Crime Weekly*, and then I also write Hallmark movies. So, I put little updates on there as well.

HM: Yeah, your Hallmark movies for that. How did you, how do you find time to do that?

AC: Um, very difficult. Um, usually on planes, you know, when I, when I'm like coming home from, you know, shooting and just when I have that downtime and I'm like, you know what, I might as well do something productive instead of watching, well, which I do as well, but watching *The Real Housewives*, which I know you really like as well.

HM: Um, that's amazing because I'm like I always if I'm coming back from doing standup or whatever, I like I'll do work going to do standup because I'm like preparing the standup, but on the way back I'm like I would never be productive. So, I'm very impressed. And what but what a dichotomy from like true crime that Hallmark is those movies are a place where you know nothing bad is going to happen. It's not stressful to watch. And I think that's why they're so successful, like because people just want to just see like a peaceful, fun little cute movie.

AC: *Dateline* brain, Hallmark brain.

HM: Amazing. Thank you so much. This was so fun. I really appreciate you coming on.

AC: Yes, your knowledge of all these cases is really incredible. Thank you for having me on, Heather. It was fun.

HM: Thank you.