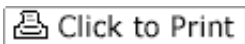




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Producer: Georgia killer made murder movie

- Story Highlights
- Convicted Georgia killer helped make "Deadly Run" in 1995, filmmaker says
- Straight-to-video movie plot mirrors real-life killing of hiker Meredith Emerson
- Hilton chose shoot locale -- 30 miles from where Emerson's body was found
- Filmmaker who worked with Hilton said he was shocked about Hilton's arrest

By Rusty Dornin
CNN

ATLANTA, Georgia (CNN) -- When attorney-turned-movie producer Samuel Rael decided he wanted to make a film about a serial killer in 1995, it was former legal client Gary Michael Hilton who he says came up with the plot.

Rael's adviser was the same Gary Hilton who confessed in January to killing 24-year-old Meredith Emerson in the North Georgia mountains and is the prime suspect in the killings of a Florida woman and a North Carolina couple.

Rael claims Hilton thought it would be a good idea to have the killer be out in the woods.

"Go ahead and let some beautiful women out in the woods, and then they could be hunted down like prey," Rael says Hilton told him.

[Watch Rael tell his disturbing account »](#)

Rael was shocked when he discovered that Hilton had been arrested and had confessed to Emerson's murder. Quickly, investigators hinted that Hilton might be a serial killer, linking him to three murders in two other states.

In all three, the bodies were dumped in the woods.

"He was a criminal," Rael said. "And he'd be the first to admit it. He might have been a sociopath, but he was a happy one and an animated one. One who, quite frankly, I never would have thought in a million years. ... Well, he had criminal instincts, but he was not a violent person. I was wrong about that."

The movie Rael and [Hilton](#) worked on was released straight to video. It was called "Deadly Run."

"I don't know if I came up with the 'run' and he came up with the 'deadly,' but somehow, as with all the film, he collaborated and helped me figure out what to do," Rael says.

It was Hilton, according to Rael, who found one of the film's prime shooting locations: a cabin in the mountains of North Georgia near the town of Cleveland. In the movie, the killer held women captive in the cabin.

Emerson's mutilated body was discovered in the woods 13 years later, 30 miles southwest of that location. She had been held captive for three days before Hilton killed her.

Hilton led investigators to where he had dumped her body, reportedly in exchange for prosecutors taking the death penalty off the table.

The similarities are haunting to Rael.

"To me, it's almost word for word. That's what was really scary about it," the filmmaker says.

Rael met Hilton in the mid-80s. Hilton hired Rael as his attorney when he was busted for trespassing on Atlanta city property. He was one of Rael's first legal clients.

Rael says he defended him on several charges over the years, including arson and false solicitation of charitable donations. The pair began to socialize more, Rael says, as he helped Hilton through his many legal battles.

Then in 1995, when Rael decided he wanted to make movies, his friend and client seemed to have plenty of ideas.

"He was involved as a consultant from the beginning to the middle to the end and associated with the film," Rael said.

Hilton picked the cast and other movie workers.

Rael thought of Hilton as extremely creative. "I saw him as a really interesting guy with a screw loose. I knew that, too."

Hilton never received credits on the film because he wanted to be paid, Rael says. It was a low-budget feature, and Rael said he didn't pay many of the people who helped.

Rael recalled Hilton as a dog lover and outdoorsman.

"Gary almost lived outdoors," he said. "He'd come around to my house and take a shower."

At the time, Hilton was living in a storage space in Atlanta. Several pictures taken by Rael show a smiling Hilton, dressed in hiking clothes, appearing tan and fit.

Before a recent jail visit, Rael hadn't seen Hilton since 1995.

He says there wasn't a fallout between them: "I went on my way, he went on his."

The filmmaker said that two days after Hilton's arrest, he visited his former client in the Dawson County jail in Georgia. Hilton was surrounded by investigators, and Rael says they didn't do much more than exchange pleasantries.

"He said 'hello' and thanked me for coming by, and that was about it," Rael said.

He wonders about Hilton's behavior when they were friends but quickly dismisses thoughts of murder during that time.

"I sincerely doubt he was capable of doing anything like that when I knew him," he said.

Rael says the chilling similarities between his movie and reality have not gone unnoticed. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation wants to talk to him, he said.

GBI spokesman John Bankhead said authorities have not been able to reach Rael to question him about their relationship and Hilton's connection with the movie.

Bankhead says they'd like to find out if any of Hilton's suggestions for the film directly match what happened in any of the cases in Georgia, North Carolina or Florida. He said Hilton, at this point, is not a suspect in any unresolved cases during the time the film was made.

Hilton was indicted February 28 for killing Cheryl Dunlap in Florida in 2007.

Prosecutors say the 46-year-old was kidnapped and her body was dumped in a national forest near Tallahassee.

Investigators also suspect Hilton in the October slaying of Irene Bryant and the presumed death of her husband, John, in Transylvania County, North Carolina, said Sheriff David Mahoney. Hilton has yet to be charged in that case.

Mahoney also said Hilton is not currently considered a suspect on any unresolved cases during the time the film was made.

Repeated calls to Hilton's attorney were not returned.

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