

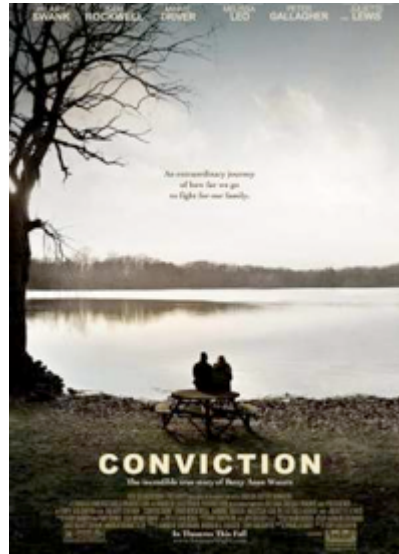


Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 23, 2010

## Conviction: The Movie and the True Story

Conviction tells the real-life story of a single mother named Betty Ann Waters, who tended bar while acquiring her GED, bachelor's degree, and then her law degree, all so that she could represent her brother Kenny, wrongly convicted of murder. Both the film and the true story are accounts of incredible loyalty, courage, and determination.

The story's history goes back 30 years, to when a Massachusetts woman was brutally murdered, and Betty Ann's brother was convicted of the crime.



Betty Ann had faith that her brother was incapable of committing such a horrific crime. CBS News reported, “[She] said that Kenny was the life of the party, and admits he was a troublemaker. But in her heart she knew he was not a killer. So Betty Ann, a high-school dropout, enrolled in community college, then on to law school, and became her brother’s attorney.”

Following his conviction, Kenny declared, “I told them I never killed nobody. I don’t know what you are talking about. I had a five-day trial and I was away for the rest of my life.”

Not if his sister had anything to say about it. Betty Ann began her own investigation of the crime and became increasingly suspicious of Nancy Taylor (played by Melissa Leo), one of the arresting officers.

Betty Ann’s story is comprised of setback upon setback, as her marriage and her relationship with her sons were strained by her efforts, and yet she never once seemed to consider giving up. And so, with the discovery of DNA at the murder scene, the unending determination of Betty Ann, and the assistance of Barry Scheck’s Innocence Project, Kenny Waters was finally exonerated after 18 years in prison.

Sadly, Kenny suffered a fatal fall in 2001, just six months after his release — an ironic twist of fate forcing people to contend with the often-confusing (from our vantage point) elements of God’s plan. However, Kenny’s tragic death did not make its way into the film. Director Tony Goldwyn explained:

"It was a hard decision. But I think that, ultimately, that’s not what the movie’s about. It’s more about his freedom and their relationship — Betty Ann’s and Kenny’s."

This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that Betty Ann no longer practices law.

The amazing story was discovered by a cub reporter for the *Boston Globe* named Farah Stockman, who happened to encounter Barry Scheck, a lawyer for the Innocence Project, a group which describes itself as “a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted people through DNA testing and reforming the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.”

Scheck shared Betty Ann’s story with Stockman, who then called her. According to Stockman:

Betty Ann, who to this day works at an Irish pub in Bristol, R.I., was shy and guarded. She seemed reluctant to portray herself as a high school dropout or a hero. Being a single mom was not a big deal, she said. Neither was dedicating herself to her brother’s case. It’s what you do for family,



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right? She didn't seem to be looking for fame. Even so, fame found her.

Betty Ann's tale became a front-page story in the *Globe*.

The tale then went viral, and ultimately Betty Ann sold her life rights to agents. Thus, ten years later, the story is now on the big screen in *Conviction*, which opened October 15.

In this powerful film, Betty Ann is played by Hillary Swank, an award-winning actress who has used this opportunity well to showcase her talents. Betty Ann's brother Kenny is played by Sam Rockwell, and Peter Gallagher depicts Barry Scheck. Though all the performances are enthralling, Swank and Rockwell ultimately steal the show; in fact, their portrayals alone are reason enough to see the film. Swank loses herself in the role as she really seems to have limited control of her emotions during the most frustrating and intense scenes. Likewise, Rockwell's fiery rage makes for a riveting performance. Even the minor characters are refreshing additions. Betty Ann's classy schoolmate, played by Minnie Driver, is a lot of fun on screen. Likewise, Juliette Lewis does an excellent job as Kenny's memorable ex-girlfriend.

The film spans a period of nearly 30 years, strewn with flashbacks to the challenging childhood of Betty Ann and Kenny that ultimately cemented the bond between them. These flashbacks are vital, since the nature of the story does not permit Swank and Rockwell to appear together very often.

The court scenes are fairly predictable, full of elusive witnesses and sharp prosecutors, but they serve to depict both the intensely desperate situation in which Kenny finds himself, and the miscarriage of justice that allowed ambiguous evidence to put a man away for life.

Similarly, *Conviction* aptly portrays the political and administrative red tape one must fight in order to achieve justice. The scenes of Betty Ann contending with the criminal justice system amply display Swank's desperation and angst.

The film also raises questions on priorities and competing family values, as Betty Ann allows her marriage and maternal responsibilities to fall by the wayside in her all-consuming mission to save her brother.

The title is apt on two accounts, addressing not only Kenny's false conviction, but also Betty Ann's conviction that her brother did not commit the murder.

It's important to note that the film contains some gruesome crime-scene imagery, as well as nudity, suicide references, and heavy profanity; however, moviegoers may feel it is redeemed by its positive story. Still, it is not suitable for younger audiences.



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