

Deseret News, Monday, December 30, 2002

Child discipline gone awry

3 cases show trend of punishment taken to extreme

By Geoffrey Fattah

Deseret News staff writer

PROVO — Yanking teeth, force-feeding water and withholding food may sound like torture-chamber tactics, but they are just some of the extreme allegations leveled against three Utah County couples over the past year. The victims: their children.

Although those who deal with child abuse cases are at a loss to explain how three high-profile child abuse cases could come up within a short time span, they do say such punishment-gone-awry cases mark a disturbing trend.

In his 10 years specializing in child abuse investigations, Utah County Sheriff's Lt. Jerry Monson said he had never before seen cases where guardians allegedly went to such bizarre lengths to punish their children.

"One of the new dynamics is this kind of disciplinary abuse," Monson said. "We've always had abuse cases. It's just now there seems to be a new motive."

The death of 4-year-old Cassandra Killpack caught national attention last fall, mainly due to the bizarre nature of the Springville girl's death. Investigators allege Killpack was forced to drink large quantities of water as punishment for earlier taking a soft drink from a sibling.

The massive intake of water caused water intoxication, creating an electrolyte imbalance that led to brain swelling. Killpack later died at Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City.

Prosecutors said an autopsy showed a cut and bruises around the girl's mouth, indicating a cup was forced on her.

Richard and Jennete Killpack, Cassandra's adoptive parents, have been charged with child abuse homicide and child abuse, both third-degree felonies. The couple awaits a preliminary hearing, scheduled for May.

Just weeks after the Killpack case caught nationwide attention, prosecutors in Utah County filed criminal charges against a Saratoga Springs couple for allegedly starving two adopted Russian children.

Teresa and Reed Hansen were charged with two second-degree felony counts of child abuse/neglect and one class A misdemeanor count of child abuse for allegedly withholding food from the children as punishment for bad behavior.

According to investigators, the children, ages 4 and 5, were locked in a bathroom without food or clothing for days at a time. The alleged abuse was reported by a pediatrician in Washington state who specializes in treating adopted Russian children. The children had been taken to him for a checkup.

The doctor was so disturbed at the children's malnourished condition that he immediately contacted Washington authorities who, in turn, contacted Utah child and family services.

One case that particularly disturbs Utah County law enforcement is the case of a Provo couple accused of abusing their two sons — including allegedly pulling out their teeth as punishment. The abuse also allegedly involved taking pliers to one of the boy's genitals to the point that he required medical attention afterward.

Chay and Shelly Huynh are each charged with two first-degree felony counts of aggravated sexual abuse of a child; three second-degree counts of child physical abuse; one count of first-degree sodomy; and one third-degree count of child abuse. Both have pleaded not guilty and are awaiting trial on the charges.

For Utah County criminal division chief Sherry Ragan, it appears some abusive parents try to reach around the traditional abuse of beating a child. "People know it's wrong to hit a kid, and so they think of different ways. What once was acceptable in years past is a crime now," Ragan said.

"I'm not one to say you can't spank a child or discipline a child to a degree," investigator Monson said. "But I think that these people are crossing the line as far as we're concerned."

While authorities struggle to find a reason behind the shocking allegations, one national expert on child abuse believes they are not likely to find one.

"There's no single answer," said Dr. David Corwin, a nationally recognized expert on the forensics of child abuse who works at Primary Children's Medical Center. "We would all like to know why some of these things happen, but the truth is, they happen for a lot of reasons."

Corwin said familial and cultural influences often play a part with abusive parents. In many cases, the parents were abused themselves as a child. Cultural folk remedies or forms of punishment used on children can be seen as abusive by U.S. standards.

But experts say such tragedies can be prevented by people in the community keeping a vigilant eye for tell-tale signs of abuse.

In the case of Cassandra Killpack, it was hospital staff at Primary Children's Medical Center who contacted police after noticing signs of possible abuse.

In the Huynh case, the two boys confided allegations of abuse to the foster mother after they were removed from their home.

Monson said pediatricians and other medical staff are often the ones who report possible abuse. Teachers and others who deal with children also report abuse.

"In terms of physical abuse, the primary thing is to notice injuries on a child where the child doesn't give an adequate explanation, or if the caregiver doesn't give an adequate explanation," Corwin said.

Signs of malnutrition, failure to grow and develop at a reasonable rate and obvious medical needs that go untreated can also be signs of an abused child.

Although abusive families tend to flourish in social isolation from neighbors and others, Corwin said families who value privacy are not necessarily abusive.

Despite the attention given to the three cases, Monson said the major form of child abuse remains sexual abuse.

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Deseret News, Wednesday, November 06, 2002

Children starved, doctors to testify

PROVO — Prosecutors say they plan to have several doctors testify during a hearing in January that a Saratoga Springs couple were starving their two adopted Russian children.

Teresa and Reed Hansen appeared in 4th District Court Tuesday to request that the state reveal its evidence against them in a preliminary hearing, scheduled for Jan. 17.

Both parents are charged with two second-degree felony counts of child abuse/neglect and one class A misdemeanor count of child abuse.

Prosecutors allege that between July 2001 and February 2002, the Hansens withheld food, sometimes days at a time, from a 4-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl they adopted from Russia.

Investigators from Utah County contend that the couple withheld the food as a form of punishment for bad behavior. Investigators also allege the couple would lock the boy in the bathroom with no bedding or clothing for several days at a time.

The case came to light when a Washington pediatric physician who specializes in Russian orphans noted that the children were severely malnourished.

The two children, along with a third adopted Russian child and three biological children, have been placed in state custody.

In court Teresa Hansen's attorney, Mike Esplin, said the preliminary hearing would likely last all day and would involve a number of witnesses from both the prosecution and the defense.

Reed Hansen's attorney, Sheldon Carter, said they plan to defend the couple by bringing forward medical experts of their own.

Deseret News, Saturday, October 05, 2002

Substance abuse leads to child, other abuses

And vicious cycle passes from one generation to next

By James Thalman

Deseret News staff writer

OGDEN — Drug abuse is not only strongly linked to child abuse, its effects get passed on and compounded with every generation if left unchecked, a national expert on substance abuse told a statewide audience of abuse treatment providers.

Speaking to the 24th annual fall conference on substance abuse meeting in Ogden this week, Anna Marsh, deputy director for the U.S. Health and Human Services Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, said the cycle usually surfaces with alcohol and drug abuse factoring into 50 percent to 75 percent of child neglect and abuse cases.

In cases of child sexual abuse, alcohol or some other drug is involved in more than 80 percent of the cases, Marsh said, adding that a study by the 3rd District Court in Utah last year showed that 60 percent of abuse cases involve drug abuse by a parent.

But substance abuse has been rippling through a child's life long before child protection or police have intervened, Marsh said. Parents who abuse alcohol and other drugs discipline children less well as a rule, they don't attend to their children's emotional needs and overreact with harsh discipline that often turns into abuse, she said.

The tragic pattern then gets passed down: Not only are substance-abusing parents poor role models, children who have been abused, particularly those who have been sexually abused, more often than not turn to abusing substances to help them deal with their past abuse.

"Substance abuse ignites an intergenerational fire," Marsh said. "The abused often become the abusers and it repeats one generation to the next."

National studies by Marsh's center show that 8.3 million children are living with a parent who is either dependent on alcohol or needs treatment for illicit drugs. That translates to 11 percent of children under age 15, or about three children per school classroom.

When an abuse situation becomes so bad that children are taken into state custody, trauma for the child becomes acute, she said. But as traumatic as removing a child can be, "it's better for a child to see a parent in recovery than to be with the parent who is abusing," Marsh said. "That is the only way we can turn abuse into healing and an abusing family into a place for sustenance and growth."

Abusing parents are a big contributor to the dramatic increase in the use of methamphetamine among teenage girls in Utah, said Michelle Wilcox, a drug treatment counselor with the state Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health.

Most girls who are recovering from meth, "which seems to be becoming the drug of choice among girls," have been using with or witnessing a parent use it, Wilcox said.

Meth, which works much like speed on the brain, is particularly difficult for young girls to give up because they use it either as part of a relationship with a parent or with a boyfriend.

"In fact, when they talk about giving up the drug, they talk about their addiction as if it were a boyfriend," Wilcox said. "That's how closely linked the drug is to their relationships. Giving it up to many of these girls is like giving up someone they love, or think they do."

The other complicating factor for girls is the message they get from the media that they must be thin, she said. Because meth increases metabolism, girls often start using it as a diet pill to look like fashion models on TV or in magazines.

"Girls haven't learned yet not to believe those portrayals, and they think the thinner they are the prettier they are," Wilcox said. "The problem is once someone starts using regularly, their self-perception gets warped, and even though they are drastically underweight, their hair is brittle, their skin has sores and they have bags under their eyes, they think they look great."

Signs of use that parents can watch for are dilated pupils, elevated respiration, uncontrollable movements and noticeable increases in activity. More use can induce anxiousness and nervousness, paranoia, mood swings and aggressive behavior. The drug can also lead to sudden death through heart attack and stroke.

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Deseret News, Sunday, August 11, 2002

Mother neglected son who died, charges say

Associated Press

CRESTVIEW, Fla.— A woman was charged with child neglect of her mentally impaired son who died in November, more than a decade after the state began investigating reports of abuse.

The Department of Children & Families investigated James Alford's death but concluded it was not caused by neglect. The finding ensured that the agency's performance would not be evaluated by a review team created by the Legislature to help prevent child deaths.

Michelle Wesson, 33, was arrested Friday. A police report said she "habitually failed" to provide minimal care for James, who was 14. The medical examiner's report found he died of septicemia, likely brought on by unsanitary living conditions.

Wesson was being held without bail Saturday.

Deseret News, Thursday, March 13, 2003

S. Ogden tot is found confined to a bedroom

SOUTH OGDEN (AP) — A child-abuse investigation is under way after a severely undernourished 3-year-old girl was found living barricaded in her bedroom, surrounded by garbage and fecal matter, police said.

"It was something you'd expect a 3-year-old to be living in if they took care of themselves," said Police Lt. Darin Parke.

The child has been removed from the home and is in the state's custody.

The case is being reviewed by the Weber County Attorney's Office.

Parke said the girl was forced to stay in her bedroom constantly and her mother and father, ages 29 and 26 respectively, slid furniture against the door to ensure she couldn't leave the room.

He said the couple gave her meager portions of food and made her eat in her bedroom, leaving the remnants there.

"The room was in complete disarray," he said. "She was stuck in there all day and all night."

Deseret News, Saturday, March 08, 2003

Newborn's mom charged with child abuse

By **Derek Jensen**

Deseret News staff writer

After giving birth to her son, a Sandy teenager placed the boy in a pile of towels and stuffed him in plastic bags, prosecutors said.

Paramedics discovered the newborn some 45 minutes later in a bathroom, upside down in the bag underneath the towels, according to charges filed in 3rd District Court against the boy's mother, Stephanie Marie DeLuca.

Prosecutors Friday charged DeLuca, 18, with child abuse, a second-degree felony, punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Meanwhile, a source close to the investigation said DeLuca was being allowed to visit the infant at Primary Children's Medical Center. Utah Department of Human Services spokeswoman Carol Sisco said she could not confirm if that was the case.

"It wouldn't be unusual to let the family visit the child, and it would be done under supervision," Sisco said. "At this point, we haven't taken custody of the baby. That too is normal. We would make that decision when the baby is ready to be released from the hospital."

The infant was breathing on his own and "doing well" Friday night, Sandy police Sgt. Michelle Burnette said.

DeLuca told investigators she delivered the baby on the toilet and then put him in the towels inside the bag and left him there because she thought he was dead, charges stated.

When a firefighter discovered the infant, the boy's body temperature was 92 degrees, and he wasn't breathing on his own, charges stated.

DeLuca originally told paramedics she was not pregnant and that the blood was coming from a cyst, charges stated.

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Deseret News, Thursday, February 20, 2003

Woman arrested in abuse

By [Pat Reavy](#)

Deseret News staff writer

The Box Elder County Attorney's Office is considering charges against a woman accused of purposely dropping her 2-year-old stepdaughter on her head and stepping on her stomach.

Alyson Johns, 21, was arrested early Sunday and booked into the Box Elder County Jail for investigation of second-degree felony child abuse. She later posted bail. Police call it one of the worst cases of child abuse they've ever seen in their area.

The young girl, meanwhile, was upgraded to serious condition Wednesday morning at Primary Children's Medical Center. She was admitted with a fractured skull, a lacerated liver and numerous cuts and bruises. In addition, police said the tube that connected the toddler's intestine to her stomach was severed.

The incident began Saturday night while the girl was staying with her father and stepmother in Brigham City. The stepmother called the girl's birth mother, who has custody of the child, to pick up the girl because she was vomiting and was "out of control," said Brigham City Police Lt. Mike Nelsen.

When the mother and stepfather picked up the child they noticed she was drifting in and out of consciousness, Nelsen said. The mother took her daughter to Brigham Community Hospital about 6:30 p.m.

Police were called to the hospital and later went to interview the stepmother, who admitted "getting angry" and "snapping" because the girl "had an attitude," Nelsen said.

Johns told investigators she struck the girl, dropped her on her head, put her in the bathtub and pressed hard against her stomach with her hands and then put her on the floor and stepped on her stomach, Nelsen said.

"She was crying during most of the interview saying (the girl) didn't deserve it," Nelsen said.

Not until after the toddler was flown to Primary Children's Medical Center the next day did investigators realize the full extent of her injuries.

The girl's birth father was not aware of the abuse, he said.

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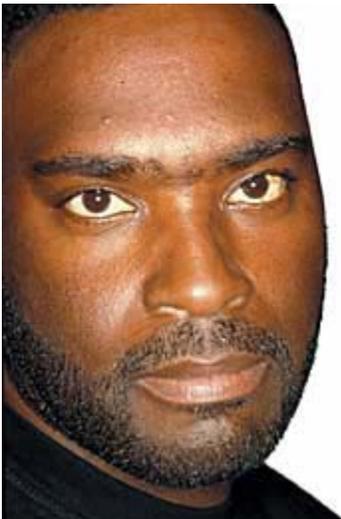
Deseret News, Friday, February 07, 2003

Reel-life hero: Antwone Fisher hopes his story will bolster others

By Jeff Strickler

Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

Antwone Fisher offers proof that the American dream is real. A foster child who suffered years of emotional and physical abuse, he is now the subject of a hit movie that bears his name.



Antwone Fisher has acknowledged that committing his story to written form was harder than he had expected.

down on paper meant that it's always going to be there. It's a paper trail that will always lead to me."

Denzel Washington chose Fisher's script for his directorial debut. Washington told him that it was the script's emotional honesty, especially the child abuse, that attracted him.

"When I wrote those scenes, I went into a room, closed the door and the drapes and poured myself two shots of Jack Daniel's," Fisher said. "Then I cried the entire time I was writing. I think Denzel picked up that script and said, 'This smells like Jack Daniel's and tears.' "

"It's the kind of thing that can happen only in America," Fisher said in an interview. "Look at where I started and where I am now — that's the American dream."

Fisher, whose autobiography "Finding Fish" forms the foundation of the movie "Antwone Fisher," said that for years he was ashamed of his childhood. He said he hopes people get from the story that when bad things happen to you, you don't have to keep them secret. "I'd like people to realize that there are good people in the world and it's OK to talk to someone, especially a professional, when you need help."

Fisher, who also wrote the movie's screenplay, acknowledged that committing the story to written form was harder than he had expected. "Writing it made it permanent. When I tell you the story verbally, I can run away and hide when I'm done. But putting it

Fisher, 43, said writing the story purged him of nightmares that used to haunt him. He is happy now, living in Los Angeles with his wife and two daughters, ages 5 and 1. And he is writing. A book of poetry, "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy," reached the bookstores last month. A children's book, title yet to be determined, is expected to be out by the end of the year.

"I love writing poetry," he said. "The cool thing about poetry is that it doesn't have to be grammatically correct, which is good for me."

He chuckled. Despite all the unpleasant things he has experienced, he has an impish sense of humor. The most recent butt of that: Derek Luke, the actor who plays Fisher in the movie.

"Derek Luke shaves his legs," he announced with a straight face.

Really?

"No. But could you report that, anyway? The next time Derek goes out to promote a movie, I want everyone to be asking him about shaving his legs."

A visitor expressed surprise to discover that Fisher is such a, well, smart aleck. His says that, despite the maudlin episodes, it's not a sad film.

"This is a movie about a winner," he said. "It's for people who want to be a winner."



Derek Luke plays the lead role in the movie "Antwone Fisher." Fisher wrote the screenplay, based on his autobiography "Finding Fish."

Michael O'Neill, Fox Searchlight

Deseret News, Tuesday, February 04, 2003

Abandoned boy returns home with his father

By **Angie Welling**

Deseret News staff writer

Making sure he had his Spider-Man tennis shoes and favorite bubble-gum-flavored toothpaste, the little boy whose dark brown eyes captured the attention of a nation returned home Monday with his father.

Joel Corpuz spent the weekend in Utah with his son, Jonathan Jacob, one week after the 3-year-old was found in a Sugar House ShopKo.

At a closed Monday morning hearing, 3rd District Juvenile Judge Frederic Oddone granted Corpuz full custody and allowed him to take the boy to his Newark, Calif., home. Father and son boarded a plane shortly after the 9:30 a.m. hearing.

Although the case has received widespread media coverage, Corpuz's weekend visit and custody hearing were kept quiet until Monday afternoon.

"Nobody expected it would go this fast," said Carol Sisco, spokeswoman for the state Department of Child and Family Services. "Everybody just worked night and day to try to get a resolution so the little boy could go back home."

DCFS director Richard Anderson accompanied Corpuz during his visit with Jonathan Jacob. Anderson reported the boy immediately reached for his dad and later showed him around his foster mother's house.

The case has garnered national attention as police first sought help identifying the boy, and again as details began to emerge about the circumstances surrounding Jonathan Jacob's abandonment.

Jonathan Jacob's stepfather, Lyle Montgomery, is accused of leaving the boy in the store. He was charged last week in Salt Lake's 3rd District Court with class A misdemeanor child abuse.



Jonathan Jacob Corpuz

Montgomery, 42, is being held without bail in Reno, Nev., while police investigate the disappearance of the boy's mother, Jeanette Snyder.

Snyder, who goes by the last names Montgomery, Corpuz and Acord, has not been seen since Jan. 23.

"All of my concern is to get my son home safe and to find Jeanette," Corpuz said in a statement prepared by DCFS.

Sisco said Monday's events give the story "at least a partial happy ending. We still don't know what happened to Mom, but at least Jonathan is with his dad."

Joel Corpuz lives with his parents, his sister and Jonathan Jacob's 5-year-old cousin and best friend, R.J.

California officials inspected the home last week, and Utah officials evaluated Corpuz over the weekend before recommending he take custody of Jonathan Jacob.

DCFS will provide Corpuz with services for the next 90 days, Sisco said.

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