

# Smith family shares another side of the 'school fight-gun carrying' story

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The action of Shawana Smith, age 38, created a media firestorm, three months ago, when video footage of her holding a firearm on the grounds of Forest Hill High School in Jackson, Mississippi, surfaced on social media and on the local news.

Forest Hill parents were frantic and community residents were stunned. Media headlines: 'Gun Mom' in custody, Parent pulls gun during fight at Forest Hill... characterized Shawana as an unstable mother who endangered the lives of students by bringing a gun to a school yard fight, May 3, 2016.

Thereafter, Shawana was charged with felony possession of a firearm on school property. She turned herself into her constable, was booked, and released on a \$30,000 bond. The constable publicly pleaded for calm in light of the fact that Shawana was receiving death threats.

A school fight spiraled out of control. It's unfortunate because students took sides. One family reported that their home was the target of a drive-by shooting. More fist fights took place days afterward. Students as young as 16 posted pictures of themselves on social media holding weapons and threatening to result to violence. The principal was fired.

Earlier this month Shawana was sentenced to serve 18 months for three misdemeanor counts of simple assault. Her husband Herbert Smith protested, "I believe her sentence was stiff considering my wife had no priors." He added, "My wife's sentence was unjust because she was defending herself May 3<sup>rd</sup> from students rather than assaulting them." He declared, "My wife, my daughter Heaven, and our 11 year old son Herbert were beaten by some 10 students that day."

Alan Hinds, age 19, who displayed video footage of the May 3<sup>rd</sup> fight on his i-Phone said, "Three of the younger students in the crowd tried to cover my big sister when she was down on the ground that day."

Alan said he saw video footage of the incidents on Facebook at home in a nearby town while it was happening. "Someone posted the video of a school fight on my wall [Facebook]. When I saw the students jumping my big sister, my nephew, and my niece I wanted to defend them," Alan stated.

Alan said Facebook posts from May 3<sup>rd</sup> revealed male and female students bragging about tag teaming his sister, his niece, and his niece's friends who were trying to break up the fight.

Several Facebook posts read, "Did My Sister fight? Damonica?" More... Tuesday at 10:53 pm.

"Girr A lot folks and heaven mommy." More... Tuesday at 10:59 pm.

"Yess she go wit my brother we tag team they a--. More... Tuesday at 10:56 pm.

Today Alan is a student at Hinds Community College looking ahead while desiring justice for his older sister and family. "The way they're doing my big sister is wrong," Alan determined. "If the people will tell the truth, we will see justice," he concluded. Alan feels the cards were stacked against his family. He announced, "They were fighting off like 10 kids."

In his wife's defense, Herbert determined the 'gun situation' was blown out of proportion. "When you look at the video no one can say my wife was pointing a gun at any child even though she had been knocked to the ground and struck repeatedly on two separate occasions," he determined.



Shawana Smith's toe

"The full video reveals that my wife was beaten, kicked, and her braids were snatched out," Herbert stated.

"My wife had no intent to harm anyone. She was going to get our daughter," Herbert admonished.

"When my wife got out of her car, she was wearing a sundress, flip flops, and had sunglasses on her face," Herbert noted. "Initially, she left her purse in the car which was running. Our son was in the car too."

"After our son saw his mother and sister being jumped, he got out to help and was also beaten," Herbert insisted.

Two videos showed there were at least two separate altercations. During the second altercation, a female voice frantically yells, "Get off her! Get off her!" By then Heaven, in a pink shirt, said there were so many hands and feet on her mother she could not get close to her to help so she cried out, "Get off her!"

Herbert said some of the original videos which were circulating the week of May 3<sup>rd</sup> were removed from Twitter and Facebook, and that one of them on YouTube has been edited. He believes Forest Hill's video system has the uninterrupted events in its surveillance system.

Herbert argued that these series of events could have been avoided if the school had taken the neces-



Herbert Smith, III holding his side where he alleged he had pain May 4, 2016.

sary steps to prevent Heaven from being bullied in April. "Those girls who were bullying Heaven were 18 and 19 years old. There were young mothers," he recalled. According to Heaven, her classmate Sylvia got into an altercation with Samantha, the younger sister of Damonica, who threatened Sylvia and Heaven while they were in their biology class.

"Damonica walked to my classroom door, and stood by Samantha on April 27, 2016. Damonica dropped her book bag, and took off her earrings," Heaven recalled. Heaven declared that even though Damonica made a scene and had to be held to stop her from entering the classroom, she was not disciplined. "During the last period, the vice principal had to pull Damonica back," Heaven added. The vice principal made Damonica and Heaven hug, but Heaven said, "Damonica laughed afterward," and Heaven acknowledged that she knew, then, the event was not over.

"Me and my wife went to the school a total of three times attempting to squash the bullying issue. We recommended having a sit down with the parents of Damonica," Mr. Smith recalled.

On her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, Heaven was repeatedly warned by students: "Watch your back", referring to 'issues' with Damonica and Kerobria. Heaven is determined that things would not have escalated had school officials suspended Damonica when she first verbally threatened Heaven at school.

"Forest Hill's administration did not follow the Zero Tolerance rules when it came to the bullying of Heaven," Herbert proclaimed.

The entire ordeal was tragic. The May 3, 2016 fight at Forest Hill had a lasting detrimental impact on the Smith family. Herbert complained, "Our children are undergoing counseling. Our son is afraid to be near teenagers. My wife lost her job, and was fired from a new job when her criminal background check revealed she had a pending felony charge on her record." Legal fees, emotional problems, loss of income, and fear of being seen in public are just a few of the Smith family's troubles.

Herbert professed, "I am defending my wife because she did not intend to cause harm that day. She went to the school to get Heaven." He concluded, "There is always two sides to a story." He pointed out that before that dreadful day, his wife was a model citizen. On May 23, 2016, Shawana received an award from Oak Forest Elementary signed by their son's teacher, Dionne Wilson, and the principal, Lorenda Cheeks. Herbert contended his wife was mischaracterized and that there is much more to this story than a still photograph and a 19 second video.

# Kitchens

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