



TRUANCY: IS IT A PARENTAL CRIME? **Thursday, January 16, 2003**

Should a parent be held responsible and punished by the justice system if a child is not attending school, even if they are unaware of their child's whereabouts? Is jail time or a stiff monetary fine the appropriate penalty? Today, we will interview parents who were, or currently are, being held responsible for their child's truancy. We will discuss the various scenarios these parents are dealing with, whether or not parental punishments, including fines or jail time, are an appropriate punishment. Our guests are people whose lives were affected by the severe measures various judges have imposed on them.

Among the cases that attorney offices have taken to prevent truancy include Michelle, who spent 3 days in jail last year for her children's truancy. She claims her kids - Kayla and Harry, 12 - were either skipping school without her knowledge or home sick. However, since the new school year began, her kids have been absent a total of 37 days, and Michelle now faces new charges and possible jail time. Abby was put on probation because her 10-year-old son, Devin, had missed too many days of school. When she violated her probation by not taking her required parenting classes, she was thrown in jail for 17 days. *When Ronnie & Paula, were unaware that their daughter, Heaven, was out of school regularly until the court notified them. They were threatened with imprisonment and fines if they didn't make sure their daughter attended class. Then, after a corporal punishment suggestion from the judge, Ronnie arrested for shackling his daughter to her bed to ensure that she attended school.* Sandra pulled her 14-year-old daughter, Joanne, out of school because she feared for her daughter's life, and as a result now may face criminal charges. We will debate the issue of whether or not truancy is a parent's responsibility. We will be joined by Criminal Defense Attorney Jayne Weintraub, who says putting parents on the line for their child's truancy is ludicrous, and Florida State Attorney Harry Shorstein, who strongly supports prosecuting the parents of habitual children. Plus, John honors 17-year-old Melissa Alexander from Germantown, OH as this week's Hometown Hero for courageously tackling a would-be attacker in the front yard of her family's home.

Michelle

Last year Michelle served 3 days in jail for her children's combined 68 days of truancy. She stated that her kids were either skipping school without her knowledge or they were sick at home. Michelle is facing more jail time for her children's 37 days of truancy during the current school year. She says that she did everything she could to get them to go to school, and she shouldn't be held responsible if they don't stay there.

Kayla & Harry

Kayla, 9, and Harry, 12, are Michelle's children. They tell John why they skipped so many days of school and why they think their mom shouldn't be punished for their truancy.

Abby

Abby was put on probation because her son, Devin, had missed an unacceptable number of class days. When she violated her probation by not taking all of her required parenting classes, she was thrown in jail for 17 days. She claims her son's school never informed her he was absent

Devin

Devin is Abby's 10-year-old son. He says his mom is partly to blame for his truancy because sometimes she wouldn't wake him for school, but says most of his absences were due to illness. He believes his mom shouldn't have received jail time.

Ronnie & Paula

Ronnie and Paula were unaware that their 12-year-old daughter, Heaven, was skipping school regularly until the court notified them; they were shocked to find out she missed 20 days of school. As a result, the judge threatened to imprison them both or fine them if they didn't make sure Heaven regularly attended school. After a corporal punishment suggestion from the judge, Ronnie was arrested for shackling his daughter to ensure that she attended school. Paula says her family's life has been destroyed as a result of her daughter's truancy.

Heaven

Heaven is the 12-year-old daughter of Ronnie & Paula. She admits to skipping school at least once a week and says she feels bad that her parents are suffering because of her truancy.

Tad Nelson, Esquire

Tad is Ronnie's defense attorney. He reveals more details about the charges against his where the case stands now.

Sandra

On October 21, 2002, Sandra took her 14-year-old daughter, Joanne, out of school because she feared for her daughter's life; Joanne hasn't been to school since. Sandra says the Bureau of Welfare has threatened her by saying that unless she puts Joanne back in school, she may face criminal charges. Sandra says she refuses to send Joanne to school until she's transferred to a safer one.

Joanne

Joanne is Sandra's 14-year-old daughter. She says she is terrified to return to school after being the victim of a bias attack and says she doesn't want to go to a school where she doesn't feel safe.

Harry Shorstein, Esquire

Harry is a Florida State Attorney. He supports holding parents responsible for their child's absences from school, and his office has made a number of parental arrests in an effort of reduce truancy.

Jayne C. Weintraub, Esquire

Jayne is a Criminal Defense Attorney. She says she believes it is ridiculous for parents to be held responsible and given jail time or fines for their child's truancy. She tells John why she feels this way and how she discusses alternatives to these punishments.

Melissa & Vickey

17-year-old Melissa, from Germantown, OH, came to the rescue of her family by single-handedly tackling, tying up, and sitting on a would-be thief who threatened the family's home. Melissa's mother, Vickey, says her teen daughter was fearless when protecting their family, and John honors Melissa as this week's Hometown Hero for her fierce bravery.