

Virginia grandmother prohibited from seeing grandchildren in school events

written by Sandy | August 27, 2019



By Sandy . . . Seventeen years ago in Grayson County, Virginia, a fourteen-year-old boy named David and a 26-year-old woman named Shelly set in motion events that would reverberate for months, years, and decades to come.

The background story:

David was a troubled youth. By fourteen he was intimately familiar with the juvenile justice system in Virginia. His legal custody had bounced from mother to grandmother to maternal aunt with stints of foster care in between. At fourteen he was legally in the custody of and living with his mother's sister Sherri. When she became highly suspicious that he was entangled in a sexual relationship with 26-year old Shelly, she went to David's mother Tammie.

Tammie confronted David and Shelly, letting them know that if they were involved and it did not cease immediately, she would go to the authorities. Two months later she received verification from her sister that he was still going to Shelly's house, and Tammie made good on her promise.

David was taken from the custody of Sherri and put once again into the foster care system; Shelly was charged with carnal knowledge of a minor and is on the Virginia sexual offense registry. Sherri was charged with a misdemeanor in connection with the affair.

Two months later, David's mother Tammie was arrested and charged under a sub-section of the Virginia penal code 18.2-307.1 with failure to report a crime in a timely manner. She took a plea and was incarcerated for a total of 18 months.

One month before she was due for release, she was informed that the crime she was charged with was a subset of a sexual crime law involving facilitating indecent liberties with a child by a person in a custodial position and that she would be classified as a sexually violent predator and be on the Virginia sex offender registry for life. Looking back on that time in her life, Tammy says, "I was devastated. I had never been told that I was charged with a sex crime or that I would be on the sex offender registry. That was never once mentioned, not in court, not by anyone. I could not believe that this was happening."

When told to sign papers verifying her knowledge of what would happen, she refused to sign. She was told that she could either sign or remain in prison. She signed. She was released one month later as a registered sexual offender with an SVP designation and a lifetime obligation to register in the county of Grayson, state of Virginia.

And now....

Fifteen years later, Tammie, as a grandmother, is the legal

guardian of four grandchildren. The penal code of Virginia, 18.2-370.5, prohibits any registered sexual offender with the SVP designation – which, apparently, is the vast majority of all registrants in that state – from being on daycare or school property or at events sponsored by the school that are held on school property. The code also sets forth the procedure for requesting that an exception be made.

Two of the four children are David's. He and his mother Tammie now have an excellent relationship, and he is involved in the lives of his children even though his mother is their official guardian.

Tammie's four grandchildren are all in daycare or public school, and three of the four are active in sports and band. She has been told verbally that she can pick them up at school or after practice as long as she does not get out of the car, but the district will not put that in writing. She is currently going through the established procedure for being granted exception status so that she can attend their extra-curricular events and be fully involved in the school lives of these children, ages three, four, eight, and twelve. This is her third such attempt, having been denied by the court in her previous two.

The procedure is lengthy and complex. It requires that notices be placed in local newspapers once a week for the two-week period preceding the scheduled court hearing; this is done at the expense of the person making the petition, in this case Tammie. The petitioner may solicit letters of support and character reference to be presented to the court.

Even if the court should grant the request, the school district is not compelled to honor it. They may set their own limitations or stipulations or even deny it outright.

Tammie's court date is October 4. Letters sent must be postmarked no later than September 25 and sent directly to the

court. They must state clearly that they are being sent in either support of or in opposition to the request of Tammie Leigh Davis Lawson's petition to be granted permission to be on daycare and school property in Grayson County, Virginia.

Letters from persons who do not know Tammie should focus on the vital importance of parents and those who stand in place of parents being involved in the school lives of their charges and on the facts that Tammie has served her punishment, completing all required of her, has maintained a totally clean record, and that as guardian and role model for these children and for their good as well as that of society in general needs to be as fully involved as possible in all aspects of their lives.

Letters may be sent to the Hon. Susan M. Herrington Clerk, Grayson County Circuit Court, PO Box 130, Independence, VA 24348, and should reference Tammie's full name as given above.

Tammie admits to mistakes that she made in the past. Like all of us, if she had a second chance to live some years over, they would be lived differently. But we do not get the chance in this life for do-overs. We should, however, get the chance going forward to make better decisions and choices and be the best that we can be.