

Parents charged with neglect when officer finds two-year-old walking along U.S. 31

Written by George Browning
Wednesday, 27 August 2014 00:00 -

Adults seeing a small child walking by herself on the shoulder of busy U.S. Highway 31 South in Scottsburg on August 13 called 9-1-1, bringing police to the child's rescue.

The youngster was located by Sgt. Joe Nicholson after motorists called to report the child "...walking unattended along U.S. 31 on the (highway's) shoulder."

Sgt. Nicholson observed the child had several flea bites and smelled of urine. She also had a red cigarette lighter in her pocket, he said.

Residents of the area tentatively identified the little girl, leading officers to the door of her home at 1117 South Gardner Street, the local name for U.S. 31. The two-story house was located about 100 yards from where the child was found. Soon after the arrival of police, the child's mother returned home. Jessica Johnson, 28, told officers that she had awakened her boyfriend, Lawrence Napier, 24, and told him that she was leaving the house. Napier is the father of the two-year-old and a one-year-old, who was found in the house. Napier later stated that Johnson may have awakened him, but he "...must have fallen back asleep," the probable cause affidavit related.

Sgt. Nicholson and Lt. David Hardin made entry into the house accompanied by a Department of Child Services (DCS) caseworker.

The probable cause affidavit described condition in the house as "deplorable." Clothes, household trash and moldy, rotten food were observed, all within the two-year-old's reach. Several open bottles and cups, apparently containing chewing tobacco spit, fleas and other bugs were listed as present. Fly traps covered with flies were also seen, said Sgt. Nicholson.

Upstairs in the bedroom where the couple said they had been living because of the flea infestation, a cup of vomit was reportedly found.

In the kitchen, Sgt. Nicholson said he saw a crib filled with open food cans, beer bottles and

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other trash. Lt. Hardin found a baby walker "...completely covered in old food and dirt..." and a toaster and toaster oven within reach of the children.

Neither child appeared to have been bathed recently and smelled, the affidavit stated. The one-year-old was clad in a soiled diaper, while the two-year-old was wearing dirty clothes and also had a soiled diaper.

Johnson told the officers that water service in the house was cut off. She said the family "...went to (a nearby gas station) or a neighbor's house for restroom needs." The mother asked the officers if her aunt could come and get the children. She allegedly said she knew the youngsters would be removed from the home "...once the DCS saw the conditions..." in which the children were living, court papers related.

The children were removed from the home by the DCS.

Both Johnson and Napier now have been charged in Scott Superior Court with two counts each of neglect of a dependent, all of which are Level 6 felonies.

In both cases, bail has been fixed at \$25,000 corporate surety bond or \$2,500 cash.

When the defendants attended their initial court hearings on Friday, August 22, preliminary not guilty pleas were entered for them, and public defenders were assigned to their cases.

No contact orders to protect the children were entered against each parent. Each of the defendants was given an initial jury trial date of November 20.

Johnson also has additional legal woes to face.

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She had been placed on supervised probation for 337 days after pleading guilty on June 24 to charges of theft, then a Class D felony, and possession of marijuana, a Class A misdemeanor, also in Superior Court.

Because of her arrest on the new neglect charges, Johnson has been placed on a 15-day hold without bond.