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Babysitter burns boy's fingers

Mother watches as 8-year-old is allegedly tortured

WILMINGTON

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This is the story of a child allegedly abused and manipulated, an accused babysitter who maybe couldn't keep a secret, and a woman who stepped forward to tell others about a nightmare she says she fell into by happenstance.

Preliminary hearings were held Friday in a case of extreme corporal punishment:

allegedly all 10 of a boy's fingers were burned with a cigarette lighter by his babysitter, while his mother and her partner — all of whom are Wilmington residents — stood by and watched.

The incident came into the open easily, but not in a conventional manner.

"I about puked," said Patricia Waelti (pronounced "well-tee"), a Wilmington woman who speaks of her Christian faith and wore a con-

cerned look during her newspaper interview Friday. "It's inhuman, is what it is."

On May 14, she says — five

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News Journal photo/Brandon Smith

Teresa Moore and Michelle Worthington wait in the courtroom Friday for their preliminary hearing. Moore is charged for allegedly burning the fingers of Worthington's son. Worthington is charged for allegedly allowing the abuse to take place.



WEATHER



Weather drawing by Hannah Rose,
Wilmington

Rain possible

Partly sunny today. A chance of showers and thunderstorms in the afternoon. Highs in the mid 80s. Chance of rain 30 percent

BURNS

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days after the alleged burning — she offered to help a woman she didn't know with a broken-down car in the Kroger parking lot. After some conversation, the stranded woman reportedly confided in Waelti that she had burnt a boy's fingers as a punishment for smoking cigarettes.

Waelti said the woman, later identified as Teresa J. Moore, 36, showed her the boy's fingers. To describe their color in her interview, Waelti pointed to a bright Christmas-red sweatshirt. The blisters on the boy's fingertips "looked like they had been popped and clipped," said Waelti.

The boy then told the women he had burned his fingers himself.

Waelti says Moore told her, "See? He knows enough to say what we'll tell him to say."

"I didn't sleep that night," Waelti said. "I just kept seeing those big eyes look up at me."

The boy and his brother are reportedly in the custody of

Children's Services.

"I do hope the boys find a good home," said Waelti.

Waelti reported the crime the next morning, May 15, to Children's Services. The alleged burning occurred at the boy's residence, in southern Wilmington, around 9:30 a.m. May 9.

Moore, the babysitter who is reportedly a friend of the family, was charged with endangering children — specifically a section that describes torture and abuse. The mother, Michelle M. Worthington, 37, was charged with permitting child abuse. The boyfriend, William L. Ballard, 39, was charged with endangering children, via wording that describes neglecting a duty of care.

All three charges are felonies of the third degree, but Richard Moyer, Clinton County prosecutor, said he will seek additional charges through the grand jury in the near future.

At Friday's hearings, Judge Chad L. Carey kept bond prices standard for the level of offense, at \$50,000. A public

defender said none of the three would be able to provide the \$5,000 required to get out of the Clinton County Jail before their trials.

Waelti is able to describe her conversation with Moore in precise detail.

According to Waelti, Moore said the youngest one, the eight-year-old, "loves to smoke." And, "When I was a little girl, I used to do that (smoke parents' cigarettes) and my mother burnt all my fingers."

Waelti was startled by the way Moore said that, and reportedly thought, "Oh no, where is this going?"

Moore then allegedly described the burning, saying she burnt 10 fingers and "had to burn four of them again because they weren't burnt enough."

"I told him I wasn't doing it to be mean, I was going to teach him," Waelti remembers Moore as saying. Waelti also noted Moore herself still smoked cigarettes.

Moore reportedly told Waelti the boy's mother cried while she stood and watched.

The boy was kept from attending school for a week afterward, police said.

Ballard, the boy's mother's partner, waived a preliminary hearing Friday and will appear in the Clinton County Common Pleas Court in the near future. Moore and Worthington requested continuances on their preliminary hearings so that special public defenders could be appointed for them. The primary public defender told the court Friday it would be a conflict of interest to represent all three defendants.

The rest of Moore and Worthington's preliminary hearings will take place in municipal court Wednesday morning. They also will likely appear in common pleas court, said the prosecutor, where felony charges are tried.

Wilmington police officers Corey Pratt and Shari Hall were assigned to the case, said Assistant Chief Duane Weyand.

"They put a lot of time and effort into this," said Weyand, "A lot of interviews. They should be given credit."