

2 ADULTS MEET, A CHILD DIES, 2 FACE CHARGES HANDING OVER CHILD LEADS TO ABUSE CASE

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After sitting inside a Detroit bus shelter for nearly half an hour with a husky, sympathetic man old enough to be her father, 20-year-old Shaniqua Betty thought he could be trusted to care for her child for just a few minutes.

"He seemed like a nice guy," Betty later told police.

She was horribly wrong.

Betty's mistake, which led to the disappearance and death of her 3-month-old son, Isaiah Lewis, resulted Tuesday in a charge of second-degree child abuse being filed against her.

"We have to be firm in dealing with parents who do not properly care for their children, and we will be firm," Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan said at a news conference Tuesday afternoon. "Anyone who hands a baby to a stranger at 1 in the morning can expect to be charged."

Betty, who is staying with relatives in Pontiac, could not be reached for comment. She is expected to turn herself in for arraignment today or Thursday. If convicted, she could face up to 4 years in prison.

Some police officials who worked on the case were sympathetic toward Betty and did not want her charged, Duggan said.

"They feel her pain far more than if they had found the baby dead that night," he said.

Betty told police at the time of Isaiah's disappearance that she is pregnant with her second child.

Duggan said his office has no say in what will happen to Betty's newborn baby and that the matter is up to the Family Independence Agency. The FIA would not comment, but to remove the newborn from Betty's care, the FIA would have to seek court permission.

The suspect in her son's death, 48-year-old **Harold Reed** of Detroit, has been charged with first-degree murder and child abuse. He is being held without bond pending a preliminary examination scheduled for Thursday.

Markedly different paths led Betty and **Reed** to meet at the bus shelter on State Fair near Woodward on a hot August night.

The fourth child of Shekellea Betty, Shaniqua Betty was born at Pontiac General Hospital in January 1981. When her mother died of a drug overdose in August 1982, Shaniqua and her 5-month-old brother were taken in by their grandfather, Charles Lewis, who died a few years later.

In 1993, when Shaniqua Betty was 11, she told a teacher at Mark Twain Elementary School in Pontiac that her father, who had been just released from prison and come to live with her grandfather, had "beat her with a switch, belt and stick on numerous occasions," according to a court report.

Her grandfather told authorities he was unable to care for the children, and the two were made temporary wards of Oakland County Juvenile Court. She remained a ward for nearly eight years, until turning 19 in January 2000. A court referee reported then that Betty was sexually active and in need of psychological help but had become too old for services through juvenile court.

Asked about a plea agreement, Duggan said he wanted to have Betty examined by a psychiatrist before deciding whether to recommend prison time.

"While her act was reckless by all accounts, she is very much a grief-stricken mother," he said.

Duggan said he decided last week to charge Betty but waited until after the child's funeral.

"I did not want her to go to her baby's funeral as an accused criminal," Duggan said.

Isaiah Lewis was buried Saturday in Perry Mount Park Cemetery in Pontiac after a service officiated by the Rev. Douglas Jones of the Welcome Missionary Baptist Church in Pontiac.

The baby's decomposing body was found Aug. 9 under a filthy mattress in an abandoned house not far from the bus shelter. An autopsy showed he died of a blunt-force head injury.

Betty had taken him to the bus stop at State Fair and Woodward about 1 a.m. on Aug. 3 after an argument with the child's father, Ivan Brown Jr., 37. She said she intended to take a bus to her relatives' in Pontiac but struck up a conversation with an older man at the bus stop.

Trusting the stranger, Betty left Isaiah with him while she went to get her purse and shoes at Brown's house, about three-quarters of a mile away. When she returned, the man and baby were gone.

Reed was identified after being videotaped by a security camera while carrying the baby into a nearby gas station and convenience store shortly after Betty left the baby with him. Duggan said **Reed** confessed to the crime and led police to the body.

Reed faces a preliminary examination Thursday, although court officials said he has not yet been assigned a lawyer and the hearing may be postponed.

A convicted child molester who is wanted on a drug-selling charge in Pittsburgh, **Reed** has a daughter about Betty's age who he hasn't seen since she was 2 years old, relatives said.

He is a Detroit native who moved to Pittsburgh in 1991 with a girlfriend who had relatives there. The girlfriend married him while he was jailed for molesting a 10-year-old boy. She divorced him when he lost his job as a security guard because of a crack cocaine addiction, she said.

"It's kind of hard to believe he'd do something like that," said **Reed** 's ex-wife, who spoke on condition she not be identified, referring to the alleged killing.

Reed was convicted in 1992 of indecent assault against the 10-year-old boy in a Pittsburgh suburb, according to court records. The assault involved fondling the boy through his clothing in a home **Reed** rented in McKees Rocks, about 3 miles from downtown Pittsburgh.

Reed is wanted in Pittsburgh for skipping out on bond after an initial hearing on charges of conspiracy to sell PCP, cocaine and methamphetamine in 1995. It is unclear why the warrant for his arrest was not known to Detroit police when he was in their custody earlier this year.

He was locked up briefly this spring for not cooperating with a Detroit police officer who was serving him with a personal protection order obtained by a former girlfriend. Officials in Pittsburgh said **Reed** 's name and identifying information were placed on the national computerized criminal information system in 1995 and remain there.

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Caption: Photo

Isaiah Lewis

Shaniqua Betty

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