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Tattoo bully, victim on Dr. Phil

Lewd phrase was drawn on boy

By [Karen Langley](#) / [Monitor staff](#)

November 24, 2010

The Concord tattooing bully and bullied didn't quite come face-to-face yesterday when they appeared, parents in tow, on the nationally syndicated television show of Dr. Phil McGraw.

A court order prevented Blake Vannest, 18, from speaking directly with Zach Austin, 15, or his parents, explained McGraw, the self-help talk show host, and so Vannest spoke through McGraw to apologize for his part in tattooing a lewd phrase on the buttocks of the younger boy.

"I would like to apologize to Zach," Vannest said to McGraw as the Austins watched on television from another room. McGraw asked why.

"Because it's a ridiculous, stupid thing I did," Vannest said. "It was wrong. It shouldn't have happened."

The Concord families appeared yesterday on a segment devoted to bullies and their parents. Vannest and three other men were convicted of charges stemming from a May 10 incident when the police said they bullied Zach into letting them apply the tattoo.

Vannest said on the show that he was freed Nov. 11 after serving four months in jail. Ryan Fisk, Donald Wyman and Travis Johnston were also sentenced to jail time in connection with the event. The police said at the time that a 15-year-old could face charges in juvenile court.

In footage taped before the show, Michael and Tammy Austin described how they felt after hearing what their son had endured in the basement of a Concord home.

"When I heard about the tattoo, I felt just a rage that was inside of me," Michael Austin said. "And to be honest with you, if I had known where these kids lived at that time, I may have gone to their house and tattooed those guys."

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"How could they do this to my son? Even once this tattoo is removed, he's still going to be the kid for the rest of his life that had the tattoo on his rear end."

Zach Austin described his response to the tattooing. "It kind of made me feel sick, and I felt really bad about myself," he said.

In her own pre-show interview, Patti Vannest, Blake's mother, said the tattooing had been a joke. She maintained that Zach had wanted the tattoo and said the news media had failed to tell the whole story.

"After this tattoo was done, Blake prepared it, put ointment on it and drove this boy back to school in my car," she said. "I find it hard to believe that if you're bullying somebody that you're going to give them a ride in your car."

During the show, McGraw challenged her claims and suggested she was portraying her son as the victim.

"Here's what we do know," McGraw said. "We do know this is a younger boy. We do know it was a 4-to-1 ratio, and these four boys took him to a basement, isolated somewhere. And is there any question that they in fact took a tattoo gun and wrote 'poop d---' on his rear end?"

"They did that," Patti Vannest said.

"Then what difference does it make what the peripheral circumstances about it are?" McGraw said.

Later, Patti Vannest said she felt pushed to defend her son in part because she had received death threats. Otherwise, she would focus on helping her family and the Austins, she said.

"If my life wasn't being threatened from people all over the country, I don't think I would be defending any of it," she said. "I don't think I would address it beyond what's going on in my house and what I could do to make their lives better."

She told McGraw she agreed her son should be punished for his crime, which she described as horrible and disgusting.

Finally, Blake Vannest appeared, saying he wanted to tell his side of the story. He said he did not deny doing anything wrong, but he said the story that was told about him was not truthful. [\(next page >>\)](#)

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By [BIODTL](#) - 11/24/2010 - 12:38 pm

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Tattoo bully, victim on Dr. Phil - page 2

Lewd phrase was drawn on boy

"The media took it and made it something it wasn't," Vannest said. "I got kicked out of my mom's house, kicked out of school. I don't see why the school threw me out."

McGraw asked Vannest if he knew Zach was younger and didn't have many friends. Vannest said he did.

"So did it occur to you he was doing this in order to get acceptance from you all?" McGraw said.

"Not until after the fact, no." Vannest said. "After it happened, yes."

Molly McKean, an attorney representing the Austins, said the family appeared on Dr. Phil to raise awareness of bullying and show that their son should not be ashamed that he was bullied.

"The more people that hear about bullying and talk about bullying, the more people might say something to their kid or notice something going on," McKean said.

McKean said the Austins are considering suing the Concord School District for negligence. She declined to say where Zach now attends school.

Jonathan Cohen, an attorney representing Vannest, said the segment was accurate and fair. But he said the case was too complex to be portrayed fully during the program.

"My impression is that this incident is a lot more complicated than can be fully reported in a half-hour segment," Cohen said. "Clearly the producers of the show have their own agenda and want to make the show interesting to their audience, but that's not a complete picture of the case."

He said more witnesses and more evidence was involved.

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(Karen Langley can be reached at 369-3316 or klangley@cmonitor.com.)

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I'd be interested to read

By [reader123](#) - 11/24/2010 - 11:52 am

I'd be interested to read what Mr. Gene Connolly had to say. Dr. Phil said that it would be on the website but I couldn't find it anywhere. If anyone could help that would be great. Thanks.



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I'd like to see Phil, go the

By [Waltham Watch](#) - 11/24/2010 - 8:50 am

I'd like to see Phil, go the way of Oprah.



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You guys are missing the

By [saa1971](#) - 11/24/2010 - 8:49 am

You guys are missing the point. The article isn't about Dr Phil. It's about raising awareness for a very serious problem in our society. This boy did not deliberately "get tattooed" to go on the Dr Phil show. His family is trying to put their story out there so that we can all see that this is a real problem with young people.



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Idiotic mom

By [Common Grind](#) - 11/24/2010 - 8:13 am

I suspect she only started receiving those death threats in response to her having arrogantly denied that what had happened was bullying, and belittled the victim. SHE was the only deserving victim in this case, and amply so. (Although I will say that she's perfect for the Dr. Phil show...)



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no accountability

By [nhmadness2003](#) - 11/25/2010 - 5:57 am

classic case of denial...my son didnt do anything wrong,he shouldnt go to jail, blah blah.. of course had it been HER son who had something horrible like that happen to him, the shoe would have been on the other foot! Johnson's mommy did the same thing if you recall, blamed the victim. That in a nutshell is the problem with society today, no accountability for one's actions, it's always everyone elses fault when you make a bad decision...



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This is just an entertainment television show

By [kraftypat](#) - 11/24/2010 - 4:34 am

When all is said and done, it is all about the money. This show is purely entertainment, which is how Dr. Phil makes his living and a very good living it is. He is not a psychiatrist. He is an entertainer. He does not have a license to practice psychiatry in Texas or in California. In fact, he was brought up on ethics charges in Texas in a case that involved his employment of a client who had gone to him for counseling and had gotten sexually involved with him.



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For more info do a search for

<http://jonathanturley.org/2008/01/21/the-dr-phil-defense-if-it-was-frien...>

People willingly participate in his television show, but they are not receiving any professional therapy. It is strictly entertainment. Whether they receive anything in exchange for their appearance or not, I do not know. He bought a home for 29 + million dollars, so he is making plenty of money out of it. Is it exploitation? Perhaps. He does have a history of less than stellar business practices.

Pat Kraft

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and this is why the internet is a dangerous place

By [nhmadness2003](#) - 11/26/2010 - 5:04 am

hey Pat, he never was a psychiatrist... he's a psychologist. He graduated with a PHD in psychology from the Univ of Texas. he also held a valid license to practice until 2006, when he officially retired. The link you posted above has to do with him trying to help Britney Spears, lol... the Texas case you refer to has nothing to do with sex, the Board investigated that and nothing was brought against Dr Phil regarding innapropriate contact. He was reprimanded for HIRING a former patient to do part time work, and he never had his psychology license suspended. If your going to try and make a point, better make sure your actually posting the correct info. Now having said all that, I do not particularly like the guy or his show, but I don't think I'd be slandering him either



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Anything

By [Jirdex77](#) - 11/24/2010 - 11:13 am

... for one's "15 minutes of fame", huh? As a "leading edge baby boomer" it's been fascinating to observe over time peoples' growing obsession with "being seen", being on television, etc. So we have the multitude of idiots ho get caught for committing crimes because they just couldn't resist posting their acts on FaceBokk or whatever.

Superficiality Reigns!

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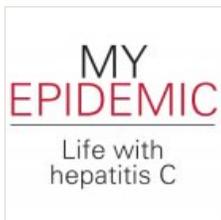
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